

Life from Barrenness

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] Father, sometimes there's stories in the Bible, and especially for us as Canadians, it's just really hard to understand why they're even in there, and why you'd ask for something like this to happen.

And Father, sometimes, especially those, mainly those of us who are Christians, we have a hard time just being honest with you, that we find it puzzling, and that something like this would be in the Bible.

And so, Father, we come before you. You know how hard it is for us to be honest before you. And we know, Father, that you want us to know who we really are in the context of who you really are. And so, Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would do a gentle but very deep work in each one of us and bring your word deep into our hearts and rule. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. So, why on earth did I say anything at all like that, especially given the text?

Those of you who aren't aware of it, we're sort of preaching through...

[1 : 09] Here at Church of the Messiah, most of the time we either preach through whole books of the Bible or big chunks, and we're going through the story cycle, the series of stories about Abraham in the book of Genesis.

And the reason I sort of prayed the way that I did is that we're going to look at circumcision today. This is the story where the rite of circumcision was first given to the Jewish people.

And so, that's... I mean, if you think about it for a second... Like, just imagine Ricky Gervais doing a comment on the rite of circumcision.

I mean, just don't imagine it necessarily with all the foul language. But... Or maybe you can. I don't know what's going on in your own heads. But, I mean, he would make a whole routine about...

Isn't everything about this story a perfect example of why people should run away from religion? If the religion requires, you know, cutting off part of... Pardon my language.

[2 : 15] The male penis. Isn't that sort of like prima facie evidence that you should just run as fast and as far away as you possibly can from such religion? You can imagine how he would handle something like this.

So, I don't want to trigger anybody. But one of the things that I think we need to think about a little tiny bit before we look at this is something which is very relevant.

Because circumcision on the face of it just seems like a repulsive type of practice. And why God demands it is... It would be a question if we're sort of honest about it.

But I don't want to trigger anybody on this. But I think part of the way that we need to start to think about it is to think about death. I was at a funeral this week. And I'm sort of bringing it right up front about we're going to talk about death a little bit.

I have no idea if any of you either here or online have just had a loved one die. Especially I'm going to make a comment about a child dying. And that might be very hard for you.

[3 : 18] I don't mean to trigger anything. But it's best actually if we talk about these things and think about them. Because death is actually that one thing that we can't avoid. That's going to happen.

Has happened to those that we know and love. And will one day happen to us. And I think if we think about death a little bit. It's going to be easier to think about this text.

And why it is that something as weird as circumcision would be required by God of Abraham. You know like in the funeral that I just was at.

There's a whole mixture of types of images. And in some ways with one or two exceptions. It sort of missed a couple of the different ways that human beings think about death.

But it sort of captured the way that most Canadians think about death. You go to a better place. You go to a type of a spiritual place.

[4 : 21] Something where there's really no bodies. You go. You're all. When they die. They're sort of. Now the person is with you still.

In some way. When they die. They're now sort of living in your memories. And in your heart. And in your strength. When they die.

They're now part of everything that's around us. So that when we see the trees. Or see. Or feel the wind. We can remember that our loved one is now part of all of that.

And then of course. If in a more. Like India. And countries like that. Ultimately the dead person is just being reincarnated.

Somewhere else. But the end product of all of that. Will be that eventually they just merge with the one. They lose their identity. The primary analogy is. It's like a drop of water.

[5 : 15] Joining the sea or the ocean. And of course. The drop of water. You stop having any independent type of existence. You're all part of just the everything. And then you have that minority.

Perfectly typified by Ricky Gervais. Who would just say. You don't go anywhere. When you're dead. You're dead. To believe anything other than that. Is just to be irrational.

And anti-scientific. When you die. You die. That's it. Sort of. I don't hope I trigger other people with this. My wife and I watched the first half of Ricky Gervais.

Controversial comedy routine. That's on Netflix. The only reason we watched half of it. Is just because. We watch it late night. And it was just. We were tired.

We wanted to go to bed. I'm not recommending you watch it. It's very. Filled with foul language. He actually talks a little bit. About the ridiculousness. Of. Of the different views of death.

[6 : 15] And he makes it very clear. As a very public atheist. That when you die. You die. There's no. Nothing. You're just. You're gone. And then he shared how. People have tweeted him.

