

A Life Defined by Faith in God: Listening to God [Participation]

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[0 : 00] That is one of those songs that preaches. And every time we sing it, and I hear you behind me singing it, I feel like I should just come up and say amen.

You're dismissed. Some of you know the background to that hymn. The man who wrote that hymn was on a voyage across the ocean with his family.

And they had a mishap, and the boat sank, and he lost his wife and children and survived. And sometime later, he was crossing in the same way, and the captain stopped the boat and let this gentleman know we're at the spot.

And this gentleman was in his cabin and wrote that song. It is well with my soul because God is well on His throne. And that will never change.

And beloved, that's the God we're here to worship. So we are in Genesis together. No one has asked, so I volunteer under no duress whatsoever.

[1 : 14] How long will we be in Genesis? Are you going to finish it? I mean, we're going to do four or five sermons in 17. You really slowed down. If we keep doing that, we'll be here for five years. Well, that's okay. I'll do other stuff too.

I don't know. I don't know if I'll finish the life of Abraham and close out Genesis for now and come back to it again another time. There are other books I want to do. I've already got my eye on a couple of them in particular that I'm praying through.

But right now, we've slowed down a bit because this is so foundational to how we understand the Scriptures, how we understand the character of God. And I want to show you so carefully from the Old Testament how it is that people who have worshipped God and been called to worship God have been called to understand and know God by His character from the very beginning.

Adam and Eve all the way through. To walk with God is to know God. It is to know His character. It is to get up every morning with your heart beating to know God.

What will God reveal to me today? What will He show me? How will I get to know Him better today? It might be through adversity. It might be through some difficult circumstance.

[2 : 28] It might be through a sense of loss in my life. A deep loss. It might be through some great joy like driving to work and seeing the sun rise and seeing the painted sky and realize God did that for human beings to marvel at His glory.

He did that for the simple pleasure that it brings. What does the psalmist say? Today, the skies and the universe are screaming the glories of God.

Do you get up every morning ready to know your God? Well, in Genesis chapter 17, I'm dealing with this title. We're several into it now.

A life defined by faith in God. This is the heartbeat of the Christian life. And it's been this way from the beginning. In this particular sermon, we're going to be talking about the larger title of listening to God.

And I'm going to zero in on listening to God as an act of participation in the gospel, in the good news of knowing God and His character through Jesus Christ.

[3 : 40] So in Genesis 17, we'll begin in verse 1, and I'll take us down through about verse 14 for today. 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. That is, fear God. Have a high and holy reverence for Him. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.

Abram then fell on his face in worship before God. And God talked with him, saying, As for me, now God is speaking about His role, 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. For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

I want you to notice how God says that in a past tense way, and yet that has not yet been fulfilled on earth. But it has in the heart of God. Verse 6, I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.

[4 : 52] I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your descendants after you, throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant. To be God to you, and to your descendants after you.

I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings. That is all the land of Israel. All the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.

And then this, at the end of verse 8, I will be their God. God said further to Abraham, Now as for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, throughout their generations.

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me, and you, and your descendants after you. Are you taking note of how often God says this? Repeated phrase over and over, about what the covenant is established in?

Every male among you shall be circumcised, and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

[6 : 07] And every male among you, who is eight days old, shall be circumcised throughout your generations. A servant who is born in the house, or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.

So, this applies to everybody under his authority. A servant who is born in your house, or who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. Thus shall my covenant be in your flesh, for an everlasting covenant.

But an uncircumcised male, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off. Yes, there is a play on words here.

Shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant. That's a very, very interesting passage that has been established in the Old Testament as an everlasting covenant between Abraham and his descendants.

Very interesting. But now, beloved, this passage is far more than a list of the details of the Abrahamic covenant, such as descendants, land, kings, circumcision.

[7 : 19] All of those are very important. But this passage is also a window into what has been fulfilled to this point. It's also a shadow of what is still to come.

And it is a mirror of what always is. And I want to delineate those three things for you just a bit here in the introduction. Now, the window that I'm speaking about into what has been fulfilled shows us these things.

It shows us Isaac. This will happen. And so in the sense of us looking back, this has been fulfilled. The window into what has been fulfilled shows us Isaac, born of Abraham and Sarah, even in their old age.

She will have this baby at 89 or 90 years old, and Abraham will be 99. And God will bring forth this baby from this couple.

It speaks of the fulfillment of the exodus that God explained in Genesis 15 when he prophesied, as it were, that the children of Israel will go into captivity for over 400 years, and then I will deliver them.

[8 : 31] And so that's the exodus. And God delivering them into the promised land of a nation of millions from Abraham's own descendants. And then of a land flowing with milk and honey and a Savior who will come from Abraham's line to bless the families of the earth through God's covenant with Abraham.

Now, the shadow, that's the window that we can look through and look into the past and see this fulfillment. The shadow of what is still to come is that of an everlasting covenant.

That is an eternal union. A greater union that will come. Jesus will be that greater union for all of us. An everlasting possession.

