

33. The Constancy of our Covenant God (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to seek courage in the scriptures and turn to our reading for this morning, which is in Genesis 25. And we'll see, even here, way back at the very beginning, of the story of God's people of faith, that it has been a story marked by struggle and marked by conflict right from the very start.

Genesis chapter 25, if you have one of our church Bibles, I think it's page 19 in the church Bibles. And we're going to read down to verse 26.

Abraham took, we should read that, I think Abraham had taken another wife whose name was Keterah. This is not after the events of chapter 24, but this is a summary now of the end of Abraham's life, as we'll see in these verses.

Abraham had taken another wife whose name was Keterah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishpak, and Shua. Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan.

The sons of Dedan were Asherim, Latushim, and Lumim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Efer, Hanoah, Abedah, and Eldah. All these were the children of Keterah.

[1 : 1 9] Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines, that is Keterah and, of course, Hagar.

But to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts. And while he was still living, he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward to the east country. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years.

Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full. The text doesn't say full of years, it just says full. It means his life was fulfilled.

Abraham died in a good old age, an old man and fulfilled, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephraim, the son of Zohar, the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites.

There Abraham was buried with Sarah, his wife. And after the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son. And Isaac settled at Beer, Lahai, Roi.

[2 : 3 4] These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth.

Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar, Adbil, Mibsam, Mishma, Duma, Massa, Haida, Temar, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedema.

These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments. Twelve princes, according to their tribes. These are the years of the life of Ishmael, 137 years.

He breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people. They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria.

That is, all of the Arabian Peninsula as we know it today. He settled over against all his kinsmen. These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son.

[3 : 36] Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife, the daughter of Bethuel, the Aramean of Paddan Aram, the sister of Laban, the Aramean.

And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah, his wife, conceived. The children struggled together.

That's a mild way of translating it. I think you could legitimately say the children smashed against each other within her.

And she said, If it's thus, why is this happening to me? So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided.

The one shall be stronger than the other. The older shall serve the younger. And the days to give birth were completed. Behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak.

[4 : 41] So they called his name Esau. Afterward, his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel. So his name was called Jacob.

The footnote says he grasps by the heel or he cheats. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them. Amen.

And may God bless his word to us. Well, if you would turn with me to Genesis chapter 25 and to a passage all about the constancy of our covenant God.

After the romance and the excitement of chapter 24, that wonderful story of the provision of a wife for Isaac, chapter 25 does look rather dull.

It's a list of unpronounceable names, a description of a funeral, and talk of a troublesome pregnancy. What on earth is going on? Well, we need to remember, don't we, that the chief actor, the chief subject of this book is God.

[5 : 52] And Moses is writing, of course, first of all, to the Israelites to remind them who their God is and what their God is like and what he's doing. Because like us, they face doubts and fears on their journey through life.

A journey that was hard, that was full of struggles, that was full of disappointments, and often real challenges to their faith. What is life really all about? Where are we going and why?

What is the point? And is this God that Moses keeps telling us about, is he really real? And if he is real, is he really able to do all that he has promised to us?

These are the kinds of questions, aren't they, that dog the traveling faithful always, whether it's in the desert with Moses or whether it's on the road with Christ's people today. And this chapter, strange as it may seem, is here to tell us, in very plain language, loudly and certainly, yes, you can trust this God.

You can trust him because you can see the constancy of his covenant grace. His promise does not fail, his plan is not forgotten, and his pattern is reassuringly familiar in everything that he does with his people.

[7 : 04] So trust him and cherish his covenant. Don't doubt him, especially when things seem very tough. I want to look at the three scenes in this chapter about a burial, a banishing, and a battling, and ask what each one of them tells us about God and his ways with his people and the constancy of his covenant of grace.

There's a fourth scene, really, about a birthright, but I'll have to wait until next time, at least, if you want to have lunch today. First then, the burial of a patriarch.

Verses 7 to 11 are the centerpiece of this first half of the chapter. And the message, I think, is pretty clear, isn't it? Yes, death still reigns, but God's promise has not failed.

It is being fulfilled, and there is no reason whatsoever to doubt that it will go on being fulfilled. Look at verse 8. We read, Abraham breathed his last and died.

Death is the end, isn't it? It's very final, and it's very fearful. There's nothing quite so final as standing and looking down into an open grave, is there, at a funeral.