And said. Is that what you'd say. To a grieving mother and father. As they're watching their child die. Is that what you would say. If you were there by that bedside. With them.

And the dying child. And his response was. He tweeted back. And says. It all depends on whether it's a pain gig. Sir. It was funnier than special. In other words.

He didn't really answer the question. But he's very unapologetic. About. What. He believes about death. The Bible is very. Very wise. And the Bible.

And part of the problem. That we Canadians have. When we read the Bible. Is both. It's. Deep wisdom. And the fact. That it's very frank. About the nature of life.

[7 : 10] And talks about it. Very frankly. And we. Are very used. To using euphemisms. And dodging questions. And not really. Thinking very clearly. Although we don't realize that.

But that's just sort of. A deep reflex. Within us. And so it catches us. By surprise. When we cross. Come across. Texts. Which are just very. Very frank. About the human condition. And.

And ultimately. The Bible wants us. To understand the human condition. So that we will understand. Our need for God. The triune God. Not the God of Canadians. But the triune God. The Father.

The Son. And the Holy Spirit. Three persons. One God. Forever and ever. A God of. Unending love. The only God.

That you can realistically. Say is a God of unending love. Because. If God is just all things. Then that means. God is both love. And hate. He's.

[8 : 03] Life. And death. And corruption. He's terror. And he's joy. And he's all of those things. Equally. And you can't really pick. One over the other. And if God is just the one.

Then that also just means. At the end of the day. He can't really be love. If there's just the one. If there's just the ocean. And the ocean doesn't love. All the things that make up the ocean. That's not love.

That's just. The ocean. And if you just have a solitary God. Then you can't really have a God of love. Because. Love requires.

Something outside of the person. To love. And only the Bible. Only the Bible. Describes the God. That really is the God of love.

The God that we ultimately long for. That from all eternity. The Father has loved the Son. And the Son has loved the Father. And from all eternity. God is good. Why? Well because from all of eternity.

[8 : 58] The God has been. The Father has been good to the Son. And Son has been good to the Father. And the Holy Spirit. And only the God of the Bible. Can truly be understood. As a God of beauty.

Because. From all eternity. The Father in a sense. Has seen the beauty of the Son. And the Son. The beauty of the Father. And both the beauty of the Holy Spirit. Because there's an other. For. And there needs to be an other. For there to be beauty. And so from all eternity. There is this God. Who's been a God of justice. A God of goodness. A God of. Of beauty. A God of love. A God that we ultimately long for. At a very, very, very deep level. Only the Bible reveals. Such a God. And it's in these stories. Even the oddest and hardest parts of them. That God reveals. Himself. The reality of who he is. To human beings. Like us. So what does the Bible say? What is this odd story.

[9 : 53] That involves circumcision. And how can we sort of understand. Why it's actually wisdom for us? Well. Turn in your Bibles. To Genesis chapter 17. And in the first verse.

It's going to begin like this. And just. If you've been following along. In chapter 12. God makes this base. Fundamental promise. That God is going to be. He's calling Abram. And he's going to be a bless.

He's going to bless Abram. He's going to bless Abram. With children. With land. And God is going to bless him. To make him into a people. A multitude of peoples. And that they will be a blessing. And Abram is revealed. As being 65 years old. Or 75 years old. And his wife is 65. And they have. They've never been able to have children. And yet God makes this promise to them. And that they're called. And there's. And then. This part just before this. Sarah. Sarah. Gets tired of waiting. For God. To do something.

[10 : 47] So she tries to fix it. According to the cultural wisdom. Of her day. By allowing her servant. To start sleeping. With Abraham. And all that does. Is it produces a baby. But all it does. Is produce chaos.

And hatred. And resentment. And it's a whole thing. Is a mess. And it's in that context. Of everything being a mess. That chapter 17 begins. And it goes like this. It says.

When Abraham was 99 years old. The Lord appeared to Abraham. And said to him. I am God almighty. Walk before me. And be blameless.

That I may make my covenant. Between me and you. And may multiply you greatly. Now just sort of pause there for a second. Some of us who have been Christians for a long time.

You've probably seen. Or posters. Or sung songs. That mention El Shaddai. And that's the word here. God almighty. Is the word in Hebrew.

