

Covenant Commitment

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together back to Genesis chapter 17 and today we're going to take the whole chapter as we continue looking at the life of Abram and as he's come to this important juncture in the history of his life and indeed in the history of the church where we find God again coming to him and reaffirming his promise but adding certain important things here that extends Abram's knowledge of God and of his life.

Now we've seen that Abram's faith has been tested and goes on being tested and that especially in regard to the promise of a son his faith was tested due to the delay in inverted commas that's in human terms what appears to be a delay from the moment that God promised him that he would have a son to this time here in chapter 17.

Many years have elapsed and still there is no son by his wife Sarah. So we've seen how that was itself a testing of his faith and we saw in chapter 16 how Abram and Sarah actually sought to meet that particular issue by trying to arrange that this servant of Abram would actually become his heir. And of course God then intervened and said no that's not the way that's not my way that's maybe good in your eyes but that's not how I have planned it and they were taken then from that and we come into chapter 17.

Now chapter 17 is very interesting because obviously it has this matter of circumcision emphasized all the way through the second part of the chapter and we're going to have a look at that very briefly.

[1 : 51] But it's interesting too because comparing it with chapter 15, chapter 15 if you like is setting the pattern for how we come to possess what God has promised.

That is in fact by faith. In other words God comes through his grace, by his grace, in his grace, in his undeserved favour. However God comes to us and reveals to us where blessings lie for us and that's of course now especially in Jesus Christ and he emphasizes that these blessings, these things are yours by faith.

When you come to place your trust in me I will keep my promise that all of these things will actually be yours, they'll be in your possession. The inheritance, the eternal life that's in Jesus Christ. And chapter 17 builds on that because there's another side to it emphasized as well as believing so as to obtain the blessing. Now there's something else as well as the believing there's a life of obedience attached to the believing.

That's why God says to Abraham here I am God Almighty walk before me and be blameless.

There's a corresponding dedication of himself on the part of Abraham required.

[3 : 11] And as well as that there's an incorporation of his family into the orbit of these blessings. They are not just for himself, they are for all his descendants as well.

Because God is promising to be a God to him and to his descendants after him. And as a sign of that they have to bear the mark of the covenant which here is circumcision.

So let's look at it under two headings. There's first of all what we can call the terms for covenant commitment. And that includes both God's side of things and also Abraham's side.

Although it's Abraham's side especially that goes on to be emphasized. The covenant terms for covenant commitment on the part of God and on the part of Abraham. There's first of all God's revelation to him.

Notice here when Abraham was 99 years old the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him I am God Almighty. It's just again God taking the initiative.

[4 : 20] God in his grace coming. This is not something Abraham planned. This is not something Abraham expected at this moment. This is not something Abraham prayed for at this precise moment.

This was God appearing. God taking the initiative. God again entering into his life. That's how God is. And you notice in verse 22.

When God had finished talking with him God went up from Abraham. That's a very interesting and important emphasis or description there.

God went up from. In other words when you read that God appeared to him. What it's saying is the opposite of God going up. It's God coming down to him. The initiative was with God. Grace always comes downwards to us.

We don't produce it. We don't create it. We don't deserve it. It is entirely of God's free will. It's entirely of God's grace that he comes downwards toward us.

[5 : 19] And all the way through the Bible you have this emphasis. So that we who come to trust in the Lord. Will actually return to him in our thanksgiving. A true note of wonder and amazement.

As well as thanksgiving. That this has actually happened. That without our control. And entirely out with our doing. God has chosen to come down.

God has chosen to reveal himself. But you see. There's something else built into that as well. Not only does it say that God appeared to him. And then after he had finished talking with him.

God went up from him. What that really tells you is that the whole thing is controlled by God. The beginning of it. And the wrapping up of it or the end of it.

It is all under God's control. God has chosen to reveal himself. God has chosen to reveal himself. And how important that is too. Because God doesn't come into your life or into the life of anyone else.

[6 : 19] Whether it's Abraham or any Christian at all. Anywhere in the world. God doesn't come into your life and say to you. Look I'm here to actually get your life back on the rails.

And now that I've given you a good start. Now that I've put you back on the rails. It's up to you now to finish it properly. That's not the kind of God we have a relationship with.

