

# The Constancy of the Covenant God

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Now, on to our Bible reading, which is coming to us from Genesis 25 this morning. And that's on page 19 of the church Bibles, if you have one of them to hand.

Willie is preaching for us this morning, as we continue this series in the book of Genesis, looking at the life of Abraham as it draws to a close. So chapter 25, and we're reading the first 26 verses, beginning at verse 1.

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

Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

[ 1 : 39 ] Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre. The field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites.

There, Abraham was buried with Sarah, his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son. And Isaac settled at Bir Lahai Roy.

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

These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments.

Twelve princes, according to their tribes. These are the years of the life of Ishmael, 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.

[ 2 : 53 ] They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen. These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son.

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

And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah, his wife, conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said, if it is thus, why is this happening to me?

So she went to inquire of the Lord, and the Lord said to her, two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided. The one shall be stronger than the other.

The older shall serve the younger. When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak.

[ 4 : 08 ] So they called his name Esau. Afterward, his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel. So his name was called Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them.

Amen. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. And may he bless it to us this morning. We'll do open your Bibles at Genesis chapter 25 in the passage that we had read a little earlier.

Now, after all the excitement and the romance of chapter 24, this next situation does seem a little dull, even disjointed. A list of names, description of a funeral, and then details of a strangely troubling pregnancy.

But remember that Genesis is not a book of individual stories. Rather, it's one great unfolding story whose chief subject, whose chief director is the Lord himself.

And Moses writes to, well, to remind his people who God is, what God's like, what God is doing. Because just like us, they often face doubts and fears and challenges to their faith.

[ 5 : 28 ] They often ask, well, where are we going? Why? What's the point? Is this God that Moses speaks about really real? Will he do all these things that he's promised?

And these kind of questions still vex us, don't they? The traveling faithful on the road with Jesus today. But these verses, strange as they may seem at first, they tell us that we can trust God. By showing us so clearly the constancy. The constancy of his covenant grace. His promise does not fail. His plan is not forgotten. And indeed, his pattern is reassuringly familiar in all his dealings with his people.

And we didn't doubt him ever, even when things are very tough. So what we have here is a burial, a banishment, and a battle. And each of these speaks very eloquently about the constancy of our covenant God.

First of all, look at verses 7 to 11. About the burial. The burial of a patriarch. This is the centerpiece of the first half of the chapter. If you look, it's sandwiched between two lists of progeny.

[ 6 : 39 ] And the message, I think, is very clear. Death still reigns, but God's promise has not failed. It's being fulfilled. And there's no reason for you to doubt that it will go on being fulfilled.

Verse 8. We read, Abraham breathed his last and died. Death is the end. It's very final. Nothing quite so final, is there, as staring down at an open grave as a coffin is lowered down into it. And so, very often surrounded by death, there's great fear. Life can be very hard, can't it? Full of burdens. But, as Hamlet says, according to Shakespeare, who would these burdens bear to grunt and sweat under a weary life?

But, that the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose born no traveler returns, puzzles the will, and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.

People don't want to die, do they? People fight against sickness, fight against death. We talk about battling cancer and other diseases. But, here's the thing, death cannot be avoided.

[ 7 : 55 ] So, is the grunt and the sweat of a weary life really worth it in the end? Especially if there's a lot of extra grunt and sweat in life because you throw in your lot with God and with the people of God, the people of the gospel.

Being faithful to his call makes you so much more struggling in life. But, in the end, just like Abraham, you also will die and be buried. Is the struggle of faithful obedience to God really worth it in the end?

Well, these verses here tell us very plainly that, yes, death may still reign, even over Abraham, the friend of God. But, God's purpose has not failed.

God's promises have been fulfilled, and they are being fulfilled, and they will go on being fulfilled forever. First of all, here, you see, we're reminded how Abraham had been blessed in his earthly life, just as God had said.

God had promised him, hadn't he, a multitude of offspring. Indeed, in chapter 17, verse 4, he was promised that a multitude of nations, plural, would come from him, not just one, and that kings and that princes would arise from him.

