

The Promised Seed Who Brings Delight

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[0 : 00] So let's turn this morning to God's Word, shall we? And we're in the book of Genesis. Willie is resuming a series in Genesis. We have plenty of visitor Bibles around the place, just on the sides at the back.

So if you don't have a Bible with you, please do make use of one of the church visitor Bibles. And we're going to be reading from two places. The first is in Genesis 17, and then secondly in chapter 21.

So Genesis 17, and we are reading from verse 15. So Genesis 17, beginning there at verse 15. And God said to Abraham, Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?

Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. God said, No, but Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.

[1 : 39] I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you.

Behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.

But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. So flick over a couple of pages to chapter 21.

Reading from verse 1. 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. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.

[2 : 49] And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 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, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?

Yet I have borne him a son in his old age. Amen. May God bless to us his words.

Well, do turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis and to chapter 21. And we're looking particularly at these first seven verses. The story of Abraham marks the beginning of real Christian faith.

And Paul makes it plain in the New Testament that God revealed to Abraham the same gospel promises that we trust in, and that those who trust in Jesus are Abraham's true seed.

[4 : 00] They're true heirs, the true inheritors of the promises God gave to him. And so Abraham's household is the beginning of true Christian faith. The people who are marked out by God, then by circumcision of all males, and now in these last days by baptism of all males and females, baptized into Christ.

Now we saw a while back, we're looking at Abraham, that as soon as his household was formed, began the story of real Christian mission. God's people, God's friends, like Abraham, are those who proclaim God's gospel to the world, and who intercede with God for the world.

But now as we come to the climax of the story of Abraham in the birth of Isaac at last, the promised seed, we will see the beginning of a pattern that foreshadows something much greater still.

Because you see, the promise that God gave to Abraham back in Genesis 12, and again in chapter 15 and chapter 17, that through his seed all the earth would be blessed, that is only partially fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, the long-awaited son.

But the very pattern of his birth and his life is itself prophetic. Points forward to what God will ultimately surely accomplish, and that is the birth of the one who will at last destroy the serpent,

who will reverse the curse of sin, and at last bring blessing to those of every nation in a world that is remade, that is renewed.

[5 : 39] And that was Abraham's hope. Hebrews chapter 11 tells us very plainly, He knew he was a stranger on this earth. He sought a true homeland.

He sought a better country. A city with lasting foundations. The city of God. And this, in the climax of Abraham's earthly story, we see many, many foreshadowings of that far greater fulfillment that's still to come.

Remember, Jesus himself said that Abraham rejoiced that he would see Christ today. Indeed, he saw it, said Jesus, and he was glad. And I think Abraham saw a lot, lot more than we may often imagine.

Because Abraham himself, in his earthly life, he witnessed the birth of a promised son who brought delight at his very birth. He witnessed a persecuted son who brought division on earth by his life. And he knew a precious son who was dedicated to God in death. You see, in Isaac, the seed promised to Abraham, we see the beginning of a redeeming pattern that will reach its zenith only, only in the wonderful birth and life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in the fullness of the time was sent by God to redeem all the true seed of Abraham.

[7 : 07] And to bring them from every tribe and every nation into his own family forever and ever. So we're going to see that over these next weeks.

But this morning, I want to focus on the first seven verses here that we read in chapter 21, which are all about the promised seed that brings delight from God by his birth.

And there are verses that tell us about the wonderful covenant promises of God in his eternal gospel. Look at verse one and two, first of all, because they bring home to us the certainty, the certainty of God's covenant promises for his people.

That unmistakable message of these verses is that the true grace of God always delivers what he has promised for his people.

God is always at work to fulfill the promises that he has given for those who are his. There may be many delays, at least it seems so to us.

[8 : 10] There may be many mysteries. There may be much waiting. There may be even much weeping. But God will bring every single promise of his to a certain fulfillment.

You can trust this God to do that. Verse one, 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. It's so brief, isn't it? So matter of fact, that you can almost skip right over the massive significance of what these verses convey, that all the promises, going back to chapter 12 and Genesis 15 and Genesis 17, they're all fulfilled just as God said, according to his plan.

Three times, as God said, as he had promised, as he had spoken. The quiet precision of God's control.

That's how Derek Kidner puts it. Now, it's quite easy sometimes, isn't it, to see that sort of thing outside your own life or looking back maybe on your own life from the future many decades on.

