

The Covenant

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Preacher: Rev Gordon Matheson

[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship this morning singing to God's praise in Psalm 105 and sing psalms.! This is page 138 in the Blue Book. The tune will be Centennial.

We're going to sing from the beginning through to verse 11. So four stanzas. Give thanks to the Lord God and call on his name. His wonderful deeds to the nations proclaim. Sing praises to him and his exploits record that all those who seek him rejoice in the Lord.

It's good for us to come with joy into the presence of our God and worship today. So let's sing with joy to his name. We'll stand to sing if we're able. Give thanks to the Lord God. Let all those who seek him rejoice in the Lord.

You've chosen one's look to the Lord and his might.

Seek help of his face and his wonders beside. His miracles too and his judgments divine.

[1 : 59] You children of Mepra and Jacob's own life. The Lord is our God and he rules all the earth.

Remembering his covenant the word he set forth. He vowed for the ages to come to make good.

His promise to Abraham to rise and renew. To Jacob is sovereign.

He was made sure. With Israel his command would always endure.

To you I will give us your portion to stand. The country of Canaan.

[3 : 20] The beautiful land. Let's bow our heads in prayer to God.

God and our Father in heaven. We come before you this morning with these words of praise on our lips.

That we have today so much to give thanks for. Because of your goodness and your grace towards sinners like us. We want to thank you today for your covenant.

You are the one who has entered into an agreement. First and foremostly within the Trinity.

Between the Father and the Son. A covenant before the foundation of the world.

Where our Lord and our Savior Jesus agreed to come into this world. In the fullness of time. And to bear the sin and reproach of his people.

[4 : 28] Let me thank you that in the fullness of time he did indeed come. And come into this world that was full of sin and rebellion against him. A world that would ultimately reject him.

And yet out of your great love. He fulfilled the terms of that covenant. And so our peace and our security was made sure.

So we thank you today for the fact that we worship a covenant keeping God. We worship a God who has established a plan of salvation. Who has fulfilled all that is necessary for us today.

To know the security of that salvation in its fullness. And so we are therefore today free to come and worship you like this. We are today free to look with hope on the future.

To know that your purposes will be unfolded in their fullness. That there is the promise of a new heavens and a new earth. And that in the midst of all of the sorrow and travail of this world.

[5 : 38] There is much that we can look forward to. And so we pray that today we would meet with this living God. That we would meet with the covenant keeping God. That we would today rejoice in our salvation.

And that we would have a confidence given to us. An assurance of the completeness of the work of Jesus. And that our faith in him would deepen and strengthen.

And so receive our worship this day. Receive our confession of sin. Forgive us our sins. And bless us with your own presence. And we ask this for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So boys and girls. Over the last few months when I've been here preaching.

I have been sharing with you some of the exploits from our house. Because it's getting done up just now. And today I bring you a box.

[6 : 40] This box is, if those of you who are electricians will understand some of the jargon that's written on the side of this box. This says it's a two gang double pole switched socket dual earth. If you're an electrician, you will know what that means.

If you're not an electrician, it will suffice for you to know it had a plug in it. And that plug is now mounted on the wall in one of the rooms in our house.

I don't even know which room this woman into. Because there's about 50 of them. I don't know. There's loads and loads and loads of these. Maybe that's something you could do this afternoon when you go home, boys and girls.

You could go home and you could count how many plugs are in your house. That would be an exciting thing to do. Our house has got more plugs in it now than it used to have.

And the reason today that I know that our house has more plugs is not only that I can go around and count them. But because I also found sitting in my kitchen this week this box.

[7 : 41] And unless my electrician is messing us around, I was fairly confident that he hadn't left a full box to go out to the recycling. I was pretty sure it was in fact an empty box.

And if I open the box, I can show you inside it. It is an empty box. And an empty box is a good thing when you're employing someone to do some work for you. Because that means they've done the job.

And so you can be really glad when you find an empty box. Now, in the Bible, there is a story, a very important story, about an empty box.

And it was after Jesus had been crucified. So you remember Jesus went to the cross and he died in our place.

And at the cross, he took our sin and our guilt for all of the bad things that we do. He took all of that on himself and he paid the price to satisfy divine justice.

[8 : 43] To satisfy God's just punishment for our sins. Jesus paid that price. And then he died.

And after he died, a man called Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took the body of Jesus and put the body of Jesus in a tomb, in a garden.

And then they rolled a big stone over the front of the tomb. So that was on Friday night. And on Sunday morning, Mary and some other women went to the tomb to find if they could anoint the body of Jesus with spices, anointments and things that they used to do when they buried someone. And they found that the stone had been rolled away and that inside the tomb, there was no body. Think of it like this.

The tomb was an empty box. And they were confused. They were thinking, why is this an empty tomb? Why is it an empty box?

[9 : 49] Now, what did I just tell you? What does an empty box tell you? An empty box tells you the work has been done. And on that first Sunday, when they went to the empty tomb of Jesus and they found the tomb empty like that.

What that says to them and what it should say to us today and what it's going to say forevermore is the work is done.

Jesus died. Jesus died. And then he rose again from the dead because the father was pleased with all the work that he had done.

The work is finished. And that's why today we can trust in Jesus completely for salvation.

There's nothing else that we need to do. There's no extra work that we need to do. Sometimes we say to ourselves, well, God will love me if I'm just a little bit better.

[10 : 53] If we were going to add anything to the finished work of Jesus, that would be like saying the box isn't really empty. There's a little bit more inside the box that we have to do.

But actually the box is empty because all of the work is complete and done. And so today we can trust Jesus because he has done all of the work for us.

We're going to say the Lord's Prayer just now. And then after we've done that, we'll sing again. So let's bow our heads in prayer to God. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise.

[11 : 57] This time from Psalm 207. Again, in Sing Psalms, page 31 in the Blue Book.

[19 : 10] We give you praise and thanks for the great privilege that we enjoy today gathering for worship like this. How good it is for us to come into the presence of our God, to give you thanks for your goodness to us, for us to gather on the first day of the week in particular, remembering the resurrection of our Savior Jesus.

We thank you that he has indeed defeated death. We thank you that the work of salvation is indeed complete, that all that is necessary to satisfy your justice over our sinfulness and our iniquity has been fully met, that the price has been paid in full.

And today we can have that confidence to therefore draw near to you, knowing that your wrath has abated against sinners like us, because Jesus has borne the curse.

We thank you today for the fact that Jesus is not merely in the grave and not even merely risen to life, but that he has ascended up to heaven. That today he is seated at your right hand.

And from there he continues to rule over all things until one day we know he will return to judge the living and the dead. And so, Father, we seek today to give you due homage and praise because of the work of salvation, and because as well that Jesus reigns, that Jesus is Lord over all things this day.

[20 : 40] And, Lord, we have to confess the mystery of that, because as we worship you today, each one of us will know in our own different ways, in our own different experiences, the strangeness of your providence.

There are, O Lord, so many times when the things that happen to us in our lives, the things that happen to us day by day, week by week, are a real mystery.

We don't understand why so much suffering is sometimes allowed to continue. We wonder at why pain endures. And we are left, Lord, so often uncertain about what the real plan is.

We often feel like Abraham did. In that passage that we've read today. And we thank you that we can rest in the knowledge that you have a purpose in all things.

That you are working out that purpose in its fullness. And that one day we will see the mystery of that marvelous interweaving of all of the events of our lives, woven together into your glorious pattern.

[21 : 52] And so we pray, Father, that you would give us faith. Simply enable us, Lord, to trust in you when things from our perspective seem to be so difficult.

We ask and pray for those, therefore, who are going through times of profound sorrow at this moment. We pray for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones. Those who are anxious over the health of loved ones.

Perhaps even the health of those who are near to death. May you minister to them into these trying times, your own grace and your love and compassion.

May they know and experience the mercy of the living God, whose promise to them is that he will never leave them nor forsake them. We thank you for that experience that is so often shared by your people.

That when we feel our own strength has failed and where there is no hope for us, that we find that underneath are the everlasting arms of God. And that you continue to lift us up and to carry us through hard and difficult experiences.

[23 : 01] We pray, therefore, for that strength today. Not for a strength merely to endure, but for us to know the strength of God that enables us to thrive in the midst of great turmoil and sorrow.

We want to pray, Father, for the congregation today and all of its different needs. We pray especially for Calamurto as he ministers to us. We ask and pray your blessing on him and his family.

We pray for the vacancy in the congregation. We pray that you would raise up a pastor who will minister in this place and lead the congregation in the study of your word and in the pastoral care that needs to be exercised.

We pray for the eldership of the church, that you would give them wisdom and understanding in the roles that they exercise. Lord, we know that in this day pastoral care is such a challenge because the problems that are in the world so often press into the lives of your people as well.

And we ask, Father, therefore, for wisdom and grace in how pastoral care is exercised, that it will be done so, Lord, full of gentleness and care and love in the way in which Jesus cared for his people.

[24 : 14] We thank you that you do not abandon us when it comes to pastoral ministry. We thank you that we have the Holy Spirit to help. And we do pray, Father, for the working and the power of

the Holy Spirit in the life of this church.

We pray, Father, that day by day, week by week, we would be more aware, in fact, of that, that we would see the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives overflowing in the lives of each and every one of us, and that we would know and experience a deepening love and care and compassion, that we would see patience and endurance increase, that we would see tenderness grow in the way in which we deal with one another, Father, that you would make us a congregation of men and women who love one another as Christ loved us.

We pray, Father, therefore, for humility to possess us. We pray, Father, that our lives would be characterized by that overflow of grace, and that we would know your hand and your work upon us. We want to pray today, Father, for the wider church on the island and across our nation. We pray, Father, for the vacancies in the church. We thank you, Father, for ministries beginning at the moment.

We lift up and pray, Father, for those who are undertaking studies and preparing for ministry in our seminary. We pray for the staff there. We ask and pray your blessing on the training of those who will go out into the work of the vineyard of the gospel.

[25 : 36] We pray, Father, that you would continue to raise up others who will serve in different capacities and ministries throughout the life of the church. We pray for the health of the church in our land.

We pray, Father, for healthy gospel churches to spring up and to be encouraged across our nation, for the light that shines in the darkness, to shine more brightly across our land, not because we are great, but because our gospel, the gospel that we herald and proclaim, the good news that we have is a wonderful message and that it does make a difference in the lives of men and women.

And so, Father, bless us with an evangelistic zeal. Bless us with a desire to make Jesus known.

And so across our nation this day, whatever the gospel has been preached, may you add fruit and multiply the blessing of the preaching of the word.

Father, just as we long for that blessing in our own nation, we pray for the nations of the world.

Lord, our news, Lord, just now is full of dire warnings and calamities that are happening in different places, concerns that people have about the movement of the nations and the hearts of rulers.

We thank you that you are the one who establishes all things. And we pray that in the midst of strange times that you would give us a resilience in the church.

[26 : 59] Help us to see the seasons for what they are, the unfolding of the great plan of the fullness of time, and to remember that Jesus is the one, the Lamb who is slain, standing in the midst of the throne, who alone is worthy to unravel the scroll of history.

We thank you that Jesus rules, even over the crises that we see in the nations. We thank you that Jesus rules over the uncertainties of war, the uncertainties of regimes that are violent and iniquitous, that Jesus rules over all of this.

And therefore, we pray for the resilience to endure in these days, not only for ourselves, but for our brothers and sisters who face far more difficult circumstances than we can imagine.

May they shine brightly for Christ, and may the radiance of Jesus be reflected in the faces of your children, especially those who languish in prison, who are facing persecution and violence for gathering in Jesus' name this day.

Because in all places, the triumph of the resurrection is worthy to be proclaimed, the triumph of the cross over sin, and the good news that salvation is for us, may, Lord, our persecutors discover this message for themselves.

[28 : 23] May men and women everywhere taste and see that God is good, and may your blessing flow. And so be with us, we pray this day, as we continue to worship you, and as we reflect on your word.

Bless us in the truth. Strengthen us in your service, and uphold us by your Holy Spirit. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing once again to God's praise in Psalm 23 in the Scottish Psalter.

This is page 229 in the Blue Psalm book, the tune of St. Columba. James was pointing out to me this morning, actually, Psalm 23 appears three times in the bulletin sheet today.

We have the Scottish Psalter version this morning. We'll be singing the St. Psalms version tonight, and it's also part of the memory verse. That's in the bulletin as well. So the Lord must be speaking to someone from these verses today.

It's good to remember these words, then. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie in pastures green. He leadeth me the quiet waters by. We'll stand and sing the whole of the psalm to God's praise.

[29 : 39] The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.

He makes me down to lie in pastures green.

He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

And so the love restore again.

And leadeth me the quiet voyque.

[30 : 50] Oh, I thought it just not will, yet will I fear the hell.

For thou art with me and thy watch, and stop me comfort still.

My table that has furnished it, in presence of my foes, my hand the dust with oil anoint, and my cup of gold.

Goodness and mercy on my life shall surely follow me.

And in your sight forevermore, my dwelling place shall be.

[32 : 39] Amen. Well, as we turn back to that passage in Genesis 15, let's just bow our heads in prayer to God.

Heavenly Father, as we come just now to your word in the Bible, we pray for your blessing today. We need, Lord, your Holy Spirit working in our hearts.

Otherwise, everything that we do today is just words. It's just meaningless in its ultimate import, because without the Spirit to open up our hearts, and without the Spirit to direct us to see what is most important, and to help us to understand, then all of this will be meaningless to us.

And so we do pray today, Father, for that work of the Spirit amongst us. We thank you that what we're reading today is truly one of the most important verses and scriptures and passages in the whole of your word.

And we thank you that it's a passage today that if we understand it, we'll see clearly what binds together the Old and the New Testament. We'll see what it is that really the whole of your revelation is about.

[33 : 51] And so we ask and pray today that we would see clearly Jesus in these verses, that we would see clearly what it is that Jesus has done, and that we would be blessed to be like Abraham, believing God and have been counted to us as righteousness.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. So as we kind of begin today looking at this chapter, I think it's worth kind of just remembering the context in which all of this takes place.

Abraham has been called by God from the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. He has moved from there and has been on this journey towards the Promised Land.

And having arrived in the Promised Land, God has been giving him more and more promises.

There's been assurances that have come to him that Abraham's descendants would inherit all of the land in which he is going.

However, there is a problem. And the problem is simply this. Abraham has no child who will inherit. And so in his thinking at this particular point, he's entering into the thinking of the ancient Near East, which was common in his day, which was that if the lord of the household had no heir to inherit, then the inheritance passes to the chief steward.

[35 : 24] And the chief steward would then hold this in trust and perpetuate the legacy of his master. And so this is before there's any sign of Ishmael or anything else.

Abraham is literally thinking, this man, Eliezer of Damascus, is the one who will inherit everything that he has received. All of his flocks, yes.

All of his tents and earthly possessions, yes. But also, crucially, will Eliezer of Damascus be the one to inherit the promise of God?

And that's the big question. This hope of salvation, is Eliezer of Damascus going to carry it on? Is Eliezer of Damascus a man who loves the Lord?

And these are the things that are occupying or preoccupying Abraham's mind. And so it's into this that God, this picture of doubt and uncertainty, that God intervenes, clarifying his promises and giving Abraham something to hold on to.

[36 : 34] And as we'll see, a covenant is really important in that sense of what Abraham can latch on to and trust in.

It's also a passage where we have one of the key verses in the Bible. Verse 6, Abraham believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

He believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham wasn't considered righteous by God because of his good works. He was considered righteous by God because of his faith.

He believed, he trusted in God. And these verses are reiterated in the New Testament as crucial to understanding what we continue to believe today.

that our salvation, our hope, our hope of being counted as righteous and saved by a merciful God is rooted not in our obedience, not in our goodness, not in our general ability to keep God's law, but rather in our trusting in his promise.

[37 : 55] And the promise that we have is essentially the same promise that Abraham has. A promise that God will give him a future.

A promise that God will persevere with him and his descendants. And that promise, as we'll see, is found in its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. And so therefore, for us today, the same holds true.

If we believe and trust in Jesus, then that will be counted to us as righteousness. That is where salvation is to be found, believing in Jesus Christ.

And so I would urge you all today, just from the outset, to understand this passage in that light. God is making promises to us.

God is offering to provide for us. And God offers us a sure and certain pledge. And the response is not to therefore say, I must be good enough to be worthy of God's promise and to earn God's provision and to receive God's pledge.

[39 : 09] The right response is to say, I believe him. I will trust in him alone. So that's our points today. Firstly, that God promises.

The passage starts with God reiterating his promise to Abraham. These wonderful words, Fear not, Abraham. I am your shield.

Your reward shall be very great. God takes Abraham outside and invites him to see the stars of the heavens and says, Your offspring shall be numbered in the same innumerable way.

As you look back through the pages of the Bible up to this point, there's not many. You can go home and read from Genesis 1 to Genesis 15 this afternoon. It'll take you about 20 minutes maybe. Not even that. But as you read through these chapters, you'll see that God is giving promises repeatedly. The first of these is right after the fall.

[40 : 14] As Adam and Eve are being cast out of the garden and as the judgment of God is announced over them, there's a promise given there that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent and that in the process the serpent will bruise his heel.

And that's the beginning of the promise of an offspring one day coming who will triumph over the entry of sin into the world, who will deal with sin and brokenness.

We know that's found ultimately in the person of Jesus. Then again, after the flood, again when terrible destruction has been wrought, Noah is given another promise.

And the promise that's given to Noah is that God will never again destroy the world in a deluge, that the seasons will remain until the end. And that there's some kind of hint of a cost to this promise because the Lord puts a bow in the heavens.

And it's said that the idea there of the rainbow is not merely that there's this multicolored sign in the heavens, but that it's an actual bow pointed heavenward. The arrow that it shoots piercing the heart of God himself.

[41 : 34] Again, the idea there of the promised one being in some way wounded in the process of salvation.

Long after all of these things are given, God's promises are ultimately fulfilled because the seed of the woman did arrive. And because the promised one did come and bear the cost in himself.

And you see it in the life and ministry of Jesus. That cost is born. The person who does come, he comes in the fullness of time to deliver on the promise of God.

And it's fascinating to do it if you go through the life of Jesus and you look and you see all of the occasions in which his life and his ministry leading up ultimately to his death and to his resurrection.

All of these things fulfill promises established in the Old Testament. He comes to deliver the promise of forgiveness.

[42 : 40] He comes to deliver the promise of eternal life to his people. Remember these precious words in John 14, I am going to prepare a place for you.

The promise is not merely of a physical place in this world for Abraham and his descendants, but it's of an eternal dwelling place for God's people to be with him.

An eternal home. An eternal rest that we're looking forward to. The promise, ultimately, as well, of justice. I mean, we look upon a world which is full of injustice.

And there's all sorts of attempts to exert justice in the world. And yet, these attempts are so often flawed and inadequate.

But one day, when Jesus comes, justice will be done in full. All wrongs will be righted. The guilty will indeed carry the penalty for their sin.

[43 : 48] And for us who are in Christ, we should remember what that means. Jesus has borne the penalty for our sin. Justice has been done for our wrongdoing.

His heel was indeed bruised. The arrow of God's wrath was directed towards Jesus to bear the penalty of our sin.

And just as God had made promises to Abraham and says to him, I will fulfill these things, God today continues to make promises to us. The same promise extends to us today.

Fear not, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. God's promise to his people, the offer of the gospel today that comes to all of us is the same.

God is promising protection and incredibly good things. And that promise comes into the sorrow of our lives right now.

[45 : 01] It comes into the sorrow of a world marred by death and suffering. and it invites us to put our faith in a God who puts his promise over against that weight of suffering in our experience.

And who says there are good things that lie in store. There is a hope given to his people. And the condition on this is one of faith.

faith. Because just like the promise came to Abraham, the same promise comes to us and says, fear not. I've been thinking about this in the face of difficult circumstances and the invitation there is to have faith.

That's what Abraham is invited to do. He's invited to trust God rather than fear the future. fear. And that's the same for us.

As our God is speaking to us today, as our God is inviting us to continue trusting him today, the invitation is just the same. He says to us, fear not because my promise is of myself and I am greater than any of the things you fear.

[46 : 34] I wonder today if that's true of us. Do we fear? What things might we fear? I suppose like Abraham, the fear was that there might be no legacy, nothing to carry on.

Sometimes that's true in the church. We might be fearful about what the future looks like, especially when we see the church nationally and perhaps locally declining.

We see congregations shrinking. We wonder what's the future going to be like for the church. perhaps you fear personal things.

You fear for your kids or you fear for your own future. Perhaps you fear for your parents' health.

Perhaps you fear for your own health or the health of your loved ones.

And into all of these fears, God is saying to us the same thing as he was saying to Abraham. Fear not, I am your shield. The invitation to us is to trust him who is greater than these fears, to relinquish our uncertainty, to relinquish our doubts, to give them all to him and to believe in him, to trust in his sufficiency.

[48 : 12] God is a God who is making promises. But he is also secondly a God who is providing. This passage, it tells us about God as a provider.

God tells Abraham that it is true not only of the past, but that God is going to continue to provide for him in the future. So you look at the way God speaks to him. And this is really interesting because this is the way covenants in the ancient world were formed.

God, the overlord, the mighty one, the powerful one, would come and say, this is how I deserve to be setting the terms of our relationship because I have already done things.

And I want you to see the things that I have already done in order for you to trust me going forward. So God comes to Abraham and says, Abraham, I am the Lord your God that has taken you out of the Chaldeans.

And what I was saying to Abraham is simply this. You can look back, Abraham, on what's already happened in your life. You can look back over recent years and you can see the journey you've been on and how I have been with you through all of this.

[49 : 23] Now, again, if you go back and you read the last few chapters in Genesis before this, you'll see all of the ways in which God has really been helping Abraham. God has really blessed him. Abraham has become powerful, so powerful in fact, that nations around about look to Abraham for help.

When an invader comes and carries away the people of some of the cities around about, Abraham is the one who goes to rescue them. I mean, Abraham's that successful and God has blessed him and enriched him and strengthened him.

And so Abraham, as he looks on his past, he's able to say, well, God hasn't let me down thus far. And so if God has been with me this far, he's not going to let me down in the future.

I know his character. I know he's dependable. I know I can trust him. And God is saying, I am providing for you. I've brought you here.

Look back. I will take you forward. Therefore, look ahead. Abraham's whole life has been characterized by this.

[50 : 35] God has provided for him. And if you go down to verse 14, you see that God says, I'm going to do that in the future for your offspring. The exodus is actually prophesied in verse 14 and 15.

the children of Israel are going to go down into another land. They're going to be enslaved there. And for four generations, that will be their experience.

But at the end of it, they will come out into a place of freedom and huge enrichment. And that's exactly what happened in Exodus. The Israelites left Egypt.

They plundered the Egyptians. Such was the Egyptians' desire to get rid of them in haste. God has provided. God will provide.

God has begun to provide for his people. He's going to keep doing that. And the invitation to us today is just the same. The invitation to us today is to look back over our lives, to look at all of the awful things that we have already come through.

[51 : 43] And if you're a Christian, it's a healthy thing to do, to look back over your life, not with rose tinted spectacles as we are sometimes wanted to do, but rather with honesty.

And to see all of the times that God in his grace has delivered us from absolute disaster. All of the times that God has lifted us, our feet, out of the mighty clay, and set us on a rock.

All of the times in our experience where our foolishness and where our sin has warranted nothing but failure and misery and disaster upon us, and yet God has been gracious and delivered us from all of these things.

And that's what God does in his grace. God in his grace delivers us from the worst of our own failings, let alone the failings that might have been visited upon us by other people vindictive and vicious or anything else.

God delivers, and God has provided, and God has strengthened, and God has been with us and helped us and presenced himself amongst us.

[53 : 02] He's blessed us. And so we can look forward. God will deliver, that God will help, that God will provide, because he is a God who provides.

And so when God calls us to have faith, when he calls us to start following him and trusting in him, he's not just asking us to do that with a vague sense of some sort of cloudy purpose that we have no idea how it's going to work out.

He asks us to trust someone who proves himself, who demonstrates himself to be a God who is worthy of trust. And Abraham, we're told in this passage, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Salvation comes from learning to trust in God. God. So there's a God who promises, a God who provides.

There's also in this passage a God who pledges. And that's when the passage takes for us a really weird turn.

[54 : 19] Because in the middle of the passage, God gives Abraham a very specific instruction. Bring a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, and a three-year-old ram, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.

And split them. And so Abraham takes some kind of instrument and cuts the animals in half, slaughters them and cuts them in half.

And he puts one half over here and one half over there, and then keeps the birds away from them, the vultures and the birds of prey that will come and scavenge the meat from these things, until he falls asleep.

And in his sleep, the Lord comes to him, and this profound vision that he has of God's promise and God's provision.

And to us, that looks completely alien. It looks really strange. But to Abraham, it was entirely normal.

[55 : 21] Because all over the ancient Near East, this is what you did when you were signing a treaty between an overlord and this vassal. The overlord would come along and say, I am giving you promises of things I will do.

Here is the story of what I have done in order to deserve to be in this position of authority over you to dictate these terms. I will provide for you. I will provide security.

Normally, it's because I've already beaten your army. My military force is greater than yours. but I've already demonstrated my power. Now, we're going to cut some animals in half and we're going to make an agreement.

What we're going to say is, if we break the terms of our agreement, may the same thing happen to us. As you walk between the animals that have been cut in half, the terms of the covenant are, if I break my loyalty to you, both the overlord breaking his loyalty to us and us breaking our loyalty to him, rebelling against him, the terms are, the same thing will happen to us.

We deserve to be cut in half. And that's a really solemn thing. This is like a blood bond that has been instituted.

[56 : 43] You're saying we will be loyal upon pain of death. And so Abraham is expecting a covenant agreement that he recognizes, a legally binding framework to be signed between him and God.

But he falls asleep. And I think that's where the thick darkness kind of comes into this. It's an evidence almost of Abraham's distress.

He expects he has to be a party to this. But how can he? Because he's lying unconscious on the ground. And then something miraculous happens.

There's two entities appear. There's this smoking pot and there's this fiery flaming torch. And we have to understand that both of these are somehow God.

One of them maybe represents Abraham or acts on Abraham's behalf. and one of them acts on God's behalf. But neither of them are actually Abraham. Abraham doesn't walk between the slain animals and say, well, if I break the terms of my loyalty to you, O God, then may the same thing happen to me.

[58 : 01] No, God himself somehow walks between the slain animals. And God himself says on his behalf, may the same thing happen to me if I break my loyalty to you, Abraham.

Abraham, but equally, a divine presence is there who says, I will take the consequences of Abraham's sin, Abraham's rebellion, Abraham's inability to keep faith.

And Abraham does. I mean, you go on reading the next few chapters in the book of Genesis, you see Abraham can't keep faith. He thinks, well, I still don't have a son, my wife's getting too old, I'll maybe have an affair with one of my servants and her child will become my heir.

And then they go down to Egypt and he tries to pass off his wife as a sister. I mean, Abraham is not righteous. He doesn't manage to keep perfect righteous loyalty towards God.

He is a sinner and a failure. But the covenant that God has entered into with him doesn't depend on Abraham keeping the terms of the covenant.

[59 : 10] It depends on this other divine figure. this other divine figure who comes and passes between the slain animals and who says, if my people fail to keep the terms of the covenant, if my people are unable to live righteously enough, I will bear the consequences.

And this is none other than God the Son. Acting as our representative, as Abraham's representative, and going between the slain animals and saying, I will take the consequences of their sin upon myself.

death. And you jump forward to the cross where Jesus is torn asunder practically.

I don't want to go into it, but that's what crucifixion really does. It shreds with the terms of the damage that it does to your ribcage. It tears your ribs apart. heart. He's pierced. He's nailed to the tree. He experiences not only the physical turmoil of this, but at the cross he experiences the wrath of God upon sin.

[60 : 38] That God's justice is meted out on the person of Jesus, hung on the tree for our sin. because he agreed to be our representative in this covenant between God and man.

In this covenant between God and Abraham, which is the same covenant that we come into in the New Testament. And that's why today we can trust the promise of God.

Because the promise of God to us doesn't depend on our obedience, it depends on the obedience of Jesus. And as long as Jesus is obedient, as long as Jesus bore the price of our failure on the cross, then God will not forsake us.

It's finished. The work of salvation is now an empty box, because it's done. It was done figuratively here for Abraham, and Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

It was ultimately done at the cross, and today we're invited to the same faith, to believe in God, to say, yes, Jesus has done it all for me.

[62 : 00] My salvation is secure in him. My future and my hope is promised in him. All of my needs will be met in him.

It's all of Jesus. Jesus, because he went to the cross to fulfill the promise of Genesis 15, that the terms of our sin being dealt with would be him torn apart.

And so today, we are invited to trust, to trust in these words, fear not, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great.

Will you not believe in him? let's pray. Heavenly Father, we want today to come to you seeking encouragement to have faith like Abraham.

We know, Lord, you are the one who gives great promises. As we look back in our lives, we can see ample evidence of your provision. You have not forsaken us thus far, and you never will. And ultimately, we thank you that you've made that through the promise and the pledge of Jesus.

[63 : 36] That before the world existed, he agreed to come and die for his people. That in the fullness of time, he did. And we see many examples of that being carried out in promise form throughout the Old Testament.

And ultimately, the climax of that was at the cross. And so we thank you today for our Saviour Jesus. We thank you for what he has done. And help us today to be assured of that truth, that the work is finished, that salvation is entirely done, entirely accomplished, and we can trust in him alone.

Bless us with that kind of faith. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion just now in Psalm 150.

This is in Sing Psalms, page 195. The theme of the Old Testament is that ultimately the climax of creation will be the praise of all resounding to the glory of God.

And Psalm 150 is really all about this. It's about the all encompassing praise of the whole of creation gathering in together. It begins in the temple, but it seems almost to spread out from there with all things rejoicing and crying out hallelujah, praise the Lord.

[65 : 05] God's salvation in Christ is complete. And all shall praise the Lord. So we're going to stand and sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise.

Praise God and his holy temple. Praise the Lord in heavens high. Praise him for his acts of power. Praise him for his majesty. We'll stand to sing to God's praise. praise him for his praise him for his acts of power.

Praise the Lord in heaven's high. Praise him for his acts of power.

Praise him for his majesty. praise him with the sounding trumpet.

Praise him with the harp and lute. Praise him and dancing.

[66 : 20] Praise him with the strings and flute. praise him with the clash of cymbals.

Without cymbals, praise the Lord. Praise him everything that's breathing.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. voy voy Thank you.

Thank you.