

26. The Promised Seed who brings Delight (2007)

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage that we read there in Genesis chapter 21. A passage all about the promised seed who brings delight.

Now, we're returning this morning back to our studies in the story of Abraham, to studies that we left off back in early June. And since it's a little while since we had our minds in Genesis, let's remind ourselves what it's all about.

Genesis, of course, is the book of beginnings. Beginning, of course, with the beginning of everything in creation. But we saw that when we came to the beginning of the story of Abraham, what we're seeing there is really the story of the beginning of real Christian faith.

That's what the New Testament makes plain for us. Abraham, we're told, is the father of all the faithful. That's what Paul says to the Galatians, that God revealed to Abraham the same gospel promises as he's revealed to us.

And that we who trust in Jesus Christ, that we are truly the seed of Abraham. We are the heirs, the inheritors of all his promises. But it's also the story, as we've seen, of the beginning of the true Christian church.

[1 : 22] That is, the community of faith marked out by God. In this case, by circumcision. Just as now, at the end of the ages, God's people are marked out by baptism into Jesus Christ.

And further, as we saw in Genesis 18 to 20, no sooner is the community of faith marked out and formed, but we have the beginning of real Christian mission.

We see God's people, his friends, as those who proclaim God's gospel to the world. And also, who intercede to God for the world.

Remember, Abraham interceding for Sodom. But now, as we come to, really, the climax of the story of Abraham, and the birth, at last, of the promised seed, we're going to see the beginning of a pattern, a pattern that foreshadows something far greater still.

Because the promise God gave to Abraham, first in chapter 12 of Genesis, and then again in chapter 15 and chapter 17, the promise that through his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed, that promise is only partially fulfilled, isn't it, in the birth of Isaac, the long-awaited son of Abraham and Sarah.

[2 : 36] But the very pattern of that birth, and what that birth precipitates, is itself prophetic. It points to something still afar off.

It points to something that God will, ultimately, at last, surely and certainly accomplish, as he has promised. Through the birth of a son, the promised seed of the woman, who at last will destroy the serpent and his power, and who at last will forever reverse the tragedy and the curse of sin, and thus at last truly bring blessing to all the nations of the world, and bring about a world which itself has been recreated as the home of righteousness.

Now, the New Testament tells us plainly, that that was Abraham's hope. That was what he was looking for. Hebrews chapter 11 says it in plain words.

He acknowledged that he was a stranger on the earth. He acknowledged that he was seeking a true homeland, a better country it's called, a heavenly city, a lasting city, which was designed and built by God, a city with true foundations.

And in the climax of Abraham's own personal journey of faith, and in the personal fulfillment to him of the promises that God had given him in the birth of his son Isaac, we're going to see extraordinary foreshadowings of that far greater fulfillment that was to come.

[4 : 14] Jesus himself tells us, doesn't he, that Abraham rejoiced that he would see his day.

Indeed, he says he did see it and was glad. And maybe Abraham foresaw and understood much more than we realized.

Because as we're going to see over these next few weeks, he himself, Abraham, witnessed the birth of a promised son who would bring delight from God by his birth.

He witnessed a persecuted son who would bring division from God by his life. And he witnessed the birth of a precious son who would be dedicated to God in death.

Even in the birth of Isaac, the seed promised to Abraham, we see the beginning, the beginning of a redeeming pattern. A pattern that will find at zenith only at last in the wonderful birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When in the fullness of time, God sent his own son to redeem all the true seed of Abraham from every tribe and of every nation and tongue and to draw them also into his divine family family of faith through his grace.

[5 : 30] So we're going to look at these things over the next few weeks. But this morning I want to focus just on these seven verses that we read. Verses all about the promised seed who brings delight from God by his birth.

And I want to look at it under three headings. The certainty of God's covenant promises, the call of his covenant promises, and lastly the character of those promises of his grace.

Well first of all, look at verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 21, which hammer home to us again and again the certainty of God's covenant promises for his people.