[11 : 42] El Shaddai. So that's where it comes from. In fact. Actually one of the things. Which is interesting about this story. Sort of a geeky moment. Is you'll notice it says. When Abraham. Verse 1.

Was 99 years old. The Lord. That's sort of the covenant name for God. Appeared. And then God is revealed. Not just his Lord. Yahweh. The covenant God.

But as El Shaddai. The almighty one. And then throughout the entire rest of the story. The word for God. That's used. Is the most abstract word for God.

The most transcendent. Distant. God. That's over all things. Is the. So three different names for God. Mentioned in the text. That's a bit of an aside. But here's the thing.

God says. I'm going to make a covenant with you. He's already inaugurated the covenant. In chapter 15. And he's reminding Abraham. That he's going to make a covenant with him. And what a covenant is.

[12 : 36] Is. It's a. It's in a sense. A bound. Relationship. Of two persons.

It's a bound. Relationship. Of two persons. Or in this particular case. Of more. A secure. Relationship. That's not really to come to an end.

And is to be characterized. By a deep relationship. With things like love. And intimacy. And presence. And. And if you think about it for a second.

As I was describing. How. Only the Bible describes a God. That can realistically. Be understood. As a God of love. As a God of goodness. Of a God.

As a God of beauty. Only really. A God of truth. As well. Because. The Father is always true to the Son.

[13:30] And the Son. Is true to the Father. And they know each other truly. There has to be something. Other than God. For God to truly be a God of truth. And. And. And so.

Only the Bible has a God. That's a God of goodness. Of. Of love. Of beauty. Of truth. Only the Bible has that. And in a sense. It's. It's out of this. It's also in a sense.

If you think about it. If there's a Father. The Son. And the Holy Spirit. Three persons. One God. Forever and ever. That. That. That's already. God. God doesn't need.

Any human beings. Because he's lonely. But. As we all know. In the best of human beings. It's of the very nature.

Of love. It's of the very. Very nature of love. That love be extended. Beyond. It's like. The very nature of goodness.

[14:27] That love be extended. Beyond. I am now. In day nine. Of having no hydro. There's a couple of us. In the congregation. Who've now.

There was one. A fellow. At the eight o'clock service. He might be here as well. And. We've now. We're now on day nine. With no hydro. And. One of the things. I can tell you. About this odd experience.

Is that neighbors. Have never talked to each other. More than they have. Than during these nine days. I've had my longest talks. With my next door neighbor. Since this has happened.

And in very. Very helpful. And friendly ways. These conversations. Have been. Have been going on. And. You know.

The fact of the matter is. That we. We long to have. Some type of a community. We long.

[15:22] To have some type of a relationship. Which is very stable. We live in a world. Where relationships. Aren't stable. Where many marriages. End in divorce. Where many.

Parents. Don't treat their kids. Very well. Where bosses. Don't often. Treat their employees. Very well. Where companies. Go in and out of business. The idea. That in the 50s.

Somebody might join a company. And be with it. For 30 or 40 years. Is sort of an idea. Of the past. We. We. We live in a world. Where all of these relationships. Seem to be very.

Very just. Impermanent. And yet. For. For each of us. We. We long. To have something. Which is permanent. It's like. One.

It's very interesting. The way. Many Canadians. Will talk about. The person. That they'd like. To live. To spend the rest. Of their time with. Is that. The rest of their life. Is they're looking. For a soul mate.

[16:15] They're looking. For something. Or someone. That is so close. To them. In their soul. That there could be. Never really be. A break. Of that. We have this desire.

For a. A covenanted. Relationship. And what the Bible. Says. Is that the God. Who from all eternity. Was seen. The beauty.

The father. Seeing the beauty. Of the son. And the son. Seeing the beauty. Of the father. And the. Both. Seeing the beauty. Of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit. Seeing the beauty. Of them. And the goodness. And the love. Etc. That that God.

Desires to have. A relationship. With human beings. Like you and me. And not just. A fleeting. Relationship. He doesn't want to have. A one night stand.

With human beings. He doesn't want to hook up. With human beings. He doesn't want to look up. A human being. On tinder. And then discard. That human being. What Bible.

