

22. The Abiding Calling of the Church in the World (2007)

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis chapter 18, which is a chapter that tells us all about the calling of God's covenant people.

In our studies in the life of Abraham, we've seen already that the call of Abraham is really the beginning of real Christian faith. Paul tells us that plainly in Galatians 3.

He says the Christian gospel was preached in advance to Abraham. And he goes on in that chapter to tell us that if we are in Christ, then we are Abraham's seed, according to promise.

So this is the beginning of our story, the story of Christian faith. And of course the heart of that story, as we've seen in the last few weeks in chapters 15 to 17, is the establishing of God's covenant with Abraham and his household.

And that we saw that those chapters speak in a very real way of the beginning of the Christian church, the family, the community of covenant faith.

[1 : 05] And that last verse of chapter 17, verse 27, reminds us, doesn't it, of a very important fact, that it was a household marked by God's grace and God's choice, and therefore a household marked by faithful obedience to God's call.

Not just a bloodline of ethnic identity. God's mark was put on all of those, not just those born within the community of faith, but those who were brought in from outside as foreigners.

They too received the mark of circumcision. And that's why Derek Kidner says, remember, that this is the birthday of the church of the Old Testament, just like the day of Pentecost was the birthday of the church in the New.

Now don't miss that. Very, very important. Don't miss that the call of Abraham to be circumcised immediately led on, in a very real sense, to mission, to the bringing in of foreigners into the family of God.

That's a vital thing, although it's something that Israel lost almost completely through our history. And it's one of the reasons Moses wrote these things, that God's people should remember what it means to be the covenant people, the people of the circumcision, as the New Testament calls them.

[2 : 24] And of course, that's why it also is preserved for us as God's people today, to remind us what it means to be blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. And we're going to see that these chapters, these next few chapters in particular, are therefore all about the beginning of Christian mission.

And this chapter, chapter 18, illustrates for us so very clearly what it means to be God's covenant people, what our calling is. And what that's been right from the very beginning, from the time of Abraham, and shall be right until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's the question after chapters 15 to 17. What does it mean for Abraham and his household to be in covenant with God? Well, remember back to God's very first command and call to Abraham, back in chapter 12.

Remember we called it the quad promise, four things. God promised Abraham progeny, a great nation would come from him. And we've seen a lot about that promise continuing on in these chapters, although still it's unseen, isn't it?

And God promised a place, the land of Canaan. Well, we've seen that being wonderfully fulfilled, although again, still just in part. And he promised his preservation and his presence with Abraham, to bless those who blessed him and to curse those who cursed him.

[3 : 49] And again, we've seen that fulfilled in these chapters. But all of these things were not just for Abraham himself, were they? Because the last thing was that God promised Abraham a vital place in his plan.

That in him and through him, all the families of the earth should be blessed. And of course, that's the particular aspect of the promise, isn't it? That Paul emphasizes in Galatians, when he says that the gospel was preached in advance to Abraham.

He foresaw, says Paul, that God would justify the Gentiles, the pagan nations, by faith, through God's plan of salvation that would be accomplished through Abraham and his seed.

And what God preached in advance to Abraham, about what God would ultimately do for the world through his seed, he also called Abraham to reflect there and then in his own life.

He says, oh God put it like this, Abraham, because of what I'm going to do ultimately through the promised seed, I'm going to begin right now through you. I'm going to show you what it means to be my covenant people, my church, the one through whom I'm going to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.

[5 : 05] And that's what this chapter is all about. It's about the true calling of God's covenant people. The long chapter, there's lots of detail, but it basically shows us three things about what it means to be God's covenant people.

The people he's called and marked out for faith. The chosen ones, excuse me, as verse 19 puts it, or more literally, as you see the footnote, the people that he has known.

Being God's covenant people means three things. It means first, having a personal relationship with God. Abraham was God's true friend. Second, it means receiving a profound revelation from God. Abraham was a true prophet of God. And thirdly, it means having a pressing responsibility from God. Abraham was a true priest for God.