It's a God who sees things through to the end. Isn't it? It's not starting things off for us and letting us then make our way through our own initiative. And through some of the gifts that he's given to us.

To see that we actually finish the job properly. What God is saying is. I'm the one who begins the work of grace. I'm the one who completes it. I'm the one who sees it through.

Aren't you thankful today. That if God has begun a work in your life. That he has said. Categorically. Absolutely.

[7 : 19] With assurance. I'll see it through. My grace will be sufficient for you. The grace that has begun that work in your life. Isn't that what Paul said in his wonderful little letter to the Philippians.

He who has begun a good work in you. Will complete it. He'll bring it to completion. There's a bit of a shame isn't there involved with something that's begun and not completed.

When you see some building project perhaps that looked very ambitious to begin with. And it was really well underway. And then all of a sudden it stopped for one reason or another.

Maybe somebody ran out of money. Maybe the person passed away. Whatever. Maybe just didn't have the will to complete it. But it just looks. So.

Unfinished. So. Bad. So. Not right. Not right. There's a good beginning to it. But. That's. That's been left.

[8 : 24] The job's not done. It should have been completed. But God's work. Is never incomplete. Every single bit of building work.

That needs to be done in your life. And in my life. By his grace. He will finish the job. He's not leaving it to our own strength. To our own ingenuity.

Even though our commitment. And our dedication to him. And our obedience. And our faith as we'll see. Are all involved. Nevertheless. It is God who begins.

And God who ends the job. And that's why. Reveals here too. I am God. Almighty. The words in Hebrew. Some translations will keep the words. As they are in Hebrew.

El Shaddai. It's a particular name. That God gives to himself. El is always. The word for God. And Shaddai means. Most commentators take it to.

[9 : 22] Indicate. An emphasis on power. I am God. Almighty. As it's translated there. Walk before me. And be blameless. God is saying something about himself. Whenever God reveals himself to us.

As indeed you can say. The whole Bible. Is God's revelation. But it's all about God. Revealing himself to us. It's God. Telling us about himself. It's God saying.

This is who I am. And this is what I'm like. For our benefit. So that we will gain from that. Well what he's saying here is. I am El Shaddai.

I am God. Almighty. And the emphasis there is on the might. On the power of God. And therefore. Abraham is being assured. Of God's. Sufficiency for him.

We use that word. Sufficient. Or sufficiency. Of God. And that's really what's. Emphasized here by God. When he's saying. I am God Almighty. He's really saying.

[10:18] For this work. That I'm involved with. For the life. That I want you to live. For me. I am El Shaddai. I am the sufficient one. Your sufficiency is in me.

You can look to me. And depend upon me. And I will take you through. And I will see you through. And how important that is. Because this word. The word here that's used.

For power. Or almightiness. It's actually used. In the Old Testament. Very often. To contrast with. Human frailty. And human weakness.

For example. It's used. Often in the book of Job. And when you. Read through the book of Job. It's a difficult book. To read through. But one of the things. That's very easy to see from it. Is Job's own. Weakness. Job's own. Incapacity. Even to understand. What God is doing. With his life. But God. Is. Again and again.

[11:16] Describing himself. To him as the. Almighty. And that's how Job. Often refers to him. The Almighty. Has done this to me. In other words. Although. He is crushed.

Under. The providence of God. The mysterious. Providence of God. Although this great. Weight has come upon him. In his life. And he can't understand. All the various paths.

And all the various things. And all the various things. Components. That make up this. Suffering.

That he's enduring. That he's having to go through. He's still. Got faith to say. It's the almighty. It's the sufficient one.

As if Job is saying. Well. I know that. I will come through. But I'll come through. Not because of what I am. But because of who he is. Of who my God is.

He is. The all. Sufficient one. Children. You know what it's like. When. You're doing something. That's. Interesting. Or important.

[12:13] Not just children. Of course. This is true of us all. Whether you're watching television. Playing your Xbox. Or computer games. Whatever it is. That uses electricity. Maybe for adults.

For the. Men. As well as the women. Maybe you're cooking the dinner. And the cooker is on. And it's halfway through. Pshht. Electric was off.

