

Entrusting Our Children to the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] and we're going to turn to our bible reading for this morning Willie Philip our senior minister is preaching to us this morning on entrusting our children to the lord and thinking about the place of baptism in this it's very fitting as we're going to have some baptisms at each of our services this morning three at each one and that will happen a little bit later and we're going to be reading from three places so you could put a finger in Galatians chapter 3 and Colossians chapter 2 before turning firstly to Genesis chapter 17 we're going to be reading first Genesis chapter 17 verses 1 to 14 Genesis 17 1 to 14 when Abraham was 99 years old the lord appeared to Abraham and said to him i am god almighty walk before me and be blameless that i may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly then Abraham fell on his face and god said to him behold my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations no longer shall your name be called Abraham but your name shall be Abraham for i have made you the father of a multitude of nations i will make you exceedingly fruitful and i will make you into nations and kings shall come from you and i will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be god to you and to your offspring after you and i will give to you and your offspring after you the land of your sojournings all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and i will be their god and god said to Abraham as for you you shall keep my covenant you and your offspring after you throughout their generations this is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you every meal among you shall be circumcised you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you he who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised every meal throughout your generations whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not your offspring both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised so shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant any uncircumcised meal who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people he has broken my covenant

I'll do turn over to Galatians chapter 3 I'm going to read from a couple of sections there Galatians chapter 3 first in verses 7 to 9 and then we'll skip a little bit ahead so Galatians 3 7 knew then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham and the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying in you shall all the nations be blessed so then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith and over to verse 27 for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek there is neither slave nor free there is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus and if you are Christ then you are Abraham's offspring heirs according to promise and finally over a few pages to Colossians chapter 2 and we're reading verses 11 to 13 in him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism in him you were also raised through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead and you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh

God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses well amen this is God's word well perhaps you would turn to the first passage we read there Genesis chapter 17 and we'll come to that in a moment this morning we have the great joy of nine families bringing their little ones for Christian baptism that'll be three families in each of our venues so after the sermon Phil and Josh will take over in Queens Park and in Bath Street and I hope that you are all from these venues joined with us now and watching and I'll continue here and it's the largest group of little ones I think that I can remember baptizing all together at one time it's partly due to this year of lockdown where we've had babies appearing and all sorts of things happening without us noticing really it's

been rather wonderful but it's a good opportunity

I think for us on a special day like this to think about what it means to entrust our children to the Lord and that's a very important matter isn't it because parenting for believers is never just a natural thing it's always a supernatural thing it's never just a biological thing it's always a theological thing it involves not just birth by the flesh but it involves birth by faith because just to become parents for Christian believers means that before our children are even conceived we're entrusting them to the Lord we're entrusting their whole lives into his hands his hands of grace his hands of promise that must be so mustn't it because otherwise how could we think of bringing little ones into this dangerous world this dark world don't we worry and fear for what children today must face and grow up into with all the stresses and strains of life with all the scourge of social media with all the dangers there are so many pitfalls aren't there so many disasters that could loom that's a huge issue for any prospective parent you might even ask the question goodness could it be right even to bring a little one into this harsh world but for Christian parents of course we've got far greater concerns even than that because we know that to bring a new life into this world means also bringing a new life into being to face an eternal world and so we need to face up to the matters not just of earthly dangers and loss but indeed of eternal dangers and loss so how can Christian parents dare to bring little ones into a world that they know will one day face eternal judgment when we know what that really does mean more than anybody else the answer is of course we can only even consider doing that if we can trust the Lord our God with our children if we can entrust our children to God which is of course what he tells us to do but it can be hard to do that can't it it can be hard to hold on to that trust in God for ourselves but also for our little ones and God knows that and so mercifully in his kindness he's always given his people signs of his grace to hold on to remind them that they can trust him and that we can entrust ourselves and our little ones into his hands he's given us visible words that reassure us of his grace and of his mercy and of his promises to all who love and who trust and follow him in the ancient times beginning with [9 : 47] Abraham that we read of here in Genesis 17 God marked out his family of faith by a sign of his grace that pointed forward to the future it pointed to a great redemption that was to come through the promised savior and that was the sign of circumcision that we read about but in these last days when we live after Jesus death and resurrection God has given his people a gracious sign that points back to fulfillment to the great redemption that has now come in Jesus Christ and that is the sign of baptism and both of these signs point to the same grace of God's covenant mercy through Christ one of them is a wonderful visible word about the future a promised future and the other is an even better visible word about a promise fulfilled the one assures God's people of the only thing that they could and must trust about him which is his promise of grace but the other tells us how much more even we can trust