That will be our eternal home. None of what you have today marks out as an everlasting possession, does it? I mean, look, you have to buy a different car periodically. You have to get more clothes and more shoes. Stuff wears out. Nothing that you own today will go with you. But you have, nevertheless, a promised everlasting possession.

[9 : 42] That is an eternal home in Christ. An eternal kingdom and an eternal people will inhabit that place. This is the new heaven and the new earth where righteousness dwells because Jesus dwells there.

And we will dwell there with Him. That's the shadow of what is still to come. This passage is also a mirror because it reflects who God is in His covenant making. in His covenant keeping. And that is what I'm talking about now is it reflects the eternal, the always faithful God.

His eternal Son at work in our lives. The Christ. The Christ. The Messiah. The Deliverer. The Anointed One who freely forgives the souls of many for their sins against God.

These are the things in terms of window and shadow and mirror that God uses in Scripture to reflect to us His character.

[10 : 42] To solidify us in a God that makes promises and keeps them. A God that fulfills them and is fulfilling them. And guaranteeing that for us.

You and I now, as you will see in the passage, as for me, and then He shifts over and says, as for you, that's for us. That's for us. You and I have a responsibility to God.

We have a responsibility to each other in our study of this passage. Our love for God and each other demands that we apply ourselves to the tasks of hearing, understanding, and then obeying or living out these truths.

So we're prayerful, we're humble, we're teachable, we're receptive, we're alert, we're expectant in our hearts as we come together to learn about God's covenant love.

This is what the covenants teach us. The covenant love of God for His people. We desire to learn how to be God's people doing God's will for His greater glory.

[11 : 46] Amen? This is what we're here for. Now I know that we're tempted to forget this. We're tempted to be distracted away from this. There are so many things in the week that we allow to pull us away from this kind of focus on why we're here.

We're not, listen, please hear me on this now. We are not here to make a living. That's not why God left us here. To wear ourselves out making a living.

It's important that we make a living. It's important that we provide for our families. But that's not the priority of living this life here on this earth as a Christian. The priority of living on this earth as a Christian is not your married life.

It's what your married life shows. That you are married in Christ and your marriage is to reflect the love that Jesus has for His wife, His bride, the church, you.

And that mutual relationship is a reflection. Here we're back now. We're back to that mirror. Our lives mirroring the character of God at work in our hearts. It doesn't matter what you give me as an area of your life.

[12 : 58] I will say to you, the Bible clearly teaches that the priority of any area of your life is to reflect the character of God as you become more like Jesus. That's why you're here.

So can you work your job and reflect the character of Jesus? I hope so. I hope that's important to you. Can you be married and reflect the character of Jesus in every area of your marriage?

I hope so. That's certainly God's design and purpose. How heavenly minded are you? And is that heavenly mindedness defining the way that you live?

Is it defining what you do? Why you do it? Where you do it? How often you do it? You know, these are the things that matter when you come and you worship and you sit before the Lord and we open the Scriptures and try to do an exposition, a verse-by-verse unpacking of the truth.

We try to be skillful and careful because we want to know our God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. So this is what I'm saying to you.

[14 : 10] We have a responsibility. Now the text provides us with two goals for our learning today. The first is this. It's to have our faith. You have faith.

To have our faith informed about God's nature as I am God Almighty. Chapter 17. Look at that with me. Now when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, what's the first thing he said?

I am God Almighty. That's it. That defines the foundation of your walk with God. You are in a relationship with I am God Almighty.

There is nothing impossible for me. Nothing. I can stand before you and say if he can save this old Georgia boy, he can save anybody. I hope you feel that way.

If God can save me, he can save anybody. Praise be to Jesus Christ. We are to have our faith informed about God's nature as God has revealed Himself to us.

[15 : 15] I am God Almighty. I am the God who saves. I am the God of the cross. Then second, we are to put our informed faith, our biblically informed faith, to work.

How do we do that? By living according to the command. Now look at the text. Walk before me and be blameless. Do you see this? Do you see how this is developing? I am trying here to lay this out very clearly for us.

First of all, I am God Almighty. You are what you are because I am who I am. Now, the second thing you need to do based on that nature that I have given to you, my own nature in my Son, walk before me and be blameless.

We can walk with God in blamelessness which Jesus has freely given to us in His sacrificial death and sanctified life. Does that mean I won't sin, Jeff? Does that mean I can get to a place where I never sin again, Jeff?

And the answer is, you will sin and no, you will never on this earth get to a place where you rise above sinning. You need to walk with the Lord.

[16 : 31] And we need to understand what walk with God and be blameless is like. Alright? So, look at the screen here and let's begin. Your work to live this out begins with looking to God and trusting God's character.

You should get up every morning reflecting on the character and nature of your promise-making, promise-keeping God who is giving you Jesus Christ alive and well in your heart.

And so this is where we went with this in the recent past. Look to God then, the first one, first point, look to God. This is an emphasis on God's character. We get this from verse 1.

I talked to you about the situational silence that Abram is facing and why that character from the Lord is so important in that. In the assurance of things hoped for and in the conviction of things seen.

