A Life Defined by Faith in God: Listening to God

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Preacher: Jeff Jackson

[0:00] Thank you, thank you. Here at Grace Church, each Lord's Day, we set out in the preaching and teaching of God's Word from Scripture! to do it in an expository manner.

And that may be a word that you're not familiar with. It sounds really fancy. It simply means to expose. Expository, if you will. And all that means is that we turn to passages in the Bible and we work through verse by verse unpacking what the Bible reveals to us by what it says.
So we want to be careful to properly understand and interpret the meaning of Scripture by what the Scripture itself reveals or exposes to us.
So we are working very hard to keep Jeff out of it. You get Jeff's personality, but hopefully you're going way past the wisdom of Jeff and you're getting the wisdom of Jesus.
That's what we're concerned about. I remember when I was out in seminary in California, at the Master's Seminary, they were teaching us. And I remember someone asked Dr. MacArthur in a Q&A, Sir, what is the hardest work that you do in sermon preparation?
[1:17] And he didn't even hesitate. He said, the hardest work I do in sermon preparation is getting me out of it. Getting me out of it. Boy, that stuck with me. I had never heard a pastor say that before.

So many pastors, it is about them. It's about their stories and their stuff and whatever's going on in the latest, greatest stuff. Hopefully we're going to exalt Jesus. Again, you'll get Jeff.
Jeff does it a little differently than Greg does it, than Matt does it or whatever. But nevertheless, we're all trying to honor the Lord. Now, what you'll see this morning is a continuation of this expository, verse-by-verse ministry from the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings.
We have been in this book for a little while now, and I have worked my way up to chapter 17. That's where we were last Sunday, and that's where we'll be again this morning. This is another part to what I'm doing in chapter 17 with you.
So, a life defined by faith in God is the head title, and then subtitled, listening to God. Last week it was looking to God. This week it's listening to God.
[2:22] And we're talking about saving faith in all of this. Let's read the text that I'll be dealing with this morning, beginning in Genesis 17, verse 1.

Now, when Abram... Remember, we've already dealt a lot with who Abram is as a character in this passage, but jump in with me here. When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty.
Walk before me and be blameless. Or walk before me and fear God. Fear me. Have that high and holy reverence for me. I will establish my covenant between me and you.
And I will multiply you exceedingly. Abram fell on his face. And God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with you.
And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham.
[3:37] For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. And I will make nations of you.

And kings will come forth from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.
Now notice for an everlasting covenant. So this Abrahamic covenant covenant is an eternal everlasting covenant. To be God to you and to be God to your descendants after you.
So all those who will come in the same faith as Abraham share in this reality of these promises. Verse 8.

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I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings. That is what we know today as Israel or the land of Canaan. All the land of Canaan.
[4:38] For an everlasting possession. And I will be their God. Now friends, last week I spoke about the situational silence is what I referred to it as.

The situational silence that can work against our faith in God and in His promises to us as His people. Now what do I mean by that? This is what we're going to be talking about this morning.
Situational silence refers to times of temptation. A kind of special temptation that we face in our life.
It's when we're uncertain about outcomes maybe in our life.
We're anxious about certain outcomes. How is this going to turn out? What is this going to be like?
It's when we feel maybe alone or in over our heads in some situation of life.
It's when it seems now like God is distant. The answers that we want. The help that we would like and feel we need are just not coming.
[5:50] And so we feel in the dark. We feel a certain situational silence about what's going on.

And we might even say, where is God? We may look up into the heavens with tears and say, Lord, where are you? It's that kind of situational silence that we're dealing with, with Abram in his situation right now.
And again, aren't we glad that the Bible includes these kind of real, raw, human situations so that we can see the Bible is not some high book far removed from our reality.
These people face the things that we face. God met them like He meets us when we're suffering, when we're uncertain, when we're going through a season that it's just clinging and hanging on us, as it were, whatever it is that we're dealing with.
I'm very glad that the Bible deals with all of that in the way that it does. It's very real, very true. Now, look, folks, we all face, including your pastors, Greg and I, we all face dark moments.
[7:07] We all face dark seasons in life. Times that we experience these kinds of things I'm talking about now. And sometimes they can be extended.

Sometimes they're more brief. Doesn't matter. The duration isn't always the issue. Sometimes. More often, it's the intensity, isn't it? The intensity.
These are times when temptation is especially intense. We're confused, maybe. We're feeling sorry for ourselves. We're allowing ourselves to maybe face off with some type of sinfulness in our lives.
We're actually confronting this sinfulness instead of running away from it. And that sin is really hard for us to see. It's really hard to know about ourselves. I did that. I said that.
I thought those things. This is the way I think. That's not right. That doesn't honor God. That can be tough to have that happen. In last Sunday's message, I emphasized the role and vital necessity of saving faith.
[8:15] Now, we're not just talking about faith. We're not talking about the way that people in the world typically talk about having faith in something. Like having faith that that chair is going to hold them up.