The unmistakable message of these verses is that the true grace of God always, always delivers what he has promised for his people. God is always at work to fulfill his purposes for those who are his.

There may be delays, at least as it seems to us. There may be many mysteries. There may be much waiting, even weeping. But God will bring every single promise of his to sure and certain fulfillment.

[6 : 42] That's the message of these verses. You can trust this God. Look at verses 1 and 2. The Lord visited Sarah as he had said and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.

And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. So brief and matter of fact, isn't it? You almost skip over the massive implications of what these words convey.

That all the promises of God going right back to Genesis 12 and chapter 15 and chapter 17, that all of them are being fulfilled just as God had said.

All according to promise. You notice that three times we're told that as he said, as he promised, as he had spoken. Derek Kidner, in his commentary, says these words express the quiet precision of his control.

Now it's easy, isn't it, to see those sorts of things outside your own life. Or maybe looking back after many, many decades in your own life. But it's not so easy to see those things when you're in the midst of it in your own life, is it?

[7 : 58] I'm pretty sure it didn't seem to Abraham that God was exhibiting the quiet precision of his control. What a story there is that we've seen between chapter 12 and chapter 21.

I'm sure it didn't seem to Abraham just as clear cut and controlled as all that. More than 25 years had passed. Years of drama, disappointments, of waiting, of warfare in all kinds of ways.

Traumas in his extended family, do you remember, with Lot. Traumas in his immediate family.

Rupture between Sarah, his wife, and Hagar, his servant. Dealing with kings.

Rescuing Lot. Nearly losing his wife on at least two occasions. Witnessing the destruction of God on the cities of the plain. And all the time through all of these things that were playing out in Abraham's life, not a sign of the fulfillment of what God had promised.

Bringing this son and heir to birth through Sarah, his wife. I'm quite sure that if Abraham had had our hymn book here, he would have often sung, maybe with more than a hint of bitterness, more than a hint of disappointment, those words.

[9 : 14] God moves in a mysterious way. A very mysterious way. At least in my life, he seems to. I'm sure Abraham would have said.

Maybe some of you feel that this morning too. It's one thing to know, isn't it, in your theology that God is sovereign? That everything is under the quiet precision of his control?

But at least in my life, it doesn't always feel like that. Does it feel like that in yours? And because it doesn't always feel like that, we often don't handle things in our lives very well, do we?

Now, we've seen Abraham in all his waiting and waiting. We've seen him getting impatient, finding it hard to trust God's word of promise. We've seen him turn more than once, haven't we, to self-preservation.

Rather than trusting in God's promise to protect him and be with him, he took it upon himself. As a result, he nearly lost his wife twice. We've seen him result in seed preservation all by himself.

[10:18] The ridiculous efforts to get his own way with Hagar instead of with Sarah. Most recently, we've seen it in chapter 20 when poor Abraham disgraces himself in the presence of a pagan king.

And Abraham becomes the very opposite, doesn't he, of what God has called him to be. He's called him to be a blessing to other families and other peoples and yet Abraham turns instead to be a curse. He brings plagues on them and barrenness.

And yet now, in these two little verses, it's as though God's saying to Abraham, Abraham, just stop. Stand aside and just look at the perfect, effortless, flawless plan that I'm bringing to fruition for you. There's been no delay. There's been no mistakes, Abraham. There's been no muddle. There's been no failure. There's been no sense at all that God has ignored you or not answered your prayer.

No. No. I'm not in a hurry, says God. But I'm not late. Everything is according to plan, as he had said, as he had promised at the time which God had spoken to him.

[11:32] He is the unchanging and the unchangeable God who does exactly as he's promised and exactly as he said. He visits his people, do you see verse 1?

He draws near to them in power and with his personal presence to bring to fruition everything that he's spoken. Just as Joshua says later on in Joshua chapter 21, not one of all the good promises the Lord has made has fallen to the ground.

Everything has come to pass. And that's because the true grace of God always delivers what he's promised for his people.