[ 9 : 12 ] And here, well, the story of his death is surrounded by lists of these offspring and these nations. Verses 1 to 4 tell us of the six sons by the concubine Keturah, and also grandchildren.

And then, verses 12 to 18 speak of Ishmael's vast family of tribes, including princes. And then, in the middle, of course, above all, there is Isaac himself, the promised supernatural seed, the true heir who would inherit everything that God had given and promised to Abraham.

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

Not full of years, that's not in the text, just full means that he had a full and satisfied life. And God had promised exactly that, in almost the same words, back in chapter 15, verse 15.

You'll be buried at a good old age. And moreover, he was promised you will be buried in peace.

And so he was. Look at verse 9. Isaac and Ishmael together in peace, despite all the hostility that had prevailed before, and then again afterwards, as verse 18 bears witness to, against his kinsman was Ishmael.

[ 10 : 35 ] So Abraham was blessed in life and in death, according to promise. But the blessing's not over, because there's clear witness here to ongoing blessing beyond even earthly life.

Look at the end of verse 8. He was gathered to his people. And that said, notice before, we're told about him being buried. So it's not just saying that he was put in a family grave, along with his ancestors.

In fact, he wasn't. Verses 9 and 10 make that clear. No, that is an expression that points to a clear, ongoing existence after death. It's just very similar to what we read later on, of Jacob before his death in chapter 47.

Let me lie with my fathers, he said, in the land of promise, not in Egypt. Why was Jacob so bothered about where his body would be buried?

Well, because he knew that his bodily death was not the end. He's looking for more blessing, a greater blessing that's still to come, according to promise. As all of the patriarchs were, Hebrews chapter 11 is explicit about that.

[11:40] Their hope, we're told, was for a heavenly country. It was for an enduring city, the city of God. And that's what's signified here, just as strongly. See, the story for Abraham is not over, because God's covenant story is not over.

Abraham is blessed by dying in real hope of more and greater fulfillment yet to come. That's why his death is surrounded by these clear assertions about the continuation of God's promise for his seed and for his land.

So the promise seed is secure. Verses 5 and 6 secure Isaac's future. Verse 11 secures Isaac's blessing. God blessed Isaac, Abraham's son.

And the promised land is secure. Abraham's personal stake in God's kingdom, the place where God dwells, is secure. Look at verse 10. Abraham is buried in the place he purchased, purchased for his own possession.

Do you remember? You see what that's saying? Abraham, you see, had a true sense of perspective about the promise of God, the purpose of God. He knew that he was caught up in his life in something far, far greater.

[12:55] Far greater than just the part that he personally had to play. And that's why he could die in peace, content with his abundance from God in life and confidence in his future beyond death.

Abraham knew that God buries his workmen, as the saying goes, but his work goes on. And that's why he could face death with a steady eye, knowing that God's promise had never failed and never would fail.

It's a great thing, isn't it? When we can be content to play our part, when we can die in peace, passing the baton on to others, knowing that we've kept the faith.

And as Paul says to Timothy, we can joyfully look forward to that crown of righteousness that awaits the day of Christ's appearing. And we can look back, can't we, on our lives and on our history and we can see even more abundant fulfillment of God's promises, even than Abraham ever could. Because through Christ Jesus, the blessing promised to Abraham has come to Gentiles, to all the world, to us. And we've received the promised Holy Spirit through faith.

[14:03] We live in the age of the fullness of the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, death still reigns, doesn't it? It's the last enemy to be destroyed for us.

But God's promise has not failed. And the story's not over. And if Abraham died in peace, well, how much more can we in whose hearts dwell the Spirit who raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and promises also to give life to our mortal bodies?

We have better promises, don't we? Even than the promises that surrounded this buried patriarch. Because we have those promises spoken from the lips of a risen Lord Jesus.

A risen human body. But even here in death, as in life, Abraham bears witness to the constancy of our covenant God.

A God you can trust in life and in death. But second then, these verses speak rather solemnly of a banishing.