[17:07] The Bible. Is revealing here. Is that the God. Who really does exist. That we'll discover. Throughout the rest of the Bible. Is in fact. Almost in a sense. A community. In a sense. With the father.

The son. The Holy Spirit. Three persons. Yet one God. That that God. Desires to have. A relationship. Of love. And intimacy. And presence. With ordinary.

Human beings. Like you and me. And that's not. A romantic view. Of the world. That's the real view. Of the world. That's the truth.

And that's what we see here. Look at the text again. The first couple of verses. When Abram. Was 99 years old. The Lord appeared to Abram. And said to him. I am El Shaddai.

Walk before me. And be blameless. And walk before me. Implies that. That the God almighty. El Shaddai.

[18:09] The Lord. The transcendent God. Desires to actually. Be with you. And he wants you to walk. Not as if.

There is no God. Not as if. You are a God. But to walk. And spend the day. With you.

And the word. Blameless. It does have a tiny bit. Of a moral aspect to it. But it's fundamentally. A relationship word. It's a word.

Of maintaining relationship. To use sort of. A marriage analogy. It would be as if. You know. Louise and I. Have been married a long time. And it's definitely. Not the case. That we've never had a fight. Or that. That we've never been. Unhappy with each other. Or definitely. She's never been. Not the case. That she's never been. Unhappy with me. But the goal of the marriage. Is in a sense. To be blameless.

[19:01] That the relationship. Is never severed. And that it's restored. And that's the idea here. And that's the fundamental thing. That God is offering. To Abram. And he's already inaugurated.

In chapter 15. You can go back. And listen to the sermon. Where God takes upon himself. All of the obligation. To make this work. And now. The covenant.

Which was inaugurated. In chapter 15. It has to be confirmed. Abraham has to say. Yes to it. And then after. Abram says yes to it. God in chapter 22. Is going to make. His final confirmation.

Of the whole thing. But that's sort of. Jumping ahead. And you look at it. In verse 2. I am El Shaddai. My desire.

Abram. Is that you'll walk with me. That you'll be blameless. That we have a relationship. That I may make. I will make. My covenant. Between me and you. And may multiply you greatly.

[19:58] And God is saying this. To a man. Who's just said. Is 99 years old. And his wife is 89. And they've never been able. To have children. And for many of you.

You weren't interested. In that other relational. Stuff stuff. You were sort of stuck. At how on earth. It can possibly be. That Abram was 99 years old. And have a baby. Once again. I just was thinking. About it this week.

Because I watched. The first part of. This Ricky Gervais. Special. Hard to watch things. When you have no hydro. And often.

The internet's not working. At our house as well. Actually. That's a whole other. You know. A whole other thing. But I could just imagine. What Ricky Gervais. Would say about a story. Like this.

George. You actually believe.

Like you're so stupid. You actually believe. 99 year old man. Can make an 89 year old. Woman pregnant. I mean. He probably. Actually. He might say. He probably. Not say stupid. He'd say something. Which was more colorful.

[20:52] Which I can't say. In church. He'd call me. A variety of names. For being so stupid. To believe it. Well. We're going to get to that. I'm not going to dodge. This particular issue. But let's look.

And see now. What God. Going to actually do. This is what his desire. Is for Abram. And look at all of the things. That God makes a claim. A promise. That he's going to do.

It begins at verse 3. Then Abram fell on his face. Now. By the way. Here. It's not clear. Whether Abram wanted to fall on his face. In worship. Or whether.

Just. Being in God's presence. And hearing God speak. Made him fall on his face. Maybe it's both. Doesn't matter. But Abram just goes down. And God said to him.

Behold. My covenant is with you. And you shall be the father. Of a multitude. Of nations. No longer shall your name.

[21:49] Be called Abram. But your name shall be Abraham. For I. Have made. You the father. Of a multitude. Of nations. By the way.

What happens sometimes is. When God wants to do something. In these original languages. When there has to be a promise. Of the certainty. Of the future. They use the past tense.

To communicate. The certainty. Of the future. No longer. Verse five again. No longer shall your name. Be called Abram. But your name.

Shall be. Abraham. For I have made you. The father. Of a multitude. Of nations. And I will make you. Exceedingly fruitful. And I. Will make you. Into nations.