God's marvelous grace to us fulfilled and completed as it is in the work of our savior Jesus Christ so first of all I want to think this morning about this mark this sign of God's family of faith in the age of promise so if you look here Genesis chapter 17 where we read in the age of promise the witnessing household of God was marked out by circumcision which God gave as a sign and a seal of his covenant promise of redemption that he had given to Abraham now when you read Genesis 17 here you notice something I think vitally important circumcision was given to Abraham by God not merely as an ethnic or a nationalistic marker and nor is it ever merely an external marker both the Old Testament and the New Testament make that very very plain here and everywhere in Acts chapter 7

Stephen says that God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision that is he identifies the spiritual promise of God's saving covenant so intimately with the sign that he actually calls the sign the covenant it's a supremely spiritual promise that God gives Abraham look at verses 7 and 8 here I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout the generations for an everlasting covenant not just an earthly thing or an outward thing to be God to you and to your offspring after you and I will give to you and to your offspring the land for an everlasting possession and I will be their God this is something that is forever so the first and the overriding thing about the mark of God's covenant family is that it speaks of a real spiritual union a relationship with the living God forever and ever and the new testament affirms that in Romans chapter 2 verse 29 the apostle Paul is plain he says circumcision circumcision is not outward and physical circumcision is a matter of the spirit not by the letter never was just an outward and physical thing but it was a sign and a seal of something that is real and everlasting the

union with God the savior forever and ever in Romans chapter 4 Paul goes on and speaks about another aspect of the spiritual reality of circumcision when he says that Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised a sign and seal of the forgiveness of sins of his justification by being declared righteous before God as a spiritual thing and Moses too back in the book of

Deuteronomy was equally clear about that about the spiritual realities signified by circumcision without which the thing was meaningless it was far from being just an external ritual to receive the blessings of God's covenant of his eternal gospel they must give God their hearts now and always so in Deuteronomy chapter 10 verse 12 he says and now Israel what does the Lord require of you but to fear the Lord to walk in his ways to love him to serve God with all your heart and soul and to keep his commands and the statutes of the Lord circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn he was utterly plain right from the beginning that the outward sign of circumcision expressed externally what was to be true of the innermost heart in God's people that it was to be united to God alone forever and ever that it was to be cleansed and renewed from all defilement of heart by God's spirit and that it was a sign of sealing

[15:21] God's people with a righteousness that comes only by faith by trusting in the grace of God so the sign depicted the truth of God's gracious covenant promise that he would at last bring an end to sin's curse that he would at last cleanse and renew his people to be with him forever and ever and it also sealed that reality that's what Paul says it sealed it to Abraham personally guaranteeing to him both the privileges the blessings and of course the responsibilities there's the curses of the covenant as well and as you see the sign and the seal was applied not just to Abraham the great believer but to his children here to Ishmael verse 23 in Genesis 17 when he was a teenage boy and later of course to Isaac when he was born on the eighth day after his birth as stipulated here and by the way notice verse 10 here

God says every male in your household will be circumcised and not just your own naturalcy but foreigners as well see Abraham's family was a missionary family right from the very start it's actually quite striking the very next chapter Genesis 18 we see that when Abraham is interceding for the foreigners of the wicked city of Sodom and that's what happened that very day verse 27 they circumcised Ishmael and all the males in his household there's no mention of their faith there's no mention even of their consent but by virtue of God's call upon Abraham and his faithful response his whole household became a covenant household a household of faith receiving the privileges of God's gracious promises promises but also the warnings and the severe penalties of breaking God's covenant and so it was to be always throughout the Old Testament age of promise a missionary people a holy people for the Lord marked out as his by the sign of his gracious covenant the sign of circumcision but of course this is not the end of the story is it all of this was given to Abraham by way of promise

Hebrews 11 tells us by faith Abraham and indeed all the saints who will by faith they obeyed and they died in faith not having received the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar because God had promised something better for us that apart from us they should not be made perfect they should not be brought to completion what could be better you wonder than these marvelous promises of God to Abraham in this covenant signified by circumcision that he would be their God and they would be his people and he would renew their hearts forever what could possibly be better than that well of course only the actual fulfillment in history of all that God promised to Abraham and to his seed the actual accomplishment in history of everything that circumcision signified and promised and looked forward to the once for all cleansing from sin and the renewal of people's hearts forever the once for all reconciliation and restoration with God that was longed for from the very beginning of man's sin and humanity's expulsion from the presence of God in the garden that's what the whole Old Testament story is looking for and longing for waiting for