There's a power cut. You know the sense of. Frustration over that. Something that you really find important. Or something that's really interesting. Or. Or enjoyable at the time.

And all of a sudden. The power cut means. That's it. It's gone. You can't continue with it. Well God is saying to Abraham. There'll be no power cuts in your life. Because I am the sufficient one.

I'm the one who has begun this. And I'm going to see it through. I am the God. Who is the Lord Almighty. I am El Shaddai. And when your life is linked to that of God.

[13:13] When you are joined to God in Christ. That's what's true of your life. There are no power cuts. Yes there are times when there are mysteries. And difficulties. And trials. And temptations.

And when God seems to be far away. But he's never detached. The power's always on. There's never a power cut. It's always God.

Being a God to us. As he promises here in the chapter. So. That's the El Shaddai. And if you look through Genesis. It's also true that. It's often used.

This word at times when. People like Abraham. And then his descendants afterwards. Isaac and Jacob particularly. When they need assurance. Or reassurance. This is the word that God uses of himself.

I am El Shaddai. I am God Almighty. And then you come to. The requirement. That accompanies the revelation. Which is. God saying to Abraham.

[14:13] Walk before me. And be blameless. Walk before me. And be blameless. In other words. He's emphasizing for Abraham. That his part.

Of this covenant relationship. Is to walk. In the presence of God. To walk. To live his life. In such a way. That is conscious. That he's living it. Under the eye of God.

That he's living it. In a living relationship. With God. That this El Shaddai. This God. This Almighty One. To whom his life is joined.

Is one that requires of him. That he walks. In his presence. Walk before me. Be. Always conscious. That you are in my presence.

That you are in a relationship. With me. And. Be. Blameless. Or be perfect. Now that's a word. [15:08] That gives rise. To. Some problems. In our. Thinking. It's. Also a concept. That's repeated. In the Psalms. Um.

For example. Psalm 119. Begins. Blessed. Is the one. Who is. Undefined. And straight. In the way. Here the word.

Is blameless. Or perfect. Is a word in Hebrew. Which means. Wholeness. Or something that's whole. Or entire. And. It doesn't. Have.

An absolute. Meaning. Meaning. Because none of us. Can have. An absolutely. Perfect. Way. Of life. In this world. And God knows that. And the word.

Whole. While it doesn't. Excuse. Any lapses. Or any sin. On our part. Nevertheless. The word. Whole. You can carry it. Into the sense. Of being. Whole.

[16:02] Being. Wholehearted. In the way. That you approach. Life. In the way. You approach. Your service. For God. In the way. That you approach. Your relationship. With God. Walk before me.

And be. Wholehearted. In it. In other words. Abram. Is still going to have lapses. But. He is a man. Who is. Wholeheartedly.

Gods. And wholeheartedly. Devoted. To God. And. That is. Comforting. As well as challenging. God requires us. To be. Wholehearted. To be. Entire. In our devotion. To him. In other words. It does fit in. Doesn't it. With Jesus.

And his own emphasis. There. In the likes of the Sermon. On the Mount. Where he calls for. Singleness. Of eye. Where he calls upon. Singleness.

[16:56] Of heart. Or James. In his epistle. When he talks about. A person that is. Double-minded. Or double-hearted. There's a bit of his mind. For God. There's a bit of his mind.

For the world. That person. Cannot serve. God. Properly. What it calls on. Is wholeheartedness. That the whole heart. Belongs to God.

So that everything. That's done. In that person's life. Is done. From that starting point. From that perspective. Of being wholehearted. For God. In other words.

Today. God is not saying to you. Don't worry. If your life's not perfect. Don't worry. If you. If you have this. Or that lapse. Or. It's. Serious. God's not saying.

Don't worry about it. God's not saying. Doesn't really matter. But God is saying. Don't be perplexed. If you find yourself. Not quite perfect yet. What I'm looking for.

[17:50] Is wholehearted. Devotion. What I'm looking for. Is a wholehearted. Approach to life. Where a person says. I know that I'm not perfect. Lord. I know that I've sinned.

I know that I've sinned. Today. As you come to the end. Of each day. But I do want to be. Better than I am. I do want to be. Completely yours. I do want to be known.

As somebody. Whose heart. Is holy. Devoted to you. So help me. To be better. Than I was yesterday. Or that I am today. That's the kind of thing.

That wholeheartedness. Takes in. Because you see. God is saying to him. Walk before me. And be blameless. So that I may make. My covenant.

Between me and you. In other words. God is saying. My covenant. Between me and you. Where I am the giver. And you are the receiver. Where I have the gift.

[18:45] Of an inheritance. To you. And to your descendants. And where you. By faith. Are receiving it. This is only going to work out. If you. Are wholehearted.

And dedicated. To me. On your part. And I will be completely. And absolutely. Committed to you. On my part. God is saying.

Now. It doesn't mean. That God gave Abraham. An inheritance. Because of his faith. Because of his wholeheartedness. But it does mean. That Abraham.

Was not given. The promise. By God. By leaving aside. The issue of being. Wholeheartedly. Devoted to God. What God is saying is. So that I may make my covenant.

With you. And with your descendants. You walk before me. And be wholehearted. That's the condition. Without which the blessing.

[19:42] Will not come into being. And it's true. For your life today. And for mine. God's blessing. Does not come to us. Detached from.

An emphasis. Or our wholehearted. Devotion to him. So that I may make my covenant. With you. He's saying. In a word. So that you will come. To possess all.

That I promised to you. In covenant. Give me your heart. Let your heart be mine. Be wholeheartedly. Devoted to me. Walk before me. And be entire. Do you want.

God's blessing. In your life. Well you'll not have it. Detached from devotion to him. Detached from being obedient to him. Detached from your whole. Heart. Being devoted to him.

And given to him. Because out of a wholeness of heart. Comes. This life. Of what James again calls. In Abraham's life.

[20 : 37] James in chapter 2. Verse 23. Refers to Abraham. With a tremendously. Beautiful. And significant name. He is called.

The friend of God. Just imagine. What that really means. God almighty. I am. El Shaddai.

And here is James. This inspired apostle. Here is this word of God. Telling us. This man Abraham. Was known. And known to God. As his friend.

How did he become his friend? He became his friend. By God's grace. Firstly coming to him. And taking him. And making him. The kind of person. They came to be. But it didn't happen.

Without Abraham's obedience. Without Abraham's. Corresponding dedication. Of heart. So that I may make. My covenant with you. Walk before me. And be wholehearted.

[21 : 31] We all want God's blessing. The promise of it. Hasn't come to us cheaply. It's taken the death.

Of God's son. And our nature. Jesus Christ. On the cross. It's taken that. To secure it for us. All that he requires of us.

Is the whole of our heart. God. He gave all of himself. He wants our heart. Our devotion.

Our wholehearted commitment. To being his. The terms. For this covenant commitment. God's revelation of himself.

Abraham. God's requirement for Abraham. The kind of life. That he must live. In his relationship with God. Second thing. The components. Of this covenant commitment.

[22 : 33] Now. Neither here in the ESV. Or in the AV. Does the. Translation. Quite capture. The wonderful words. That you find. In the Hebrew text. Because.

In verse 4. And in verse 9. You find. The same words. Repeated. Here in verse 9. You have it in the ESV. As for you. But in verse 4. You have exactly. The same words.

Although it says. As for me. Rather than. As for you. They are not translated here. In ESV. Which should be in verse 4. Behold. As for me.

My covenant is with you. And then verse 9. As for you. You shall keep my covenant. In other words. God is bringing together. His own side.

Of the covenant. Of the arrangement. And his commitment. To the promise. That he has given to Abraham. And he is bringing that together. With Abraham's requirement.

[23 : 28] Abraham's responsibility. As for you. You shall keep my covenant. Well here is God saying. As for me. My covenant is with you. You shall be. The father of a multitude of nations.

Kings. Shall come out from you. And I will establish my covenant. Between me. And you. And your offspring. And all these verses build in. What the future is for Abraham.

And his spiritual descendants. But you notice. There are change. In Abraham's name. Abraham is given. A name.

That actually reflects. The change. That has been effected. In his life. You shall no longer be called. Abram. Or Abram. Which literally means. A mighty father.

Or a big father. That's been changed. Changed to Abraham. Which means. Father of a multitude. Doesn't look like a lot of change. But. There's a change in the meaning.

[24 : 26] And Sarah. Is also given. Correspondingly. A different name. It's very like. The one she had. Sarah. Which means. My princess. And Sarah.

Comes to be her name. Which means. Something like. The princess. Of many. Or the princess. Of a multitude. And again. The emphasis is that. This is not just.

Personal to themselves. The blessing. Is not just for Abram. And for Sarah. Personally. The blessing of God. The covenant. God has made. With Abram. Which now. Incorporates.

His wife. Sarah. Into the way. The blessing. Is going to be. Devolved. To his own. Descendants. They have a name. That corresponds. To the pivotal. Place.

That God has given them. In this arrangement. He is the father. Of a multitude. And she is the princess. For many descendants. Very often. In the Bible. God changes names.
[25 : 24] In relation. To very important events. The same happened. In Abram's grandson. Jacob. The same happened. With Cephas. With Peter. With Simon.

In the New Testament. You shall no longer be called. Simon. But Cephas. The rock. Because of what Christ. Was making him into. The name. Associated.

With that change. That God. Effects. And so. Here is the core. Of the covenant. I will give to you. And your offspring.

After you. The land of your sojournings. And I will be. Their God. There is the heart. The core. Of the covenant. God's promise. To be God.

To Abram. And to his people. And so it is for you. And for me. And all that God's promise. Is attached to. Because it is attached to us.

[26 : 18] And to our children. It is attached to God's people. In the visible church. And to their descendants. To their children. To their families. I will be a God to you. And you shall be my people.

Nothing. Is more crucial. To the covenant. Arrangement. Than that. It is a bit like a marriage. It is a bit like. Or if you like. You know. The questions.

That are put to. A minister. When he comes to be. Inducted. Into a congregation. Certainly in the way that. We do things in the free church. There are a number of questions. To do with doctrine. To do with promises. Regarding the government. And worship. And discipline. Of the church. And all of these things. But then when it comes to the final. One of the questions. Do you now close with. And accept. The call. From this congregation. To be. Their minister. Their pastor. And the answer to that is. I do. There is the clincher.

[27 : 15] There is the one that. Brings them together. Formally. I do. It is like a wedding vow. Just why it is called. In Galilee. A marriage bond. Induction.

Is a pause. It is a bringing together. Of a people. And a person. To be. Bonded. In that way. Well that is what God is saying. I will be a God to you.

And you will be my people. I will be bonded to you. And you will be bonded to me. And this will be our relationship. I am saying to you Abraham. I am saying my I do.

Or I will now. And you and your people. Will say I do. To me as your God. That is what it means. To belong to the visible church of God.

If we are right. In our hearts. As we should be. Corresponding. To our baptism. To the sign of the covenant. Which here was circumcision.

[28 : 16] As for me. God is saying. This is what I am committing myself to. I will be your God. I will give to you. And your offspring. This land of your sojournings.

In all the land of Canaan. Of course that. As we saw earlier. Here. Takes us beyond. The literal Canaan. Into the spiritual inheritance. That God gives to his people.

In Christ. And that is why Hebrews 11. Speaks about Abraham. In the way he does. He looked for a city. That has foundations. He did not just look to.

Canaan literally. That was a kind of sign to him. Or if you like. An illustration. Of the true. And lasting. Inheritance.

In heaven. That God promised him. And that is what he looked forward to. Beyond Canaan. That is what God is saying. To us today. That is what we take.

[29 : 10] From this great passage. This is the God. We have a relationship with. God almighty. God the unfailing one. But God the covenant God. God the giver in covenant.

Of a glorious inheritance. God who is true to his promise. God who has bonded himself. To his people. And who. Bonds his people to him. And requires of them.

That they will correspond. To his. I do. I take you. As my people. That we will correspond. And take. Yes. I do. I take you.

As my God. And so. It comes to. As for you. That is God's side of it. Now he comes to Abraham's side. As for you. You shall keep my covenant.

And then. The passage goes on. To speak. Mostly about. Circumcision. The main emphasis. Is on that. As a sign of this covenant. The covenant itself.

[30 : 04] Is not. Circumcision. Covenant is. The relationship. And grace. Between God and Abraham. But. God has marked. And given a sign. Of that relationship. In a way.

That he specified. Every male child. Would be circumcised. From now on. And the adults. As well. At the beginning of things. Here with Abraham. In his household. Including himself. And his 13 year old son. Ishmael. They would be circumcised. Now that has. A lot of teaching. Which we don't have anything like time. To go into. Today. We might come back. And look at this subject. In itself. Because. Our baptism. And our infant baptism. Our practice. Of infant baptism. Is actually rooted here. In the Old Testament. You do not begin looking. At why we baptise. Infant children. In the covenant community. Of the visible church. By beginning. [30 : 58] With the New Testament. You do not begin looking at it. In the New Testament. You begin here. You begin with circumcision. You begin with God's. Specification. For Abraham. And you work it from that.

Through into the New Testament. And the greater privileges. Of the New Testament. But do notice this. Everybody in Abraham's household. Had to be circumcised. Not just. Those who were. Himself. Abraham and born. In his house. Also those bought with money. Even of a foreigner. Who were not Jews like Abraham. Who were not of. Of Abraham's own. Racial stock. They too. Had to be. Circumcised. Circumcised. They belonged. To this household. Of faith. If you like. And so as belonging. To that household. Of faith. They were required. [31 : 55] By God. To be circumcised. And that's where you see. Baptism. In the baptism. Of infants. As a sign of.

Belonging. To the visible. Church of God. Our catechisms. And the. The standards. That we have there. The catechism. The confession. Of faith. This is the kind of language. It uses. For this reason. That by. Baptism. We are admitted. Into the. Membership. Of the visible. Church. It's not going to the Lord's table. That makes you a member. Of the visible. Church. It's receiving. The sacrament. Of baptism. What you do. With that. Is your responsibility. But it has done you. No harm. To have been baptized. As a child. Into the number. Of God's visible. Church. To whom. Are given. The promises. Of God. [32 : 50] And covenant. If they themselves. Are of a mind. And a will. To take them. They are theirs. And your baptism. Reminds you. That all.

That God. Has promised. Should be yours. Possessively. By coming. To put your trust. In him. By taking. Must you. God. In your heart. It's perfectly. Possible. To carry. The sign. Of baptism. In your own. History. And not. Be in your heart. What your baptism. Actually. Signifies. And that is wrong. Because every one of us. Should make sure. If we've been baptized. That we are. In our hearts. Cleansed from sin. Grafted to Christ. Joined to God. In covenant. Bonded to him. [33 : 47] So that we possess. What he has promised to us. In Christ. Well. That's what God. Is doing here. He's establishing.

The sign. Of the covenant. And that's just. Briefly touched on it. There's a whole lot more. That needs to be said. In order to open that out. But notice that. When God. Then promised the birth. Of. Of a son. By Sarah. That Abraham. When he heard this. In verse 17. He fell on his face. God said to him. As for Sarah. Your wife. She will have a son. I will bless her. She'll become nations. And Abraham fell on his face. And laughed. And said to himself. Shall a child be born to God. 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. Now what does all that mean. But the laughter of Abraham. [34 : 43] Was not. Derision. Or ridicule. Or total unbelief. It's the laughter of a man. Who is just totally astonished.

By what God has just said. He's ninety nine years old. Sarah's ninety year old. And here is God saying. You are going to have a son. I will establish my covenant with him. And he will be born to Sarah your wife. This time next year. She will bear a son. And Abraham is astonished.

He is not entirely disbelieving. Because Romans four tells us. He did not stagger. At the promise of God.

Through unbelief. But he hesitates. He just thinks. This is just too much for me. This is just. Too good to be true. This is so amazing.

[35 : 38] It's just that. Initial shock. And he. You know see. He doesn't laugh to God. He doesn't laugh back at God. He laughs within himself. It's a. It's a mixture. I think of. In this laughter.

It's a kind of a mixture. Of the hesitancy. And the sheer. Note of. Of joy. If you like. That realization. As to what's going to happen. He's just absolutely.

Astonished. And. We shouldn't be surprised. At that word. Because we've been studying. The gospel of Luke. For quite a long time now. And we've noticed. So many times.

In the gospel of Luke. That Luke says. In regard to something. That Jesus said. Or something that Jesus did. That people were astonished. The same idea.

Astonished. By God. Astonished. At what God. Is actually doing. And has done. Astonished to the point. That you just can't take it all in. Every Christian life.

[36 : 37] Should be a life. That from time to time. At least. Has a note of astonishment. About it. Because in a sense. Everything that God does. In our lives. Should be astonishing to us. It's astonishing.

That he comes to us at all. It's astonishing. That he brings us to life. When we are dead. In trespasses and sins. It's astonishing. That he keeps coming back to us. Despite all our failures. And our lapses. And our sins. And our waywardness. And our slowness. To learn. God astonishes us. God astonishes us. With his patience.

He astonishes us. With his. The sheer quality. Of his grace. God astonishes us. With so many things. From day to day. At least. They ought to be astonishing to us. Because that's what they are. When did we last. Myself included. When did we last. As we went to our knees. In private with God. When did we last. Say Lord.

[37 : 37] I'm astonished. I'm just amazed. At what you've done. At what you continue to do for me. A heart that's.

Wholeheartedly God's. Will not be. A stranger to astonishment. Will not be a stranger to this. Mixture of astonishment.

And joy. In the laughter of Abraham. Abraham. And so. As Abraham is astonished. As he's overcome. Momentarily. His mind again.

Goes to Ishmael. And he prays for Ishmael. And. In a sense. He's really suggesting to God. Well instead of waiting for that. Oh that Ishmael. Might.

Live before you. And God said. Abraham. No. I've already told you. That's not the way. No.

[38 : 35] But Sarah shall bear you a son. Your wife. And you shall call his name. Isaac. And you know what Yitzhak Isaac means in Hebrew.

It means laughter. It means he who laughs. Isn't that wonderful? That God. Said to Abraham. I'm going to capture this moment for you. In the name of your son. Because this time next year. Laughter will be born to you.

Joy will come from your wife's birth. You will have a son. And you'll call his name. Laughter. Isn't God magnificent? Isn't God wonderful?

Doesn't God just capture the things. That he wants us. And realizes we have to remember. And carry with us. These significant moments.

[39 : 31] God puts them into a little bundle. In some way or other. Not necessarily in somebody's name. But he says. I want you to remember this moment. Because it's significant. And there's something else.

That's quite wonderful in it too. As for Ishmael. I have heard you. In a sense God is saying to Abraham.

No. No. Don't pray with regard to Ishmael. That's not the way that I'm going to fulfill my covenant with you. Sarah. Your wife will have a son. Isaac will be his name.

It's not through Ishmael. But. As for Ishmael. I have heard your prayer. That's another wonderful thing about God.

God. Even when our prayer has not been quite what it should be. Even when our prayer through our own mistakenness. Or whatever has focused on things that we. Come to realize are not just exactly as God has planned.

[40 : 31] Or perhaps even might still be feeling. Our own way of doing things. We don't have a God who has completely ignored that. As for Ishmael.

I have heard you. I have heard your concerns about him. And in response I will bless him. Not even a prayer for Ishmael.

Goes unnoticed by God. Ishmael will not be. The child of the covenant. But he is circumcised. He is in Abraham's household.

And Abraham's prayers. For him are heard and answered. You may be worried today. That God. Doesn't hear your prayers.

Because they are really different to. The kind of prayer you think they should be. You may be worried. That you haven't prayed in the right manner. That you may have prayed mistakenly.

[41 : 36] That you haven't prayed. For things to be done God's way. Well God is saying to you. I have heard you.

And I will answer my way. And you don't need to be afraid of Ishmael. I will take care of him too. Isn't he a wonderful God?

When even the tiniest ripples of prayer. Even mistaken prayer. Are never unnoticed. Never disregarded. Never thrown aside as insignificant.

God always keeps saying to us. I have heard you. Leave it with me. Let's pray. Lord our God.

We thank you. That you are the almighty one. That you have sealed your covenant. In a way that has demonstrated that might. In the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[42 : 38] From the dead. That that same power that you showed in him. And in that resurrection. Is now working in the children of obedience. We bless you for that.

And for the way we can depend upon you. In all our circumstances. Bless us then now. And bless your word to us. Bless us throughout this day we pray. And pardon our sin for Jesus sake.

Amen.