[8 : 25] And there is fear. Life is hard, and there are many burdens in it, but as Hamlet said, or really as Shakespeare said through Hamlet, who would burdens bear to grunt and sweat under a weary life but that the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose born no traveler returns, puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others we know not of.

And people feel that, don't they? They don't want to die. They fight against sickness and death. People battle against cancer and other disease.

But death can't be avoided. The two great certainties in life, death and taxes. Well, it seems that taxes can be avoided if you're rich enough, but not death.

Not death. Death comes to us all. So is the grunt and the sweat and the burden of a weary life really worth it in the end?

Especially if there is extra grunt and sweat because you throw in your lot with God and with his gospel and with his people. Especially if being faithful to his gospel can make your life so much more of a struggle than it would be otherwise.

[9 : 43] And in the end, just like Abraham, he also will die and be buried. Is the struggle of obedient faith really worth it?

Well, these verses tell us plainly that yes, though death still may reign, even for Abraham, even for the friend of God, God's promise has not failed.

They're being fulfilled, they're still being fulfilled, and they will go on being fulfilled. See, first we're told that Abraham was blessed in life just as God had promised him.

God had promised Abraham, hadn't he, a multitude of offspring in several places in Genesis. Genesis 17, verse 4, he was promised a multitude of nations, plural, would come from his body, not just one, but kings and princes would arise from him.

And so here we are in the story of his death and what do we find? It's surrounded by the lists of offspring and nations that had come from his body. Six sons by the concubine, and Keturah and their grandchildren as well in the first four verses.

[10 : 52] Ishmael's vast family and their tribes and their princes in verses 12 to 18. And of course, above all, there's Isaac himself, the promised supernatural seed, the true heir who inherited all that God had promised to Abraham.

Verse 5, Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. God fulfilled his promises to Abraham in life. And also in his death, verse 8, he died a good old age, an old man full, fulfilled, a full and satisfied life.

And God had promised him exactly that. In the very same words in Genesis 15, verse 15, you shall be buried, he said, in a good old age. And wherever he'd said to him in that verse, you'll be buried in peace.

And here he is, verse 9, buried by Isaac and Ishmael together, his sons, in peace, despite all the hostility that prevailed before and ever afterwards. He was blessed in life and in death according to God's promise.

And yet, the blessing is still not over. There's clear witness here in these verses to blessing that was going on even after Abraham's death. Look at the end of verse 8. He's gathered to his people, we're told.

[12 : 13] How we're told that before we're told about his burial. It's not just saying he was put in a grave along with his ancestors. We know he wasn't. Verses 9 and 10 make it clear. Now that expression clearly points to an ongoing existence after his bodily life.

Very similar to Joseph in Genesis chapter 47 where he says, let me lie with my fathers and he insists on his bones being taken up into the promised land and not left in Egypt. Why on earth did Joseph care where he was buried?

Did Abraham care where he was buried? Because he knew that his life in the body wasn't the end. He was looking for more and greater blessings still to come all according to God's promise.

And all the patriarchs were looking for exactly that. Hebrews 11 tells us quite explicitly their hope was for a heavenly country, for an enduring city, a city built by God.

And that is what's being signified right here in these verses just as strongly. God's story for Abraham is not over because God's covenant story is not over.

[13 : 24] Abraham is blessed by dying in a real hope of more and greater fulfillment that is still to come. And that's why his death is surrounded by these clear assertions about the continuation of God's purpose for his promised seed and for his promised land.

So the promised seed we're told is secure verses 5 and 6. Isaac's future is secured. In verse 11 God blesses Isaac just as he blessed Abraham. And the promised land and Abraham's own personal stake in the promised land is secure.

We're told once again in verse 10 that the place he is buried and is not a borrowed grave but it's the place he purchased for his own possession from the Hittites.

Do you see what it's saying to us? Telling us that Abraham had a real sense of perspective about the promise and the purpose of God. He knew that he was caught up in something far, far greater than just his own small and tiny part in that.

And that's why he could die in peace. That's why he could be at peace in life and be content with his abundance in life and be content with his future beyond death.

[14 : 38] Abraham knew that God yes, buries his workmen but that God's work always goes on. And so he could face death with a steady eye knowing God's promises had never failed in the past and would never fail in the future.