And kings. Shall come. From you. And I will establish. My covenant. Between me and you. And your offspring. After you. Throughout their generations.

[22:42] For an everlasting covenant. And here. The word everlasting. Basically. It's. Into the future. Without end. That's sort of the.

The idea. In the original language. Sort of captured. In the old prayer book. When it says. A world without end. That phrase. Those of you. Are familiar. With the old prayer book.

When they'll. They'll often say. Things world without end. That's actually. Capturing the Hebrew. Idea. Which is expressed here. To be. Sorry.

I'll read verse seven. Again. And I will establish. My covenant. Between me and you. And your offspring. After you. Throughout their generations. For an everlasting. Covenant. To be God. To you. And to your offspring. After you. And I will give. To you. And to your offspring. After you. The land. Of your sojournings. All the land.

[23 : 36] Of Canaan. For an everlasting. Possession. That's a world. Without end. Possession. And I. Will be. Their. God. And that's the heart.

Of what God is. Notice all of the things. Abram has no children. He has no land. He has no. He's not. The head of a nation. I will make nations.

Come from you. I will give you the land. You have no. Children. I will give you children. Or a child. And you will multiply. And most importantly.

I. Will. Be. Your. God. So God looks to the unlikely. The unqualified. The unsuitable. The childless. Ninety nine. Year old man. And he makes these very. Very concrete. Real. Promises. About community. About nation. About family.

[24 : 31] About babies. And about land. Now I'm going to circle around to that. Why circumcision. In fact.

Actually. There's sort of three questions. Around this text. If you think about it. The first one is. How on earth. Could a ninety nine year old man. Make an eighty nine year old woman pregnant. Is the Bible. Just being naive. And foolish. Is it talking. Fairy tale language. Second. Why circumcision.

Why something. That seems so barbaric. And third. Isn't circumcision. Cruel. And doesn't it reveal. The masochistic. Element. Of the God of the Bible. Well. Let's look. Verse nine.

[25 : 32] And God said to Abram. As for you. You shall keep my covenant. So those are all the things. God's going to do. God's going to. Actually give him a baby. He's going to not only give him a baby.

But ultimately. There'll eventually be multitudes. There'll be nations. There'll be land. There'll be. All of this. What's Abram to do. How is Abram. To receive the covenant.

And show that he is received. And wants to enter into this covenant. And how will this be marked? Verse 9, and God said to Abram, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money, from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised.

[26 : 49] So shall my covenant be in your flesh, an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people.

He has broken my covenant. And God said to Abram, As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her.

And moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her. And she shall become nations. Kings of people shall come from her.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?

Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you.

[27 : 51] And God said, No, but Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.

So, first of all, we can see that the Bible is very realistic. Abraham doesn't just say, Oh, yeah, yeah, God, you said that's going to happen, it's just going to happen. It's just sort of the same thing when I was introducing the gospel text.

Sometime down the road, people will listen to just the sermon and not the service. But in this service, I was introducing the gospel text, which we read in the service, John.

And one of the things I pointed out is that Jesus knew the night before that he was going to be captured that night. He knew he was going to die on the cross the next day. And he knew that none of his disciples believed that he would rise from the dead.

He knew that the Jewish authorities didn't believe it. The Roman authorities didn't believe it. The soldiers who carried out the crucifixion didn't believe it. He knew that his mom didn't believe it. His brothers and sisters didn't believe it.

[28 : 58] His disciples didn't believe it. Nobody believed it. The fact, one of the things is if you read the ancient biographies of Jesus, it's very, very clear. The biographies make it very clear that nobody believed that Jesus would rise from the dead.

Nobody. Nobody, nobody, nobody. And we can see here in the text that Abraham, and later on in the next story, that Sarah, none of them believed that Abraham would be able to have a baby, that Sarah, that Abraham would be able to make God, that Abraham, that God would be able to make Abraham make Sarah, get all the lines, the makes correct, make her pregnant.

So, once again, you can sort of imagine what Ricky Gervais would say about this. But here's the thing. This is a very important thing. God is making a claim here that he is going to do a miracle. And that's part of the reason why the age 99 is very, very significant. The age of 99 is very significant because it's going to be made very clear to Abraham and to all of the Jewish people who come after and to us that it's a miracle, that God does something that could not possibly, under any stretch of the imagination, under any circumstances, could it have been accomplished, humanly speaking.