Abraham needs to understand who it is that stands behind all this. Then we moved toward listen to God. Look to God, listen to God. This is an emphasis on God's Word.

[17 : 34] We move from His character to His Word that emanates from His character. Listening to God defines our personhood in covenant relationship with God.

And what we're talking about here is our being, our very nature in covenant relationship with the Lord. That's our personhood before the Lord.

The details of God's covenant promise in verses 2 through 8 particularly serve to define Abraham's identity. That is, his personhood, his nature, his being.

But in relationship to his God. Abraham is Abraham because of God. His very name reflects that. But listening to God should also define our doing.

It should define our way of living, our actual, here's where it comes in, participation in God's covenant relationship with us. We have something to do.

[18 : 36] Praise the Lord. We're not puppets. We're not robots. And that is what we will deal with now. So look at this with me. Listen to God.

This is where we are. This is an emphasis on God's Word as I've said. Listening to God defines our personhood. That was the last time, two Sundays ago when I was in the pulpit. Now you get the next installment.

Listening to God defines our participation. And we're zeroing in on verses 9 through 14. Listening to God defines our participation in covenant relationship with God.

So what we're talking about is our doing, our living, our actions. The idea is that of Abraham acting or living on who God has defined him to be.

Please don't skip over that. In other words, he is the father of a multitude. Abram to Abraham.

Abraham means the father of a multitude or the father of nations.

[19 : 37] His name, his very name is a prophecy of what will come. Millions and millions of people will come into covenant relationship with God based on the faith of Abraham.

Abraham believed in God. We'll be told in the New Testament that unless you believe as Abraham believed and was justified, you cannot know the Lord. Abraham believed in the same way you and I believe.

He believed in Messiah. He believed in God's promise of an anointed one. And that was saving faith. It's the same way. When people ask you that question, how did people get saved in the Old Testament?

They got saved the same way you do in the sense of they believed in the one who would come. We believe in the one who came and will come again. Isn't that the same thing?

Yes, it is. That's what the Bible teaches us, beloved. So listening to God is about participation. It is an active listening. It is a listening that moves you to action.

[20 : 40] You are compelled to action because you love the Lord and you know He loves you. And that love is active. It's a churning. It's a wonderful boiling love.

And it just has to express. Right? It has to get out. If it's not getting out, something's wrong. And this should be a flag for us.

We're being called to action. Folks, look. This follows the pattern of God acting according to who He is as well as well as I am.

I will. And for Abram, I have made you so you shall. This is the way the Christian life works.

It is God initiating and God acting and us responding. Us responding. Us responding. This is why every day we get up it's so important for us to rehearse in our hearts who God is, why He's left us here, what this is all about and then get in that response of love to the Lord.

[21 : 47] Right? That's how we track. If you get up and just let everything default, you will chase the shadows. And before you know it, you'll be 64 years old.

You can't get it back. Now, be sobered, friends. We're not playing games here with the truth, are we? Abraham is a child of God and his life should display aspects of God's nature such as God's love, God's wrath against sin, God's kindness, His grace, His mercy that Jude called us to be merciful.

Right? So, Abraham. Abraham here. Abraham's exceeding fruitfulness, the legacy he will have, his future family, and even his very name all demonstrate rich and wonderful aspects of God's covenant nature.

Abraham's obedient participation in this covenant relationship with God Almighty is how he fulfills this phrase. Walk, see it on the screen, walk before me and be blameless.

Abraham is being commanded to join in that and follow that. That's a command. Based on my nature, at work in you with my covenant, now you go forward and walk, get active, do, obey, and be blameless.

[23 : 17] That is, be holy. Be holy in all that you think, say, and do. Live a holy life because it honors Christ. Don't be afraid of hell.

If you're a Christian, you've escaped hell. Don't let the motivation worry you about hell. Hell, hell, hell, it's taken care of for you. Jesus took care of that. Let your motivation be this great God who suffered and died on my behalf and who now has set his eternal love on my life.

Eternal love for all eternity. This is the God whom I want to serve. This is the God whom I want to honor. And don't think in terms of the least that I can give him.

Give him everything. Give him your A game. Does he deserve less? Give him your A game. Smile. Be happy. Be blessed.

In your health problems, honor the Lord. In your confusion, honor the Lord. In your marital challenges, honor the Lord. Why? Well, he never stops being God.

[24 : 27] He has you, beloved. Do you hear me? He said, God loves you with an eternal love. And he proved it on the cross.

You don't have any higher proof of God's love for you than the cross. Why would God give something so precious, his son, only to play games with your soul and be fickle about whether or not he will hold on to you?

What a dishonor to his son. That's not the way God works, is it? It's not who he is. I'm just trying to preach behind the scenes here to help you see the nature of this God who loves you and has called you to walk before him and be holy.

As Israel obediently participates in covenant relationship with God, they're going to walk before God and be holy people. So this is why Moses is giving this instruction to the Israelites now.