You can trust this God. That's what Moses, the writer of these chapters, wants us to grasp, isn't it? His first heroes, the Israelites in the desert, they constantly needed that reassurance, didn't they? That God's promise to them was secure and certain. Just as you need it and I need it. That what this God begins, he always finishes and never forgets.

[12:38] They knew this same God, didn't they, who comes to visit his people to fulfill his promises. If you read the last chapter of Genesis, you'll see that Joseph, while he was dying, prophesied that.

He said, God will surely visit you to bring you up out of the land of Egypt and into the land that he swore to give to you and you'll carry my bones up with you. And we read in the book of Exodus how that exactly happened.

God visited his people and Moses carried Joseph bones before him when he delivered them out of the land of bondage into the land of promise.

But God's people under Moses also knew that they had a lot of waiting to do, didn't they? They hadn't yet seen all of God's promises fulfilled.

They were still waiting to have the full possession of the land. Very often, as you read in these books of Exodus and Numbers, you'll see, don't you, that they doubt God's promise.

[13:37] They wonder if God really has the power to do everything that he said he would do. And Moses is saying, to them, no, don't doubt. You can trust this God as he has said, so he will do in his perfect time.

Look at what God did to Abraham and Sarah. Well, remember, he's your God too. And he's our God too, isn't he? And we need that kind of encouragement just the same.

We need to remember the certainty of God's promises to us. Of course, we have far, far more than Moses' first readers have to encourage us about the God who keeps his promise, about the God who visits his people.

We've got the whole Bible. The Old Testament is full of these wonderful answers to God's promises. That's why it's here for us in our Bibles. Paul says that through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope in just the same way.

We've got the book of Ruth. Ruth. We remember when Ruth came back to Bethlehem in the time of famine because the Lord had visited his people to give them food in the place of famine.

[14:48] We can read in Jeremiah chapter 29 where the prophet says, the Lord will visit his people after 70 years of exile and fulfill his promise to bring them back to the land.

We can read of how God wonderfully visited Hannah in answer to her prayers and she bore Samuel and other sons and daughters. We can see how God is always at work to fulfill the promises that he's made to his people by wonderful visitations of his grace and his power.

And of course, most wonderfully of all, we've witnessed, haven't we, the great answer to his promise, the great visitation that brought to fulfillment everything that God promised Abraham way back then in the birth of the Lord Jesus.

It's very significant, I think, that when you read in Luke's Gospel chapter 1 and listen to the angel's words to Mary, this is what he said, listen, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will, well it's translated, overshadow you, literally, visit you and therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God.

Do you remember Zechariah's song a little bit later saying, blessed be the God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise from on high has visited us.

[16:13] That birth, that birth at last of the promised seed of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the Savior of the world, it happened just as God had said, just as he had promised in God's perfect time.

It's the certainty of God's covenant promises. And that's the message of these two little verses. It's the message, really, of the whole of the Christian gospel that God is always at work to fulfill the promises for those who are his and therefore you can trust him.

You can. You can trust him in every detail of your own personal life and walk with God. However big, however small. You can trust him no matter how mysterious it seems to be at present.

No matter how slow it seems to be that God is working. No matter how perplexing the path is that he seems to be calling you to walk at this moment. That he is working all these things together for the good of those who love him.

Look at the evidence we have in scripture. He has kept every single one of these promises through hundreds and even thousands of years. And he sent his son at last to be our savior.

[17:37] And that's why Paul says he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us how will he not also with him give us all things? It's impossible, isn't it?

That he won't keep every one of his promises to us. That means we can trust him. We don't despair. We have hope no matter how dark our path may be right at this very moment.

Of course we've got to be careful. I'm talking here about faith not about fantasy. Sometimes we as Christians can find ourselves trusting in things that God hasn't promised.

Things that are in fact just self-suggestion. Things that we want to believe that God has promised us personally but things that God hasn't promised at all. Sometimes people say well I really believe that God is going to give me this job.

I really believe that God's promised me this romance. I really believe that God has promised me this particular sphere of service or whatever it might be. But it's not always so is it?