[9 : 28] But it is not so easy to see that as true when you're right in the midst of it yourself. It certainly did not look like that to Abraham, did it? What a story there is between Genesis chapter 12, that first promise, and here in chapter 21.

It did not seem like the quiet precision of God's control. There were more than 25 years of dramas and of disappointments. There was the waiting.

There was the warfare. There was in and out of the promised land. There was all the trauma in Abraham's extended family. All the story of Lot, remember. All the problems in his immediate family with Hagar and Sarah, remember that.

Dealing with kings, rescuing nephews, nearly losing his wife at least twice. And witnessing the terrible destruction, remember, of the cities of the plain.

And all that time, all through those years, there was no sign of what God had said. Abraham, this is what your whole life is about. bringing the promised son and heir to birth through your wife Sarah.

[10 : 36] Not a sign of it. I'm quite sure that if Abraham did have a hymn book, he would have sung often, often with a hint of great disappointment and regret, these words that we sang.

God moves in a mysterious way. A mysterious way. A very mysterious way, I'm sure he thought, in his own life. And I'm sure many of us often feel exactly like that.

It's one thing to know, isn't it, in your theology, that God is sovereign. That everything is under the quiet precision of God's control. But often it doesn't feel like that, does it?

And that makes it very difficult sometimes for us to handle things, because it doesn't feel like that. And we've seen Abraham waiting and waiting and getting impatient about whether he could really trust God's promise.

So he turns to self-preservation, remember, more than once. Instead of trusting God to protect him. I have to do it my way. As a result, he nearly lost his wife twice and many other things.

[11 : 47] And he turned himself to seed preservation, you might call it, trying to get the result his way. Not with Sarah, but with Hagar. And then most recently, last time we saw it in chapter 20, disgracing himself utterly in front of the pagan king.

So that Abraham, instead of being what God called him to be, a blessing to the nations of the world, well, he becomes the one who brings plagues and barrenness to the people around about him.

But now you see, it's as though God is saying, all right, Abraham, step aside and just look at how effortlessly and how perfectly and how flawlessly my plan and promise is coming to fruition.

There's no delay. There's no mistakes. There's no muddle. There's no failure of God to hear your prayers and answer your prayers. No, no. God is not in a hurry, but he's not late.

It is all unfolding exactly to plan. As God had said, as he had promised, at the time of which God has spoken to him.

[12 : 55] He is the unchanging God, the unchangeable God, who does exactly as he's promised, exactly as he's said. He visits his people, says verse 1.

He draws near in par with a display of God's personal presence to bring to fruition everything that he's spoken. As Joshua said later, not one word of all God's promises that the Lord had made fell to the ground.

All came to pass. Because you see, the true grace of God always delivers what he's promised for his people. And you can trust him to do that.

That's what Moses, the preacher, is driving home to his first hearers, the people who listen to this. They constantly needed reassurance that God's promise to them was secure, just as we need that assurance.

But what God begins, he will finish. And they knew the same God, didn't he? The God who visits his people to fulfill his promises. Read the very last chapter of Genesis, later Genesis 50, where Joseph, on his deathbed, is prophesying and saying, God will surely visit you and bring you out of Egypt back into the land which God swore to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

[14 : 20] And then in Exodus chapter 3, you read about how Moses took Joseph's bones when God did exactly as he promised and visited them in their affliction to deliver them. And they had a lot of waiting, a lot of trusting God to do because they had not yet either seen all God's promises fulfilled.

They were still awaiting, weren't they, the full possession of the land as they traveled with Moses. And they also very often doubted God's plan, doubted God's power to do what he had said he would do.

And Moses is saying to them, no, you can trust this God. As God said, so he will do in God's perfect time.

Look at what God did in all this that he promised to Abraham and Sarah. Well, this is your God too. You can trust him. And this is our God too, isn't he?

Can't we trust him? We need encouragement, don't we, to remember the certainty of God's promises, all of God's promises to us.

[15 : 29] And of course, we have so much more, don't we, of the story of God's wonderful promises, far more even than these first hearers of Moses. Far more witnesses to the great visitations of God all through history to fulfill his promises.

The whole Old Testament is full of these things. That's why it's here for us, isn't it? That's why Paul says the things written in the former times are written for us so that through the encouragement of these scriptures we might have hope.