Moses is saying, Israel, they're all there. Moses is teaching them this material right here, what we're reading. Moses is giving it to his original audience. And he's saying, Israel, this is how your covenant with God began hundreds of years ago with God's promises to our father, Abraham. [25 : 54] Just as God's covenant defined Abraham's entire life, so God's covenant with you should define your life as a nation, as a people, and as individuals.

Israel, just as God displayed his nature through his choice to covenant with Abraham, God's covenant relationship with you as a nation needs to show the other nations God's power, majesty, love, wrath, justice, goodness, holiness.

The nations know nothing of this God. They worship pagan idols and statues made with their own hands. They throw their children into giant bonfires to these false gods who are nothing short of demons.

And the spirits of darkness laugh at them and say, one day we will have you with us forever. And you will see the reality of what we are and it will be too late.

This is the sickening way of demonic spiritual warfare. Well, this is what we have. We will live according to who we are in relationship to God.

[27 : 10] God's faith in God. Your identity as a believer should be expressed as your loving, obedient, self-denying response to His covenant with you every day.

Every single day. God sets that pattern for us. If you look with me, we've already gone through, again, I'm just rehearsing some of this stuff with you from other sermons.

I want you to notice in verse 4 how God turns this thing. In verse 4 He says, as for me. Does your Bible read like that? Okay, as for me.

Notice that. Here is my role, God says. Here is my response. He didn't leave that out. Here's my relational commitments to you.

And I start with me, God says, because everything I'm going to tell you is based on who I am and what I'm doing. That's how we live. That's how we are called to live.

[28 : 14] I, he says to Abraham, in essence, listen now, here's what he tells him, I am making you my instrument. I am making you my instrument to bear my name.

Wow. I'm making you my instrument to carry my message, to fulfill my purposes. Now, I'm speaking directly to you right now.

I wish I had time to say every one of your names in that sentence. Because I'm looking at you and I'm thinking about you this way. I wrote it this way. Your God is saying, I am making you my instrument to carry my name.

I am making you my instrument to carry my message. I'm not playing here. I am making you my instrument to fulfill my purposes in your sphere of influence in your life.

The people you meet, the people you love, the people you influence, I'm counting on you to bear my name, my message, and my purpose to them. I want to be your God.

[29 : 38] And I want to be the God who is the God of those who come after you. And here's how I'm going to show myself as God to you and to your descendants. Then next, and he goes through and he outlines that in this passage.

I want you to notice what he tells him. He says, my covenant in verse 4 is with you. You see how specific that is? Isn't it wonderful for you to reflect on the fact that the God of creation wasn't too busy and distracted to come and find you and save you from your sin?

And yet, what do we do? We get so busy and so distracted. That's not the case with God. my covenant is with you. And you know, I just put ellipsis there, dot, dot, dot, dot, and put my name, Jeff.

And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. Well, that's not a prophecy for me, but that's a promise that I will join in on. I will get to see those nations in heaven.

I'll get to see every tribe, tongue, and nation. I'll get to hear them singing the praises of God. verse 5, no longer shall your name be called Abram, but now Abraham, the father of many nations.

[30 : 55] For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I, notice all this I, I, I will make you exceedingly fruitful, Abraham, because I'm going to make nations of you kings.

What's the greatest king that will come in the line of Abraham? Who is he? Jesus. I will establish my covenant between me and you. Do you see that?

Between you and your descendants after you, they'll all fall. Look, throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, I will be God to you, Abraham, but I will also be God to people after you.

I'm going to give, I'm going to give to you and your descendants after you a land. That's a promise, folks. Israel will have the land, period.

It's going to happen. All the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I will be their God. I will be their God. Look, I am not dissing our president at all.

[31 : 53] Appreciate him, love him, pray for him. Donald Trump is not responsible to bring peace to the Middle East and guarantee Israel their land. Sorry, Donald, you're not God, but God has promised this land to his people and he's going to deliver and he may decide to make you his instrument in part of that.

That's what I'd say to our president with all respect. Sir, love you, pray for you, appreciate many things that you're trying to do, but I want you to remember something. You need to have somebody in your ear every morning when you get up and the first thing that you hear is, Donald, you are not God, God, but you can know the God who sits on the throne of the universe.

Now, ask him if he will use you as his instrument and stay in your lane. Pray for your president, folks. Pray for your president. But just know that your God is the one who's made these guarantees to the people of Israel and he will fulfill them!

Amen? He will fulfill them. He gets down to verse 9 and he changes it up and what does he say? God said further to Abraham, now as for you, that's my part, now as for your part, here is your role. Look up there on the screen and you'll see it. Here is your role, responsibility, relational commitment to me as my servant, my instrument. Here is how I will make it possible for you to bear my name, carry my message and fulfill my purposes for your life.

[33 : 33] And he outlines that. What does he say to him? You shall keep my covenant. That's a promise that God stands behind. Abraham, I'm going to make sure you persevere in your faith.

Folks, that's a promise to you. If you're a Christian, you can't be unsaved. God will make sure you persevere in your faith. You can be disobedient and then you can get a spanking.

That's up to you. But your father will never let go of you. He'll spank you, but he will not let go of you. Amen. Now, why do you say amen to that?