Let's look at these three things then. First of all, look at verses 1 to 8. They remind us very forcibly that God grants his covenant people a real personal relationship with him.

[6 : 08] These verses show us so clearly that Abraham was God's true friend. It's a wonderful picture, isn't it, of real friendship. God just drops in on Abraham for a meal and for a chat.

William still says of this chapter, the astonishing thing about the story is the combination of sheer homeliness and divine momentousness. That's right, isn't it?

You see, God is not just a promising God. He's a truly personal God. It's not just that he speaks to Abraham out of a voice from the sky or appearing as a smoking firepot.

No, he appears in the flesh to speak with him, to eat with him in his very own home. He's not just a God who rules over his people. He's a God who rejoices in relationship, in friendship.

And that's what it means to be in covenant with God. It's a wonderful intimacy, isn't there, in this picture. It's almost something not seen since Genesis chapter 2 when God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve.

[7 : 10] I wonder how soon you think Abraham recognized the Lord. You read the books, people argue a lot about that. I'm not sure that it really matters. Certainly Moses leaves us in no doubt who these visitors were.

It was, says verse 1, the Lord himself who appeared to Abraham. And Abraham speaks all the way through to just one person. Verse 22, if you read on, makes it clear that the two others were angels and they went off to Sodom.

We read about that in chapter 19. Maybe it didn't dawn on Abraham at first who these men were, but verse 2 says, they were real men, they appeared in the flesh and they went on to have a jolly good meal.

Maybe that Abraham was dozing, having his siesta at the door of his tent in the middle of the day and perhaps he was dozing off and all of a sudden he awoke and these three men were in front of him. At any rate, we're just told they appeared on the scene.

But I tend to think that Abraham caught on pretty fast. If you look at verse 3, he addresses one of them in exactly the same way he spoke to God in chapter 15, verse 2. O Lord, or O Sovereign Lord, as it had there in the NIV.

[8 : 21] It's a term only used of God. And remember, this might not be the first time that Abraham had seen God in this way. Back in chapter 12, verse 7, we're told that God appeared to Abraham in the land.

Not given any details. But at any rate, Abraham certainly recognized that this was somebody very special before him at once. And that surely is why there was such haste and such lavishness in his hospitality.

More even, I think, than the famous hospitality and customs of the Bedouins. You look at verse 6, it's interesting that the word there for fine flour is only ever used in Leviticus of the flour to make special offerings to God.

But anyway, however any of that might be, it's abundantly clear who the chief visitor is. It certainly becomes clear to Abraham. He knows, for example, Abraham's wife's name.

Her new name, by the way, Sarah, the one given by God himself. And then we see that he seems to know even her thoughts. He can hear her laughter even though it was inward and it was away inside the tent.

[9 : 31] So there's no doubt who it is here. Here's the Lord God, the creator of the earth and heavens, the maker of covenants, the ruler of all. And he's sitting down to roast beef and yogurt and cakes by the campfire with Abraham.

He just drops in out of the blue. That's the sort of thing real friends do, isn't it? Not total strangers. Remember when we moved to London, I couldn't quite get used to the culture of appointments. You know, if you phone somebody up and say, oh, you fancy going for a walk tomorrow? They would say something like, oh, well, I can fit you into the diary in about three weeks' time. Everything was done sort of by appointment. And we were just used to dropping around on people and that sort of thing.

We had some friends who lived quite near us and they said to me after a while that if the doorbell went after eight o'clock in the evening, they always knew it was me at the door because I was the only person who ever just dropped in and announced.

I said, well, that's what friends do. And I'd go in and put my feet up on the sofa and we'd have a natter and perhaps we'd eat something. And that's the point, you see. God rejoices in real relationship with his people.

[10 : 37] He makes us his real friends. That's Abraham's great distinction in the Old Testament. He's called the friend of God. And it's very significant that the apostle James picks that up and reminds us of that.

Not only did God credit righteousness to Abraham by faith, he called him his friend, says James. He's a personal God. He engages in real personal relationship with his people.