Having faith that their car is going to get them to work. Having faith that their spouse is going to stay loyal to them. We're talking about saving faith. That's something very unique.
And it's something that only comes from God. You can only get saving faith from God. It's His gift alone to give. Saving faith overcomes doubt.
Saving faith overcomes fear. Saving faith overcomes fear. It overcomes anxiety. Saving faith overcomes worry. Saving faith overcomes worry. Now, listen to this. It even overcomes the anger that can well up in us in times of difficulty.
Now, have you ever gotten a little bit angry and bitter toward the Lord? Where are you attitude? Why aren't you showing up? Or this isn't fair.
[9:15] It's not fair. And that's just a step away from saying this isn't right. Now, who are we to tell the God of the universe that He's got it wrong in this case?

And you know why we say that? Because it's hard. We don't like it. And we want to change. This is the temptation that Abram has faced in terms of his covenant relationship with God.
Now, my heart this morning is to help you strengthen your faith in God and in His promises that He makes to you uniquely designed for you as a Christian, as His people.
The people that He bought with the blood and body of His own Son on the cross. I want you to be able to faithfully persevere with joy and thankfulness in your heart to obey God even in the hard times.

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Maybe I should say especially in the hard times. When we sin and we feel its weight on our hearts, when we become painfully aware of what we've done against Jesus or others, and we feel that weight of wrong in ourselves, it's very hard to overcome feelings of guilt, isn't it?
[10:33] Sometimes guilt is just devastating. It's very hard to overcome a sense of shame, wrongdoing. It's very hard sometimes to overcome a sense of failure.

And you personalize it and you say, it's not that I failed, it's that I'm a failure. Have you been there? Folks, that's a hard, hard place for people to be.
We all fail. But it's another step to say, I'm a failure. We can be confused, as I've mentioned. In these particular times, I think it's especially important for us to believe and live out the vital connection between saving faith and God's covenant with us in Jesus Christ.
I'm going to explain a covenant again in just a moment because we've already gone over that. Just hang with me. I want you to understand that this saving faith is a response.
All right? Are you with me? Hang on to this now. Saving faith is a gift from God and it is a response to God for His gift of Jesus Christ.
[11:48] It is a grateful response to His promise to never leave us, never forsake us, to always, in every situation and circumstance and detail of our lives, to work His purposes for our good and His greater glory.

Always. Never fail. You and I fail, but God does not fail. He is faithful. Now, Abram is a good example of everything I've been talking about in terms of what to believe and do.
But I don't want to exalt Abram as a human being. I'm glad he's a good example and I'm glad that we have examples where he failed and we can see what he did as God restored him.
That's so encouraging. What I want to do is lift up and exalt the God who is making Abram's life and faith possible.
Making it real. So this isn't just some potential in Abram. This is the guarantee of God to stay faithful to Abram and help him persevere through completion.
[12:59] And that's what I want you to hold on to today. Because I know how hard it is. I know how tough it is. I want to show you a place in the New Testament where the Apostle Paul is going to actually talk about Abram and give glory to God for what happened in Abram's life.

I want you to see ahead of time how the New Testament helps us interpret this issue in Abram's life. This moment in Abram's life. So if you'll hold your finger here in Genesis 17 and go to Romans chapter 4.
Now I don't want this to get real complicated. I'm just trying to give you a biblical illustration from the life of Abram during this time of his life and the prescription that God makes for what he did, for what Abram did.
Romans chapter 4, and I'll begin in verse 1. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found.
For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say?
[14:16] Abraham believed God. That's saving faith, folks. Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. What he's saying is, Abraham did not earn his salvation from God.
He didn't merit, he didn't deserve his salvation. His salvation did not come to him as if he had gone out and done the proper work to earn it, and God paid him in salvation for what he earned.
He says, no, that's not what happened. Abraham can't boast about God forgiving him and saving him. God gave him the gift of saving faith and brought him to God.
It was the work of Almighty God. And so who gets the glory? Abraham or God? He's very careful to explain this because he wants God to get the glory for what God's done.
[15:27] Isn't this how you want to live your life? You want people to see your life and say there's something different about that person. And you want to be able to have the opportunity to tell them the difference is not me, it's a person and it's Jesus.

Jesus is making the difference in me. I'm not perfect. I don't always say and do the exact right thing. But when I don't, I repent and I come to the Lord and God restores me and we move on together.