Because you're like me. You want to say, Jeff Jackson, sin and hard heartedness and pride and weakness are not greater than God's love to hold on to me.

I can't undo God's love for me. Even my sin isn't that powerful. That's hallelujah now. We brought our sin to the equation of being saved.

[34 : 31] We continue to sin. God help us and he does. But God holds on to us and will not allow our sin to keep us from serving his purposes as his instrument. In other words, the perseverance of the saints means that we will persevere in true faith until the end.

If that does not happen, it means that you have to go back and realize you were never saved. We can't besmirch God in that equation.

We have to take that on ourselves. Because if we say we can lose our salvation, we're saying something about a God who's not sovereign. You see what's at stake?

All right, so we have to be careful. Through Abraham's participation in circumcision, we have to deal with that as a sign of God's covenant love and of God's commitment to do all that he's promised in Abraham's life.

This is what he's commanding this for. You're going to do this because it's going to be a reminder of what I've promised. So now look, Jeff, Jeff, are you saying that there's some kind of special spiritual power inherent in the act of circumcision itself?

[35 : 45] is it a power that catapults believers to new and more meaningful levels of covenant relationship with God? What's the answer? No. I'm not saying that.

The Bible doesn't say it either. No. All right? Verse 10. Verse 10. This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your descendants after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. That's a command. shall be circumcised. You see it up there on the screen. In verse 11, then he adds this, and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin and it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

Boy, he got specific. All the males in your household, Abraham, are to be circumcised. And in right quick, and you too. Wow. There is a sense in which circumcision is the covenant.

Now hold on. There is also a sense in which circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. We have signs. We have symbols.

[37 : 03] Don't we? What's this? That's right. It's a symbol. It's a sign. You see this, and as a Christian, it evokes certain ideas and thoughts in your mind. We have the Lord's table.

Communion. We have baptism. Do these things infuse in us some sense of special spiritual power that catapults us beyond the normal Christian life and makes us super Christians?

No. We don't put our faith in the symbols, do we? We put our faith in what the symbols represent. What they point to. This is capturing now the essence of what we need to understand about this covenant in circumcision.

What is circumcision's, I'll put it up here, what is circumcision's significance in Abraham's covenant relationship with God? Folks, you won't be, lots of people get this wrong and we just don't need to play games with this and try to mystify it and turn it into some mystical experience, all right?

Because then the first thing you got to ask is, well then what about the women? Well, sorry gals, you're just left out. Right? We suffer a little bit as men and then we get over it and then now we're super Christians.

[38 : 17] And you poor ladies, that's not the way it works, is it? No. People, you would be surprised at the hoops that people will jump through and the kinds of things that they will develop in layers of explanation about this that are just ridiculous.

worthless and I don't want that to be for you. All right? Now, so real quickly I'm going to walk through this slide by slide so you see this. What is circumcision significance in Abraham's covenant relationship with God?

Here it is. Circumcision is significant to Abraham's relationship with the Lord because of what it points to, what it stands for, what it represents.

Now the act itself is an act of important obedience so I don't want to slight the act itself but I want to also help you understand what it points to. What is it dealing with?

We can say this about it. It is a sign. It is a symbol. It is also importantly a seal of the relationship between God and Abraham and Abraham's future descendants who will come to faith in the Lord.

[39 : 25] Now as a sign, you see it up here, as a sign circumcision points to something, and that is what a sign does. Circumcision reminds and sends a message.

It reminds and it sends a message. Okay, now in a similar way, a symbol represents something else.

Abraham's circumcision is a symbol of his separation to God, not from God, to God. God. He's being separated from the world into the Lord.

You're no longer an unbeliever, a pagan, an idol worshiper, a moon worshiper. That's what he used to do with his dad. Now you worship the true God. He's been set apart to the Lord, separated to God.

It reminds Abraham that God has set him apart from the world and called him out or made him holy, sanctified him. Circumcision is also a seal of God's love.

[40 : 28] It's a seal and it's a sign or a symbol of ownership and authority. This is an outward physical demonstration of an inward ownership and authority.

As in the seal of a king or official. So those who bear the seal of the king belong to the king and therefore are his servants in his kingdom. You see that? For those of you who were here last Wednesday night I made a big old hairy deal out of transferring you from one kingdom, the kingdom of darkness, into another kingdom, the kingdom of God's beloved son.

We spent all Wednesday night talking about that transferring reality spiritually. It was wonderful. I really enjoyed that time. This is what we're talking about here.

So circumcision at the bottom of the screen represents the relationship of God's ownership and it reminds Abraham of his debt of submission, humility, obedience, and gratitude.

Boy, that's exactly what the cross should do for us every day. The cross should remind us of the submission, humility, obedience, and gratitude that we owe to the Lord and desire to give to God.

[41 : 43] We live in the gospel. We live in the good news of the cross of Jesus and his glorious resurrection. salvation. You say, well, what about verses 12 through 14?