[18:43] Sometimes it's other people's who give those suggestions to us. I really believe that God has told me that you're going to be healed or that God's going to do this in your life or that in your life or something like that.

And what you need to do is work up enough faith to claim those promises. That's not what I'm talking about. That can be very dangerous. That can be very damaging. It can be very damning.

I was just reading this week of a pastor in the United States who says I'm still believing God for my second private jet. He's got a first private jet but he's believing for his second private jet.

Well, I'm afraid there are no promises in Scripture about private jets for pastors. Alas. Anyway, with the price of oil today it wouldn't be much good, would it?

No, but there are promises, real promises in Scriptures for pastors for suffering and for agony.

There are real promises too for everyone who will seek to be godly, aren't they?

[19:46] that they will be persecuted. And that's important, you see. It's not manufactured promises, wishful thinking that we're to trust in in our lives, not at all.

That's fantasy. That's folly. That's the kind of thing that gives ammunition to people like Richard Dawkins, isn't it? To ridicule our faith. To call us all a bunch of idiots.

No, it's faith in what God has said. It's faith in what God really has promised in the appointed times that he's revealed to us that we can trust in, just as it was those things that Abraham could trust in.

And for us, these promises are found right here, aren't they? They're found in God's Word in the Scriptures. In his second letter in the New Testament, Peter tells us plainly that God has given us

everything we need for life and godliness in the great and precious promises that we have in the Gospel of his Son.

And Peter exhorts us to remember the promises of the prophets of old, to remember the commands of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through his apostles. And he tells us that these are for us like a light shining in a dark place until the day that Jesus himself returns.

[21 : 01] We have certainty in God's covenant promises in Scripture and we can trust them. We wait, says Peter, for a new creation, the home of righteousness.

That's a promise, friends. That means we don't have to fear or panic about world calamity or world catastrophes or all the scare stories that are around us today.

Jesus says, I will be with you even to the end of the age. That's a promise. That means we don't ever need to feel abandoned in our Christian calling.

Even if we feel that God's distant, even if we feel that God is gone, he's not answering our prayers. No. Jesus says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. It's a promise.

Whoever comes to me, I will never under any circumstances cast out, says Jesus. That's a promise. And you need that promise. You might be somebody who fears that some sin that you've committed, something that you've done, must cause Jesus to be finished with you, must drive him away from you so he can have nothing to do with you anymore.

[22 : 12] He says, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. That's a promise. Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness. And all these things, says Jesus, everything that you really need will be added unto you.

That's a promise. That means you don't need to fear or be anxious about your life or your job or your food and clothing. Even in the recession that is fast upon us as everybody's telling us.

You may not feel always, of course, that you have everything you want, but God promises, he promises to give us everything that we need.

And Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. I will raise him up at the last day. That is a promise.

That's a real promise that you can trust, that you can cling to in the face of the shadow of death, in the face of growing frailty and infirmity, in the face of the great shadow that comes on your life.

[23 : 21] It's a promise. I could go on and on, but you see, the message is clear, isn't it? You can trust our God. His true grace will always, always deliver what he has promised for his people.

As he has said, as he has promised, in his good, perfect time. You need to know that, don't you? And so do I. As Ralph Davis would say, you need to work it down into your pores so that it touches every aspect of your thinking and your living.

Because there often is, as there was for Abraham, a long time of waiting involved from our point of view in our lives before these promises come to fruition. God's timing is perfect, but it doesn't always seem like that to us.

We have to trust. You see, that brings me to the second point. Because not only is God always at work to fulfill his purposes for us, he's also always at work to fulfill his purposes in us as his people.

[24 : 30] And verses 3 and 4 bear witness to that in terms of the call of God's covenant promises on his people. You see, the true grace of God is always at work in God's people to draw out the true obedient faith that he has commanded from them.