It's completely and utterly a miracle. And so, our skeptical friends will say, George, this is completely and utterly ridiculous. How can you believe that life could come from such barrenness?

[30 : 28] But here's the thing which is very significant. Ricky Gervais and I both believe that life comes from barrenness. The University of Ottawa, the CBC, CTV, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, Secular Canada, they and I both believe that life comes from barrenness.

And you'll say that's completely and utterly absurd, George, that's not true. And I will say it is completely true because that's what you believe about evolution. The very, very heart, the basis of all secular Canadian thought is that life emerged out of barrenness and death.

Ricky Gervais believes that. Which is more likely? Which is more likely to believe? That a God who is life himself can make the barren produce life or remain to believe that unending barrenness can somehow or another produce life.

I would say that one of us is actually believing something which is more credible and that Christians in fact are believing something that is more reasonable.

because the fact of the matter is that really anywhere other than the very, very beginnings of human belief origins nobody believes that happens today.

[32 : 09] If somebody was to say that there was a whole pile of sand and all of a sudden out of that sand and a whole pile of other things that there was a tornado and out of it life emerged like nobody would believe that.

Like nobody would believe that. Nobody would believe it. Everybody would go looking for some type of microorganisms that happened to be there that we just weren't able to detect.

Why? Because everybody knows that life does not come from barrenness except when it comes for the foundation of secular Canada's belief.

We, Christians, are not gullible. We know that life does not come from barrenness. Abram knew that.

Sarah knew that. It's a miracle. God did what only God could do. What about why circumcision?

[33 : 08] Well, I mean, there's several things here which is going to be a very, very, part of it is a great threat to Canadians. Canadians. Canadians. Canadians. Canadians. Canadians. Canadians. Canadians. In a sense, the source of procreation is marked as belonging to God with an indelible mark for the covenant people.

And the circumcision as the mark that you've entered into this covenant community, I mean, it's going to come to adults. We're going to see at the end of the story, or maybe we won't. If you read to the end, you'll see that at the end of this, Abraham gets himself at 99 circumcised.

Everybody in his household is circumcised by the end of the story. But fundamentally, at the heart of it, is that the agent, in a sense, the means of procreation is marked indelibly.

That means it can't be removed as being claimed by God, as belonging to God, that life, ultimately, is something that comes from God.

The miracle is a miracle of life coming to barrenness, and the indelible mark of belonging to the community is a reminder that God is the source of life and claims it.

[34 : 32] And why the cutting and the blood and the pain? Well, the fact of the matter is, and this is far harder for us, because as we all know, meat actually doesn't come from an animal. Meat is made in a factory, and it comes pre-wrapped in saran wrap or whatever it is, that there's no animals that have been killed, there's no blood, there's no gore, there's nothing like that, and so it's harder for us to see the earthiness and the reality of every time we have a hamburger, the fact that that was originally a cow, or if you're eating a pork hamburger, it was originally a pig, the earthiness of it.

But here is the other thing about it, which is so hard for us as Christians to get our minds around. Like, think about how we Canadians think about death. Like, we live a real life, and we live a real life where there's a real world, and we're like, if we go and we buy a dozen donuts from Tim Hortons, and afterwards, as we're going to the car, we count them, and they only give us nine, what do we do?

We go back, we bought twelve, you only gave us nine. We don't spiritualize what happened to it. But how is it that we Canadians, who first of all, are in denial of the fact that we believe that life comes out of barrenness, also at the end of the day, all of our understandings of the end of life is completely and utterly non-physical.

It's just, like, sorry, I don't want to offend, but it's like, woo, woo. I mean, that's why Ricky Gervais can go to make a lot of hay out of making fun of it.

Like, really? Like, really, you think about it for a second, that when you die, you know, when your loved one dies, sorry, I'm offending you, your loved one dies, they're with you in your spirit.

[36 : 16] Well, that's actually a bit creepy. And how does that actually work? So, when your loved one, their loved ones died, so, you know, your parent dies, but their, your parents, grandparents have already died, so, your grandparents' spirits are sort of with your parent and they're now with you?