And every male among you who is eight days old needs to be circumcised throughout the generations. If you have a servant born in your house, even if you have a servant bought with money from outside of your house, you know, a foreigner, somebody who's not part of your descendants, even them, a servant who's born in your house or who is bought with money, they need to be circumcised.

It's all about my covenant with people who live in your house. They need to know who you belong to. They need to know who they're serving. But an uncircumcised male who's not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people.

He has broken my covenant. This is very clear. How does what we've said about circumcision apply to eight day old infants, pagan servants and those refusing circumcision?

One of the reasons this is so important to talk about is because of how paedo-baptism, baptizing babies, is used to correspond to circumcision. Eight days old.

[43 : 02] This is why people get confirmed. This is why people are baptized as babies. Because people make the explanation from the Old Testament that what we're doing with people in doing that with them, baptizing the babies like we do, corresponds to what they used to do in circumcision.

That is an unbiblical argument as far as we are concerned. We do not do that. We do not baptize babies at Grace Church, do we? We baptize believers.

We believe in believers' baptism. You with me? All right. If you need to talk more about that with us, we'd be happy to do that. But we do not use this passage as a prescription to carry over into New Testament life and say, well, circumcision isn't the issue anymore.

It's the act of what now is the new circumcision for new believers. And that's baptizing the babies. I can't make the argument very well because every time I've heard it, the last time this happened, I listened and I asked, and it was right over there where Lisa and Jeff are sitting.

Somebody visited our church from another denomination and they were sitting there and we got to talking after a Wednesday night and that subject came up because the person asked me directly about it.

[44 : 20] And I said, well, let me ask you some questions. And I spent some time asking them questions to explain carefully to me how this transfers over into how they believe about baptizing babies.

And I listened as carefully as I could to the explanation. And when he finished, I said, listen, brother, with all humility in my heart, I have tried to carefully listen to you and everything you just said to me makes absolutely no biblical sense whatsoever.

I can't get there. and I'm trying. I cannot get there. Now that was attributed to my bias. Could be. I hope it's biblical.

I think it is. What we have here are infants and servants were circumcised because God commanded it. There it is. I don't have to do any more with that if I don't want to.

I will. But I don't have to. It didn't mean they were made holy. It didn't mean they were brought into covenant faith in the Lord.

[45 : 27] You don't, you don't, you don't get circumcised as an eight day old male and you're in baby. That's not how it works. And it did not make them more likely to become holy.

This is the other explanation. We baptize them like that because then it seals the deal that at some later point, they are now exponentially more likely to come into the flock, to the faith.

And I, and I just go, my goodness. All right. The Bible, look up on the screen here. The Bible refers to two types of circumcision. Did you know that?

There are two types. The circumcision of the flesh to take the male organ and take off the foreskin of the male organ. That's one. And the circumcision of the heart, which is spiritually done.

And I want to show you this. We'll start with the flesh and you see this in verse 11. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin and it shall be the sign of the covenant.

[46 : 29] All right. But we have other places. I'm going to take just a moment now. Go to Leviticus 12 with me. Genesis, Exodus, Exodus, Leviticus. Chapter 12.

I want you to see this in your Bibles. You can, you perhaps will mark it so you have a paper trail as it were. Leviticus 12, verse 3. This is under the heading in the New American Standard of the laws of motherhood.

If you're going to be a good Jewish mom, this is what you do. On the eighth day, verse 3 of chapter 12, on the eighth day, the flesh of your male son's foreskin shall be circumcised.

Okay. So every good Jewish mama is going to take all their male offspring on the eighth day to the temple or wherever, and they're going to have them circumcised.

The kid doesn't get a say. Then if you go over to Luke, hold your finger there in Genesis, and go over to Luke, please. It's Luke chapter 1.

[47 : 33] I'm turning there with you. And we'll look at verse 59 to start with.

Verse 59. See if you can figure out who they're talking about here. And it happened that on the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias after his father.

After his father. Who, who, who were they talking about circumcising here on the eighth day? Who is it? John the Baptist. That's right.

That's right. Then if you go to chapter 2, verse 21, you see that on the eighth day there in verse 59. Now chapter 2, verse 21.

And when eight days had passed before his circumcision, his name was then called Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

[48 : 33] So here it is that eight days, Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, are taking Jesus to the temple to be circumcised on the eighth day. Infants, servants, foreigners were circumcised by God's command, and what did their circumcision point to?

It pointed to their inclusion in the covenant life of national Israel in a Judaistic way of life. faith, not saving faith. Getting circumcised did not save them from hell.

It didn't guarantee them heaven. It pointed to their inclusion in this covenant life that God has for these people. In other words, they are benefiting under the true believing population.

They are benefiting, these foreigners are benefiting from the grace that God is showing these believers. Your children are the same way. Your children growing up in a Christian home benefit from the umbrella of grace that extends from your life over them, isn't it?

While they're unbelieving, they are living under the umbrella of your followership and obedience to Jesus Christ, and you offer them the example. But, does that relationship to you as they live under that grace guarantee them?

