

The Promise

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 July 2024

Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

- [0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, brothers, sisters and friends. A special welcome if you're visiting with us this evening. It's a joy to have you. We ask the Lord to bless his word to you.
- The same intimations as the morning. There's some intimation sheets still at the back door. Just to highlight perhaps two of the most pressing ones we have. Well, three. First of all, as always, this Thursday at 7 in the hall at a prayer meeting.
- It's a reminder that prayer meeting is open to everyone. I don't know what perhaps people may think of times, but I know that we have a history of that in our island or our culture. It is open to all.
- It is open to all to come along and to hear more from God's word. And you'll be asked to do anything other than just to sit and be under the word. So 7 o'clock, as always, in the Thursday prayer meeting.
- And then, God willing, this a week today, this coming Lord's Day morning, we hope to have a baptism of baby Finn. And again, as said in the morning, just would you pray for Finn as he grows up?
- [1 : 0 3] Powerful Lionel, Fiona and the family and everyone connected to them. Again, as said in the morning, a baptism is often a good chance to be evangelical.
- People like to see a baptism. People like to watch a baptism. So please make use of that opportunity. Also one looking forward to the end of the month, 27th and 28th of July.
- So that's Saturday and Sunday. We hope to have an in-house communion. It would be myself doing the services. A bit of normal communion, other than the fact it's not advertised, it's not public. Just ourselves.
- And it's a good chance, perhaps, if you haven't yet and you have been wrestling for years to go forward, this will be quiet, likely to have no visitors at all.
- It's a good chance, perhaps, to make that public step. We're here to worship God. We can do so in the Scottish Psalter.
- [2 : 0 3] All our worship this evening is from the Scottish Psalter and Psalm 127. The Scottish Psalter, Psalm 127.
- It's on page 420. Psalm 127, on page 420. Psalm 127.
- Accept the Lord to build the house. The builders lose their pain. Accept the Lord, the city keep. The watchmen watch in vain. Tis vain for you to rise betimes.
- Or late from rest to keep. To feed on sorrows bread. So gives he, his beloved, sleep. Psalm 127. Have a whole psalm to God's praise. Amen.
- Accept the Lord to build the house. Accept the Lord to build the house.
- [3 : 0 2] That will SAPs ■ way. The watchmen watch in vain.
- Amen. Amen.
- Amen. Amen.

Amen. God, let us feel the Lord inside times of worship, these times where we are identifying ourselves as your church, openly and freely and gladly worshipping a risen saviour.

Help us, Lord, this evening, then, to come to this place with that necessary mix of a solemn heart, a solemn heart understanding. We come to a serious occasion, a serious occasion because we come just now to our God who is sovereign, that all things are known to you, all things are kept by you, all power is yours, all glory is yours, all praise is yours. We come solemnly before your understanding that you alone have a one, true, living God. Help us then, for this short time together, to have our hearts and our minds framed in such a way that we have just the smallest grasp of your wonder, of your glory, that you're the God who makes covenantal promises, you're the God who keeps these promises to the very end, you're the God who from the start of your creation until the end of your creation, that you are with your people, you promise never to leave them, and at the coming of our Saviour, we see that promise in human form, in human flesh. As we come, Lord, asking that we solemnize our hearts and our minds, we also come just now with praise, with joy, understanding we come as a free people, worshipping you freely. Those of us here this evening who know and who love our Saviour, we come as a free people, free from the chains of sin, free from the bounds of sin, and yes, at times we find ourselves still going back to these old ways and these old patterns and these old habits and desires that we confess, but we know we are free. We were once slaves to this world, once slaves to the evil one, but now we find ourselves servants of our Saviour. We now find ourselves serving Him, being led by Him, but once we're being led to destruction, now we're led by our Saviour in to eternal victory.

[8 : 13] Help us, Lord, then, to approach these times of worship of joy. Joy, we come before a Father in heaven who knows us, who cares for us, who loves us, who tells us quite clearly in your words, and you desire to hear our worship. You desire to hear the praise of your people. Let me see your face. Let me hear your voice.

Lord, help us, Lord, help us, then, be seen together often. Help us, then, be seen together in public worship, lifting up our voices to you in praise. We thank you for the gift of singing, that you've given us, the great gift, the gift to your church of all generations, where we can sing your praises and show in the smallest of ways that appreciation we have for who you are and what you have done for us.

Help us, then, to continue to lift our voices up, not concerned about our own particular ability, but concerned, rather, about the quality of our hearts as we sing these words to you.