Moses in calling the Israelites to circumcise their hearts he was calling them to real repentance and faith and trust in God and ongoing obedience in God in their personal experience but he could do that only because he knew that God had promised that one day at last he will accomplish in history the great circumcision the putting away of sinful flesh forever and ever and the renewal and the cleansing of new birth for his people and he says that plainly at the end of Deuteronomy in chapter 30 one day despite your sin God will do this once and for all for all who are his and then the prophets of course longed for that day and foretold that day more and more the day the great day of

God's intervention in history to bring that true and that everlasting renewal and union with God for his people forever and ever to Ezekiel the prophet spoke about it in chapter 26 of his prophecy a time is coming he says when I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and from all the idols

I will cleanse you and I'll give you a new heart and a new spirit I'll put within you and you will be my people and I will be your God Jeremiah chapter 31 of his prophecy similar words the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah I will forgive their iniquity I'll remember their sins no more ultimate forgiveness that's the better things that are still to come the Old Testament saints like Abraham saw and greeted afar off and had to wait for so that as Hebrews 11 said only together with us who have the privilege of living in these last days of fulfillment only together with us should their story be made perfect be brought to completion should they inherit all that we also shall inherit as recipients of this new covenant the everlasting covenant that God promised but where does this great promise that circumcision proclaims of real and lasting cleansing and renewal and reconciliation with God where does it find fulfillment where is this decisive action of God that does that well the answer of course we know is in is in the person and in the saving work of the Lord Jesus

[21 : 52] Christ on the cross everything every promise of God is fulfilled in him and in him alone and so as the apostle Paul says and here's Colossians chapter one if you'd like to turn to it Colossians one and two that we read from he has delivered us Jesus has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son in him we have redemption the forgiveness of sins that's Colossians one verses 13 and 14 and Paul goes on to describe that in that little passage we read in Colossians chapter two big in 8 verse 11 he describes it as the once and for all great circumcision listen to verse 11 again in him that is in Christ you and he's talking here to Gentiles not to Jews Gentile believers in him you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of flesh by the circumcision of

Christ isn't that striking that in Christ alone these physically uncircumcised Gentile believers he says are therefore truly circumcised that is they truly do belong to the household of God to the family of God to the people of God and they don't need anything else to be sure of the fullest spiritual blessings that's what this whole letter to the Colossians is about by the way in Christ alone and through faith in him comes every blessing of heaven and earth just by trusting and following Jesus they are Paul says truly circumcised forever they're cleansed they're renewed they're united to Christ forever so there's no need anymore for circumcision in the flesh for them if they're to become fully and completely members of God's family they don't need that they've been fully circumcised through Jesus

Christ so what then if circumcision no longer is the thing that determines who truly is and is not part of the family of God in the new covenant age in the age of fulfillment what is the mark of belonging if it's not circumcision well let's think about that the second thing the mark the sign of God's covenant family of faith in this age of fulfillment and the answer that the new testament gives us so very clearly is that this witnessing household this household of God this family of God is marked out clearly as his by baptism look at these verses in Colossians 2 in the age of promise Abraham and all Israel after him were marked out by circumcision as a sign of the redemption that was promised in the Christ who was to come but so in the age of fulfillment we have baptism as a sign of redemption accomplished in the

Christ who has come and that's exactly the point that Paul is making here in Colossians chapter 2 to these gentile converts in Colossians in the old days of promise it was true outsiders could belong could come in and join the people of God but they had to be circumcised to fully join God's people you weren't allowed to take the Passover if you weren't circumcised but that is not the case any longer Paul says because look at verse 11 in him that is in Christ you were truly circumcised in the death of Christ that was applied to you when you believe when you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and everything that that right of physical circumcision signified that is the putting off of the body of sinful flesh that is signified to you now by baptism look carefully at verses 11 and 12 look at verse 11 in him in

Christ you were circumcised and then there's a parenthesis there really explaining the reality of the fulfillment in Christ it wasn't a circumcision done by hands and the flesh but it was by the putting off of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism in him you were circumcised having been buried with him in baptism you see this sentence there's a sandwich

isn't it with circumcision on one side baptism on the other and in between there's the reality that both of those signs speak of the actual dealing with the body of flesh our sinful nature through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross what one of the signs pointed to prospectively pointing forward looking for fulfillment the other one speaks of retrospectively looking backwards at having been fulfilled and so it's no surprise then to find the

[27 : 23] New Testament speaking about baptism and what baptism marks out and what it means in exactly the same sort of ways as the Old Testament book of circumcision it's a sign of true cleansing and renewal by the Holy Spirit just as Ezekiel promised he saved us says Paul to Titus by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior he he has sanctified us cleansing his church by the washing of water with the words says Paul to Ephesians it speaks of forgiveness and renewed hearts by faith just as Jeremiah promised baptism saves you not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ says Peter it's a pledge from God to us that our conscience is clean that is that we are justified in his sight because