We can read about Ruth, can't we, coming to Bethlehem because the Lord had visited his people there in the famine to give them food. We can read in Jeremiah 29 of God's promise to visit his people again after 70 years of exile and fulfill his promise and bring them back into their own land as he did.

We can read of how God visited Hannah as he had said in her distress and she bore Samuel and other sons and daughters. God is always at work to fulfill the promises to his people through a great and wonderful visitation of his power and his presence.

And of course, most wonderfully of all, we are witnesses to the great visitation that brought to fulfillment all, all the promises of God for his people forever in the birth of Jesus Christ.

[16:52] How does the New Testament open? Well, Zechariah, the prophet, remember, singing for joy about the birth of Jesus to come. Blessed be the Lord, 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.

You see, this birth at last of the promised seed of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was in answer to God's promise at his time as he had said.

He visited his people. There is a certainty about the covenant promises of our God. And that's the message of these two little verses.

But it's the message, isn't it, of the whole Christian gospel that God is always at work to fulfill his promises to those who are his. And you can trust him to do that.

And that means that you can trust him in every single detail of your life, whether it's big or whether it's small. No matter how mysterious it may seem to you at present, no matter how slow God may seem to be in acting, no matter how perplexing the whole situation is, he is working all things together for good to those who love him.

[18:15] He is working for the blessing of those that he loves. Look at the evidence that we have all through the Bible. If he kept these promises through thousands and thousands of years, if he at last sent his Son to be our Savior as he promised, then as Paul says, he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him give us all things?

It's impossible that God will not keep all his promises to us. And so we can trust him. We don't despair. We can have hope no matter how dark our path may seem at times.

Now, of course, let me say this. We've got to be careful. I'm talking about faith. I'm not talking about fantasy. Now, sometimes people may be trusting in things that God hasn't promised.

It might just be self-suggestion. It might just be trusting in things that we want to believe that God has promised. But actually, he hasn't. It's just wishful thinking. I really, really, really believe that God's going to give me this job.

Or I really, really believe God's going to give me that romance. I really, really believe that God has this particular ministry for me. I need to be very careful. Or sometimes it's somebody else saying to you, well, I really believe God's told me that you're going to be healed.

[19:42] Or that God will do this or God will do that in your life, whatever it might be. And what you need to have is faith to claim those promises. Friends, that can be very dangerous. That is very damaging.

Indeed, sometimes it's very damaging. I once watched a pastor, a TV pastor in the United States, telling the congregation he was still believing God for his second private jet. God had given him one already, but he believed that he was going to give him a second one.

Well, somewhat regretfully, I have to say that there are no promises in Scriptures for private jets for pastors. So, Paul, you and I, I'm afraid we're still on easy jet. What there are promises in the New Testament for pastors is plenty of suffering and opposition and struggles for the sake of the gospel. And indeed, Paul says, everyone, every believer who seeks true godliness will be persecuted. So, it's important to remember that. It is not manufactured promises.

It's not wishful thinking that we're to trust in. That's just folly. That's fantasy, isn't it? And actually, it's very damaging because that just gives enormous ammunition, doesn't it, to atheists and opposers of the Christian faith to ridicule us?

[20:59] And they're right to do that in that sense. Now, what we're talking about here is faith in what God has said, in what God has promised, and in the appointed times that God has revealed to His people.

And for us, you see, we have all of these things that we're clearly written in the Scriptures, in the Bibles. Peter, in his second letter, 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 Jesus Christ.

And he exhorts us to remember the promises of the prophets of old and the commands of our Lord Jesus through His apostles. And he says that these are like a lamp shining in the dark until the day

of Jesus dawns in our hearts.

See, we have the certainty of God's covenant promises in our Scriptures, and we can trust them. He tells us, doesn't he, that we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

That is a promise. And we can trust it. That means we don't need to fear the BBC's constant warnings about world calamities and natural catastrophes or whatever else it is next week.

[22 : 14] Jesus says to us, I will be with you even to the end of the age. That is a promise. And therefore, we do not need to feel abandoned in our Christian calling.

Even if we feel sometimes that God is distant or He's left us alone. No, He has not. He has promised. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Whoever comes to me, says Jesus, I will never cast out.