We thank you, as always, for the ones who lead our worship week after week, the ones who are willing to stand up and to lead the sung worship, a task that not many of us are called to, not many of us are able to even begin to do. We thank you, Lord, for the skills and the talents given to those who lead us, that they would know that they partake in the essential part of worship, as we are led by them, as we sing and lift our voices to you. As we pray today for our own local situation, we pray this evening more widely. We remember our prayer points, remember especially the mission work going on in Japan. Remember, as we said this morning, those connected with the free church, but we also remember the mission work in the wider church circles in Japan, a nation where, through such confusion, a nation where, in many ways, an advanced society, but also in many ways, far advanced more than ourselves, but in many ways, a society where there is little to zero gospel interest, where we ask that you would work in that place and in that society and bring the hope of the gospel to a society that seems to have many things worked out, but is still lacking the greatest thing, the hope that is found in Jesus and in him alone. We thank you this evening, Lord, that the reality is we are part of a worldwide church. We're being just now before you believers, not just in Asia, being before you believers in that great continent of Africa, being before you believers in that continent, especially those associated with free church mission work and those who have long since left the free church to establish their own congregations and their own denominations, with their own culture, with their own people. We thank you for that privilege. We understand, Lord, the day is coming and is approaching soon when there will be more Christians, indeed many more Christians in Africa and many, many more Christians in Asia than there are in the West. We give you praise for that fact, that your church is being built across the world. Help us to be humble enough to understand we are a small part of the greater plan of salvation.

Remember just now the ongoing work in nations we do not often think about, in nations we have perhaps a little understanding of, we remember especially just now in Central Asia.

[11 : 59] Pay the Lord for various Stan nations there we have heard about in recent months. Pay the Lord for ongoing work in Kazakhstan as we hear of mission work going on there in recent days. Lord, we ask you to bless your people there as some natives local to that country of wealth but also country of poverty. As some natives there, some locals have started a ministry, Lord, you know the full details. We ask you to bless the gospel work to that place. We come this evening feeling in terms of distance at times, in terms of use at every time, so far away from helping our brothers and sisters across the world. For we give you praise that as we join together in prayer just now, we are immediately beside them. There is no distance at all. Just as there is no distance between us and you when we lift our voices, but as we lift our distance between us and fellow believers when we pray to you.

And this act just now, this act of worship, this service of worship, in our singing, in our prayers, in our breaking down of the word, we join alongside brothers and sisters across our nation, across this world. Help us, Lord, to have that holistic, that wide view of your church.

It's a church of many nations, of many languages, many colours, many cultures. Help us, Lord, then, to understand that and to give you praise for that. We thank you for the great privilege we have of being able to share in the gospel work in this small corner of your vineyard. We pray once more for North Tulsa. We thank you for the privilege of living here and of serving here. We pray just now, Lord, this week especially, as we look forward to the upcoming baptism this coming Lord's Day morning.

We ask, Lord, for strength, Lord, for the family. We ask, Lord, especially mindful of Finn, we give you thanks for him. Lord, we know that he's a baby that is well loved, not just by his parents, not just by grandparents, not just by family on both sides, but he's well loved also by a community around him.

We ask that as he grows up, he would grow up in the things of the Lord, who grow up knowing that this is a place full of people who know him, who are praying for him, who care for him. We ask first and foremost that he would grow up to be one of your glorious servants. We leave that with you. Pray also, Lord, for the upcoming communion plans, for the time of encouragement for us as a congregation.

[14 : 38] Give us the energy and give us the strength, Lord, to work well all things out to glorify you, so that together around the table we take the simple elements and we're reminded as to the beauty and the glory, but also the horror of the cross. We pray just now for any who are heavy in their minds about coming forward, any who have been praying for any opportunity, who are looking for a sign, as it were, who are looking for some token of encouragement. We ask you to realize that the token has been given, the instruction, the command has been given from Jesus, to come, take and eat.

Lord, we ask that it would be a blessing to our brothers and sisters who perhaps are waiting just now, who have not yet publicly declared their faith in you, that you would prompt their hearts and spirits that perhaps this time may be the time for them. We leave that, Lord, with you.

Help us this evening, then. We confess we come before you with so many distractions in our mind, so many things which pull our attention away from what it is we're doing here. We ask for this short time together, this short time around your word, this short time digging into one of the glorious doctrines you've given us. We ask, Lord, you'd help us to be full of understanding, but not just to be growing in head knowledge, but to leave this place having grown in our love for who you are and for what you have done. We come this evening asking forgiveness of sin.