Jesus has been raised for our justification that's how Paul puts it in Romans 4 verse 25 see how parallel these signs are circumcision was a sign of God's gospel promise based on that once for all decisive action in history to forgive sins through Christ and his death in the future baptism is a sign of that same covenant promise based on Christ's once for all action on the cross now in the past but they're both signs of the same gospel of sovereign saving grace because there's only ever been one gospel one way of salvation one savior that's what we read about in galatians chapter three when paul says the gospel was preached in advance to abraham and the blessing promised to abraham comes to the uncircumcised gentiles he says in christ so in galatians three verse 27 for if any of you were baptized into christ you have put on christ there is neither slave nor free there is no jew or gentile there is no male or female for you are all one in christ jesus and if you're christ through baptism then you are abraham's offspring you are heirs of that promise heirs of the covenant that circumcision was all about in the first place and that's why paul says repeatedly that now physical circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't mean anything because what matters is the new creation that has now begun in christ the one new family of faith in christ jesus jew and gentile brought together baptized into christ and so he says to ephesians there is one body there is one lord there is one faith there is one baptism one one one not two and circumcision then is no longer the mark of god's covenant people of faith in his family it's no longer the mark of belonging that's an era that's an age that is now past and so he says to the philippian church we are the circumcision we who glory in christ jesus we are the community that are marked out by this new covenant sign of baptism i think all of that is is pretty clear i hope that's clear to us all but here's the question if god has from the beginning of his dealing with his people if he's delighted to deal in families and if circumcision if the mark of belonging to the people of god in the old days in the days of shadows and promises if it was given to the children of god's people then and if it was commanded to be given without fail to the children of god's people is it really conceivable that in these last days now in these better days the days of fulfillment and the new covenant which is by definition a better covenant with better promises is it conceivable that god would have us now to restrict or constrict the blessings of his covenant grace so as to exclude our children the children of believers to exclude them from the household of faith and the orbit of his grace so we can no longer see our little ones as truly part of god's church so that we're to see them as outsiders as foreigners foreigners to the covenants of promise that means pagans that means god haters that's what outsiders were in the bible is that conceivable is the grace of god in the fulfillment of his promises through jesus christ now somehow less gracious to us and to our children than it was under moose so it's not any longer a promise to you and to your son and your daughter but to you and not at all to your sons and daughters until such a time as they can respond in a certain prescribed way and convince everyone beyond doubt of their intellectual understanding and articulation of the christian faith well it certainly seems surely that must be inconceivable for to believe the whole tenor of the bible's movement from grace to greater grace in the fulfillment of all things in jesus christ and moreover it would be such a massive reversal wouldn't it of all the covenant ways that god had dealt with his people all through history all through the scriptures for the new testament church to stop thinking of their children as properly included among the professing family of the saints of god and if that were to be the case surely we would expect and need to have major discussion serious discussion taking place in the new testament as to why that