That's a great thing isn't it? a great thing if we can be content to play our part and to die in peace passing the battle on to others knowing that we've kept the faith knowing that as Paul said to Timothy we're joyfully looking forward to the crown of righteousness that awaits on the day of Christ's appearing.

We can look back on our lives of course and on our history with even more abundant evidence of the fulfillment of God's promises than ever Abraham could because of course through Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham we're told has come to the Gentiles all to us and we have received the promised Holy Spirit through faith we live in the age of the fullness of the spirit of the risen Lord Jesus Christ and yet death still reigns for us death is still the last enemy to be destroyed isn't that so?

But God's promise has not failed and the story is not over Abraham died in peace well how much more friends can we die in peace in whom dwells the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ who raised Jesus from the dead and who will raise us from the dead and give our lives our bodies abundant life at his coming we have better promises even than Abraham don't we?

We have better promises than those that surround a buried patriarch because we have the promises spoken by a risen savior but even here in death as in life Abraham becomes a witness to the trust he had in the covenant constant God and you can trust this God in life and death is what we're being told the second thing that these verses speak of solemnly is of a banishing a banishing of a progeny we're told that a family is ruptured and yet God's plan and his purpose is not forgotten if all these names in the genealogies that bracket Abraham's burial bear witness to God's promised blessings being fulfilled then surely the sending away of all these sons it seems so terribly cruel it seems so terribly unjust this is the first mention isn't it of Keturah and her sons clearly it predated both

[17 : 26] Isaac and Ishmael's birth and so as it were these were older brothers in some sense at least although they were illegitimate they were preceding them in rank and yet all of these all of these are disinherited and they're banished just as Ishmael was purposefully banished back in chapter 21 and his family moved away and they settled in Arabia as we're told there in verse 18 so how do we explain this this banishment of course it's certainly not a license to disinherit children or to choose some over others as favorites the Israelites knew that very plainly read Deuteronomy chapter 21 it forbids inequitable treatment of unloved offspring it's not that but here Abraham is acting according to the specific command of God and he's acting in a way that is essential to the preservation of the covenant promise in chapter 21 verse 12

God overrides Abraham's feelings he overrides Abraham's emotions when Abraham wanted to keep Ishmael in the camp and it's God who tells him he must listen to Sarah and send him away for through Isaac and Isaac alone shall your offspring be named and it's just the same here you see in verse 6 it's the same principle that we saw last week in chapter 24 of no possible assimilation the household of covenant faith must be kept pure if it is ever going to be kept secure otherwise it would never survive it would be destroyed its very purpose would come to nothing and sometimes God's God's ruthless commitment to his covenant is very painful for his people just as it was I'm sure here for Abraham and just as it is sometimes for the church as a household of faith today when sometimes painful partings and the ruptures of close and natural bonds are called for for the sake of the gospel and for the kingdom do you think it was easy for the Corinthian church to do as Paul commanded in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 to expel someone from the congregation whose sinful sexual behavior was corrupting the church and imperiling its very survival let alone its witness to the world do you think that was easy do you think it was easy for the church in Rome to follow through

Paul's words in Romans 16 and his command to watch out for and to avoid those who cause divisions in the fellowship for such persons he says do not serve our Lord Christ but their own attitudes very hard and painful I would think especially when Paul says that such people's outward demeanor is often cloaked in pious words smooth talk and flattery he says that will deceive certainly some naive people so they feel very uncomfortable about seeming to have to take sides against them do you think that was easy was it easy for Titus the leader of the church in Crete to obey the apostolic command when Paul says to him as for a person who stirs up division after warning him once then twice have nothing more to do with him knowing that such a person is warped and sinful he is self condemned maybe Titus was a lot tougher than me

I suddenly find that responsibility a very very hard thing to bear especially when we live in an age when even committed Christian people squirm at the very thought of such a thing as any kind of church discipline and in an age when sentimentality wins over biblical faithfulness almost every time even in the church my guess is that if Abraham was around in Britain in 2012 there would be howls of protest and howls of evangelical protest against his banishment of those who were his own flesh and blood don't you think it would be Abraham who was labeled as the extremist as the intolerant one as the sinful one but it was very hard painfully hard I'm sure for Abraham even then don't you think but he did it because he knew that the household of covenant faith must be kept pure or else it would be destroyed he did it because the gospel always comes first and that's true today just as the

