

So Why is That Important?

Acts 13:13-26

The Nativity of Saint John, the Baptist, June 24, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

For those of you who know the account of the Old Testament, why is Abraham important to you? It seems like everyone is claiming Abraham in one form or another. Some claim to be like Abraham. Some claim to be the sons of Abraham and therefore claim to be his heirs. Why do you claim Abraham? You are not a Jew. Abraham is the father of Israel. Out of Israel came the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Judah went into exile and came back and we call them Jews. They were called Jews at the time of our Lord. You are not a Jew. You are not a blood descendent from Abraham. So why is Abraham important to you? If you are interested you can map out your own genealogy. You can see who your ancestors were. Some of you have even been to Europe to see where your ancestors came from. If that is the case, why is Abraham is important to you?

It is because Abraham believed in the promises of God. Abraham's God then sent His Son to be your Savior. That Son of Abraham's God spoke the blessings of forgiveness and salvation to you. You have believed the promises of Abraham's God made to you by the Son of Abraham's God. You therefore believe in the same God that Abraham did. You are therefore the sons and heirs of Abraham by faith.

And so it is because of Jesus that Abraham is important to you.

For those of you who know the account of the book of Exodus, why is that so important to you? For you older members of the congregation who remember going to the cinema to see Cecille B. DeMille's classic, *The Ten Commandments*, why did you go? Did you identify with the Israelite slaves? If you did, why did you identify with them? You are not Jews. You are Gentiles. Pharaoh was a Gentile. Why didn't you identify with him?

The reason that you identified with the enslaved Israelites is because by faith in Christ Jesus, you have been grafted into Israel. They are therefore your people. Pharaoh is not your people. He is the one whose heart was hard. You are not the people whose hearts are hard. You are the ones who rejoice in the salvation that God has brought to you in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus saved you from slavery to sin and death. Therefore when God saved Israel out of slavery to Pharaoh, that was a preview of your salvation. Therefore as much as you rejoice in the salvation that Christ Jesus has brought to you so also you rejoice in the salvation that God brought to you in Egypt.

And so it is because of Jesus that the redemption out of Egypt is important.

After God brought Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, He fed Israel with manna. This was Israel's only source of food. Perhaps someone might be able to provide a naturalistic explanation for the manna that fell, but it fell on Israel in the wilderness for forty years.

Now why is this important to you? Why is this in the Bible that you study, assuming that you actually study it? You were not in the wilderness with Israel back then. You did not see the manna fall. God did not feed you through forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Why is it important to you?

It is important to you because while you may not be living in the same wilderness that Israel lived, you are living in a wilderness. You are wandering through life even if you have lived in pretty much the same place all of your life. You are going through life without reliable help from the world. The only reliable source of help that you have had your whole life has been the same God who fed Israel in the wilderness. God has fed you not only with the bread of your table, but He has also fed you with bread

from heaven. He has fed you with His Son's body and blood and with that forgiveness you live confidently in this wilderness called life.

And so it is because Jesus feeds you in this life with the things of this life and with His own body in the Sacrament of the Altar that God feeding you in the wilderness after you came out of Egypt is important.

Why is Joshua important?

Joshua is the leader of Israel who led them in their campaigns against the Canaanites after their forty years in the wilderness. God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. He led them for forty years in the wilderness feeding them with manna. He led them to the land that He had promised them. Once they got to the land, Moses died. Joshua took over as leader of Israel. He led Israel into the Promised Land. Under God's leadership at Joshua's direction Israel entered the Promised Land and conquered the Canaanites who lived there and took over their land. It was God's way of punishing the Canaanites for their idolatry and His way of giving the Promised Land to Israel.

Now why is that important to you? Even though you have been grafted into Israel, you do not live in the Promised Land. All believers in Jesus are not flying over to the Promised Land in an effort to live there and take over. Some of us vacation there to learn more about our Lord, but that is all.

Now if the Promised Land whom God promised to the heirs of Abraham is no longer important to possess by those who are the heirs of Abraham, why study and read the accounts of Joshua at all?

The reason is that like Israel wandered in the wilderness, but finally came to the Promised Land, so also you are wandering in the wilderness of your life, but God has promised you a better life to come. He has made this promise in His Son Jesus Christ. And just like the promise of the land that God made to Abraham was real and tangible so also the salvation that God has promised you is real and tangible. He has not promised you some vague ethereal salvation that is hard to describe and can only be imagined. He has promised you resurrection from the dead and a new heaven and a new earth. He has promised you a real concrete, tangible salvation. And just as God delivered His promise to Israel when He gave them the Promised Land so also in Christ Jesus He will deliver on His promise of salvation to you. In fact in Hebrew the name "Jesus" is "Joshua." He is bringing you to your Promised Land. He has already proven that He can do this by rising from the dead Himself.