So yes, there may be many lapses, many failures, many failings, but God will bring his people to the obedient faith that he's called them to. By God's grace, you can and you will faithfully obey this God. notice the significance of verses 3 and 4. We're told that Abraham names his son Isaac. That is, he obeys God's command back in chapter 17 that accompanied God's promise.

Sarah, your wife, will have a son, that's the promise, and you shall name him Isaac. That's the command. We've seen it again and again, haven't we? God's commands and his promises going side by side.

And just in the same way, he circumcises Isaac. Again, according to God's command in obedience to him. God had said to Abraham many times, hadn't he, walk before me and be blameless.

[25 : 39] That's what faith is. Walking in obedience to God's command in response to his promises. It's what Paul calls the obedience of faith. And it's what real love to God looks like, isn't it?

Jesus says, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word. And these verses speak of the simplicity of believing faith in Abraham's life, don't they? By faith, Abraham obeyed.

That's how Hebrews 11 sums it all up. But we know, don't we, that the simplicity of that faithful obedience wasn't just some sudden flash that followed immediately upon his first experience of God.

Not at all. It was an obedience forged on the anvil of 25 years of journeying with God through many dangers and toils and snares, wasn't it?

It was an obedience that he learned as God's grace led him through all the dramas and all the crises and all the muck-ups and all the worst moments of his failures.

[26 : 41] And it was matured, wasn't it? As God worked in his life to draw out that obedience of faith by his grace. even as God was working out his purposes for his life in bringing those promises to fruition.

And that's because, you see, it's not enough for God that he should simply achieve his purposes for our lives. It's not enough. It's not just what happens to us and what happens through us that God's interested in.

He's determined, isn't he, to fulfill his purpose in us so that we should become the people that he's called us to be, that we should become a people holy to the Lord.

That's what Moses tells Israel later on in Deuteronomy chapter 26 that God has called them to be a treasured possession, a people holy to the Lord, a people like him keeping all his commands.

That's what the New Testament tells us we're created for. Ephesians chapter 2, we're created in Christ Jesus for good works. Or as Peter says, we're created to be a holy people to proclaim and reflect the glory of God.

[27 : 53] And that doesn't happen overnight, does it? But you see, God's grace is at work in our lives to draw out in us all that God has commanded in terms of the call of his covenant promises upon us.

God is working out his purpose of fulfillment in us. He's making us like him. He's making us into the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's his goal. And it can't happen any other way. Even Jesus, the New Testament tells us, had to learn obedience.

Yes, he was without sin, but he had to learn the meaning. He had to learn the cost and the struggle of obeying his Father's word, of trusting his Father's promises. And so it was with Abraham and so it is with us.

And that's what accounts so often you see for the waiting, for the perplexity, for the many mysteries of God's unfolding plan in our own lives. When it seems that God isn't working in us at all, when it seems that he isn't working his purpose out, that he's forgotten that he can't keep his promises, no.

[29 : 06] It's rather that in the way he delivers what he has promised to his people, he's drawing out in them by his amazing grace and shaping them into the people that he's called them to be.

Just like Abraham, obedient servants, friends of God. John Newton, who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, knew that much better than most.

I've just finished reading the excellent biography of him by Jonathan Akin. Some of you may have read it. I recommend it very highly. It really is a story. As the title says, From Disgrace to Amazing Grace.

And terrible things happened to John Newton in his younger days. You don't know the half of it. He was enslaved in Africa. He was nearly killed at sea. And even after his conversion, for a long time, he went through many long and terrible struggles.

But through every danger, toil and snare, it was God's grace that was bringing him safe to the end. And all the way along, it was God's grace that was teaching him to be the man of faith that he became, that was shaping him into being the fruitful vine that he was in the hands of God and that God could use for such blessing in the world.

[30 : 24] You see, the Bible tells us that that's what God is doing with you if you're a Christian. Because the New Testament says that you are sons of Abraham, that you're heirs of the same promise, and that he's blessing you along with Abraham, the man of faith.