We confess that we have sinned against you this past week and indeed this past day. We confess that often the old man wins over, that often the old man has his way, and we find ourselves at times perplexed, at times distressed, at times confused. As we wonder, as we think, as we worry about our position before you, we give you praise that we come to a Saviour who holds on to his people, who died once and for all, to have his people once and for all, and to have them all forever. Lord, help us then to understand that and to lay hold of that fact, that his power to keep us is far greater than our power to walk away or to fall away. We remember his goodness, remember his grace towards us, and all that he has done for us. Keep us safe, Lord, this evening. We pray, Lord, for safety from the evil one this evening and this week. We understand that he hates gatherings like this. He hates times of worship. He hates the growth of your people. He hates the growth of fellowship. He hates the growth of gospel in an area. We do pray for protection from him and his fellow evil workers as we seek to see the good, the gospel good of North Tolstah. Keep us safe,

Lord, and keep us depending on you for all things. Let's call these things in and through and for Jesus. His precious name's sake. Amen. Let's start a read in God's Word in the book of Acts. In a few weeks' time, we hope to start a brand new series in the evening in Acts. But this evening, we're looking at just one single section. Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2. We can read verse 36 of the chapter.

[18 : 10] Acts chapter 2 and verse 36. That's on page 856. Acts 2 verse 36 on page 856.

Let's hear again the word of God. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. With many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings, and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. Praising God, having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. And then we give praise to God for his holy and precious word, even that small section of it. It is his truth. And we praise him for it. Let's again sing to God's praise this time again in the Psalter and Psalm 89. The Scottish Psalter, Psalm 89.

We can sing verses 1 down to verse 4 of the Psalm. Psalm 89 on page 344. Psalm 89 verses 1 down to verse 4.

God's mercies I will ever sing, and with my mouth I shall, by faithfulness make to be known to generations all. For mercy shall be built, said I, forever to endure, by faithfulness even in the heavens, by will it, by will it, by will it, establish sure. Psalm 89 verses 1 to 4. To God's praise.

[21 : 10] Psalm 89 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 89 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 89 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 89 verses 1 to 5. Psalm 89 verses 1 to 5.

And as I see you, this overheard is happy, by faithfulness even in the extended And who to the end of the creation song Thy and all that I created Let's for a short time go back to the chapter we had, Acts chapter 2.

[23 : 58] We have the glorious words of verse 39, Acts chapter 2, verse 39.

Where Peter says, the Holy Spirit says, 3 Peter, For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

I want an apology to our visitors. This will be more of a lecture this evening. We tend not to do this, we tend to keep our lectures, teaching sessions for our prayer meetings.

But God willing, as I said, we have a baptism coming up this coming Lord's Day morning. And we'll rather keep it to a prayer meeting where there's perhaps fewer of us out.

What do we do in the evening? Just a quick reminder for us. A summary of why are we doing what we're about to do next Sunday morning? Why are we hopefully, with God's help and God willing, going to baptise Finn?

[25 : 06] Why are we doing it? Providentially, there was to be a series, and there will still be a series, probably end of the year, into next year now, about why we do things.

Remember, we started a few months ago, we asked the question, why are we Presbyterian? And we answered that question through scripture. There was a hope of doing why do we baptise babies. It would be a three week sermon series.

But this evening, a summary for us. And again, going forward, we'll do a proper series. But it's a summary of this evening. And to help us with that summary, we have the verse there, verse 39.

Now, the thing about having one verse to help us this evening is, my whole point is, it's not about one verse. The case, the evidence, the reason why we baptise infants, as well as adults, is one which takes in the whole of scripture.

Now that sounds like a way out, like an easy answer, but it's not. That's the very problem of why so many people perhaps struggle with it. The reason why we baptise infants, it stretches right back to the start.

- [26 : 19] It stretches forward to the end of this creation. And it stretches then into the new creation, the new heavens, and the new earth. It connects to all the promises, all the covenants that God makes with and to and for his people.

Again, this is why so many people, understandingly, struggle with it. It's why we struggle to understand why we do what we do.

As it is not just one verse we point to. And it requires many of us, myself included, to unlearn a lot of things we just assume, or take for granted, the Bible says.

Or to unlearn things we assume the Bible is telling us to do. When you go back to scripture and look at it holistically, look at it as a whole thing.

The picture begins to form that bit more easy. Again, there's not one single verse that says, take your children and baptise them.