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And that's how I live my life. This is what we need to see. Now jump over based on this. Jump over to verse... Let's start off in verse 13.
For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world, that's one of the promises God made to Abraham, was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.
God made that promise to Abraham and he believed it by saving faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified. For the law brings about God's holy anger or wrath.
[16:33] But where there is no law, there's also no violation. Now what is he talking about? Go on with me. Verse 16. For this reason, it is by faith in order that it may be in accordance with grace.

Grace is God's divine favor. So he's saying, this faith that we have in God, it is all by the divine favor of God on our lives. God has favored us.
He didn't have to do that. It's undeserved. So that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.
It is written, a father of many nations, I have made you Abraham in the presence of him who believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.
In hope against hope, Abraham believed so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken. If you haven't got this underlined and you underline and write in your Bible, you've got to underline this.
[17:41] According to that which had been spoken. God spoke. And it's standing to this day. So shall your descendants be, is what he said.

Without becoming weak in faith, Abraham contemplated his own body, now as good as dead, since he was about 100 years old and he still didn't have that baby.
And the deadness of Sarah's womb, his wife has been barren her whole life. And she's 89 years old. And God is still telling them, you guys are going to have a baby.
And Abraham's thinking, okay, okay, I'm holding on. Yet, with respect to the promise of God, Abraham did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God.
Now folks, that's worth preaching. You need to know how this happened in Abraham's life. I need to know how this happened in Abraham's life. And being fully assured that what God had promised, he was also able to perform, therefore, it was also credited to Abraham as righteousness.
[19:00] He didn't earn it. God was the one by grace who helped him believe it. And by that believing, it was credited to him as righteousness. That is the work of God in his heart.

Now, not only for Abraham's sake, only was it written that it was credited to him, but also for our sake, to whom it will be credited as those who believe in him who raised Jesus Christ, our Lord, from the dead.
He who was delivered over because of our transgressions and was raised because of our justification. Amen. Now, that's the example of Abraham's life to us.
He was a man of saving faith. Now, at the same time, here's what we need to understand. Abram, right now, his name is still Abram.
Abram is also someone who sinned with Hagar. Now, I don't have time to go back into that. That's previous messages. He sinned with Hagar. But he also counted on the promise of God and he learned to obey.
[20:09] He learned to obey the Lord with a strong faith in God's precious covenant promises. Abraham didn't put his faith in what he couldn't know. Abraham didn't put his faith in what he couldn't see, couldn't change, couldn't fulfill.

Abraham put his faith in what God said and in who God is. That's where we need to live or we're going to get in a lot of trouble.
So here's what I want to give you. The lesson then and encouragement for us in these passages, I'll put it up here on the screen, is this. Learn and live what God has said.
The Scripture. So that you can wisely apply this truth in the issues of life as you encounter them. Count on your covenant making, covenant keeping God.
There will be plenty of times in your life if you haven't experienced it already where you won't have a clue. Where you will be down, you will be tempted to discouragement, you will wonder, you will be confused, you will be afraid.

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[21:17] You need something a lot bigger than you in those moments to help bring you through and make the difference in your life. And God is that difference. He is faithful.

Now I want you to notice in chapter 17, verse 1, we have a transition from what is said in the previous chapter in verse 16 of chapter 16.
Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him. And you and I both know that Hagar was not part of the plan.
That was Abram's plan. So he's 86 years old when this child came into his life, but this is not the child of promise. This is not Isaac.
Who will come later. Now in verse 1 of chapter 17, now when Abram was 99 years old, so 13 years have gone by, the Lord appeared to Abram and then said these particular things.
[22:20] He's facing the situational silence of 13 years without any further direction from God about what God's promised. Abram still doesn't have all that land that was promised.

He still hasn't seen all these people, just thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of people behind him and all that. That's his descendants. And he still doesn't have the promised heir that God will build all this from.
None of that's happened yet. And he's been waiting all these years with this promise in place. He's 99. His wife is 89. She's way past childbearing.
She's barren. Her womb is unfruitful. Even if she was still in childbearing age, she couldn't have kids and hasn't had any. Now this situation seems insurmountable, doesn't it?
On a human level, it sounds totally insurmountable. What's the difference? Well, it's what God has said. It's what God has promised. The human reality isn't the difference maker.
[23:26] My problems are not the difference maker. The difference maker is what God has promised to me as his child, even if my circumstances don't change.