[49 : 45] No. That's a work. That's not cross gospel. That's a work gospel, which is no gospel at all. Alright, everybody's tracking, right? So, the responsibility is upon us as parents to model the character of God in our life in a consistent way and pray for our kids and share and live the priority of the gospel with them.

I'm telling you folks, what you live before your children as your God, that's the one that they're going to look to. Now, by God's grace, they can be saved from that.

But, we need to be very careful about the kind of God we portray to our kids. Little g God. Alright, so this is what's going on. To practice the social and religious rituals of Judaism, you had to be circumcised.

That's the way it was then. Now, outward circumcision, look, this is the last thing here, outward circumcision, there's the verses, reminded the Jews that they were evidence of the ongoing faithfulness of God in fulfillment of His promise to bless and provide.

There you go. That's what the outward act was all about. But now we have this real quickly, the heart. The heart. So, I want you to go to Deuteronomy chapter 30.

[51 : 07] We'll do just a little bit more verse analysis with this one because this one applies to us. Deuteronomy 30, verse 6.

Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants. And what will that circumcision be about?

To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul so that you may live. You see that? Verse 10.

If you obey the Lord your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.

That's what circumcision of the heart is all about. That your heart will turn away from you and false gods and idols and turn to the true God. This is what we're being given as a prescription.

[52 : 08] Then in the same passage in verses 19 and 20 He spells it out. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.

So now, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, by holding fast to Him.

For this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to give to them. Isn't it cool how He ties those together? He ties covenant with circumcision of the heart. It's always been like this, folks. It's never been about physical circumcision. It's always been about what that represented.

It represented the circumcision of the heart. It's always been like that from Jump Street. This is why the apostles will later confront the Judaizers who are saying, you have to be circumcised as a Christian to be in the faith.

[53 : 17] And Paul said, time out. No, you don't. And you don't have to keep all the dietary laws either to be a Christian. This is where all this argument is based.

If you go to the book of Ezekiel, just keep turning back in the Old Testament and you'll come to it.

You go past Jeremiah, past Lamentations, Jeremiah, past Isaiah, all that.

And you get to the book of Ezekiel. And we're in chapter 44, 6, and 7. I picked a few places to show you this isn't just one or two places in the Bible in the Old Testament.

You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel. 44, 6.

Now 7. When you brought in foreigners, notice how he describes them, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh.

[54 : 23] To be in my sanctuary, to do what? Profane it. Even my house, when you offered my food, the fat and the blood, for they made my covenant void. This, in addition to all your other abominations, he said, it's an abomination for you to bring these people in here and let them pretend like they're worshipping me when their hearts are not circumcised for me.

They have no heart of worship for me. They're just going through empty ritual and it is offensive to God. It is offensive for God to come into this place and have people who are false worshipers offer worship in deception or intentionally and offend the name of the Lord.

Wow. This is why we say our worship services are not designed for unbelievers. Unbelievers worship Satan. They don't know that, but they do.

It's believers that our services are designed for. We're trying to help prompt you to worship your God as a people so that you can go out this week and be reminded of what is the priority.

You're looking at it. This is the priority. You need to be reminded that your home is not here. It's in heaven and one day you guys will all be together singing unto the Lord for eternity because you've been circumcised of heart.

[55 : 44] then in Jeremiah just go back the other way a little bit and you'll come to the book of Jeremiah and we're going to go to chapter 9. Jeremiah 9, 23-26.

Thus says the Lord, Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom and let not the mighty man boast of his might. Let not a rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises...

This is like God saying to Abraham, I am God Almighty, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice, righteousness, for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, that I will punish all who are what? Circumcised and yet uncircumcised. Just because you say you're a Jew and jump through all the hoops, not all Israel is Israel.

Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples, for all the nations are uncircumcised, unbelieving, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.

[57 : 13] Heart. And most importantly, I want to give you one more before we move on.

Colossians. Please look with me at the book of Colossians, chapter 2.

Perhaps one of the clearest expressions of this spiritual heart circumcision that we all have to participate in, male and female, to come to Christ and be forgiven for our sins through Jesus alone. In verse 9 of chapter 2, For in Him, Jesus, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. And in Him, Jesus, you have been made complete.

And He is the head, the authority over all rule and authority. And in Jesus, you were also, what church? Circumcised. But it was a circumcision made without hands.

So now we know we're not talking about physical circumcision. It's the removal of the body of flesh of the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism. This is the spiritual significance, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead.

[58 : 28] When you were dead, spiritually separated from God in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

There's your circumcision of the heart. Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

There's your gospel. The circumcision of the heart is the gospel grace of God for forgiveness of sins by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Now, Moses, Moses is teaching Israel that Abraham was circumcised because he believed. He already believed God. He was devoted to God. Paul is teaching believers how this physical act came to symbolize our spiritual circumcision of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

[59 : 34] So, religious practice must follow from relational devotion. We're not working our way to God, are we? Our participation, this is what this whole sermon is about.

Our participation in God's covenant has to follow from our personal relationship with Him. We cannot get those backwards. Our personhood, that's what we started with, our personhood, who we are in relationship to God, defines and determines our participation with God.