[15:13] The banishing of a progeny. And a family here is ruptured, but again, God's plan is not forgotten. For all these names and the genealogies that bracket Abraham's burial bear witness to God's promised blessings being fulfilled in his life, then doesn't it seem that the sending away of all of these sons described in verse 6 seems terribly cruel, even unjust?

This is the first mention that we have actually of Keturah and her sons. It seems likely that they predated in their births both Isaac and Ishmael and because they were older than them and in a sense preceded them in rank, to some degree, but they were illegitimate and they're all disinherited here and all banished.

Remember, that's what happened also to Ishmael back in chapter 21. His family, his descendants were sent away and as verse 18 here tells us, they were settled opposite Egypt towards Assyria,

that's Arabia.

So how do we explain this apparently cruel banishing? Well, it's certainly not a license to disinherit children or choose some as favorites over others.

The Israelites knew that very plainly. Moses had taught them that in Deuteronomy chapter 21.

Explicitly forbade having favorites or treating unloved offspring wrongly.

[16:45] But you see here, Abraham is acting on specific commands from God. He had to act this way as an essential preservation of the covenant promise.

Remember back in chapter 21, God overrides Abraham's own feelings, his own emotions when he wanted to keep Ishmael in the camp. But God says, no, you must send him away because through Isaac, that is, Isaac alone shall your offspring be named.

And it's the same here in verse 6, you see. It's the same principle. It's the same principle we saw last week in chapter 24. There can be no assimilation. The household of covenant faith has to be kept pure, otherwise it would never survive.

It would be destroyed. Its very purpose would come to nothing if it didn't remain pure. And sometimes, sometimes God's ruthless commitment to his covenant is very painful for his people as surely it was here for Abraham.

And it still is in the church as a household of faith today, isn't it? when painful partings, when ruptures of close natural bonds are sometimes needed for the sake of the gospel and the kingdom.

[17:59] Do you think it was easy for the Corinthian church, for example, to do what Paul commanded them to do in 1 Corinthians 5, to expel someone from the congregation whose behavior was corrupting the church, imperiling its very survival, let alone its witness to the world?

Do you think that was easy? Do you think it was easy for the church in Rome to follow through on Paul's words in Romans 16 and his command to watch out for and to avoid those who cause divisions in the fellowship because Paul says for such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites.

Very painful and hard, I would say. Especially when those people's outward demeanor is cloaked in all sorts of pious words, as Paul says, smooth talk and flattery that will certainly deceive some naive people.

so that people will be very, very uncomfortable about having to apparently take sides against them. And that's nearly always how it looks to some when these issues arise in a church and the divisive person always plays the victim.

Do you think it was easy for Titus, the church leader in Crete, to obey the apostolic command of Paul when he's told that as for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once, then twice, have nothing more to do with him.

[19:15] Knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned. Well, maybe Titus was a lot tougher than me, but I certainly would find that very hard.

It's a very hard responsibility to bear, especially when we're living in an age as we are where even committed Christian people squirm at the very thought of any sort of discipline like that in the church.

Where sentimentality nearly always wins over painful biblical faithfulness. My guess is that if Abraham was around today, there would be howls of protest, evangelical protest at that, against his banishment of his flesh and blood.

It would be Abraham who would be labeled as intolerant, as an extremist. Isn't that right? But it was no doubt hard, it was no doubt painfully hard even then for Abraham and yet he did it because he knew that the household of covenant faith must be kept pure or it would be destroyed.

He did it because the gospel of God must always, always come first. And that is so today, isn't it? The New Testament teaches us with great clarity painful banishments are sometimes necessary.

[20:40] But remember the purpose of all of this. the purpose is not ultimately punitive, the purpose is redemptive. And that's the reason we are given such detailed names here and tribes and so on.

Could have just had a whole summary of verses 1 to 4 and verses 13 to 17. Could have been admitted, admitted, couldn't it? Just a one verse summary. They were all sent away. But they're not. They're all named and it's for a reason. What we're being told is that the blessing and the promise can come only one way. Only through the chosen seed. Only through his true family of faith.

But, that is a blessing that is not going to be just inwardly focused. Not just possessed by this family. It's a blessing that would be outward with a worldwide focus to bring joy and blessing to all the families of the earth.