And that's why immediately after the chapter that speaks so much about Abraham in the New Testament in Hebrews chapter 11, immediately after that, the writer goes immediately on to speak to Christian believers and say this in Hebrews 12 verse 5, Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

My son, don't regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, don't be weary when reprov'd by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

It's for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. See, that's what explains so often the perplexity of our Christian lives, isn't it?

The writer goes on to say he disciplines us for our good that we might share his holiness. It seems painful at the present time. Of course it does, he says, yet later it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

[31 : 47] God's true grace, even as it is at work always for us to fulfill his eternal purposes for us, all the way along is always also at work in us, shaping our hearts to draw from us what he has called us to be.

And his purpose is that he has called us to be like his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And he won't stop, friends, he won't stop doing that, not ever, until we become the people of true obedient faith that he's called us to be.

That's his goal. That's why even though it may often seem to us that God moves in a mysterious way, nonetheless, he is performing wonders and he will perform wonders.

Wonders of grace. not only for us in the end, but in us all along the way. And William Cooper, who's him we sung, who was John Newton's great friend, who wrote that hymn, God moves in a mysterious way, he understood that even though he himself suffered from the most terrible and dreadful depressive illness.

It was actually on the brink of a descent into terrible depressive madness that he wrote the words of that hymn that we sang. Just listen to the verses again. Think of Abraham singing these words.

[33 : 07] Deep in unfathomable minds of never failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. You fearful saints, fresh courage take.

The clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sins, but trust him for his grace.

Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet, sweet will be the flower.

I don't know what God's grace is allowing you to be exposed to at the moment, but I do know this, none of it, none of it is in vain.

And in the midst I know that he is working his sovereign will for your life and around your life and he's drawing out his purpose in your life. He's shaping you to be the man or the woman that God wants you to be and has called you to be.

[34 : 18] Because you can and you will faithfully obey this God. It's the call of his covenant promise and it won't fail. His purposes will ripen fast, even though to you they may seem terribly slow.

And even though the bud may, yes, have a bitter taste, sweet will be the flower. There will be joy in the wonders that he performs for you.

And that brings me just to the final thing, the character of God's covenant promises. Because in the fullness of time, the true grace of God will always, always delight his people.

Not only is God at work to fulfill his purposes for us and in us, he has a great purpose to fulfill with us his people. That we should share in the sheer joy that always abounds wherever he is to be found.

And that means that there may be many sorrows and trials along the way. There may be many tears, many heartbreaks. Yet you will rejoice and delight with this God.

[35 : 30] Joy is the goal of his grace. You see how everyone's laughing at the end of this story? Even the Lord himself is laughing, I'm sure.

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him and Sarah said, God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me and she said, well, why?

She said, who would have said that Sarah would bear children, yet I have borne him sons in his old age? Who would have said that ancient geriatrics would be changing nappies with the telegram from the cream celebrating their hundredth birthday sitting on the mantelpiece?

Who would have said it? But somebody did say it, didn't they? God said it, plainly, back in chapter 17. And do you remember there was laughter back then too, wasn't there?

Laughter of a different kind. The natural laughter of doubt and of disbelief, not scornful unbelief, but just incredulity. Because just like us, Abraham and Sarah just couldn't comprehend God's capacity to exceed every human thought and imagining.

[36 : 47] But now, that laughter of incredulity and disbelief at the staggering nature of God's promise, that laughter had given way to the laughter of sheer joy and wonder at his power that had done everything that he'd promised.

I'm sure many of us have experienced the wonder and the joy of that laughter when God has been proved true and we've been proved false. But that's the character of God's promises.

It's his mark. The psalmist says, when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, our mouth was filled with laughter, our tongue with shouts of joy. God loves to delight his people.

He loves to rejoice with them. And this is a scene, isn't it, of unmitigated joy in the birth of Isaac. And yet you notice that even in the joy he won't allow his people to forget the abundance of his grace.

That he's bringing joy even in the face of disbelief, even in the face of total unworthiness. Isaac's very name would have said that to them. His name means he laughs.