And so Joshua is important because of Jesus.

And why is Samuel, the prophet, so important?

Samuel is the last of the judges in Israel. He also served as a prophet. He was the last of judges because after him Israel had a king. God chose Samuel to anoint Israel's king. At first God directed Samuel to anoint Saul king over Israel. When Saul proved to be unfaithful in executing God's will for Israel God sent Samuel to anoint another king. This time God chose David to be king.

Why should you Gentiles even care who is king over ancient Israel? Shouldn't you Gentiles care about the kings of old who reigned over your ancestors? Who were the ancient kings of the European nations from which your ancestors came? Or for those of you with Native American blood in you, who were the tribal chiefs of the tribe or tribes from which you came? Surely that ancient history is more relevant to us than an ancient king in Israel. Or should we not be more concerned with the rulers who reign over us now in the United States? Why is Samuel so important and why are the kings, in particular David, whom he anointed so important?

It is from David that our Lord is descended. It is our Lord who inherited David's throne. It is our Lord who executed God's will for Israel without failing like Saul or even David did. It is therefore with

Jesus as the king over Israel that God make David's throne and David's kingdom the everlasting kingdom. David's throne is the only one that is everlasting. Jesus is sitting on it right now reigning over Israel. The Kingdom over which Jesus reigns is the only kingdom that is everlasting. By faith in the king of Israel, you have been grafted into the nation of Israel. Jesus is therefore your king. He is the king who saves you. Since you have become part of His everlasting kingdom, you are also everlasting. Any citizen of the kingdom of Jesus is everlasting because the kingdom is everlasting. The kingdom cannot be everlasting if its citizens are not everlasting. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the donkey, that is no unreal spiritualized event. Jesus actually rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and before the week was over He had become Israel's king. He executed God's will for Israel when He died. God raised Him from the dead so that He could reign over the kingdom which He had established. Jesus is the heir of this David whom Samuel anointed.

Therefore Samuel, and Saul, and especially David, are important because of Jesus.

Today is the celebration of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. It is June 24. It is six months and one day from Christmas. Since the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of our Lord in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist, the church celebrates the birth of John, the Baptist, on this day.

But why is John, the Baptist important? Surely Jesus is more important than John. Surely we as a Church would do better to celebrate something having to do with Jesus than to divert our attention on this day to one of His prophets. Even John the Baptist himself says that he is not worthy to untie the sandals of the One who came after him and the One who came after him was Jesus. And John was right.

So why is John the Baptist important? John the Baptist is important because he is the immediate forerunner of Jesus. He is the last of the prophets promised through Moses that would come before the Christ. He is the fulfillment of the prophecy made through Malachi that before the Day of the Lord came Elijah would come. John the Baptist is this Elijah that God said would come before His Day came. The Day of the Lord came in Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus by preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins. John does not preach the frail repentance of behavior modification and a changed behavior pattern. John preaches the repentance of a changed condition of the entire of one's life and will. He preaches the new birth unto everlasting life. He preaches the death to sin and the life to God in the One who came after him. And in the One who came after Him, John the Baptist preached the forgiveness of sins.

In this way he prepared the people of his day to receive Jesus. And so it is with that same new man of repentance and the same forgiveness of sins, that you receive the Jesus who has already come. John baptized with water a baptism of this repentance. You are baptized with a repentance in the Name of Jesus Christ.

John is not simply the last of the old order of prophets to come before the Christ. He prepared the way for the Christ. And this Christ is your Christ, your Savior.

John the Baptist is important because of Jesus.

And finally, why are you important?

You are a sinner. You live in rebellion against God. You don't observe His law. You don't even desire to out your old man. God could overlook you and leave you behind. He could cast you into hell and not remember again who you were or what you did because who you were and what you did were not important to Him.

But you have been redeemed by this Christ. This Christ who fulfills the Old Testament and therefore fulfills the history of the creation is the One who deemed you in His love worth dying for. Your worth was not in yourselves or in something that you did. Your worth was in the fact that He loved you and gave His life for you.

He does not need you to speak Jesus to your neighbors, He can do that with whomever He likes. He does not need you to engage in missionary work. He can do that with whomever He likes. He does not need you to go to foreign countries and tell them about Jesus. If you don't go, He will send someone else. He will always save His elect. He does not need you to do it.

But He has chosen you to be His people. He has chosen you to be His priests. He has chosen you to be a holy nation. He has chosen you to declare His praises to others, to whomever He sends you.

He has chosen you to be forgiven. He has promised you the Promised Land. He has fed you constantly with the food of heaven. He has chosen you to be His own. He made this choice known to you when He baptized you.

You are important because of Jesus.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.