New Testament tells us with absolute clarity painful banishments like these are sometimes necessary but notice the purpose of all of this notice the purpose very important God's purpose in this is not ultimately punitive but it's redemptive and that's the very reason that we are given all these lists of names and tribes here in this summary in verses 1 to 4 in verses 13 to 17 almost everything there could be omitted couldn't it just one verse would suffice to give a summary of all of that but they're not they're laid out there very carefully we're told why well because the blessing and the promise of Abraham to the world can only come one way it can only come through the promised seed through the Messiah and through his family of faith but that blessing is not something to be inwardly focused something to be possessed only by this family no it's a blessing from the beginning with an outward focus with a worldwide focus to bring joy to all the families of the earth and that's what God's promise was to Abraham right at the very beginning and that's why we have all these names here listed out carefully for us it tells us that God cares for all the peoples of the world tells us that his covenant people are to be the carriers of the blessing to all the peoples of this world and that's why this separation had to happen it's a separation to serve salvation the promised seed must be kept holy and faithful to the covenant so that at last there will come a savior for the whole world that's the point of the whole chapter here it's part of the unfolding story of

[24:16] Christ through whom blessings will flow to all the nations it's what the prophets take up isn't it in Isaiah I will make you says the Lord to his servant a light for the nations that my salvation might reach the very ends of the earth including including some of these very tribes that are mentioned here look at some of the names verses 3 and 4 Sheba and Midian or verse 13 Nebaioth and Kedar these are names of enemies of Israel all through their history but then listen listen to the promise of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 60 about the coming of the Messiah behold darkness shall cover the earth a thick darkness all peoples but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you and all nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising a multitude of camels shall cover you the young camels of Midian and Ephah and those from Sheba shall come they shall bring gold and frankincense and shall bring good news and the praises of the

Lord all the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you the realms of Nebaioth shall minister to you and they shall come with acceptance and my altar and will beautify my house the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you and all who despise you shall bow down at your feet they shall call you the city of the Lord the Zion of the Holy One of Israel you see that wonderful isn't it salvation to every nation but there will be no salvation for any nation or any people unless through the unique seed the only seed of Isaac alone and unless God's covenant household are utterly clear and committed to that unique gospel of salvation and won't let anything or anyone dilute it or destroy it even when it's very painful and very personal and rupture sometimes has to happen even within natural bonds like those between Isaac and his brothers of course no covenant community no new covenant community of faith can be perfect but God says it must be holy must be distinct it cannot be says

Paul unequally yoked with unbelievers for what fellowship has light with darkness what agreement is the temple of God with idols it's just because there is no other way to be carriers of God's blessing of salvation to all people than through the preserving and the proclaiming of the unique and pure biblical gospel of Christ it's just because of that that the people of faith are always and will always be called to real gospel unity before every other natural tie however painful that might be and so painfully although not vindictively look at verse 6 Abraham gave gifts to all of those he sent away painfully but not vindictively a family is ruptured but God's plan is not forgotten and in fact in his marvelous grace it is furthered for the blessings of all peoples even enemies of the Christ and his seed but the struggles of God's church will never be resolved permanently in this world and the next section that we see here bears testimony to the ongoing reality of that verses 19 to 26 speak of ongoing battling of a pregnancy and the message here seems to be that faith yes can be perplexing deeply perplexing but God's pattern is reassuringly familiar verse 19 begins the

Jacob story properly with this introduction the generations of Isaac and two things I think stand out in these verses in which we're told about the conception and the birth of the twins a conception that's long delayed and a birth that is marked by a portentous struggle tell us about the sufficiency of God's grace and also the sovereignty of God's grace at first God's verse 21 seems very straightforward doesn't it seems rather lovely Isaac prays and Rebecca conceives but notice verse 20 and verse 26 you see that there's a 20 year gap between Isaac's marriage and the birth and it implies a long and agonizing time of waiting and of prayer before this conception now that's agonizing isn't it for any couple infertility like that is a great burden that some have to bear but you see here the stakes are even higher aren't they because these people had been told by