- [27 : 28] In a sense. And for many that's enough. We say, well, if it's not there, then why are we doing it? Well, if you've been going to our prayer meetings, you would say we're doing a series on the Trinity.

If you're to apply that same logic to the Trinity, then we can say, well, we can't believe in the Trinity anymore, can we? Because where in the Bible does it say, God is Trinity, believe in the Trinity, follow the Trinity?

It doesn't. In the Trinity series, we've been starting the Old Testament, haven't we? And working our way slowly through all the evidence that shows our God is Tyune.

And that takes in the whole scope of scripture. From old to new, from now until the future. And the same for all, all the principles, all the teachings, all the glorious truths of scripture.

It's not about finding one single proof text. It's always dangerous. Almost always dangerous. It's about saying, what is God teaching throughout all of time about this?

- [28 : 34] And you'll see, as we have the Trinity and for this evening, a short look. When it comes to the place of children in God's covenant, in God's church, it goes back to the start.

And it is incredibly important to at least begin to work to understanding it. I know I don't have to say this, but just to remind ourselves, it's not a salvation issue.

It's not a salvation issue. There's brothers and sisters, I'm sure perhaps some in our own congregation, who perhaps don't agree with the principle of a theology of baptizing infants.

In fact, to be a free church member, there's no requirement to believe that. But it is to be elder and to be ministers. Of course, in deacons, we sign the confession. But there's no requirement for members to believe this.

Indeed, I know myself, my own friendship groups, there's plenty of people who don't believe this. Or at least don't fully believe it. It's not a salvation issue.

- [29 : 42] To prove that point, God willing, I'm currently working on getting one of my Baptist brothers. He's a brother in Christ. He's a minister on the mainland. I'm hoping to get him for one of our communion services next year.

It's not a salvation issue. What about ourselves and Baptists can happily fellowship and serve together? But it is an important issue. Just because it's not a salvation issue, it doesn't mean it's not an important issue.

Again, we won't cover everything, but just for the short time together, just three things for us to think about. Again, using this verse as just a platform for us, we can go off and take a journey through all of Scripture.

Three things. First of all, basic principles. Basic principles. And then looking at the benefits and the beauty. So basic principles, then the benefits and the beauty.

Again, this is just to prime us this evening so we can sit next Lord's Day morning and be reminded and be thinking about perhaps what it is that's taking place.

[30 : 46] First of all, in basic principles. Quite simply, the first principle is God has always included families and or children in his promises.

Go back to the Old Testament, go back to the start, work your way through. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, when God speaks to his people, when God makes us aware of the big covenantal promises, it's to the person or people he's talking with and their family and their generations after them.

In fact, if you've been paying attention perhaps to what we've been singing carefully, we've even sung it just now. One of the promises. That's Psalm 89.

Where God, of course, is speaking here and speaking to David, but of course it's reflected fully in Jesus. I with my chosen one have made a covenant graciously to David, and to my servant whom I love to David sworn have I.

What does the promise to David include? We sing these things, we love these Psalms.

[32 : 06] But when we stop and think about it, what is God saying? Well, here's the evidence for us. When God makes a promise, it's to the people and to the children and the families of the people.

Adam and who? His family. Abraham and who? His generations. His family. Noah and who? And the generations and family.

David and who? David and his generations and his family. Again and again, every covenantal moment, every promise that God makes to his people, at least to the heads of his people.

To the prophets and to the kings. To the leaders. Again and again, the same theme, the same thread is there. It's to you and your children. To you and your children.

To you and your seed. To you and your generation. The various wordings all saying, of course, the exact same thing. The exact same thing.

[33 : 08] We'll see this more in a second. But perhaps the most obvious is not in Abraham. What's the first thing, really, that Abraham was told to do?

To go on to circumcise. To go on to show physically that you and your family, you and your seed are now part of this new promise.

This new family of God. It will be shown physically on your children. And again and again, God has included and includes family.

Think of Israel itself. Think of Israel of old, travelling through the desert. In Israel, you've got a group of people. Many of whom are faithful.

Many of whom are travelling because they believe and they know the Lord. And many of whom have seen the miracles of the Lord. But who also are part of Israel? Is it just the old, understanding, grown up people in that group?

[34 : 12] No. It's everyone who is circumcised. All the children are part of Israel. All the children are part of Israel. All the children are part of Israel. Right from the start, the theme is there.

The sign is there. The evidence is there. That God includes not just adult, grown up people. He includes their children. Their generation in the promises too.