So we shouldn't be surprised, should we, when we read on in the Bible and find that this is the God who promises that he will one day come to be with his people forever in the flesh. Although when he did come in the person of Jesus Christ in the flesh, he was called the friend of sinners.

The one who dropped in for tea, the house of Zacchaeus. Or Matthew. Or many others. You're not just servants, says Jesus in John 15.

You're my friends. And greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. God's covenant people are those that he's called into friendship with him.

[11 : 46] And that's so important for us to remember. Sometimes we depersonalize the gospel, don't we? We make it all about just sin and forgiveness and justification.

and so on. Well, it is about all of that. All of that. Don't forget. Don't ever misunderstand. But what's all of that for? Because God wants us to be his friends.

He wants to sit down and feast with us. To eat good food with us. To drink good wine with us. To laugh. To rejoice. To revel in all that real friendship really is. He wants us to be at home with him.

In the Father's house. And Jesus says the Father's house is a house of joy. Do you have friends like that? Not acquaintances. But real true friends.

Friends you can drop in on. Talk to about anything. Rejoice with. Well, if you do that's a pointer. Just a pale, pale pointer to what God has in store for you in Christ.

[12 : 49] To what God has called us to. Maybe you don't have friends like that. Maybe that's the kind of friends you long for. Well, you see in the Christian church there ought to be everywhere real reflections of God's relationship with his people.

That ought to be evident in our relationship with one another. Real, deep, precious friendships.

Some of us are far too slow aren't we to give ourselves like that. We need to learn from Jesus.

But here's the indisputable truth of scripture. In Jesus God came to offer real friendship to us. Just as he did to Abraham. Real, personal relationship.

Not just servants says Jesus but friends. I know a man who was converted just from reading that very verse in John's Gospel chapter 15 about God calling us friends.

He was in hospital detoxifying from drugs and alcohol and the Gideon Bible beside his bed was there and he picked it up and opened it. He had never read the scripture before and he read those words and God just spoke to him right out of it.

[14:03] Being in covenant with God means he grants his people personal relationship. Abraham is God's true friend. But friends share things don't they?

And that brings us to the second thing here in verses 9 through to 21. God grants his covenant people a profound revelation about himself. And these verses show us how it is that Abraham can be God's true prophet.

Amos chapter 3 tells us that God does nothing without revealing his plans to his servants the prophets. And God's friendship with Abraham means that he shares the deep things of his mind and his heart with him.

The things concerning his plan and his future for the whole world. God calls his people into fellowship in covenant for a purpose and that purpose is that we should join with him in his plan of redemption for the world.

Look at verse 19. I've chosen him says God or literally I have known him that is personally as a friend so that he may lead his family and descendants after him to be the instruments of God fulfilling his mission to the world just as he's promised.

[15:20] God's friends join him in a privileged calling and that is as we're reminded in verse 18 there the blessing of all nations. Ephesians. You see God's choice and his calling go together.

God's electing grace always goes together in the Bible with his missionary purpose. Read Ephesians chapter 1 it's very very plain. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight so that ultimately all things might be to the praise of his glory and the whole church together might glorify him.

That's what the book of Ephesians is all about. It's a revelation of God's ultimate purpose so that his people now his church now can fulfill the purpose of his calling as those who proclaim to the world that message as God's prophets.

And that's just what we're told here. Abraham doesn't hide the future from Abraham. He reveals it so that he'll fulfill his role as a prophet of God telling the world the gospel of God that was preached to him in advance.

He and his household after him. But you see God's revelation to his friends is a profound revelation. God hides nothing from his servants the prophets.

[16:40] As Jesus said to his disciples I've called you friends for all that I've heard from my father I have made known to you. And so it is here God reveals his mercy and his justice to Abraham also.

both his staggering kindness and also his sobering sternness are made known. First you see in verses 9 to 15 we have a profound revelation of God's kindness.