should be so because after all there's a huge amount of of teaching in there about certain things that did require enormous persuasion to make the new testament church think things had changed circumcision itself for example paul's always having to say why it doesn't matter why we've moved past that age the food laws and certain things from the old testament people of god that were changed with the coming of christ people took a lot of convincing about that and they had to be taught explicitly no no no not that anymore well surely with circumcision and with baptism we would expect the same we'd expect far more if the children of the new covenant were no longer to be included and marked out as being among god's people but in fact we don't find that at all we find rather consistently the very opposite of that so in the gospels for example when people brought their their little ones to jesus mostly infants jesus did not rebuke them and turn them away and say no no no no no not until they profess faith themselves no and he rebuked the people who tried to stop them coming and he said let the little children come to me because to such belongs the kingdom of heaven and without waiting for any sign of faith on their part he took them in his arms and he blessed them and the blessing of god almighty through the person of the son of god himself that is something that is no trivial thing it's fraught with with promise the word blessed remember in the beatitudes it is the it is the pronouncement of god of acceptance into his kingdom so that's what we see from the lord jesus himself in the apostolic preaching in the acts the apostles do not say at pentecost repent and be baptized every one of you except that is your children who can't be part of christ church until they've decided for themselves it's not like moses gracious gospel anymore it's no longer for you and for your son and for your daughter thank god he didn't say that he says the promise is for you and for your children as well as those who are far off still the gentiles and all that the lord is going to call it's greater grace even than moses day it's for those far far off as well and all through the acts of the apostles what we do not see is the baptism of only believing heads of households to the exclusion of their families the apostles pattern mirrors exactly the lord's pattern with abraham when he believed and all his household received the mark of circumcision well it's exactly the same in the new testament there are seven household baptisms in the book of acts and three of them that are individually named it is explicitly said and it said in two of the others where it's not people are not explicitly named and lydia's one and the philippine jailer in act 16 it's explicitly said that they as individuals believed and that as a result the whole of their households were baptized now whether infants are present in those households or not isn't the point we can't prove that either way although it seems highly unlikely there's no children in any of these households but the point is whatever age the people were in these households they were included in the family of the church by virtue of the faith of the head of the household and that's indisputable when we read the epistles the letters to the churches in the new testament we find that the apostles clearly address children as part of the church they're addressed as among the holy as among the saints as those who belong to the church through baptism so in the next chapter here of colossians chapter three paul commands children to obey their parents in the lord because he considers them to be in the lord in ephesians chapter five it's the same children receive instruction in just the same way as fathers and mothers do and husbands and wives do because they're part of the church they belong to the lord they're responsible to live as the lord's people first corinthians seven paul explicitly says that the children of even one believing parent are holy that they're set apart for the lord in fact he takes for granted that they take that for granted because he uses that to argue his point about a mixed marriage he says well you know this is true of your of your children so obviously it must be true in a marriage situation there's total consistency in god's pattern right from the very beginning you are a people holy to the lord said moses to israel you and your sons and your daughters so you must live as a people holy to the lord set apart living out the meaning of your circumcision with circumcised hearts in humble faith before the lord and the apostles say to the church in the new testament you are a people holy to the lord including your children and you must walk in a manner worthy of the calling that you have received in your baptism that's how paul talks in ephesians chapter 4 and 5 the promise is to you and to your children and the blessings of the grace of god belong to our families as do of course the responsibilities that go with that so how can we possibly deny the sign of that promise and the sign of those responsibilities to our little ones of whom long before as believers we have had to say lord we entrust them to you we entrust their future to you and god has said to us take this child take this child of promise and nurture him for me mark her out publicly as mine from earliest days teach them to walk in my ways all the days of their lives we can't deny them that sign and that assurance we want to rejoice in this wonderful assurance of god's grace

to us as believing parents as we lay hold on god's promises as we trust him and as we as we teach our little ones to grow up into him to love him to obey him to serve him all the days of their lives as god commands us to do right from the very beginning friends that's the great privilege of the christian family according to scripture we don't want to pass that by there are many christian parents you know who live with fear about their children fear that they won't follow the lord fear that they'll go astray living with a constant sense of anxiety god does not want us to raise our little ones in fear like that he wants us to raise them in faith in trust in his gracious promises assured of his loving inclination towards our little ones who we gladly bring into his arms from earliest age even from before their birth even from before their conception and in this gracious gift of of baptism you see that word of assurance is given to us all not just audibly but visibly tangibly we're going to see it before our eyes and whenever a little one is baptized we see again the wonderful grace and mercy and promise of god to us and to our children and for parents when in in due time our little ones might say to us just as they as they said to their parents about the passover and said what does this mean daddy mommy what is what did it mean my baptism what we say to them what we say to them well on that day in front of the whole company of god's people people who love god and trust god his family on that day the lord jesus promised to all of them and to us as your parents and to you that if you go on trusting him all the days of your life then as surely as the lord lives he will wash away your sins he will fill your heart with love to him he will enable you to serve him all the days of your life that's what he's promised to you and that's what your baptism means so our prayer for all these little ones this morning as it is for all our children in the church claimed for the lord jesus christ through their baptism our prayer is not for some kind of dramatic conversion many years from now that we're desperately desperately waiting for to find our assurance in now our prayer is that as they grow as they're brought up as they mature in the lord jesus christ their testimony will be that of the psalmist that we sung at the beginning or of the psalmist in psalm 22 that they should say you or he who took me from the womb you made me trust in you at my mother's breast on you i was cast from my birth and from my mother's womb you have been my god that's our prayer for these little ones being baptized this morning and it's the prayer for every child every little one growing up in this the household of faith and we say amen so let it be let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you are the god of grace

[44 : 30] whose grace goes before us who knew us even as we were knitted together in our mother's wombs yours is the grace that surrounds us every day of our life here on this earth and yours is the grace that promises to bring us home forever to be part of your glorious household and family of faith and of love forever and ever eternally so help us lord our gracious savior our gentle shepherd to whom little ones are dear and precious help us all we pray to walk in faith and trust and to lay hold of these gracious promises and signs of your mercy that we might know the assurance and the peace that you promise to every household that loves and follows you and that this might abound to the blessing of your people and the glory of our lord jesus christ in whose name we pray amen tom you now to me and the ■ which