Again, we'll keep this for our upcoming series at some point. There's a fascinating theme in the New Testament. Perhaps it's very easy to miss, but once you see it, you see it everywhere.

Almost 50 times, around 48, depending on how you translate some words. But say 48 times in the New Testament. We see believers in Jesus, New Testament Christians, being named or being called or being placed alongside those who are the covenant of Abraham.

In other words, included in the covenant of Abraham. So the covenant God made of Abraham and his seed, we're told in the New Testament that we are part of that same covenant.

[35 : 29] Which implies the same covenant stipulations still are there for us. Which means, if Abraham had to show on his children their part of the covenant, then the question is, well, how do we do that today?

That brings us to our second principle. That baptism in the New Testament, it mirrors quite perfectly circumcision in the Old Testament.

And again, that will be a whole separate sermon that follows.

But just to give us some summary and some principles this evening. This sounds basic, it sounds simple, because it is. The basic principle that we see assumed by the early Christians, assumed by the early church, and we have quotes to back that up, assumed by the first church councils, is that baptism was a New Testament evidence that reflected Old Testament practice of circumcision.

When Christ came, we see circumcision is gone, but what is the sign of the New Testament? It's baptism. It's baptism. Just as the children of the Old Testament had the sign of God's care placed upon them, and just as the children of Israel had the sign of God's care, yes, but also of God's keeping over them, and the same as the same as now shown in the New Testament.

[37 : 13] The commentators, many of them, give various examples of how these two symbols mirror one another. They're not the same, but they mirror one another.

Circumcision in the Old was pointing towards something. We find that pointing towards baptism in the New. I've got just ten examples here. There's plenty more.

There's one writer alone, one minister alone, who has over thirty examples. But I've picked ten here that I've found myself the most convincing. And again, if you want scriptural verses for these, please let me know and I can provide them for you.

But just go run through them with some commentary just now. So these are things that apply both to circumcision and infant baptism or baptism that shows it is the same thing being mirrored.

Both are called a sign in scripture. Both are called a sign. A sign and a seal as our catechism tells us.

[38 : 15] I won't look at them, but poor Lionel had to answer that question when he came before the session. The catechism tells us baptism is a sign and a seal. It's a sign.

A sign of what? It's a sign that shows us that this person has been given the privilege of being brought up, of being born into, of being shown at least a measure of God's covenantal promise.

Every child born, every male child, I'll say more in a second, every male child born in Israel was born in Israel. They weren't born to Gentile tribes.

They weren't born to pagan tribes. They were born in Israel. Born to Jewish people, Jewish parents, and as they're wandering through the wilderness, only they have God present with them leading the way.

For what a privilege. But not every child born in Israel who received the circumcision sign, not every one of them remained a good Jewish man.

[39 : 21] Many of them we know rebelled. Again, we said this morning, think of the judges. Think of judges. Think of all the horror we saw. Plenty of good Jewish men were not good Jewish men.

They were evil men who sacrificed their own children to idols. But many of them grew up hearing God's promises, had the privilege of being part, as it were, of the camp of Israel.

It was a sign of God's care for them. Our children, when we baptise them into the church, say, well, how many of these children you baptise will then go on to become Christians?

Well, everyone won't. Everyone, at least outwardly, will not go on to become a Christian. But every child we baptise into the church and we try and encourage parents and grandparents to remain part of our fellowship.

And every child we pray for going forward. It doesn't mean nothing. It means something. It's a sign that you've been born into a community, born into a group of people who will pray for you, who want the Lord's best for you.

[40 : 33] It's also a seal. Again, circumcision was called and seen as a seal. It was there to separate you, to show in you there's something different about you for the rest of the world.

Our baptism, whether infant or adult, our baptism is there to show that we are different to the rest of the world.

Not in a pompous way, not in an arrogant way, but in a practical way. That we again have been prayed for, we again are kept and are known by the community of God's people.

And there are certain privileges and certain blessings we have that those outside of that community do not have. Both symbolise regeneration.

Here's fascinating. And again, we'll come in detail on this in the future, God willing. But there is text and there is scripture, tells us that circumcision is described as being a symbol of regeneration, of being made clean.

[41 : 43] But there's something being done to a child by their parents, the child has no input in that. So is baptism. So is baptism. Both are for those who are holy or set apart by their parents.

Or by their community's relationship to God. Number six. Both point to union with God. And seven.

Both oblige the recipient to walk in newness of life. We're told we ought to remember your baptism. Remember your baptism.