It's so staggering to them it's so hard to believe and yet God is determined that they will come to understand it. It's a repeat isn't it of what God told Abraham in chapter 17.

And obviously these events are very soon after the events of chapter 17 because in chapter 17 verse 21 God says to Abraham Sarah is going to bear a son this time next year and again that's exactly what he says here in verse 14.

So not much time can have passed. And maybe that's why Sarah seems so taken aback in verse 12. Perhaps Abraham hasn't actually told her yet.

[17:43] Or if he has well perhaps he hasn't convinced her we don't know. So when she hears all of this from inside the tent she just can't help laughing. Although interestingly she does so inwardly to herself not outwardly as Abraham had in chapter 17.

Now I want to say to you don't be too hard on poor Sarah here. The commentators love to berate Sarah here for her lack of faith. But I want you to notice that God was not hard on her here.

God was very gentle with her. And don't forget either what the inspired writer of the book of Hebrews tells us about Sarah in chapter 11. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past age since she considered him faithful who had promised.

So we mustn't be holier than God or think we're holier than Sarah. Remember Peter tells us that Sarah was a holy woman. She's an example to all Christian wives. Now Sarah's inward laugh isn't a laugh of pride and hardness and outright unbelief.

It is doubt yes but it's more like Peter in Matthew 14 when he's sinking in the waves remember. And the rebuke that God gives is like that rebuke Jesus gave to Peter.

[19:03] Oh you of little faith why do you doubt? Not like the rebuke Jesus gave to hardened Pharisees. That's what happens here.

Poor Sarah. she did doubt God's promise but no wonder she'd lived with that promise for more than 20 years hadn't she? She'd waited she'd prayed and there was no answer nothing to show.

That's very hard isn't it? You know that. Maybe some of us here have prayed for 20 years for something for somebody for a friend for a family member a spouse even somebody to come to faith and we've just seen nothing.

We begin to despair don't we? We begin to think it's impossible impossible that that prayer should ever be answered and we often give up. Well that was Sarah.

It's doubt that comes from despair and from hopelessness isn't it? You see what we're told about her in verse 11 do you notice? She's old and childless and she's well frankly post-menopausal that's the medical fact that's what that phrase means.

[20:16] But look at how she feels verse 12 I'm worn out she says it's all just fantasy now that that prayer should ever be answered my husband's old but I'm old and worn out.

I think that's an insight into poor Sarah's heart isn't it? The deep pain for her part of her very identity as a woman and a wife has been torn away from her she feels utterly hopeless useless so don't be too hard on Sarah especially if you're a man John Calvin has very characteristic good judgment and he shows it here he says this nothing was less in Sarah's mind than to call God a liar no he says her only sin was she just didn't expect from God a miracle she simply couldn't conceive with her own mind and he points out the fact that most of us are like that a lot of the time aren't we he says as often as we measure the promises and the works of God by our own reason and by the laws of nature we act reproachfully towards him although we may intend nothing of the sort and that was Sarah but you see the Lord wouldn't have her continuing doubting and look how kind he is to her in verse 13 you see how God repeats her words almost exactly and yet he doesn't use those words worn out yes you're old Sarah but you're not worn out you're not finished in

God's plans maybe that's encouragement to some of us today we're old but you're not worn out says God in my plans I remember that tomorrow morning when it's my birthday I'm old I feel old but I'm not worn out not yet what about those wonderful words in verse 14 is anything too hard for the Lord is one of God's favourite expressions he loves to say that look at Luke chapter 1 that's exactly what he told his angel to say to Mary about another miraculous birth nothing shall be impossible with God of course nothing's too hard for him and nothing that he has surely promised will ever prove too hard for him poor Sarah she's left so staggered she's just blethering isn't she he doesn't know what to say just makes things worse and it's as if the Lord is quietly smiling and saying no no Sarah come on don't make things worse just wait and soon you'll see you'll be laughing at yourself of course that's exactly what happens as we'll discover but you see in all of this God is reaffirming again to