We participate in Christian living because of who God has made us in our personhood. He's changed our nature. We are new creatures in Christ and so now we live like it.

But what if we don't? Then hit the pause button and come talk to your pastors or one of these people in this congregation that are walking with the Lord. whether we're talking about Abraham or Israel or us, any outward acts of religious ritual are not guarantees of authentic relationship with God.

That is why God gave Israel, that is not why God gave Israel circumcision so that they could boast about their separation. Right?

[60 : 54] No. Israel is hearing this as instruction for their relationship with the Lord as His witness nation. You are my witness nation and I'm giving you a symbol to bring you into constant reminder of the covenant that I've made with you and now what you are to do in response to what I've done and to who I am.

They're hearing this as a people who've been chosen by God. I can say it this way, they've been given the privilege of being brought into covenant with the Lord. It's a privilege.

Even as Abraham was chosen and privileged. Man, Abraham was worshipping the moon when God found him. Many of these original hearers that are hearing this for the first time from Moses, they're people who came out of bondage in Egypt.

They are not circumcised in heart of yet. So what does covenant with Abraham teach Israel about knowing and following God according to the covenant God has made with them.

Here it is. The covenant teaches them to rightly understand and apply God's commands, to walk before God and be holy, be blameless, to understand and live by God's commands as they relate to knowing him as God Almighty.

[62 : 13] Just think about what is up there on that screen and what a difference this would have made to Israel if they'd have been faithful. If they'd have just thought about that, adhered to that, given their lives to God in that way, how different things could have been.

Now friends, we are in covenant with God through Christ, aren't we? We are commanded to obey in Christ. We are commanded to do in Christ and not to do certain things in Christ in our relationship with God.

So we have to accurately understand the proper place and reason for these outward spiritual acts that we're called to. They're not acts in and of themselves.

They're signs. They're symbols. They're important. And they flow from the character of God at work in our lives as we respond to God in His covenant making with us through the cross.

The Christian life is a life lived in response. We get active not to convince other people. We don't get active to convince God and impress God.

[63 : 22] We get active in humility before the Lord because we know we owe such a great debt of love to Him. This is why we do this.

So when we talk about baptism, when we talk about Old Testament circumcision or the circumcision of our heart, the Lord's table, prayer, going to church services, Bible reading, good deeds, giving your time and money and service to your church and other religious institutions and other things that you do, we're not talking about you working your way into God's favor.

We have to understand and practice all these outward acts in relationship to God. And when I say that, I mean in saving faith that Jesus lives in you and you offer your life to Jesus as that.

It is a sacrifice of life. Jesus, I would have no life apart from you. The least I can do is live it back to you. I don't have a greater gift to give God than that.

Do you? Do you have a greater gift to give to God than the life he gave to you through his son?

What's the most precious thing that God has ever done for you as a human being?

[64 : 39] Giving you life in his son. Then what is the greatest gift of gratitude you can give back to him? That life. That's the most precious thing you own is the life of his son.

So if you want to give God the highest possible gift of gratitude you can, give him that life back by living it for him. That's the Christian life and it's in the Old Testament.

And it's why we're in Genesis. This is 1 Corinthians 10 31. You can look it up later. So Abraham is not a true follower of God because he's now circumcised.

Israel is not a true people of God because they circumcise or have the law and claim Abraham as their father and you are not a true Christian because you pray to prayer.

Because you go to church. Even you read the Bible and do other religious things. Prayer, church attendance, reading the scriptures, serving in the church, all these other spiritual, they're important.

[65 : 47] They're important but those efforts are not what make us Christians. Here's what makes us Christians. True Christianity is determined by our relationship with God through the gift of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church never needs to stop preaching that, teaching that, calling people to remember that, rehearse that. True Christian faith is born in the human heart.

It is a circumcision of the heart. By the miracle of God's grace in Christ, it is lived out by the miracle of God's grace in Christ. It is kept and completed by the miracle of God's grace in Christ so that no one may boast.

So make no mistake, friends, our relationship with God determines how we live. You can't lose your salvation but you can sure get up every day and default to you and not give God the glory in how you think, say, and do.

So let's covenant together with the Lord to try and live this week in a way that expresses our life's gratitude to our Savior for all that He has given to us in His own blood.

[67 : 00] Let's pray. Father, thank You for the kind attention Your people show me and Greg and You as they sit to honor You by listening to the Word of God.

And thank You for giving me the strength and endurance and perseverance in my own life to try and live before You in obedience and in happy joy serving Christ and giving the life of Jesus back to You in the way that I live to Your honor.

We pray You would forgive us for our sins, Lord, because we've been convicted this morning. Each of us know that there are wastes in our life. There are times and seasons that we're not living with that gratitude and joy.

We're not living with that single-minded focus to bring honor and glory to Jesus. And we sin and we ask for Your forgiveness and teach us the way of repentance.

Thank You for each soul here today and thank You for the wonderful way that You bless us as people step forward to serve You out of that joy and gratitude in their hearts.

[68 : 06] May we bless and honor and glorify You in Jesus' name. Amen.