That is a promise. And that means that if you are fearful that some sin that you've committed must cause Jesus now to cast you out and be finished with you, well, you must banish that fear because you have the promise of the Lord Jesus.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things, all that you need in life will be added to you. That's a promise.

So, you don't need to feel fear and anxiety about your life or about your job or about food or clothing. Even if there's a great recession approaching or whatever there might be.

[23 : 33] You may not feel that you have all you want, of course, but God promises that He will give us everything we need. That is a promise. And Jesus says, listen to this, Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life.

We were looking at that last week, weren't we? Whoever believes in me shall never die. I will raise him up at the last day. That is a promise. That is a promise, friends, that you and I can trust and cling to in the face even of the dark valley of the shadow of death.

And I could go on and on and on, couldn't I? All day. But the message is so simple, it's so clear.

You can trust our God. His true grace will always deliver what He has promised for His people.

Always. As God has said, as He has promised, in His good and perfect time. And you need to know that. As my friend Ralph Davis would say, you need to work it down into your pores, the truth of it.

Because there is often, as there was with Abraham, there is often a long time of waiting involved from our point of view sometimes. God's timing is perfect, but it often seems very, very difficult to us.

[25 : 00] And see, that brings us to the second thing here, because not only is God at work to fulfill His purpose for us, but He's also at work always to fulfill His purpose in us, in us as His people.

And verses 3 to 4 bear witness, you see, to this in terms of the call of God's covenant promises on His people. The true grace of God is always at work in God's people to draw out the obedience of faith that God has commanded from them.

So yes, there may be many lapses, many failures, but God will bring His people to the obedience of faith that He has called them to. By God's grace you can and you will obey this God.

notice the significance of verses 3 and 4. Abraham names his son Isaac. That is, he's obeying the command that God gave back in chapter 17 that we read that accompanied the promise.

Sarah, your wife, will bear a son, there's the promise, and you will call his name Isaac, there's the command. Seen it again and again, haven't we? All through, God's commands and His promises always come together.

[26 : 17] And likewise, here He says that He circumcised Isaac on the 8th day. Again, that was in obedience to God's command in chapter 17. God said to Abraham, didn't He, walk before me and be blameless.

Well, that is what real faith is. Walking in obedience to God's commands in response to God's promise. That's what Paul in the New Testament calls the obedience of faith.

That's real faith. That's what love to God looks like according to Jesus. Anyone who loves me keeps my word, my commands.

And you see, these verses are speaking about that simplicity of real believing faith. By faith, Abraham obeyed is how Hebrews 11 sums it up. And that wasn't just some sudden flash of a one-off thing immediately after his first call.

No, no, no. It was an obedience that was forged on the anvil of 25 years of journeying with God through many dangers and toils and snares.

[27 : 23] And it was an obedience he learned as God's grace led him through all the dramas, all the crises, all the muck-ups, and all the worst moments even of his own failures.

And it was matured, you see, as God worked in his life to draw out that obedience of faith by his grace. even as God was working out the purpose for his life in bringing the promise to fruition.

Because, see, it's not enough for God that he would simply achieve his purposes for our lives in terms of what will happen to us and what he might do through us and so on.

He is determined to fill his purpose in us so that we will become the people that God has called us to be. A people he has chosen to be holy to the Lord.

That's what Moses told his people that God had chosen them to be. You can read it in Deuteronomy chapter 26. He's chosen you to be, he says, a treasured possession, a people holy to him, to be like him, keeping his commands.

[28 : 35] And Paul says the same thing in the New Testament. In Ephesians 2, we are created, he says, in Christ Jesus for good works to image our God. We're to be a holy people, says Peter, to proclaim and to reflect to the world the glory of God.

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

God's working his purpose to fulfillment in us by his grace to make us like him. He's shaping us, isn't he, into the image of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the goal of God's promise to us. And the New Testament tells us, doesn't it, that even Jesus had to learn obedience. Yes, he was without sin, but he had to learn the true meaning.

He had to learn the cost of the struggle to obey his father's word, to trust his promises all through life. And that's the way it was also with Abraham. And that's the way it is for us. And you see, that's what accounts very often for the waiting, for the perplexities, for the mysteries of God's unfolding plan in our lives even now.