Abraham the staggering kindness and mercy of his purposes of grace for Abraham and his family personally as his covenant people but also in terms of their destiny the destiny they would share as being the means of blessing to the world verse 18 yes he will himself become a great and mighty nation but also all the nations of the world will be blessed in him staggering kindness of God isn't it and yet alongside that staggering relationship of God's kindness and mercy to him and to the world there is another side isn't there and that too is part of God's revelation to Abraham his true prophet there's the sobering revelation of God's justice and his wrath against sin isn't there in verse 16 to 21 shall I hide that from Abraham

God says now of course I can't because a true prophet of God must know and tell the whole truth of God not just half of it that's so important isn't it it may be hard for us to digest that but it's so essential because half a gospel is no gospel at all is it there are some people today who just want to speak about the love of God and nothing else but you see the Bible speaks about God's love in abundance and that's why it must also speak of his justice just because true love must by its nature hate and oppose all that is evil all that's wicked all that's sinful otherwise it wouldn't be true love at all just a moment's thought tells you that's true doesn't it if you discover that children are being abused and tortured by wicked men by abusers then true love isn't just to have thoughts of love towards those children is it to have a determination to stop those abusers to bring them to justice to bring them to just punishment that's love and so it is with God who loves the world and therefore is

determined to bring justice to evil and to wickedness to all the things that have ruined the world that's part of his mercy and love for those he's saving and so here God reveals the whole of the future to Abraham not just

[25 : 25] God's plan for bringing blessing to the nations but also his commitment to judging the world punishing sin and in this particular case for Sodom and Gomorrah that time had come I'm sure you see that the language in verse 21 echoes the prelude to the flood story doesn't it it also echoes especially the story of Babel I will go down and see says God must have been very clear to Abraham a friend of God to whom he granted real personal relationship the prophet of God to whom he granted a profound revelation laying out his future plans of salvation yes but also of judgment but something else also became clear to Abraham in all of this and I think that's a big part of why this story is here a big part of what Moses wanted his people to see and what God wants us to see about our calling as God's covenant people and it's this

God gives also a pressing responsibility to his covenant people and that's what we see in verses 22 to the end Abraham as God's true priest as God's friend he talks with God and eats with him and enjoys relationship with him as God's prophet he knows God's revelation about the future both his saving grace and his just judgment and he can talk to men from God but as God's priest he intercedes with God on behalf of men he talks to God for men and that's what we see here isn't it in this extraordinary encounter with God notice how God seems to draw it out of Abraham you see in verse 17 he shares his plan with Abraham and yet in verse 21 there's a chink of hope isn't there I'll go and see says God and if it's not as I've been told well then I'll know there's a chink of light there isn't there and then in verse 22 the two men go off but the

Lord stays behind it's very likely I think that the text should read the Lord remains standing before Abraham now why does he stay well he's willing Abraham to pray he wants him to intercede for these cities and I think that's what explains Abraham's boldness in approaching God as an advocate for Sodom because that's the language that's used there that's what's implied he's standing in as an advocate on Sodom's behalf Abraham is appealing to what he knows of God's character and to what he knows of God's promise to him to be a vehicle of blessing to the nations God has just said nothing is too difficult for the Lord that must surely mean that even such a place as Sodom has hope and he knows God is absolutely just verse 25 is plain isn't it God will not he cannot act unjustly the judge of all the earth must do right so Abraham says okay

Lord that's why you've called me that's why you've revealed yourself to me so I'm going to be bold and wrestling with you for these cities these nations of the world notice it is the whole cities that he prays for it's not just Lot never mentions Lot's name of course Lot must have been in his mind but he doesn't mention that it's an amazing thing isn't it here's a man who in the face of God's salvation and judgment revealed to him in all its awfulness he prays not just for his own but for his enemies his rivals that's what the inhabitants of these cities were in the land it's unique in the Old Testament that you know many of other the other prophets of God Moses and Samuel and so and they intercede with God on behalf of Israel but Abraham here is a man who prays for his enemies who shows love for a world lost in wickedness and in rebellion against God in awful sin seems that he's learned quite a lot from his friend doesn't it and he's bold in his priestly intercession with God and yet he's also humble isn't he verse 27 I'm but dust and ashes there's no presumption it's not a name it and claim it kind of prayer it's not trying to use God he knows that God is sovereign he knows his justice can't be trifled it can't be mocked and so he feels his way and it seems that Abraham knows when he's asked enough there's a great ring of reality about this prayer there's no fantasy about it yes nothing is impossible with God but that doesn't mean God will be untrue to himself he won't be mocked and there is an end to his grace and favour when people harden themselves abundantly and again and again absolutely against God in the end God will give them their heart's desire there is says the apostle John a sin that leads to death in those circumstances prayer becomes inappropriate and it seems

[30 : 51] Abraham knows when to stop praying we're not sure how I think it's possible the text is hinting to us that it's God's tone that told him when to stop because God's replies seem to get more grim as he goes along verse 26 it's quite positive God says I'll spare the whole place for 50 righteous verse 29 for the sake of 40 he says I will not do it and in verse 30 again for 30 I will not do it but in verse 31 it's a bit more somber isn't it for 20 I will not destroy it in verse 32 Abraham knows it's the last time just one more time I'll ask he says and God answers and leaves you notice that God calls an end to the conversation the Lord went his way he didn't wait and of course as we'll see

there weren't even 10 righteous in Sodom only Lot and his immediate family and even they were rescued by the scruff of their neck as we'll see but what an extraordinary demonstration isn't it of the pressing responsibility

Abraham understood by his calling from God he was called and set apart he and his family after him to be God's friends and therefore his prophets to the world but also priests for the world to bring God's truth to the peoples of the world yes but to bring the peoples of the world also to God's throne in prayer that's what the formation of God's covenant family his church led to that's what circumcision immediately issued forth in passionate mission to a godless world well what's all that got to do with us well God wants us to remember doesn't he what his covenant people have so often forgotten all down the ages what it means to be the church of God the calling of his covenant people Israel were called to be a kingdom of priests weren't they under Moses at Sinai read Exodus 19 he calls them there he talks about the personal relationship he's had with them he profoundly reveals the future to them and he calls them to a pressing responsibility to be priests for God a kingdom of priests for the blessing of the people of the earth they were to live for God's glory to shine to the world they're all the way through the prophets read

Isaiah Israel are to be God's servants to bless the Gentile nations to be light and truth to lead people to the living God you are my witnesses says God in Isaiah 43 you're a light to the nations that my salvation might reach the end of the earth of course for the most part God's people forgot their calling didn't they they forgot that they were to proclaim to the world the great one who was still to come and to bear responsibility for being light in the darkness of paganism but at last in the fullness of time the promised seed did come the true savior the true servant who did himself intercede with God not only for his own people but also for the peoples of the world for their salvation it's highly significant I think that in Romans chapter 15 verse 8 Paul calls Jesus Christ literally the servant of the circumcision that is the one who fulfills the calling of God's people Israel to show says Paul God's faithfulness to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy and he goes on to quote whole loads of Old Testament scriptures about the blessing of God coming to the gentiles so you see Abraham's priestly intercession for a lost and wicked world points to one far greater in whom God would at last show how it was possible for him to have mercy on those who deserve nothing that's how Abraham could intercede with God because of the promise that one day in Christ he would achieve real reconciliation for his enemies but that's not all you see because God's covenant people his church still have the same calling to be friends of God and therefore prophets who can speak for God and also priests who can speak for people to God that's our calling that's why

Paul says in Philippians 3 verse 3 we are the true circumcision who glory in Jesus Christ that's why Jesus says you are my witnesses as he ascended and promised the spirit to them in other words he's saying my friends still have a share in my glorious plan and purpose you are the light of the world Jesus says I haven't come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them to fulfill all its great calling through you my new covenant people what I called Abraham to I'm also calling you to and for you that responsibility is even greater and more pressing you've got greater privileges even than Abraham had because the promises are being fulfilled in this age and therefore you've got greater responsibilities but also you've been given even greater power haven't you because of the coming in power upon the whole church of the