That was God's promise to Abraham right at the beginning, remember? And that's why we all have all these names here laid out so carefully. It tells us that God cares for all the people of the earth.

[ 21 : 45 ] Even those who are outside still the family of faith. God's chosen people are the carriers of his blessing to all the world.

And so this separation was necessary to serve that worldwide salvation. Through the promised seed being kept true, being kept holy and faithful to the covenant.

through that would at last come a savior for the world. And this is just part of that unfolding story of the coming of the Christ whose blessings at last would flow to all the nations.

I will make you a light for the nations, says God through Isaiah, speaking about his coming servant king, the Messiah, so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth, including these very tribes mentioned here.

Some of these names, Sheba, verses 3 and 4, Midian, verse 13, Nebaioth, Cedar. Read the later chapters of Isaiah and you'll find that these names, even though they were enemies of Israel throughout their history, are explicitly mentioned in Isaiah chapter 60 as glorifying God for his salvation through his servant Messiah.

[ 23 : 00 ] salvation to every nation. But you see, there'll be no salvation for any nation unless through the unique seed, the only true seed, through Isaac and his line alone.

And unless God's covenant household is utterly clear and committed to that unique gospel of salvation and won't let anything or anyone dilute it or destroy it, even when that involves a painful and even personal rupture, of what appear to be very natural bonds like these, unless they are committed to that, there'll be no salvation for any.

And of course, no covenant community, not even the new covenant church of Christ can be perfect, but it is called to be holy, it is called to be distinct, separate.

Cannot be, says the apostle, unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship has light with darkness? What agreement is the temple of God with idols?

It's just because there is no other way to be carriers of God's blessing to the whole world, to all people, than through the preserving and the proclaiming of the unique and pure biblical gospel of Christ.

[ 24 : 17 ] It's just because of that, that the people of faith are always called to be part of real gospel unity before any other natural tie. However painful that may be, and sometimes it is very painful, and there must be partings.

And so painfully, although not vindictively, notice verse 6, Abraham gives gifts to all this family, but the family is ruptured. But God's plan is not forgotten.

In fact, in his marvelous grace, it is furthered through this for the blessing of all peoples. But you see, the struggle of God's church will never be resolved completely and permanently in this world. And the next section bears testimony to that ongoing reality. Verses 19 to 26 speak of ongoing battling, don't they? the battling of a progeny. And the message here is that faith can be very perplexing, but notice that God's pattern is reassuringly familiar.

It's verse 19 that begins Jacob's story proper, the generations of Isaac. And two things stand out in these verses, in what we're told about first the conception, and then the birth, a conception that's long delayed actually, and a birth that's marked by this portentous struggle.

[ 25 : 45 ] And those two things are the sufficiency of God's grace and the sovereignty of his grace. Look at verse 21. At first glance it seems very straightforward, doesn't it?

And rather lovely. Isaac prays and Rebecca conceives. But notice verse 20 and verse 26. And the ages were told there.

Do you see? There's a 20 year gap. And that implies a long and agonizing time of waiting for that conception. And that's agonizing for any couple of course.

And that burden of infertility is a very great burden for some to bear. But here you see the stakes are even higher than that, aren't they? Because they've been told by God that they would give rise to offspring, to great offspring at that.

None of us have that promise from God, do we? And they knew also that the whole purpose of God for the world depended on that offspring. And here they are surrounded, do you see, by the evident

fecundity of all of Isaac's half-brothers.

[ 26 : 58 ] These families outside the line of promise are fertility personified. Offspring everywhere. That must have been very hard, don't you think? Perhaps they had begun to seriously doubt God.

Maybe they thought it was their sin. Maybe their lack of faith that was the cause. Maybe others had suggested that to them, to taunt them. And maybe they thought suggesting these sort of things was helpful to them.

People can be very insensitive sometimes, you know, to that pain of infertility. We need to be very careful of that. We especially need to be careful of that in a church where there's a baby boom happening.

Not everybody's involved in that and that's very hard. We don't know what Isaac and Rebecca suffered, we're not told. But we do know here that with Isaac there were no concubines, there was no Hagar as a surrogate mother.