I can't. I was baptised 30 odd years ago in Graver by Malcolm McDonald as I was there crying baby. I don't remember that at all. Remember your baptism.

What does that mean for me? Remember you're part of a community that has been praying for you. For me, I remember and think I was baptised with, again, non-believing parents.

[42 : 45] But granny was there with them. And she was there. And as I was baptised, I am baptised to a generation of people, my granny included, who prayed for me for 25 odd years.

20 years. 20 years before that. Of a congregation of people who to this very day are still praying for me. Who in their minds, of course, think of me as that wee baby baptised all these years ago.

And for baby Finn, he has been baptised into this congregation, this community of God's people, this family of God's people. And it's not just an act we're doing just for the sake of it. We're doing this.

And as the vows are made, as the promises are made, as the prayers are said, it's an act of worship before God. As a solemn act of baptism takes place, we are saying to Finn, we will pray for you.

And you're being set aside here to be different. To walk in newness of life in the day and time comes for him to understand it.

[43 : 49] Of course, both baptism and circumcision given to children. Both signs are only administered, of course, once for obvious reasons. And both, interestingly, again for the future, are talked about pointing to justification by faith.

But we'll leave that for now. This is ten of twenty plus signs that show us baptism and circumcision are mirrored together. Circumcision, in other words then, was always meant to be more than just a physical sign.

It's always there to point you to the heart. God reminds us people often of this. Two examples for us.

Jeremiah 9, verse 25. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh.

In other words, the expectation was, yes, your circumcision is in the flesh. But that is there to remind you that you are called to be one of God's people.

[45 : 01] And there is punishment coming for those who are not acting in that way or living in that way. Baptism, practically speaking, practically speaking, baptism is some water sprinkled on a baby's head.

There is no magic, there is no special quality of the water, there is no special quality of the minister. What's taking place? Well, it's not just a bare sign, it's not just an empty sign.

What's taking place? Well, like circumcision, the physical sign is to point towards the heart. Remember your baptism. Deuteronomy 10, 16.

As God commands, circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn.

In other words, the physical is pointing towards the spiritual. As baby thin grows up, as he asks questions, as he searches for meaning, as he wonders about what salvation is for him, it can be said to him, you are baptized, you are included, you are numbered, both literally and spiritually, the number of God's people, therefore, remember your baptism and who you are.

[46 : 31] God has always included families in his promise. Baptism and circumcision are mirrors of one another. And thirdly, an argument I find quite beautiful, is God always widens his promises and never constricts them, never constrains them, never shortens them.

God's promises always get bigger. With respect, they always get better. Think of Eden. We covered this a few weeks ago in the prayer meeting. Think of Eden, old Eden, the first Eden.

Beautiful as it was, glorious as it was, special as it was, it is nothing compared to the new heavens and the new earth, to new Eden. For me, this is the simple question I always go to, and I was in class, when it comes to infant baptism, it's not an issue I am passionate about, only because I was in class in ETS, it was myself as the only full-time future student.

So the other full-time students were all Baptists. So it was myself and 15 Baptists in class for three years. That shapes you. It transforms you.

It challenges me. And it means you have to think these things through. And one question I always found myself going to. If God at the start, if God in the Old Testament quite happily and quite freely and quite easily included children, when did God change his mind in the New Testament?

[48 : 11] When does God say, right, I used to include children and families and generations and seed, but actually now in the New Testament, I've changed my mind. Families no longer included.

Children no longer included. Of course, it doesn't say that. God always widens the promises.

Old Testament, we see Israel only. Israel only had salvation. And those who joined in from Gentile nations, they could always join. We see that. Think of Rahab, for example. A woman who, on paper, had no hope of salvation.

But we read of Rahab, that after her heroic act, she then joins the children of Israel and lives her and her family, her and her family live with Israel for the rest of their days.

But in general, it was Israel against the world. All pagans, all Gentiles, worshipping Baal and everything else. And there's Israel there. But in the New Testament comes, and slowly but surely, it's Israel and the gospel within who for?

[49 : 25] For the Gentiles too. Well, the gospel, the hope of salvation in the Old Testament included the children of believers. Then why suddenly, to suit our own ideas, does it then be constrained and constricted in the New Testament?

It doesn't make sense. That is not the pattern we see. Every single covenant we see God making, he widens and widens out his promise. Even successive covenants, the promise and the benefits become wider and wider and wider.

Think even of male and female, boys and girls. Again, of course, it's only males who receive, who received the circumcision sign. Were females not part of Israel?