God that they would give rise to offspring and to great offspring none of us are given a specific promise by God like that and they also know that the whole future of God's promise and his covenant depends on it and moreover at the same time as we see in this chapter they are surrounded on every side by the evident fecundity of Isaac's half brothers those families who are outside the promise line seem to be the very epitome of fertility personified don't they hordes of them that must have been so very hard don't you think perhaps they have begun to doubt God perhaps they thought it was their sin or their lack of faith that was the cause of it maybe even others had suggested that to them in order to taunt them but perhaps in a pious way they thought it was helpful like some very good friends of mine whose pastor's wife still regularly tells them that if only they'll have enough faith then surely they will have the child that they've longed to have and haven't had after 20 years of marriage it gives

[30 : 53] Job's friends a run for their money don't you think don't ever say that sort of thing to somebody well we don't know what Isaac and Rebecca suffered we're not told but what we do know is that with Isaac unlike with Abraham there was no Hagar there were no concubines just verse 21 Isaac prayed evidently over many years this I think was Isaac's finest hour Isaac's finest years before his faith did seem to become eclipsed by more carnal appetites as we'll see Isaac prayed and God answered in the end with a pregnancy it's a familiar pattern isn't it in the scriptures just like the delay in Isaac's own conception just like the long delay before Joseph's birth or Samson's birth or Samuel's birth Derek Kidner in his excellent commentary says this God's way of prefacing an exceptional work with exceptional difficulties was often to take this form why well I think because learning to trust the sheer sufficiency of God's grace encourages and strengthens his people when they feel weak and when they doubt and fear that they can fulfill the calling in life that God has given them to see only obstacles and to be reduced absolutely to dependence on

God and then to see God work and to do great things despite our weakness and to know that the only possible explanation is the grace and the mercy and the power of God that is to learn a very great lesson a very great lesson that his grace is sufficient and that his power so often is made perfect in weakness isn't that so read 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 it's learning that that makes us able to live with great thorns in the flesh whatever they are and whoever they are if we can say with Paul I'm content with weaknesses insults hardship persecutions calamities for when I'm weak then I'm strong great great lesson to learn the sufficiency of God's grace sometimes it takes perplexity and pain and a very very long time to learn it but I think

I'd go as far as to say that always it takes perplexity and pain and a long time to learn I don't think there is any other way to learn real trust in God's sufficient grace than to be forced to throw oneself on that grace and on that grace alone and to trust and to keep on trusting isn't that what Hebrews 5 tells us even of our Lord Jesus Christ although he was a son says the apostle he learned obedience through what he suffered not learning how to be obedient as though he was disobedient before of course not but learning the real meaning of obedient trust in God for all things the real meaning of utter dependence on his father's grace he offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his reverence although he was a son he learned obedience through what was suffered a familiar pattern for Isaac the seed of promise the son of Abraham and for the promised seed himself our Lord

Jesus Christ and friends for all who are truly Christ's who are Abraham's seed therefore and who are heirs according to the same promise you sometimes feel that your life is perplexing and painful even agonizing full of doubts and fears and even at times almost utter despair do you feel that sometimes well fear not little flock says the Lord recognize the pattern and even if you can't see how this could possibly be a blessing to you well there will come a time when you can see at least in part and you'll be able to see with the apostle therefore I will boast all the more gladly in my weakness so that the power of Christ may rest on me for when I am weak then I'm strong maybe that's something that the

Lord is teaching us together especially as a fellowship at this time learning to trust the sheer sufficiency of God's grace will strengthen us and encourage us if we fear and when we doubt that we're able to fulfill the calling that God has given us in our life together that's the first thing and the second though is just as important learning to submit to the sovereignty of God's grace is what will humble us when we're tempted to feel that we're strong and able and we're tempted to feel perhaps worthy and proud as though we had some special pedigree that's surely the message of this oracle in verse 23 isn't it and what we're told about Jacob and Esau in verses 24 to 26 Rebecca's troubled verse 22 the twins in her room are struggling or as I said more literally battering one another and no doubt she's very worried after this long wait for a precious pregnancy she fears for what's going to happen so she seeks the Lord perhaps at one of the altars of Abraham the Lord reveals to her in verse 23 an astonishing thing not just that she's got twins within her that's enough of a shock you can see

[37 : 11] Donald smiling at the back not just that but that these boys will give rise to two nations and to rival nations nations divided from one another at odds with one another it's the same conflict same conflict that goes right the way through the story of the chosen line right the way back to Cain and Abel ultimately it's the persistent conflict between the seed of God's promise and the seed of the serpent it's a conflict that is initiated by nothing else than God's sovereign choice God puts enmity between the seed of promise and the natural seed and that struggle therefore is inevitable even sometimes within the bonds of a natural family it's a struggle that we see right from Genesis chapter 3 all the way to Revelation chapter 20 when at last that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan is cast into the pit forever with all his seed who oppose the people of