It was just trust in God. Verse 21 says Isaac prayed. And that went on no doubt for many, many years. 20 years. In a way it was Isaac's finest hour because his faith sadly later does seem to become eclipsed by his carnal appetites.

[ 28 : 11 ] But Isaac prayed and in the end God answered with a pregnancy. And that is a very familiar pattern, isn't it, in the Bible.

It's just like the delay in Isaac's own conception or the long delay in Joseph's conception or Samson's or Samuel's. Derek Kidner says that God's way of prefacing an exceptional work with exceptional difficulties was often to take this form.

Why is that do you think? Well I think because learning to trust the sheer sufficiency of God's grace is what strengthens and encourages his people when they feel weak.

When they doubt perhaps they can fulfill the calling that God's given them in life. To see only obstacles to be reduced to utter dependence on God alone.

And then to see God work wonderful things, do things despite our weaknesses, to know that the only explanation must be God's own power.

[ 29 : 22 ] That's to learn a very great lesson, isn't it? That his grace is sufficient, that his power is made perfect in weakness, as Paul says.

Read 2 Corinthians 12. It's learning that, isn't it, that makes us able to live with the great thorns in our flesh, whatever they are. And to say with Paul, I'm content with weakness, with insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities, for when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

It's great to learn to trust in the sufficiency of God's grace. And sometimes it takes great perplexity and pain and a long time for us to learn that.

In fact, I would go as far as to say it nearly always takes pain and perplexity and time to learn that. I don't think there's any other way, is there, really, to learn trust in God's sufficient grace and to be forced to throw yourself on that grace alone and to trust and just have to keep on trusting.

Isn't that what Hebrews chapter 5 even says of our Lord Jesus Christ? Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Not learning how to be obedient as though he was disobedient before that, but learning the real meaning of obedient trust in God for all things depending only on his Father's grace.

[ 30 : 49 ] He offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death. And he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

The familiar pattern. For Isaac, the seed of promise, the son of Abraham, and for the promised seed himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. And also, therefore, for all who are truly Christ's, all who are Abraham's seed according to the promise.

You sometimes find your life, your life of faith, full of perplexing things, painful things, agonizing things, the doubts and fears, maybe even despair setting in at times.

Well, fear not, little flock. Recognize the pattern, do you see? And even if you just can't see how it could possibly be a form of blessing to you now, there will come a time when you can see, at least in part, and you'll be able to say with the Apostle Paul, therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest on me.

For when I am weak, then, then, I'm strong. Learning to trust in the sheer sufficiency of God's grace is what will strengthen us, what will encourage us when we fear and when we doubt, perhaps, that we'll be able to fulfill the calling that God's given us in our personal life and in our life together as a

church.

[ 32 : 35 ] That's the first thing, but the second thing is just as important. Learning to submit to the sovereignty of God's grace is what will humble us when we're tempted to feel that we're too strong and able and we're tempted to pride, perhaps because of our spiritual pedigree or something else.

And that's surely the message here of the oracle in verse 23 about what we're told of the birth of Jacob and Esau in verses 24 to 26. Verse 22 says, Rebecca's troubled because the twins in her womb were struggling.

More literally, you could translate that, that they were battering each other in the womb. And then she's worried after waiting for so long, worried about this precious pregnancy, fearing what might happen.

So she seeks the Lord, we're told. Maybe she went to one of the altars that Abraham had built. And the Lord reveals to her in verse 23 a very astonishing thing.

Not just that she's got twins within her, but that these boys will give rise to two nations, rival nations, divided from one another at odds with one another.

[ 33 : 44 ] It's the same conflict, isn't it, that we saw earlier? The same conflict goes right back through this story, right back to Cain and Abel and even beyond. Ultimately, it is the persistent conflict between the seed of God's promise and the seed of the serpent.

It's a conflict that is initiated by God's own sovereign choice. Do you remember in Genesis 3.15? He said he would put enmity between the seeds, between the seed of promise and the natural seed, the seed of Satan.