And then you go back for generations, like, what does it mean? Like, you mean, like, within you, you have, like, a million, a billion, like, spirits all sort of present with you? Like, how does that make any sense?

And, and if you think about it for a second, like, the idea that when you die and you just sort of join everything, how is that different from just understanding that when you're dead, you're dead? And, and if you understand that death is just ultimately being like a drop of water going into the ocean, how is that different than just dying and not having any identity anymore?

Like, how is it, like, the thing about this story, and you see, this is, and so it's very easy when you have understandings of, first of all, that you're in denial that life comes out of barrenness and you somehow believe that and you're in denial about the fact that you believe it and at the same time that you, you sort of believe that there's some type of a spiritual type of thing that comes to you and, and it makes it very, very easy for you to think that right and wrong is, and, and how you live your life is sort of really something more abstract and more emotional and just sort of more spiritual and not very earthy and not, not as, as concrete as we many, many times know and want it to be because dang it all, if I buy a dozen donuts at Tim Hortons, there needs to be twelve in the box. Nine doesn't cut it. I don't accept three spiritual ones. I want twelve that I can eat, not nine and three that I can pretend that I ate.

[38 : 08] I want all twelve. And so here, you see, it's all part of what's going on here in the Bible. What is it saying? God is going to make a covenant and out of Abraham is going to come, there's going to be land and there's going to be babies and there's going to be nations and what does that mean?

It means there's going to be laws. There's going to be that you drive on the right-hand side of the road, not the left-hand side of the road. It means that you stop at stop signs. It means that there's customs in families. It means that there's traditions because it's real.

It's real life. And so the Bible is not calling you into an imaginary life, an emotional life, a spiritual life. It's talking into a real life where there's human beings and there's land and there's customs and there's communities and there's families and there's obligations of a husband to a wife and a wife to her husband and of parents to the children and children to the parents and neighbors to each other and neighbors to the king and king to the people.

It's a real world that the Bible is calling you into and as part of that sign of the real world, the origin of life is marked as belonging to God in a real, indelible, physical way that you can be reminded of and hence circumcision.

And is it cruel? There's two things here about this text which are so remarkable. The first is if you go back and you look at it and I'm sort of running out of time so you just go look at it yourself.

[39 : 42] The rich and the poor are part of the covenant community. The foreigner, the stranger, the slave, the owner, all are part of the community.

All are equal. Ones who are not physically descendant of Abraham, they are part of the covenant community. It is truly for all without respect of person.

Bill Gates and a street person both have to enter the kingdom of God the same way. And Bill Gates can be outside the kingdom and the street person in.

Both have to humble themselves and in our case of the new covenant accept what Christ has done for them. It's profoundly equal. And the wonderful thing as well about this is the fact that it's babies. See this is, I was thinking about afterwards, I'd have a bit of a time afterwards to try how this text helps us to understand why biblical, many people who are very, very biblical and don't believe in magical things like baptismal regeneration understand the significance of infant baptism.

[40 : 56] See the fact of the matter is, is that when they're having an eight day old baby enter the covenant community, nobody can say it's only brave people who become part of the community.

It's only holy people who become part of the community. It's only people with high IQs who can be part of the community. It's only rich people. It's only a person of a certain race.

It's only a person of a certain accomplishment that you need to do some types of things and because you do some types of things then you deserve to be in it. People with all of the right connection, no!

By having an eight day old baby part of the covenant community, you realize that it's only and completely and utterly because of God's grace. they have earned nothing, they've accomplished nothing and God welcomes them into the covenant community.

My time has to come to an end. All of this paints a bit of a riddle that only Christ is able to satisfy and bring to a completion.

[42 : 05] You see, we Christians believe that when Jesus died upon the cross and rose from the dead, there's a new covenant which is offered to human beings. But the very, very same principles come. I can't make a new spiritual life myself.

That has to be a gift that comes from God to give me this new spiritual life. And the fact of the matter is is that Abraham wasn't able to keep perfectly the covenant.

He didn't walk perfectly before God and he wasn't perfectly blameless. And how is that going to be dealt with? And even if you go, this is all part of the first book of a five-book series and the next books in the series make very clear that there has to be some type of a means by which justice is dealt with and the covenant relationship can be secured, but at the end of the day it's going to involve the death and the sacrifice of animals, but all that is is it's just, you know, an ending type of sacrifice and an ending type of examination of the context of your conscience and it's never something which is so completely and utterly secure.