God and who scorn the son of God you may find that thought very offensive I can understand that it is deeply offensive but you know it's Jesus who gives that offense it's he who warns us about the judgment of that day it's he who tells us that he will say the words that he says in Matthew 25 verse 41 depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels you see but for the extraordinary grace of God that is the judgment deserved by every human being everyone every one of us by nature is a children of wrath disobedient to God under his curse as Paul says to the

Ephesians by grace sheer grace you have been saved not of your own doing it is the gift of God not as the result of works that no man can boast and that is exactly what we're shown here in Genesis chapter 25 the twins batter each other in the womb and they come out sparring neither of them is portrayed in a very good light are they as Bruce Waltke says in his commentary one is a hairy monster and the so they're called Esau the hairy one and Jacob the deceitful grasper and yet one of these Jacob is chosen by God for wonder and honor and glory and blessing in his purposes of grace why why Jacob the grasper why Jacob the second born not the first born why either of these odious pair for that matter the answer we see here is in every other part of the

Bible is because of God's sheer sovereign grace and mercy God's grace takes us totally by surprise all the time doesn't it it turns every human convention absolutely upside down not the first born not the fittest and the brightest and the nicest and the best we ourselves might read this story and feel far more naturally attracted to Esau the rugged outdoor type the macho man the manly man instead of Jacob the cultured civilized man who seems to be a bit of a mummy's boy staying around the tents we might we might certainly feel mightn't we that God's blessing is much more naturally appropriate for ourselves good and upright people doing the right things not doing bad things at least not publicly not scandalous things like some people we are generally respectable but that is not what God reveals about his grace and mercy

Jacob is chosen before his birth within the womb even before his conception why does God do this why does he tell us he does this he does it because the bible tells us in every place he is a God of sovereign grace and mercy I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy he said to Moses as Paul quotes him in Romans chapter 9 and he tells us he is sovereign in order to humble us all under his grace lest any of us should ever boast lest any of us should ever feel in our lives superior to any other human being let alone any other Christian brother or sister doesn't matter who you are this text tells us it doesn't matter who your father was however great he was in the kingdom as a patriarch or as a preacher but for

[42 : 30] God's sovereign mercy you have no status you are as nothing before him Romans 9 11 says though they were not yet born and had done nothing good or bad in order that God's purpose in election might continue not because of works but because of his call she was told the older will serve the younger so that it depends not on human will not on exertion but upon God who has mercy why did the Lord give the oracle to Isaac and Rebecca why did Moses record it for Israel and the spirit preserve it for us today because learning to bow to the sovereignty of God's grace is what humbles us lest we should ever be full of pride or presumption there is no favoritism with

God there is no special pleading with God either of family or of status or of merit or of performance or of theology or of anything you could ever imagine but there is mercy mercy even for a worm like Jacob surely a model of utter crookedness if ever there was one there is mercy and there is hope even for people like me and you depth of mercy can there be mercy still reserved for me can my God his wrath forbear me the chief of sinners spare the answer for Jacob like every other sinner after him is yes yes because of his sheer sovereign grace that turns upside down every expectation and every convention of man

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being may boast in the presence of God he is the source of your life in Christ Jesus he alone by his sheer sovereign grace so there we are just the story of a burial a banishing and a battering and yet through it all testimony to the constancy of our covenant God and his unchanging ways of grace and of mercy a God whom we can trust always right to the end even in the face of death we know his promise has not and will not fail even through the pain of fractured relationships his plan is not forgotten and will be furthered and in perplexing paths the pattern is oh so familiar and so wonderfully reassuring driving us to trust in his sufficient grace and humbling us under his sovereign grace and mercy so if your path just now is perplexing painful or perhaps looming with the dark shadow of the valley of death aren't you glad you can trust in the constancy of this

God who is the source of all your life in Christ Jesus be glad and trust him amen let us pray God we bow low before you the God of sovereign might the God of sovereign mercy we thank you for the sufficiency of your grace to lift us up and for the sovereign wonder of that grace that bows us low before you and in the presence of one another help us we pray to trust you to love you and to honor you all the days of our lives for Jesus sake amen and other things as these