Of course they were. Of course they were. We know they were. But in the New Testament, we see the sign is given to all children, male and female. Male and female.

But in Christ there is neither, what? Jew nor Greek, male nor female. Free nor slave. If in the Old Testament children were included, how much more must there be included in the New Testament?

[50 : 39] The sign has changed, yes. The physical sign has changed. The way we show God's blessing has changed. But the audience, the participants have not changed.

If it has, then some of and many of God's promises in the Old Testament become null and void. It's actually, although myself and my Baptist friends still now will have some light conversation on these things and we'll putge our legs.

There is a serious component to this discussion. To maintain a Baptist position, not on purpose, but quite unwittingly, it makes many of God's promises in the Old Testament completely useless.

Completely meaningless. One example, or two examples perhaps, for one just now. We'll keep one for later on. Isaiah 59, where God promises the coming Saviour and the power of that Saviour's work.

Isaiah 59, verse 21. As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord. My spirit who is on you will not depart from you.

[51 : 56] And my words I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips. On the lips of your children and the lips of their descendants from this time on and forever, says the Lord.

What we're saying, if that is talking, we believe both Baptist and Pasadena, we all believe that speaking of the coming Saviour's work. We're saying, well, children aren't included in the promise.

Then is God lying in that verse? Well, no one would say yes to that. We would not say yes to that. It's a dangerous thing to say, well, this can't mean what it's clearly saying.

And plenty of examples with it. Friends and brothers and sisters, God does not change. God does not change. And neither does his promises. If they're wide in the Old Testament, and the promises to include more in the years to come, that's what we see in the New Testament.

Again, the verse we had here, again, this will be the verse we look to in the future when we come to a series on this. But just for this evening, the verse we had here briefly, the promise, promise of what?

[53 : 03] The promise of salvation, the context promise of salvation, promise of being part of the Christian family. The promise is for who in verse 39? The promise is for you, yes, and for your children and for all who are far off.

You and your children. Is Peter wrong? Is he lying in his sermon here? Is he getting God's goodness wrong? Is he giving the people false hope?

No. Who is included? You and your children. Who was saved in the jailer's family? The jailer and his family. And plenty of examples we could look to for that.

There are just three evidences of many of the scriptural proof. I hate that word. It's a helpful word.

The scriptural evidence of infant baptism. Quite simply, three ways. God has always included families. God has always included families.

[54 : 08] Baptism mirrors circumcision in the Old Testament. And finally, God always widens his promises and doesn't constrain them. So briefly then, what are the benefits?

What's the benefit? What's the beauty then of infant baptism? Well, quite beautifully, baptism is a sign of needed faith.

It's a sign that faith, that saving faith is needed. So yes, when you baptise a child, you're including them in a community. But we're not saying for a second, again, by sprinkling some water on a baby's head, you're saying you're now completely saved and going to glory.

That's dangerous. And that is not what was taught by our fathers, our forefathers, our reformers, or our early church. At least not in the majority. Baptism is a sign of needed faith.

Romans 4, verse 11, if you want to look into that. Romans 4, we see that circumcision was not a sign of Abraham's faith. Therefore, it wasn't a sign either of Isaac's faith.

[55 : 21] Rather, for both Abraham and for Isaac, circumcision is a sign of God's covenant righteousness. That God will keep his promise to his people.

It was a sign they had to look to by faith. Again, why we call baptism a sign. It's a sign of God's goodness and God's promise towards the children who will be brought up in the knowledge and fear and things of the Lord.

And again, many will say the obvious objection is, Well, babies can't make a profession of faith. Babies can't make a profession of faith.

They can't articulate or fully understand what it is to be saved. When baby Finn comes up, God willing, in a week's time, Poor Finn is completely passive. As long as he will not bring him up, he's completely passive.

At best of all the world, poor Finn has no idea what's going on. Finn is just there, just, we hope, enjoying himself, we hope, have a good day out. But in his mind, he has no idea, no clue who all these people are and why suddenly his head's a bit damp.

[56 : 38] No idea whatsoever. In that sense, Finn, yes, is totally passive in his baptism. Brought here by his parents, baptized by the minister and so on.

How active were you in your salvation? How active were you in the Lord working in your life? Every one of us is passive. Yes, there's a point you say, Lord, I believe.

Lord, yes, I come to you. But before that, before that, working as it were behind the scenes, the Lord is taking you to that point in your life. And brothers and sisters, we were totally and are totally passive in that.