[36 : 32] Holy Spirit we've all received the calling to be true heirs of the promises given to Abraham true friends true prophets true priests just as we close let's turn to the New Testament to John chapter 15 to look there because I want you to see this so clearly it's page 902 in our church bibles these are words Jesus spoke of course first to his disciples the apostles but of course through them to all who share in their faith just see what Jesus calls us verse 15 of John 15 no longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends friends of God in Christ we have a personal relationship with God and what does that mean read on for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you we have received a profound revelation of God and we all have a message all of us the whole truth we are all prophets and look at verse 16 you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the father in my name he may give it to you he's chosen us to bear fruit as he answers our prayers and we are to have that pressing responsibility now to pray to intercede with

God that there might be abiding fruit for his gospel in the world we are to be priests of God and look at that reassurance whatever you ask in my name he will give to us isn't that something in Christ we are all made like Abraham we are all friends who know God we are all prophets who know his words and we are all priests who know the way to the heart of God how can we be sure he has really given us such a high calling verse 13 tells us doesn't it he couldn't show us greater love he has laid down his own life for us his friends so we know that this is our calling and we believe him we must be humble of course we can't presume on his friendship he tells us we didn't chose him he chose us just as he chose

Abraham by sheer grace and we're never to forget that that's the only thing that separates us from the likes of the people of Sodom but we can be bold God chose Abraham to be a blessing and so with us he chose us he says to bear fruit to learn to ask the Father to give us fruit so here's the question for us this morning that this passage poses to us do we know the purpose of our calling we're a city church here aren't we it's a great city but it is a wicked city in God's eyes by and large it is full of people who pay absolutely no attention to God God is long forgotten as is the true motto of our city let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of his word and the praising of his name and our calling is to both preach and praise yes but also to pray isn't it we're a company of priests that God has put in the heart of this pagan city we know the future for this city don't we and for the whole world in both blessing and judgment in the coming of

Jesus Christ can a city like Glasgow flourish can a city like Glasgow today truly be renewed by the power of the spirit of God seems impossible doesn't it but nothing is impossible with God nothing's too hard for him it's just that so often it seems too hard for us so we don't ask him we don't pray do we maybe it's because we forget the extraordinary thing it is for almighty God to have moved heaven and earth just so as to make people like us his friends perhaps we have forgotten all that it cost him to do that laying down his own life that we might have eternal life with him I wonder how far we are willing to go I wonder how daring we are willing to be in bearing fruit for Christ's glory in the calling that he's called us to hear in Glasgow

I wonder how much we are willing to love a godless city and seek its peace and its good I wonder how much we are willing to intercede for its people with God and for its preservation so that there remains time for people to hear the message and repent I wonder how much we are willing to give of our time and our talents and our money for Christ's mission to love this city these are big questions aren't they things we all need to ponder let's ask ourselves that question this week and many others do we know the purpose of our calling but in the end you know it all comes down to this doesn't it the extent of our boldness in talking to men for God as prophets and in talking to God for men and women as priests the extent of that boldness will all be proportional to the extent to which our own hearts have been truly humbled humbled by the sheer wonder of what it really means that in

[42 : 30] Jesus Christ God has called us people like you and me friends real friends does that thought touch your heart this morning does that melt your heart I hope it does it doesn't have to see you can't yet really have grasped the tremendous grace of God as Abraham did that thought doesn't touch you you can't yet have really understood the gospel of God maybe that's something we also ought to meditate on this week let's pray together gracious God our heavenly father how we thank you that we have a great high priest that we come before you knowing that in him we have certainty about your blessing and kindness to us which is so staggering we can hardly take it in help us also to know the purpose of our calling this joy this wonder this grace this glory should be shared by us and through us the people of this city for the great glory of our

Lord Jesus Christ in his name we pray amen