[29 : 59] When it seems to me maybe that God isn't working for us, or God's forgotten to keep his promises, or he doesn't know what he's doing, or it's all gone wrong. No. It's rather that in the way that he is delivering what he's promised to his people, he's drawing out by his amazing grace what he is shaping us into.

He is enabling us to learn to be the people that he's called us to be. Like Abraham, obedient servants, faithful friends of this God.

See, the New Testament tells us that we are sons of Abraham, that we are heirs of the same promise, and that he's blessing us along with Abraham, the man of faith.

And that's why actually immediately after the chapter in Hebrews 11, all about Abraham's faith, the writer goes right on to speak about Christian believers. Listen to what he says. Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

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

[31 : 11] It's for discipline that you have to endure because God is treating you as sons. That's what explains the perplexities that we so often have in our lives, you see.

He goes on, he's disciplining us for our good that we might share his holiness. It seems painful at present, of course, yet later it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

See, God's true grace, even as it's at work for us to fulfill his eternal purposes for us, all the way that he is doing that, it's at work in us as well.

It's shaping our hearts to draw out from us what God has called us to be. And his purpose for us is that we should become like him in the image of his son, the Lord Jesus.

And so he won't stop doing that ever until we are the people of obedient faith that he's called us to be. That is God's goal. And that's why it may often seem to us that God moves in a very mysterious way, but nevertheless he is performing wonders, wonders of grace, not just for us in the end, but in us all the way to the end.

[32 : 42] William Cooper, who wrote that hymn, he knew that. He was a man who suffered terribly from dreadful depressive illness. And actually, you know, it was on the brink of a collapse into psychotic depressive madness that he wrote the words of that hymn that we sang.

Listen to some of these verses again. Abraham could have surely sung these verses with great feeling, I think, here in Genesis 21. 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 sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind the frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour.

The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. I don't know what God's grace is allowing each of you to be exposed to right at this moment, but I do know this, none of it, none of it is in vain.

[34 : 06] and in the midst, he is working his sovereign will for your life and around your life. And he's drawing out his purpose in your life for you to shape you to be the man and the woman of obedient faith that he's called you to be.

You can and you will by his grace faithfully obey this God. That is the call of his covenant promise, and it will not fail. His purpose will ripen fast, even though it seems very slow to you perhaps. And though the bud may have a bitter taste, the flower will be sweet. There will be joy in the wonders that he performs for you and in you by his grace.

And that brings us to the final thing, you see, which is the character, 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 always at work to fulfill his promises for us and in us, but he has a purpose to fulfill with us.

[35 : 27] and that is that we should share in the sheer joy that abounds wherever he is to be found. And that means that though there may be many sorrows, there may be many trials along the way, there may be many tears and many heartbreaks in our lives, here is God's promise, you will rejoice with delight and with great joy in this God.

Joy is the goal of God's grace always. Always. Look at the end of this story, everyone's laughing. Everyone is laughing, aren't they?

In fact, I'm sure the Lord himself is laughing. Verse 5, Abraham was 100 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. It's laughter of wonderment, of joy, of happiness, isn't it? Why? Well, look at verse 7. Who would have said?

Who would have said that these ancient geriatrics would be changing nappies as they looked on the mantelpiece and saw the king's telegram for a hundredth birthday party? Who would have said it? Says Sarah.

[36 : 42] Well, actually, somebody had said it, hadn't they? God had said it, plainly, many times. And they're back in chapter 17. And there was laughter then, wasn't there?

There was laughter of a different kind. There was a natural laughter of doubt and of disbelief. Not scornful unbelief, but incredulity, doubt that God could really do such a thing.

And they were just like us, weren't they? Abraham and Sarah just couldn't comprehend God's ability to exceed every human thought or imagining. But now, you see, that laughter of incredulity and disbelief at the staggering nature of God's promise, it had given way, hadn't it, to a laughter of utter joy and wonder that God had done everything that He had promised in their lives.

I expect many of us have experienced the laughter of joy at times of just wonderful things that God's done. Things perhaps that we thought were impossible but now have come to pass and have proved wonderfully true.

But that's the character of God's covenant promise. That is the mark, it's the hallmark of our God. Psalm 126, When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongue with shouts of joy.

[38 : 12] God loves to rejoice with His people, to delight His people and to bring them joy. And this is a scene of sheer, unmitigated joy.