Oh, silence. Did you notice I didn't get any amens to that, Mitch? None. Yeah. What does it say about God if my circumstances don't change and He leaves me right there?
Does that change what He said? What He's promised? Who He is? His character? Am I the measure of God's character? Are my circumstances the measure of God's faithfulness?
Boy, if that was the case with Abram, he's in a lot of trouble, isn't he? Because God made a promise to him and now his human weakness and the fact that they're too far gone to have kids is going to mean that God can't pull it off.
Is that the God that made the sun and the universe? No. This is what he's facing. It seems insurmountable and yet, and yet, Abram has come to trust God and take Him at His word.
[24:38] Abram is learning. Friends, Abram is learning the lessons of what the silence of the Lord is and is not.

Please hear this. He is learning the lessons of what the silence of God is and is not. When I say silence, I am not referring to the idea that God has said nothing and left us in the dark.
No hope, no instruction, no direction, do the best you can. Oh, and by the way, if you fail, I'm going to burn you. What kind of God is that?
It's not our God. God has spoken. He has given promises. When I say situational silence, here's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the fact that God hasn't changed His circumstances.
He's gone silent on that. And Abram's living in it. So what are we to say? Well, God's silence the way I've defined it to you, God's silence is not the silence or the quiet of ignorance.
[25:49] As if God is saying, yeah, yeah, yeah, you know, I don't know what to do either. Okay? You're 99, she's 89, I missed my moment. What can I say? I missed my moment.

Sorry. It's not the quiet of lack. Yeah, you know, I don't understand how to do this. I can't figure it out. It's not the quiet of inadequacy.
Well, what do you expect? I can't do anything about this. What are you looking at me for? Doesn't that sound ridiculous? When you see me say that, you're thinking, Jeff, quit being silly. This is how we live.
Now, don't deny it. We live like this. We may not say this out loud, but we can live like that. As if our God's not powerful enough.
As if our God's not good enough. As if our God's not wise enough. And God help us. Well, what is it then? What is this situational silence Abram finds himself in after all this time that God made this promise and it's still not coming true?

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[26:54] And he's living in it and he's getting older? He's thinking, man, well, what is it? Here it is. God's silence is about the quiet of purpose.

It's God's greater good being served. Could God have helped him have the baby 10 years ago when he talked about it?
Yeah, sure. 13 years? Sure. And that would have been a miracle enough because they were already that old. And she was barren after all. But boy, God pushed that thing out and pushed that thing out.
Now he's almost 100 years old and his wife's just 10 years behind him. It looks really bad. But not with God.
Not with God. God had spoken and he's spoken to you too in his word and he's made promises and he stands behind them.
[27:50] And in times of situational silence, it's very important that you and I yoke ourselves to those promises and not to the fickle feelings we have, not to the counsel that we might receive from people who don't know the Lord and don't understand the wisdom of God who can't explain these things to you.

They don't know them and they don't live by them themselves. We need to live by these as we look to the Lord. Now let me show you this and we'll see how far we get this morning, okay? I don't know how far I'll get, doesn't matter.
We'll just pick up here next time I'm in the pulpit. Look at this. This is the outline that we worked from last time. We are to look to God. That was just verse 1.
This is know and trust God's character. God didn't begin by telling Abram all the things that he would do. When he spoke again to Abram after 13 years of silence, God started in verse 1 with his own character.
I am God Almighty. Boom! Full stop. That's where he began. In situational silence, we need to look to God.
[28:55] In the assurance of things hoped for, look to God. In the conviction of things not seen, look to God. And then this is the outline we'll be working from. Part of it today and the remainder of it over the next couple of Sundays.

Listen to God. Know and trust God's Word. His Word is based on His character. So we'll deal with parts of listening to God defines our personhood this morning.
That's what we'll focus on aspects of today. Now what am I talking about here? Listen to God and know and trust His Word because listening to God defines your personhood.
This is about our relationship with God defining our being. Defining our personhood. How do I define personhood? I do not define it the way psychology defines it.
I define it biblically. Personhood refers to your existence as a created being. Not an evolutionary being. A created being. You are on purpose.
[30:01] You are not the accident of primordial ooze trillions of years ago. You were created by the God of the universe and there's only one of you. That's beautiful.

It means your individual identity is one made in the image of God. You are distinct from the animals. You are made in the image of God. Unlike anything else God has ever made, you are made in His image.
You've been given a soul. God is spirit. You are spirit. You've been given a soul in which to relate to God. Your body is the temple or house for your soul.
The most important thing about you is not your physical body. It's your soul encased in your body. Take care of your body because it's your soul's house. But realize that when you die you get a new body.
Travis, are you glad, brother? What were we talking about this morning? Oh, my back. Oh, my back. Right. Well, we're going to get a whole new one, man. And it's going to last forever. Right.
[31:01] But what's going to survive all that, my soul? And I'm made in the image of God in that sense. That's very beautiful. And powerful. Personhood, then, is who you really are.

It is the depth of your being. It's what makes you you. It expresses the core of your nature as made in the image of God with a soul to relate to Him. And it involves what you are, yes.
But even more importantly, who you are in relationship to God. The most important thing about your soul is its relationship to its creator.

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Are you rightly related to your creator or are you not? That's the issue of your soul. There's only two possibilities for your soul in this life, this side of eternity.
You are rightly related to God or you are wrongly related to God. There is only one bridge that can bridge the issue of that gap between right and wrong.
[32:00] And it's right behind me. It's this. It's the cross. Jesus Christ gives you the bridge between being wrongly related to God and rightly related to God.

He is the only way of forgiveness. He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. Jesus is the gate, the bridge.
He's the only way. As we deal with this issue of our personhood according to the emphasis of Genesis 17, we need to work to understand how God is redefining Abram's personhood to be in connection with God's covenant with Abram himself.
So in other words, here's what I'm saying. We need to see, we need to see that God's promises concerning his relationship with Abram are the defining factors for Abram's entire life.
Let me see if it's... There it is. God's promises concerning his relationship with Abram are the defining factors for Abram's entire life and labor.
[33:12] Folks, hold on to that. That's the difference maker in Christian living. It's our relationship with God that defines how we live, how we labor, and why we do it.

Because it's not about us. This is how the Lord's always had it. It's a covenant love that we're called to respond to.
When we know the reality that God gave us His Son on the cross to bear our sins in our place and pay the penalty for those sins as if He committed them instead of us.
He took that on Himself for us. Why? Because somebody had to pay for those sins. You can't be before a holy God full of sin. And the only way for your sin to be dealt with is for it to be fully paid for and or forgiven.
And so Jesus paid for those sins and paid our criminal debt to God and expunged the record. It's been paid in full. And then heaped on top of that the forgiveness of God toward us for all eternity and bought for us, purchased for us, heaven.
[34:27] This is the gift of His Son. Now, folks, when you hear that, why would you not want to respond and run to that God and say, God, forgive me.

Thank You for loving me. Thank You for sending me Your Son. Thank You for the greatest message humanity has ever heard. Thank You for making my soul right with You by saving faith.
I want that faith. I want to confess that to You. I want You to be my God. I want to serve You and know You. I want to live my life in that kind of priority. I want to know that peace.
This is what God does for us. And now this. Look at this. When Satan tries to deceive you away from a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus, what I was just describing, when that happens, when your fleshly desires fight against the truth and goodness of God and when the world caters to your pride, promotes your selfishness, these are all attempts to corrupt or degrade or pervert your covenant relationship with Jesus as a Christian.
Satan can't take your salvation away from you. God has secured that for you for all eternity. That is safeguarded and protected in the hands of God. But Satan can tempt you away from and pervert and corrupt your relationship with God in terms of your loyalty, your devotion, trusting in His goodness, operating in the sense of serving Him out of joy and gratitude.
[35:58] He can confuse all of that. So you say, well, Jeff, what sorts that out? What He has said. It reorients, regrounds.

It helps put us on a solid footing. So what makes Abram, Abram is his relationship to God.
What makes you, you is your relationship to God. You say, Jeff, can you say that about every human being who's ever lived? I sure can for this reason.
What makes people who don't believe God by saving faith, what makes them who they are is their unbelief. You with me? And what changes when a person comes to saving faith and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins is God gives them a new heart.
They become a new spiritual being. Awakened and made alive. Regenerated is the word we use theologically. So that they now come to be alive to God and know God.
[37:07] And that's now what defines them. Their relationship to God is what defines us, folks, because our soul is related to God either through belief or unbelief.

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The Bible says there's no other issue, no other regard, no other option. We either know God and believe through Jesus Christ or we do not. That is the condition of our soul before our Creator. And one day we will give an account for that belief or unbelief. Now what we see in this passage is that God is expressing what He will do for, to, and through Abram.
There are details here about what God's relationship with Abram, His covenant with Abram will embody. And these details are definitely important. But I want you to consider something. Considering the life of Israel, the original hearers of this information, what is more important here is that the Hebrew people see the connection between being and doing in relationship to God.
[38:10] Because of who I am in my relationship with God, I do what I do, I live how I live, I think what I think, I say what I say. In other words, it's all about God.

It's all about Christ in me that redefines my life. And when I'm not doing that, that is sin. And I need to repent of that sin and replace it with what is right.
Isn't this how we live? How many people in here, raise your hands, how many people in here went through seven days last week and did not sin one time? Mine won't go up.
This is where we live. And we read these stories about these people in the Old Testament and we can blow right by it and miss so many of the life lessons that come from what God Himself is doing. God put it in here for a reason. The people of Israel, as they form this nation, they're on the precipice, the cusp, of forming the nation of Israel.
[39:19] They're not Israel yet. As they read this and understand it from the life of Moses, they're standing on one side of the Jordan River getting ready to cross the Jordan River into the promised land and fight for it.