And all of this text is pointing, how can God justly deal with the fact that we keep breaking the covenant? How is it that we can't perfectly keep the covenant and God will accept it? How does this work?

And the Bible keeps pointing and pointing for us to understand this profound insight that we can't. And that's why we need Jesus. You see, later on in the book of Exodus, the book of Leviticus, the book of Numbers, and the book of Deuteronomy, he's going to make very clear that there has to be something like a sacrifice to make us right with God.

[43 : 49] It has to be something from outside of us. And if this covenant is to be as secure and eternal and go beyond life and death and into the new heaven and the new earth, because the biblical view of what happens at the end of the end of the end of the end is that we inhabit redeemed bodies in a redeemed and restored creation for all eternity.

Real people in real bodies in a real world with a real God. And when we understand that we'll be real people in real bodies in a real world with a real community with a real God, God, it doesn't mean that that makes this world less valuable, it makes it more valuable.

And the story is going to continue to show in the illustration of the sacrifices that you have this, in a sense, blameless animal. And the animal is going to be sacrificed.

You put your hand on the animal and there's a double type of exchange that happens there. In a sense, the sinlessness or blamelessness of the animal is, in a sense, put upon you, clothed upon you, and the wrong that you've done to break your relationship with God is put on the animal.

And the animal dies in your place, but before the animal dies in your place, its innocence, in a sense, is placed on you. There's only going to be one offspring of Abraham that perfectly lives the covenant and that's Jesus.

[45 : 21] And when we see Jesus dying upon the cross and when we put our faith and trust in him and his resurrection power, we're not only acknowledging that only God can give us that spiritual life that will outlast death.

Only God can give us that. And when we put our hand upon into Christ, there's this exchange that happens and it's not just with an animal that can't really fully represent us as human beings and can sort of deal with what we've done up until now but can't deal with what we've done in the future.

But when we see God, the Son of God, who's the only one who has perfectly kept the covenant that God made with Abram, the only one of Abram's seed that perfectly keeps the covenant, that when we put our hands in the hand of Christ, whether you are rich or poor, whether you are high IQ or low IQ, whether you come from Rwanda or Sudan or Ireland or Canada or China or Indonesia, whether you, when you put your hand in the hands of Christ who is God, the Son of God, the only one who has walked perfectly in this covenant, that what is happening is that his perfect keeping of the covenant is bestowed upon you.

And the wrong you've done to damage the covenant is put upon him. And this also happens in the real world, in real time, in real history.

But because of who he is, in a sense, it happens in the heavens and therefore is available for those before him and after him to every human being.

[47 : 00] And so this picture of the covenant is pointing to the greater covenant that it was still to come. And every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we renew the covenant.

We remember how it is that we become Christ's and become part of Christ's covenant community. That we reaffirm that we need to receive him and feed on him spiritually.

We need to receive his benefits and that we are to walk with him. We come confessing our sins, acknowledging the different ways this week, acknowledging that the ways we've done wrong this week, acknowledging that the only way we can stand before him is because of his finished work upon the cross.

And we remember once again his death, we remember his resurrection, we remember his coming again, we remember that there will one day be the new heaven and the new earth and once again we recommit and we say thank you Jesus and we recommit to walk as his.

Let's stand. Bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus.

[48 : 21] We thank you for the gift of new life that comes in him. We thank you, Father, that your desire for us is that one day we who walk with you by faith but not by sight, that one day the day will come when we see you face to face as you always see us in our face.

That we will have renewed bodies, restored bodies, resurrection bodies in a restored and recreated world, in a community under your headship and your kingship.

We will walk on this earth, the new earth. We will go to distant stars and different planets. The whole unending universe will be ours while our home will always be on this earth.

We will always be under your kingly and loving authority. And, Father, we ask that you help us to understand as your children and people at a deeper level what Christ has done for us to give us this new life that can only come from you and that knowing what our destiny is that we will love this earth.

We will love our neighbors. We will love our nation. We will love all of this creation. We will care for it knowing that you love it and will restore all things.

[49 : 57] And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen.