

Threats from Within and Without

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[0:00] Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 21, 8-34, our sermon text for today.

! If you need a Bible, you're welcome to take one off the back table and keep it as our gift to you. Genesis 21, starting in verse 8.

And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac. And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.

But God said to Abraham, Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

[0:58] And I will make a nation of the son of this slave woman also, because he is your offspring. So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away.

And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water and the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow shot, for she said, Let me not look on the death of this child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up, lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation. Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

[2:08] At that time, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, God is with you in all that you do. Now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, or with my descendants, or with my posterity.

But as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me, and with the land where you have sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing. You did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today. So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart.

And Abimelech said to Abraham, what is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart? He said, these seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.

Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines.

[3:13] Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Heavenly Father, we ask you one more time. Would you speak to us through this word? God, you've ministered to our hearts already in so many different ways.

This service, would you continue, Lord, to speak to us now through this text from Genesis chapter 21. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, good morning, Shoreline.

Good morning. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here. I'm just glad that you all have joined us this morning. We're digging into this sort of strange, archaic text in Genesis 21.

You know, only a few weeks ago was the 25th anniversary of 9-11. And that was a day in which our nation experienced this terrible awakening to the reality of its vulnerability, right?

[4:16] Vulnerability, especially to outside threats. The thing is, we also face threats internally, right? And hence the need, if you are in the military, if you work at an electric boat, and probably other places as well, you have insider threat awareness training, and, you know, those are things you take annually to be informed of the threat and to know what to do.

But I'm not here to talk about the threats that we face national security. There's a lot more qualified people in this room to do that. But we face threats all the time, both internally and externally, that oppose the purposes of God.

And that happens in our lives individually. That happens as family units. It happens here in our church corporately. And today's passage helps us to see how God responds to threats to his purposes.

And so if you haven't already, please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 21, 8-34. The title of today's sermon is Threats from Within and Without. And the main point that I'm going to argue in this sermon is that God protects his people and promises from threats within and without, yet offers mercy to the very ones who threaten.

God protects his people and promises. And we can read there, God protects his church, the church of Christ today. But he protects his people and promises from threats within and without, yet offers mercy to the very ones who threaten.

[5:38] Now, just some context. If you're new, this morning we have been walking through the book of Genesis all year and we saw how God made a very good world. And then we messed it up through sin. But then God made this gracious promise in Genesis 3.15.

Now, when we recite the Genesis 3.15, you might have been thinking, that sounds really strange. But if you read it in context, and I'd encourage you to go back and listen to the sermon on that passage. I will put enmity.

Jesus, God is talking to the serpent, to Satan. He says, I will put enmity between you and the woman, that's Eve, and between your offspring, the offspring of the serpent, and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. And what God is saying is that a conqueror is going to come from Eve's line to defeat Satan and to undo sin's curse.

And we have been tracing that promise since then. And then in Genesis 12, that promise gets particularized in the person of Abraham. And in Abraham's offspring, promised redemption, promised blessing to all of humanity is going to come through him.

[6:46] And this would involve both seed or offspring, and it would involve land here in Genesis. Now, last week, after 25 years of waiting, Isaac came.

Isaac was born. God is beginning to fulfill that promise of seed. And so we arrived at that climactic moment, and we saw how God has proven himself faithful yet again. But then, amazing, the narrative moves on very quickly from that climactic moment.

And in today's text, we find a threat to God's promise of seed in the first half. And then in the second half, we see a threat to the promise of land.

And one of them is an internal threat, and one of them is an external threat. And so the first thing that we're going to consider is the seed threat from within. Now, when I say seed, I'm talking about offspring. And here, we're really talking about Isaac and the promise through Isaac.

And so we see in this first part, God protects from inside threat. Look in your Bibles at verse 8. And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

[7:52] Now, again, 25 years, Abraham and Sarah waited. They schemed and did foolish things. And what we said last year is that neither biological impossibility, right, a physical impossibility, 90-year-old woman, 100-year-old man bearing a son, nor human unreliability, and their scheming, neither of those two things could prevent the fulfillment of God's promise.

It came to pass. He is faithful. Now, Isaac here is probably around three years old, and there's a celebration because there's a very low infant mortality back then in the ancient Near East.

And so it's a pretty big deal for infants to make it to this stage. And so hence, this celebration. But look at verse 9. And it says, But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

Now, this word laughter has appeared quite a bit if you've read the last few chapters together. It's amazing how human laughter can carry so many different meanings. We can laugh in disbelief, as Abraham and Sarah both did at God's promise.

We can laugh in delight, as Sarah did when Isaac was born. His name, again, means he laughs. And then we can also laugh, as we see here, in derision, as Ishmael appears to be doing here towards that very same son, Isaac.

[9:09] Now, based on the narrative, Ishmael is probably around 16 or 17 years old, so we shouldn't be too surprised at his teenage behavior. But Ishmael seems here to be mocking Isaac.

Paul helps us, because in Galatians 4.29, Paul says that Ishmael persecuted Isaac. And so Sarah sees this going on, and in verse 10, she said to Abraham, We see a few things going on here. Now, one, Sarah's maternal protective instincts are kicking in. And she's demanding this expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. Now, we see here harshness. And we had seen this back in Genesis chapter 16.

She had shown harshness to Hagar, and that caused Hagar to go wandering. And what we see from Abraham this time is then the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. Abraham is grieved over this. After all, Ishmael is his firstborn son, right? He's actually his son, and it says that, his son. Now, perhaps we should also see here this resistance to listening to Sarah's voice.

[10:19] Now, in Genesis 16, he had listened to Sarah's voice, and that led down a bad path. Not the promise, not the fulfillment that God had in mind. And so maybe he's a little hesitant to listen to what she's saying.

But notice in verse 12, God said to Abraham, Now, in spite of Sarah's ungodly attitude towards Hagar and Ishmael, God is actually confirming that she's actually kind of right.

Her directive does, well, this doesn't excuse her harshness, okay? The way that she acts towards Hagar is wrong, but the conclusion that she reaches, God is actually affirming.

It's in accord with his promise. It's also in accord with ancient Near Eastern customs, which would have required Ishmael to be co-heir with Isaac. And God is essentially intervening here to prevent the outcome that Abraham and Sarah's actions would have led to, right?

Their actions for Abraham to sleep with Hagar and bear a son who's not the promised son, their own actions. God is intervening now to say, no, no, no, no. My promise is through Isaac. And God does still have promises for Ishmael, right?

[11:39] We saw this in chapter 16. We saw it in 17. However, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. The promise, right? The covenant promises of God to Abraham.

They will not come through Ishmael, but rather Isaac. And as we see this, it's interesting. If you look at the names used for Ishmael and Isaac in this text, actually, Ishmael is not mentioned by name a single time.

He's called a bunch of other things, but he's never called by name. Isaac is mentioned by name three different times. And Moses is just underscoring the priority of the promise being through Isaac. And look at verse 14.

So Abraham rose early in the morning. He took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder along with the child and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Abraham rising early in the morning. That phrase appears over and over again. It's prompt obedience. He's doing what the Lord has told him to do. Now, we should also feel a sense of grief. Hagar and Ishmael are being kicked out of the family.

[12:39] Ishmael was even circumcised. He was a member of the covenant family. And now he's being sent away. But the reason for that we need to keep before us. He's posing a threat to the fulfillment of God's covenant promises.

And God's covenant promises do not ever fail to come to pass. God's covenant promises never fail to come to pass. And so God, he's intervening here to remove the threat, to preserve his word, to preserve his promises.

And so that's the first thing we see. God protects his people and promises from threats within. But then something beautiful and paradoxical happens in the next part. We see that God pours mercy on the one who threatened those very promises.

And so if you look in your Bibles at verse 15, when the water in the skin was gone, Hagar, she put the child under one of the bushes. Now, if you're confused here by the word child for someone as old as Ishmael, consider the fact that Ishmael is referred to.

I mentioned he's referred to in different ways. And it's really depending on the relationship. To Sarah, he's the son of this slave woman. Okay, see the contempt. To Abraham, he's his son. To Hagar, he's the child.

[13:50] And to God, he's the boy. And that word boy can actually cover a boy from an infant up to a grown man. And then, verse 16, she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow shot.

For she said, let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. Now, Hagar and Ishmael's wilderness wandering has led them to the brink of death, right?

She is in this utterly desperate condition right now. She's been the victim of an injustice, right?

She's been cast out now into the barren wilderness. She doesn't have any water. She's ran out.

She probably has also run out of bread. And so has Ishmael. They are literally at the end. And God heard the voice of the boy.

And the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven. Now, look, as God had done back in chapter 16, God meets Hagar in her lowest moment. But this time, though, it's interesting, the angel comes to her having heard the voice of the boy.

[14:53] Now, Ishmael's name means, as we saw in chapter 16, it means God hears. So Ishmael is crying out to the Lord, perhaps. He's at least crying.

God hears him. And it's just fascinating. Hagar sits just a bow shot away. And out of earshot of Ishmael. God from heaven hears the cry of Ishmael. And he comes to their aid.

And this angel comes first with this question, what troubles you, Hagar? And then that oft-repeated exhortation in Scripture, fear not. Most often repeated command in the Bible is fear not.

Why should she not fear? What does the text say? It says, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he has up. Lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.

Now, God confirms here his promise for Ishmael. Again, it's not the promise. It's not the covenant promise through Abraham. But it is indeed still a promise. And then God opened her eyes, verse 19.

[15:52] And she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. Was Hagar unable to see the well before because of her tears? Or did God cause a well of water to spring up?

We don't know. But either way, God provides. And this is a little foreshadowing, by the way, all kinds of parallels with this week's passage and the testing of Abraham we come to next week. But God provides here.

And God offers them. So he offers them a promise. He offers them provision. And then his very presence. And God was with the boy. And he grew up. And then we see at the end there, God beginning to fulfill his promises for Ishmael.

Now, friends, what is this here if it's not the incredible mercy of God? So Hagar and Ishmael, let's consider a step back here. They are banished from the chosen family, right?

This is God's promises through Abraham. This is where blessing is found. They're banished from that family. And then in love, God pursues them. They had posed a threat to God's promise.

[16:52] God acted to protect the promise. And then he comes in love and goes after them. The very ones who threatened God's purposes, he reaches out to in mercy and in loving kindness.

Now, I want to speak to you all this morning. Maybe, maybe similar to Ishmael, you've mocked Christianity. Maybe you've shown contempt towards the church, towards other believers.

Maybe you've wandered the wilderness, so to speak, seeking lasting refreshment. And you haven't found any. And so maybe that's why you're here this morning. Maybe God's brought you to a place like Hagar and Ishmael of desperation.

And you've got nowhere else to turn. But maybe you're here thinking, you know what? There's not mercy enough for me. I've done too many bad things. God can't offer me forgiveness. There's no way that God would love me. And friends, I'm here to tell you from this passage and from God's word, his word shouts a different message. The gospel of Jesus Christ shouts something entirely different, that God actually pursues the very ones who have scorned his name and scorned his promises.

[17:56] God that was even willing to suffer and to die on the cross for your sake. And Jesus is the good shepherd. He's a good shepherd who leaves the 99 and he goes and pursues that one stubborn, rebellious sheep and he brings them back into the fold.

He is a merciful shepherd. And, you know, he doesn't just do this in some vague abstract. This isn't just theoretical. He pursues sheep in intimate, personal ways.

And so maybe you've heard his voice speaking to you this morning or in the past. I want to say he has been speaking to you. Hear the voice of the shepherd and answer him. Some wandered in desert waste, finding no way to a city to dwell in.

Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way until they reached a city to dwell in.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man. For he satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

[19:01] Psalm 107, 4 through 9. If you have a longing soul, come be satisfied without money, without price from Jesus Christ. Now perhaps you're here and you don't struggle with the record of your past, but you feel like an outcast nonetheless.

Despite a vast friend network online, despite being surrounded by others right now in this room, maybe you're here and you feel alone. Maybe you feel unseen and uncared for.

And I'm here to tell you that no matter what human relationships have failed you, no matter who has abandoned you in the past, God will never abandon you.

There is a God in heaven who sees you and if you cry to him, he will respond. He will come to your aid. He promises to hear the cry of the afflicted. You know, I can say more than that still.

Because I can tell you that if you're here and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then there's more to that. That means that you are a member of the body, the one body of Christ, many members.

[20:05] That means that you are a vital and indispensable part of this very body and of Christ's church. And so you are filled with the Spirit and you are gifted in ways to build up and to bless this body.

You belong in the family eternally because of what Jesus has done. And you know, that brings me back to the first half of our main point. That God protects his people and promises from threats within.

And so brothers and sisters, again, if you're in Christ, I want you to consider what this means for us. We belong to the covenant family of God through Jesus. And there are so often threats that arise from within.

And when I say from within, I mean certainly within the corporate body of Christ. And we see that in the very New Testament, okay? There's threats arising from within. God is acting to protect the church from people within that would threaten.

But I'm also talking about right here. There are threats that arise daily from my own heart, my flesh battling the Spirit. And God is faithful to preserve his saints from any kinds of those threats, whether it's myself, because I need God to protect me from me.

[21:13] I'm my biggest problem every day, not others. He protects you from you, child of God. And he protects us from other threats that would arise.

And so just by way of application here, take comfort, saints, in God's protection from inside threats. Now that we could take that and say, well, that means I can just kind of sit back on my heels and just wait and see what God does.

Now God sovereignly acts, but he uses means. He uses means, you see, to accomplish his purposes. And those means include his people actively rooting out anything from within that would seek to oppose his purposes.

The author of Hebrews says, And so I want to say, cast out that which threatens God's purposes.

Cast out that which threatens God's purposes. Okay, now we do this corporately as we hold one another accountable for sin, as we lovingly correct one another, we help one another casting out sin.

[22:30] In rare cases, this leads down a path towards people actually being expelled from the church. But God uses church discipline to purify and to preserve his church.

But I want to ask, what about you individually though? Is there something that your heart is drawn to that runs counter to God's purpose? God's trying to do things in your heart, in your life, and there's something that's running counter to that.

Now maybe, maybe it is actually a person. Right? We can be heavily influenced by others. Paul says bad company ruins good morals. God's got purposes for you, and maybe someone's influencing you to run, duck, or hide from what he's got.

But I'm not mostly thinking about people. Because I think it's actually pretty rare by comparison that we need to cut ties with other people. I'm thinking more about the idols of our hearts that we nurse and protect.

And they're actually damaging our spiritual lives. And we talked about this a little bit back in Genesis 19. A lot of this aligns with the values of our culture, ways we've assimilated into Sodom and its godlessness.

[23:40] And I'm just going to give one example before we move on. How often do you turn to your phone or smartwatch or something throughout the day to fill space?

And I'm not asking you because I'm immune to this. We were just talking about this as elders. How easy it is. I've got 10 seconds. Let me just scroll and see what the... Like, it's so easy. Do you really need to check the NFL standings again?

Like, did they change that much in the last few hours? You know? Do you really need to read again about the conflict in Iran? I mean, I know oil prices are fluctuating. Do you need to check it again?

Do you really need to see everyone's latest Instagram reel? But we feel this need, this drive. I've got to know. I've got to know. And I just want to ask, you know, is that helping serve the purposes of God in your life?

Is it helping? Is it making you more like Christ? Is it casting your eyes on him and the cross and what he's done? Is it helping you share the gospel with those around you? Perhaps your time would be better spent loving the physical people in front of you?

[24:43] And this, in an endless number of ways, we need to be casting out the things that threaten God's purposes. But I want to form a gospel sandwich here because I don't want that to be the last thing we talk about before we move on.

And it's this. Look always... So we talked about finding comfort in God's protection. Okay? Our action to cast out what threatens from within. Look always to Christ for your confidence.

Now, this might not sound like it belongs here. But I want to explain why I say that. I say that because of the way that Paul uses this story in Galatians chapter 4.

Paul goes back to Genesis 16 and Genesis 21, Hagar and Sarah, to prove a point. Now, in the Galatian church, and we talked about this in the equipping class a few months ago, right, Tim?

A false teaching was spreading in the Galatian church that the Gentiles needed to follow the law of Moses. They need to become circumcised, do all the right law-keeping activity before they could then become Christians.

[25:42] And Paul is saying no. The whole letter is Paul saying no, no, no. That is counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel says that you're saved, whether Jew or Gentile, by faith in Jesus Christ alone, by grace alone.

And you're going back to the law and saying if you do enough good things and become like the law says, then you can be saved. And what Paul does is he points to this as an allegory, to Hagar and Sarah.

He says Hagar and Sarah are representatives of these two paths of pursuing salvation. He says Hagar and Ishmael represents the flesh. This was human effort. And we saw how human effort went.

It didn't go anywhere to serve God's promises. Sarah and Isaac are the promise. It's God's grace. It's faith. And that's what leads to salvation.

Human effort is futility. God's divine power. That brings fulfillment of promises. And so we can say, now we, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

[26:46] Righteousness belongs to us. We were just singing All Sufficient Merit, one of my favorite songs. Righteousness belongs to us by grace through faith, not the flesh. Right?

No amount of human striving, no level of human performance will earn you right standing with God. It might give you standing with your commander or your supervisor. It will not give you right standing with God.

Okay? Because that's like thinking that if you do enough push-ups, you can defeat the cancer or you can have it in your body. It's like that. It's at worst. Okay? Like that would be outlandish. Like I'm just going to keep doing push-ups and the cancer is going to go. It's like, no, no, no. You have a disease of the heart and the only solution is the righteousness of Christ through faith in him and what he's done on the cross.

But Christians, here's the thing. What we do, Christians, because I'm not talking to non-Christians, I'm talking to Christians right now with this point. After having come to faith in Christ, after trusting him to cure us of our soul sickness, we go back to doing push-ups.

[27:48] Like this is going to keep the disease away. And then here's the thing. When we can't do enough push-ups, we collapse in despair and we think, I will never be good enough. I'm just a terrible person.

Like how could God love me? And I want to say, believer, don't you remember you weren't good enough? You were a terrible person and God loves you anyway.

And that's what Calvary proves. His loving of enemies to make them into friends and family in the person of Christ. Your righteousness, your salvation, your place in God's family, it's eternally secured in Jesus.

You are a child of promise. So don't go back to that old way of seeking right standing with God.

Look to Christ for your confidence. Okay, so that's the first half of the passage.

We're going to go through the second half faster here. We saw the seed threat from within and then we see this land threat from without. Now this scene is a little bit more difficult for us to get our arms around because it's a little more archaic, but it's worth the work to understand.

[28:56] And so we see in verse 22, So stop there.

Let's consider the significance here. Who is Abimelech? What's his position? He's a king. Okay? He's accompanied by a commander of an army.

These men represent political power, military power. Okay? Now what about Abraham? Now certainly we saw that Abraham has some military power back in Genesis 14. He has 318 trained men.

Right? And he's gained a measure of wealth, but he's still a nomad. He's a tent dweller. Okay? So by comparison, human standards, king, military commander, Abraham is down here.

Right? He doesn't even have any land to call his own. But they approach Abraham to make a treaty with Abraham because it's as if he's their superior. Like they want to be in his good graces.

[30:04] And why? Because they say here, God is with you in everything that you do. They've noticed the abiding presence of God blessing what he's doing. And this becomes a theme in Genesis.

We're going to see other peoples and nations saying to Isaac and to Jacob and to Joseph, God is with you. He's blessing you. And so they ask Abraham to swear before God to this agreement. And he does. But then in verse 25, there's some trouble. Right? Abraham reproves Abimelech about a well of water that his servants had seized. And then Abimelech says, I don't know who's done this thing.

You didn't tell me. I haven't heard about it until today. We get a little appreciation here for nomadic life in the ancient Near East. Right? In chapter 13, we witnessed feuding over pasture land.

Now there is some feuding over a well of water, which would be a very precious commodity in wilderness country. And we recognize like Abraham's chosen this life by faith. And so he brings his grievance to Abimelech.

[31:02] And Abimelech, again, like last chapter, he's pleading his innocence. And that alone should tell us he respects Abraham. He wants to be in this fellowship with Abraham. But then we see this reversal occur.

Last week, Abimelech had gifted sheep and oxen to Abraham. This time, Abraham gives the sheep and the oxen. And it's for them to enter into this agreement with one another.

And Abraham, he sets apart these ewe lambs. He gives them to Abimelech specifically as a witness that this well is actually Abraham's. And so Abimelech accepts that gift. And we read in verse 31, So they gave, there was this formal verbal agreement.

That was not good enough. So now they enter into this more formal covenant and oath. And then the king and his commander go home, I think, pleased with what transpired. And so we see here this Beersheba, well of, it means well of seven or well of the oath, can mean either thing.

This becomes the very first piece of property that Abraham actually owns in the promised land. This is like a down payment from God of the future inheritance of his offspring.

[32 : 21] And Abraham, look at verse 33. How does Abraham respond? He plants this tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

A lot more details we could pick out here, but I want us to see the big picture. Now he's planting this tree. That, you know, trees take a while to grow. A tamarisk tree would take maybe a generation to grow up into something.

It's a monument that he's making by faith to future generations of the Lord's grace and the Lord's faithfulness of what he has shown to Abraham. And it's also a sign, like, this land belongs to me and my offspring, according to God.

This was an act of faith. It's also an act of worship because we see he calls upon the name of the Lord. Now, of course, read the rest of Abraham's story. He remains a sojourner looking forward to the promises of God that remain to be fulfilled.

And Moses highlights that in these closing words. But now he owns a physical piece of land in Canaan. Right? So, again, external threat this time. A king, power, military commander.

[33 : 31] God kind of sets them aside. He actually uses this covenant with Abimelech and his commander to neutralize the threat and then to give Abraham this down payment of this offspring of his future inheritance.

And so I want us to see here, what does this mean for us today? Well, I think very similar to the last point. Take comfort in God's protection from outside threats.

Take comfort in God's protection from outside threats. You know, God promises his people through Isaiah, no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed.

No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed. Jesus, in Matthew 16, will promise the disciples that, I will build my church, Jesus says. And then what does he say, church?

You know this. And the gates of hell shall not prevail. The gates of hell shall not prevail. And we look to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the ultimate proof of that thing.

[34 : 31] Why do we look there? Because in the cross of Christ, in the resurrection of Christ, we see that God is wielding human power. He's wielding cosmic powers of evil to accomplish his purposes of redemption.

Do you hear what I said there? He uses even the evil schemes of men to bring about ultimate good for all of humanity.

And Christ rose from the dead. And he was exalted at the Father's right hand. And there he reigns victoriously on high. And we, by faith, enter into that victory.

Saints, we enter into the victory of the risen Christ. If God is for us, Paul says, who can be against us? God is for us. Who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Christ. And his answer, in short, is nothing. Nothing in all creation. Now listen, within American and Western culture, we seem to be living in a day where the outside threat to the church has increased.

[35 : 33] Right? We all feel that. We understand that. We've seen that in events across our country. There's a greater resistance to the gospel now than there has been historically within our culture.

But this is not unique to church history. Right? If anything, lack of opposition would be unique in church history throughout the last 2,000 years and right now all around the world.

Right? Places that Randy's going and we're praying for him. Persecution has faced the church. And I just want to say, whatever, we don't know the future of our nation here.

Will the opposition continue to rise against the gospel? I don't know. There are people coming to faith in Christ right now all over New England and around this country. We don't know what's going to happen. But what I do know is that we should not seek our assurance of protection from this

nation's leaders.

Okay? Or from our justice system. Or in our ability and our right to bear arms. Now I'm not saying that we can't or shouldn't make wise use of these things. But saints, I'm calling us to place our hope and our confidence not in flesh and blood, but in God.

[36:38] He's our protector. God is our strength. He's our helper and our keeper and our refuge and our dwelling place. And it's God alone who promises these words.

No evil shall be allowed to befall you. No plague come near your tent. He's not saying temporally. He's saying ultimately. You're guarded. You're safe.

Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name. It's in Psalm 91. And here's the final point of application I want to make here.

Love the outcast and the foreigner. The first half of the passage, we see one sent out of the family and God pursues in love. In the second half of the passage, we have this foreign king who is being blessed in connection with Abraham.

Now, we do not know their salvation state. Okay, there's some clues in the text that can point one way or the other for both Ishmael and for Abimelech, the king of Gerar.

[37:39] But we see how God was pouring out mercy to each of them and blessing them through Abraham. And so we learned, you know, we learned this lesson.

God loves and pursues the outcast. And likewise, he loves and pursues the outsider, the foreigner. And church, if God is like that, then his people ought to be the same way.

Loving the outsider, pursuing the foreigner, so that they would find eternal blessing in connection with Jesus Christ, like we have found. This was one of God's purposes for Israel.

This was his purpose for her. Now, that purpose has been made bold and highlighted and underlined through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Psalm 22, this is showing us the effect of the death and resurrection of Christ is that all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

God wants his people, like himself, to be pursuers of the outcasts, right? Chasing after the lost sheep, spreading the good news of the gospel to our neighbors and to our coworkers and to people on the sports field and to people across the ends of the earth.

[38:58] Now, I just want to close with one story that I think illustrates some of the things that we've talked about. There's a movie called Sabina Tortured for Christ. It tells the story of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrandt, who are the founders of Voice of the Martyrs.

Now, Sabina grew up in a Jewish family under the World War II era, under the Nazi regime, and she later became a Christian. But her parents and her two sisters and her brother were all killed in Nazi concentration camps.

And years later, a soldier came into their apartment named Barilla. Now, Sabina was sleeping.

Richard was awake. And he answers the door, and he welcomes this man in.

And this man is boasting about all of the atrocities that he's committed. But then a change happens. Clearly, a spirit-led change. He begins to feel this remorse and this grief over what he's done.

And so Richard begins to speak into his life the gospel of Jesus Christ and say, there's actually forgiveness, even for what you've done. And he says, there's no way. And he says, well, let me demonstrate to you the love of Christ. I'm going to go wake up my wife, Sabina.

[40:05] And in that, sorry, important point, in that conversation, it became pretty apparent that he was probably the man that had killed her family in those concentration camps. And Richard says, I'm going to go tell Sabina that you're here, the man who probably killed her family, and she's going to love you.

And that's going to show you how powerful the love of Christ is. And that's exactly what happened.

He goes and wakes up his wife, Sabina. She comes into that room, and she embraces him and weeps with him. And that man, Barilla, is saved.

He was an enemy of Christ. And God pursued him in love and welcomed him into the family. And then he became a force for good, for spreading the gospel. And friends, God protects.

He protects his people and promises from threats within and without, and yet offers mercy to the very ones who threaten. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.