God said, go in there and wipe them out. This is the land I gave you and I'm going to give it to you forever. It's yours. Go take it. They're waiting to do that and they're hearing this.
And what's the most important thing they're seeing from their spiritual father, Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation? Walk with me and it'll go well. Leave me and you'll crash and burn.
And what happened? Where are they today? Still fighting.
Still fighting. These details and stuff are important. These laws, these codes, these regulations, these restrictions.
[40:22] Sure. Look, those are certainly distinctive. Those are important. But they all hinge on the covenant relationship with who it is that stands behind all these things that they're doing.

And we just tend to forget that sometime. So to answer the questions, what makes Abram, Abram? What makes you, you? What makes Israel, Israel? Those are the questions about our nature in relationship to God.
We look to God's nature expressed in His covenant with us. How do I know who I am? Jeff, who are you? Well, Jeff, you are who you are in Christ.
You are who you are in what God has done for you in His Son. That's who you are. And so what about that, Lord? That will never change. You'll continue to grow in likeness to Jesus and then you're going to die and I'm going to bring you to heaven and you won't have to deal with tears, sin, pain anymore.
And I'm like, well, that sounds like a win-win. Ooh, yeah. It is. But it's hard right now. We are who we are as God's people because God is who He is as God Almighty.
[41:34] And that's the way it has to be. When Satan tries to deceive and demoralize you, he aims at breaching your trust in who truly owns you. Yes, of course, he wants you to do wrong.

He wants you to sin. But his aim in your sin is to discredit God in your life so that you dishonor the Lord. You don't look like a Christian, sound like a Christian, act like a Christian.
And what does that do? That dishonors God. Have you ever heard anybody say, I don't want to go to that church. I know so-and-so who's in that church. And if they go to that church and that's what a Christian is, I don't want to have anything to do with that church.
I don't want to have anything to do with that religion. I know so-and-so. Have you ever heard that? You ever seen that? This is what Satan wants to do. You're small potatoes. But if he can dishonor and discredit the Lord in your life, that's what he's after.
That's what he wants. He doesn't want you to be a witness for Christ. It's one thing for people to see the flaws in our life and see still the difference that Jesus is making through repentance and grace and forgiveness and kindness and compassion.

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[42:39] It's another thing for us to discredit God and not care. God made a covenant and He cares. And Satan wants to discredit that covenant. Through God's covenant invitation for Abram to know and live for God, Abram is now Abraham.

I want you to look at it with me. Let's read the text again together. Now when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless.
I will establish my covenant between me and you. I will multiply you exceedingly. Abram fell on his face. What an appropriate response, right? He's worshiping.
And then God talked with him. As for me, now God's going to say, as for me, as for my part of the covenant and what I've promised, my covenant is with you. That's so beautiful.
Abram, it's with you. I know you. And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. Folks, you can read that. That's millions of people that are coming. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham.
[43:46] The father of a multitude is what this means. Abram means exalted father. Abraham means the father of a multitude of nations or many.

This is the promise that God is making to him in this moment. So through God's covenant invitation for you, you, to know and live for the Lord, your life is God's child through God's covenant in Christ. And as a member of the bride of Christ, you, you are to reflect the character of God Almighty. This is what God's saying. Abram, I am God Almighty. I will do these things through your life, not to exalt you, but to exalt myself through your life.
I will use your life to show the world the power of God in covenant. I will keep my promises. I will love you through this. Folks, if you know in a hard season of life that God has this good and greater purpose for showcasing his character in your life, would you ever pray the prayer, stop the circumstance?
Would you say, God, halt it. I can't take the pain anymore. I know you're being glorified. I know you have a greater purpose. I know this is a situational silence that is a purpose of good being served in you even though I can't see it.
[45:06] But God, it's just too much. Can you just stop it? Now would you? If you knew. That's hard, isn't it?

What if you saw it in the person you love the most on the earth? You saw the suffering, the pain. Would you say, God, stop it?
When you know that behind all of that is a good and gracious God serving a greater purpose that you might not know. He's not revealing it to you.
He didn't to Abram. We have a track record of God doing this. It sobers us to help us see that there's a bigger picture to our life. And that's the agenda that we need to plug into.
And be faithful to. It's the agenda of the cross. What did Jesus say? If anyone wants to come after me, he needs to deny himself, take up his cross, and then follow me.
[46:13] That's the cross life. Consider our definition of a covenant. A biblical covenant is a clear statement of God's purposes and intentions expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what he's promised.