[37 : 57] But it was a name, wasn't it, that would have brought rebuke as well as rejoicing to their hearts. Because every time they uttered the name Isaac, he laughed. They'd be reminded, wouldn't they, of their laughter? Of their disbelieving laughter.

Rebuking their sin. But also the laughter of joy and of gladness, of God's goodness and grace, despite all of their sin. And again, that's what the true grace of God always does for us, doesn't it? Never pretends away our sin. It magnifies our sin before us. And it humbles us in the dust, doesn't it? And yet at the same time, it buries our sin in the same sea of grace.

It lifts our hearts to heaven rejoicing in the joy of our great Savior. And that's always the character of God's true grace and His gospel promises. Think of old Zechariah, the priest, in Luke chapter 1. Remember, the angel says, you will have a son and call his name John and you will rejoice in his birth. And poor old Zechariah, just couldn't believe it. And he was struck dumb. But when the day of his birth came, he wrote on the tablet, his name is John.

[39 : 12] And immediately, he was released in praise and in joy and in laughter. A name that would forever after speak to him of God's grace abounding despite his unbelief.

And isn't that the same with Jesus' name? The name we love to hear, we love to speak its worth. It sounds like music in our ear, the sweetest name on earth.

Why? Well, it's the sweetest name, isn't it? Because it tells us of a Savior's love who died to set me free. It tells me of the precious blood, the sinner's perfect plea.

It's the name that lifts us to the heavens with laughter and with gladness and with joy. But it's also the name, well, the name that humbles us in the dust. Because we can't utter the name of Jesus, can we, without being reminded of the cross and of his blood, blood shed for us, for our sin.

You shall call his name Jesus, said the angel, because he will save his people from their sin. It's the name that humbles us, isn't it? But it's the name also that brings us joy and laughter and rejoicing and gladness.

[40 : 26] Because the goal of the grace of our God is joy, sheer joy. It was for the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross that we might share that joy with him.

His kingdom, says Paul, is a place of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. and his reward to all who are his is to say, well done, good and faithful servant.

Enter then the joy of your master. God's people are people of joy. And in the fullness of time, friends, God's grace will never fail, ever, to delight his people.

He'll delight us with great and abundant joy. God has made laughter for me. That's what we will say. Maybe that's hard for some of us to see this morning.

Maybe it is darkness that blocks out any sense of his grace, any sense of that joy. The clouds blocked out any sense of the sun this morning.

[41 : 35] But let me tell you, just like Isaac, and just as in him the long promised seed, he brought joy and laughter and delight to old Abraham and Sarah by the very fact of his birth, by the very fact of the birth in history of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There will be joy and laughter. There will be rejoicing and delight for you as surely as the sun returns after rain, as surely as day follows night, because it's his covenant promise.

and it can't fail. And his very name, Jesus, reminds us of it. And if at times it seems hard for you to believe that, if it seems hard to hold on to it, if the way seems long and dark, if it seems confused and hard, if your steps sometimes seem to be marked far more by sadness than by joy, more by tears than by laughter, then come to Genesis chapter 21 and remember the laughter of Abraham

and Sarah and read about their joy and their delight at last in the fulfillment of God's promises. And then come to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ when he said, Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh. and remember that in Jesus Christ our God is at work to deliver all that he's promised for us and to draw out all that he has purposed in us so that in his perfect time he will delight to rejoice with us in joy and in abundant laughter.

There is joy and laughter in abundance in the name of Jesus. the name of the promised seed who brings delight. It's his promise.

[43 : 38] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the quiet precision of your control over every single aspect of this world's history, over every detail of our own personal lives.

And we ask that you would teach us in our frailty and our uncertainty teach us to turn day by day to the name who is our only hope, the name who is our rock and our shield and our hiding place, the name of Jesus our Savior.

And may his boundless stores of grace bring us strength and endurance for the dark times, for the perplexing paths, for the sorrows and for the sadnesses.

Because we know that there shall be in your perfect time joy and delight for all who are his. For we ask it in his name.

Amen.