And related to that, just this afternoon we were discussing ourselves and just thinking through the fact that from the very point you're born, if you think back, the way the Lord works all things together for your salvation eventually and for his good ultimately.

You know, Christians look back and you think how everything works out together. That job you applied for, those lessons you listened to in school, those marks you got in school, and then you applied for that job rather than that job.

[57 : 52] That then led you to that place to speak to that person, who then encouraged you to speak to that person. And then you went to church in that place. And the journey is long-winded. But right from the start, we see God working and you are completely passive in all of it.

All of it. Thin, an ever-baby, is completely passive. But that doesn't mean the Lord is not fully involved in what is taking place.

Finally then, just to summarize the beauty of it. What is the beauty we see in infant baptism? Well, the obvious one of course, is the congregational encouragement.

The congregational encouragement. It encourages us to see the Lord is still bringing in people. Whether that's from back to church Sunday, whether that's children coming into our numbers.

Also, it gives us congregational responsibility. Of course, we'll go through the plan next Lord's Day morning. But as a congregation, we will be physically but also mentally and spiritually standing together when Thin is baptized.

[59 : 09] Why? As a congregation, as a family, we have responsibility to pray for, to care for spiritually, to look after spiritually Thin.

It gives us a reminder that we're not passive. That we are a church family active in this glorious work. There's also beauty in the fact that Thin, we pray, will grow up knowing and hearing about these covenantal promises.

The knowledge that Thin will grow up with family members, those part of our congregation, close family members, extended family members, neighbours, yourselves, friends of the family, who will encourage this wee boy as he grows up.

There's also beauty in it for us as we think of the hope in the years to come. When Thin thinks on his baptism, thinks on his church family, thinks on who he is and what he is part of.

When he applies then the promises that have been given to him to his own experience in his own life, we have the beauty and the hope. The hope that he will not just be nominally attached to our congregation, or this one or any other one.

[60 : 30] The hope that one day Jesus will be both his Lord and Saviour, not just in name but also in his experience. There's great beauty and also plenty of benefits in what we are doing.

It is not just a bare action. It's not just doing what our Father has done before us. We do this because we believe it. We do this because we believe it's scriptural. We believe it is right.

And we believe it actually has real benefit, not just for ourselves, but real benefit also for Finn. I encourage us all of course to be in prayer this week especially for the McKeever family.

Close and extended. The family on both sides. The friends on both sides. The communities that will be coming together to enjoy and take part in a baptism.

To remember of course especially Lionel and Fiona. And to be in prayer also for Finn. Praying for his future. Praying of how the Lord may use him, may lead him, may take him.

[61 : 39] But one day he'll look back on his baptism and know it and love it with a heart full of faith for his Saviour. Let's bow our heads in that hour of prayer. Thank you Lord for the gift of your word.

In it we find going back through the centuries and decades that the beauty of your promises to your people. And the hope you give us through these promises.

You're a covenant making, a covenant keeping God. Where we ourselves daily fail to as it were keep our side of the covenant. We give you praise that you keep it for us.

That we are not here resting in our own efforts for salvation. We are here this evening, those of us who know and love Jesus. We are here this evening resting on him and his finished work in all our salvation.

Pray Lord for the upcoming week. Pray Lord for the plans behind the scenes. All the bits and pieces that must be done Lord to be done well and carefully. Pray Lord practically. Lord for Lionel and Fiona and for Finn.

[62 : 41] Lord we thank you for them. Look after them as a family. That they would have hope and confidence. And know that as they come to baptise their beloved baby.

That we remember them. That we are praying for them. But more importantly we ask that as a family. Both near and extended. That we all come to know the blessing of Jesus as friend, as Saviour and as King.

Help us Lord this new week to go forward. Having grown we hope in our love and knowledge of who you are. To apply all we have heard to the daily realities of life. Let's call these things in and through and for Jesus.

In his precious name's sake. Amen. Let's conclude. Let's conclude. Again this altar. Psalm 103. Psalm 103. Psalm 103. And verses 17 down to verse 20.

Psalm 103. Verse 17 down to verse 20. Psalm 103. Verse 17 down to verse 20. Again singing of God's covenant. Psalm 103. Again singing of God's covenant.

[63 : 50] Psalm 103 verse 17. But unto them that do him fear, God's mercy never ends. And to their children still his righteousness extends.

To such as keep his covenant. And mindful are always of his most just commandments. That they may them obey. Psalm 103 verses 17 to 20.

God's praise.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[66 : 42] Amen.