God binds himself to keep his own promises. He pledges by himself. I am God Almighty. There's nothing higher than that. I'm going to do what I said I would do by my own word.
There's nothing higher than that. I can't break my own word. He can't. You remember what I said to you a few weeks ago? Is there anything impossible for God?
Yes. Sin. He cannot. If there's anything God can't do, He can't sin. He can't go against Himself. Which is why He'll never desert you.
Because He lives in you. He'll always stay faithful to you. This is the truth of a faithful God. Now, do this.
[47:14] Look up on the screen there. Look into and through these purposes and promises that He's made to Abram about an heir and about land and a multitude of nations. And what do you see? You see faithfulness.

You see love and mercy and grace and goodness and compassion and patience. Well, he's not going to see any of that if Abram's got his eyes on himself and what's not being done.
If he looks into the darkness and says, yeah, but my situation's not changing. The timing of this is not happening according to my timetable. If he focuses on stuff like that, he's not going to see

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goodness in God.
He's not going to see love and kindness and mercy. He's not going to have gratitude in his heart. Now, what's that going to? You choose. Which one do you want? You want one that spirals you down or you want one that lifts you up?
Behold your God. I am God Almighty. Where do you want to live? Where do you want to live? Now, here's a harder question. Where do you live?
[48:16] Don't just tell me what you want. Where do you live? In relationship to God. This is what Abram's being challenged with.

Do I believe him or not? What is the significance then of changing Abram's name? I've already mentioned it to you. Look what precedes the name change in verse 1.
I am God Almighty. Everything God is saying now is based on that statement. And sometimes, folks, that's all we have to stand on. And the question is, is it enough?
Is it enough for you to know I am God Almighty? The first thing that that tells Jeff Jackson is, okay, there's only one of those and I'm not it.
So I better start getting myself to the place where I say, Lord, please forgive me. I'm going to stop trying to play God for myself. It comes down to am I going to play God or serve God?
[49:20] This is Abram. Is he going to believe I am God Almighty or not? Look at this. I am is a declaration of being, folks.

It's a declaration of personhood. It's a description of God's nature. And God Almighty stresses God's sovereign actions that follow from his character of I am God Almighty.
In other words, it's backed by his authority. This is a way of saying to Abram, look, but you got the best and the highest backing you up on this that you can possibly have.
So be comforted. God exists and he exists to act. And the way that he has acted for humanity and the highest expression of his love for humanity is the cross of his Son, Jesus Christ.
Notice what follows after all of this. Notice, look at the text there and look at these verses. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8. What is happening here?
[50:26] I am God Almighty in verse 1 followed with all this. I will establish. I will multiply. I have made.

I will make. I will make. I will establish. I will give. I will be. You see that? Where does all that come from?
From his character. None of that means anything if it's not true that I am God Almighty. Because what that tells us is I can do anything.
Nothing's impossible for me. Say again, Abram. How old are you? 99. Sarai, how old are you? 89. How long have you been barren? My whole life. Uh-huh.
And you think that's an issue for me? When I do God like this, I don't mean to make him sound like he's got an attitude, but you know it's okay if he does. Sometimes we need that.
[51:22] Based on who I am, here's what I'll do. Don't forget who's standing behind you. So God will relate to Abram, now Abraham, the father of many nations.

That's what that means. He even changed his name to reflect the fulfillment of the promise. Wow! It's all based on who he is.
So this understanding of God and his actions and his covenant promises to Abram defines for us the basis on which Abram is to relate to God. Folks, that's one of the most important statements I made this morning.
Understanding who God is and how he acts in his promise to covenant with us. To bind himself, to keep his promises, and to stay our God through anything.
Nothing will ever break the power of me being your God because I have covenanted with you. I have made you my child. And now I own you. You belong to me.
[52:27] That's the basis on which Abram is called to relate to God. And that's worthy of something. If you notice in verses 4 and 5, as for me, behold, my covenant is with you and you will be.

See how that's established? You will be the father of a multitude of nations. It's going to happen. It's in the bank. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but Abraham, the father of many nations. That's who you are now. Folks, we do from who we are. We are what God has made us to be in His Son.

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For 24 years, Abram has carried a name which meant that he was exalted. He was highly regarded as a spiritual father, if you were, to those who would come after him in belief, sharing in the same saving faith as Abraham.
That's why the Jews could say that Abraham is our spiritual father, the father of our nation. In truth, what God means by that is not just genetically. He's talking about the fact that Abram, or Abraham now, is someone who believed on God by saving faith and walked with God in covenant.
[53:45] And this is what we do through the Lord Jesus. God's appointed heir will come. The multitudes will be too numerous to count.

We are part of that multitude. Many nations, many tongues, many tribes. We are part of that. I am in the saving faith of the heritage of Abraham.
And so are you if you're a Christian. Because we're all believing on God in the same way in terms of saving faith. We got saved the same way Abraham did, by faith. This is what God is working.
Your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you. Did you see that? For I have made you this. God has purposed. He has intended. And so He's going to bring to physical completion all that He's promised.
Folks, so sure and certain is this promise of God's covenant that it stands fulfilled from God's side of the equation. It's done. In God's economy, it's already done.
[54:47] It's complete. That's how sure it is. This is the same way that God looks at you in Christ. You are in Jesus Christ. From God's economy and God's purpose and God's side, you are already in heaven with Him.

it is so fixed that your eternity is with God that it is complete in the mind of God. And nothing can change it. That's how solid it is. It's all fixed and unalterable.
You are my recreation in this world, the Lord says. Abram, in his very person, the personhood of his nature, through his relationship to the Lord, reflects the nature and power of God by the way that he lives in covenant with God.
That's what he intended. There are so many verses in the New Testament that speak to this reality and I don't have time to rehearse all of them, but I wanted to show you just one before I move to a close here.
Would you mind turning, if you would, back to the book of Colossians? Hold your finger there in Genesis and stay with me just a few minutes more.
[56:01] I want to wrap this up with some of what the New Testament helps us see about this reality of this covenant-making God. In Colossians 2, beginning in verse 9, you have an expression of the beautiful covenant that God has made with us in Jesus Christ through His cross.

In verse 9 of chapter 2, for in Christ all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. In other words, Jesus is deity. He is God.
And in Christ, you have been made complete. I wanted you to see that. Do you see the past tense? And in Jesus Christ, you have already been made complete.
In the mind of God, you are complete as His child. And Jesus is the head over all rule and authority. And in Him, you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands.
This is the spiritual circumcision of your heart. To put you in covenant with God through Christ. Having been buried with Jesus in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him.
[57:15] That's the resurrection. Through what? Faith in the working of God. I'm not putting my faith in myself. I'm putting it in the work of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

In other words, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that will raise me from the dead. When you were dead, verse 13, in your transgressions, when you were dead in the uncircumcision of your flesh, you were outside the covenant of the Lord, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.
He canceled out the certificate of debt in sin consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us. He has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross.
Folks, that's the power of Almighty God to bring us into covenant with Himself through Jesus. And it's a game changer. It's a life changer. The covenant that God makes with us helps us see God's heart.
The cross helps us see the heart of Almighty God for us. And in seeing His heart, we are brought into deeper love for Him, which in turn becomes our motive to listen to Him so that we learn to trust and obey Him.

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[58:30] That's the way it works. We are to look to God and trust His goodness because it's God's character that defines who we are and how we're to live in covenant relationship to Him.

So here's how we'll sum it up and end. Looking to God stresses our need to know and trust His character in His covenant with us. That's where it starts. It starts with God and who's standing behind what He promises you.
We listen to God and stress our need to know His word because that's the truth. The Bible tells us the truth about ourselves, our world, and the God who made it.
And then finally, we'll end up talking about laboring for God which stresses our need to trust and obey His authority in our covenant relationship with Him. Who's your authority?
You or God? Folks, that's the message and meaning of the gospel of Jesus who is our treasure, our wisdom, our forgiveness, our freedom from sin.
[59:36] And now, we each have a choice to make. And here's what I leave you with. We each have a choice to make. We can listen to our own self-talk in life and stay in our own heads.

We can listen to the world with its many falsehoods and shallowness. We can listen to Satan who always lies to us.
Or we can listen to God who gave us His Son Jesus and speaks to us in His Word of Truth. That's where we live. And we need to ask God to help us live listening to Him.
Will you pray with me? Almighty God and Father, I thank You for the kind attention of Your people as they have sat here listening to this exposition of this passage extolling the fatherly covenant that You have made with us through Your Son Jesus Christ.
even in the life of Abraham going way back in the Old Testament. We see that You were a God who called Him to Your heart through saving faith just like You do to us.
[60:52] And so Father, we thank You for Your goodness. I thank You for the visitors here today who have been kind enough and attentive enough to listen and to take in what You have spoken.

I thank You for the members of this congregation who labor diligently week after week to keep this ministry moving forward so that other people can hear the truth. God, please, comfort our hearts with Your compassion and care.
Help us to live without fear in this world trusting that You will keep Your promises to us as Your people. We thank You for Your goodness and Your grace in Jesus' name.
Amen.

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