And yet, do you notice that even in the midst of the joy, He won't let them forget the sheer abundance of His grace. That He brings enormous joy even in the face of His people's unbelief and their total unworthiness to receive it.

Do you see that in Isaac's very name? It means he laughs. That's a name that brings both rejoicing but also rebuke to their hearts, doesn't it? Because every time that name was uttered, little boy, he laughs, it would remind them, wouldn't it?

Both of their disbelieving laughter but also the joyful laughter. In His very name there's a rebuke, isn't there? For their sinfulness and their unbelief as well as a reminder of the great grace and the mercy and the joy-bringing love of God.

You see, that's what God's true grace always does to us, doesn't it? It never pretends away our sin. Actually, it magnifies our sin. It reminds us that we're in the dust.

[39 : 37] It humbles us. And yet, at the same time as reminding us of that, it buries our sin in a sea of that same grace of God.

And it lifts up our heart in joy and delight in the wonders of our great Savior. And that's always the character of God's true grace, of His true gospel.

Think of old Zechariah the priest again in Luke chapter 1. Remember the angel said to him, you'll have a son in your old age and you'll call his name John and you'll rejoice in his birth. And El Zechariah couldn't believe it either.

And so the angel said, well, you're going to be dumb. You can't speak. And he couldn't speak until at last, remember, at John's birth, he was asked the name. And what did he do?

He wrote down, his name is John. And suddenly, he's able to speak. And what he does is give a great song of joy and praise.

[40 : 37] And in that name, John, would be the same message of grace abounding despite his sinful unbelief. And it's the same, isn't it, with the name of our Lord Jesus, the name we love to hear, we love to speak its worth.

It sounds like music in our ear, the sweetest name of earth. But why? Why is it the sweetest name on earth? Because it tells me 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 in laughter and gladness and sheer joy. But it's the same name, isn't it, that humbles us in the dust.

Because we can't utter the name of Jesus, can we? But also being turned to the cross and to the blood that was shed for us and for our sins. We shall call his name Jesus, said the angel, because he will save his people from their sins.

It's the name that humbles us. Yet it's the name that exalts us to the place of joy and unending praise. because the goal of our God and his grace is joy, sheer joy and laughter and rejoicing.

[42 : 09] Paul says his kingdom is a place of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. God has made laughter for me. And what's the reward that Jesus says is the Father's for those who are his?

Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy, the joy of your master. God's people are a people of joy. And in the fullness of time, his grace will never fail to delight his people with great and abundant joy.

God has made laughter for me. It will be the testimony of every believer the world over in the end. And maybe that's hard for some of us to see this morning.

Maybe it feels to us like the darkness has completely blocked out the sun. Let me tell you, just as Isaac, the long promised seed, brought joy and laughter and delight at last to old Abraham and Sarah, just by the very fact of his birth, so also the very fact in history of the birth of the Lord Jesus, the promised seed, the Son of God.

It promises, it promises exceedingly abundantly more and forever that there will be joy and rejoicing and laughter and delight for you and for every Christian believer just as surely as the sun returns after the clouds and just as surely as day always follows night.

[43 : 44] It's God's covenant promise. It cannot fail. And his very name, Jesus, who saves us from our sin.

It's a reminder of that forever. So if at times you find that hard to believe, hard to hold on to, if it seems that for you the way is very dark and cloudy and confused and mysterious, if your past seems to be more full of sadness and joy and tears than of laughter, well, remember Abraham and Sarah and come back and read this chapter and see their joy and their delight at last.

And remember Jesus' own words, blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh. In Jesus, you see, our God is at work.

He's at work to deliver everything that He's promised for us and He's at work to draw out everything that He has purposed within us so that in His perfect time He will delight and rejoice with us in that abundant and everlasting joy of His house.

There is joy and laughter in abundance in the name of Jesus, in the name of the promised seed who brings delight.

[45 : 10] Well, let's pray. Amen. Lord, we thank You that however things may seem to be to us, the truth is that the quiet precision of Your control is over our lives and it's over this world and it is unassailable and it is working all things for good to everyone who loves the Lord Jesus.

So teach us, Lord, in our frailty and our uncertainty, teach us to turn daily to the name that brings music to our ears, to the name that tells us of our Savior's love, to the name that tells us that we can trust, that we need never fear.

The name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.