So struggle is inevitable. Even within blood families. It's a struggle that's seen from Genesis chapter 3 right through to Revelation chapter 20 when that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan at last is cast into the pit forever along with all his seed, all who have opposed the people of God, all who have scorned the Son of God.

It's Jesus himself, isn't it, who warns us about the judgment of that day when he says the terrible words that we read about in Matthew chapter 25. To some he will say, depart from me, you cursed. Depart into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And you see, but for the extraordinary sovereign grace of God, that is the judgment that is deserved naturally by all human beings.

[ 35 : 20 ] Who Paul says, by nature, are children of wrath, disobedient, under God's curse. But as Paul says to those Ephesian Christians, by sheer grace, you have been saved.

It's not your own doing. It's the gift of God, not as a result of work so that no man can boast. And that is exactly what we see here in Genesis 25.

The twins batter each other in the womb. They come out sparring. Neither of them is exactly portrayed in a very favorable light. Bruce Walkie says, verse 25 says, one's a hairy monster and the other is a heel clutcher.

So they're called Esau the hairy. And Jacob, as you see the footnote, says the deceitful grasper. And yet, one of these, Jacob, is chosen by God for honor and glory and blessing in his extraordinary purposes of grace.

Why? Why Jacob, the grasper? Why Jacob, the second born, not the first born? In fact, why either of this odious pair?

[ 36 : 34 ] You see, the answer we see here and everywhere else in the whole Bible is simply this. Because of God's sheer sovereign grace and mercy.

God's grace just takes us all totally by surprise, doesn't it? It turns all human conventions, all human ideas, absolutely upside down.

Not the first born. Not the fittest, the brightest, the nicest, the best. In fact, we read the story in Genesis. We might find ourselves much more naturally attracted to Esau.

Esau was the manly man, the man's man, the rugged outdoor type. Jacob was a more cultured man, a civilized man, but something of a mummy's boy. We might certainly feel about ourselves that God's blessing is much more naturally appropriate for someone like us.

If we think that we are generally upright people, moral people, people who do the right things, don't do bad things, at least not scandalous things, generally respectable.

[ 37 : 39 ] But that is not what God reveals to us about his grace and mercy. Jacob is chosen before birth within the womb.

In fact, even before his conception. Why does God do this? Why does he tell us that he does it?

Well, he does it because he is the God of sovereign grace and mercy. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, he says to Moses.

As Paul quotes him in Romans chapter 9. And he tells us that he is sovereign in order to humble us all under his grace. Lest any of us should ever boast.

Lest any of us should ever think that we're superior to any other human being. Far less any other Christian believer. Doesn't matter who you are. Doesn't matter who your father is.

[ 38 : 36 ] However great in the kingdom. Whether he's a patriarch or a preacher or anything else. But for God's sovereign grace and mercy, you have no status before him at all.

Romans 9 verse 11 says, Though they were not yet born and had done nothing, good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue.

Not because of works, but because of his call. She was told the older will serve the younger. So then it depends not on human will or exertion.

But on God. Who has mercy. Why did God give this oracle to Isaac and Rebecca? Why did Moses record it for that matter for his people?

In fact, for us today. Well, because you see, learning to bow to the sovereignty of God's grace is what humbles us.

[ 39 : 40 ] Thus we should ever be tempted to pride or to presumption. There is no favoritism with God. There is no special pleading. Either of family or of status or of merit or performance or doctrinal purity or whatever it is that you think so important.

There is no favoritism with God. But there is mercy. Mercy. Even for a worm like Jacob. Surely a model of utter crookedness if ever there was one.

There is mercy. And so there is hope. Even for people like me. People like you.

Depth of mercy. Can there be mercy still reserved for me? Can my God, his wrath forbear me? The chief of sinners spare?

The answer for Jacob. And every sinner like him is yes. Because of the sheer sovereign grace that turns upside down every convention, every expectation of men.

[ 40 : 59 ] God chose what is weak in the world, says Paul, to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus. He alone, by sheer sovereign grace.

So here we are, a strange chapter, a story of a burial, and a banishing, and a battling.

And yet through it all, do you see a testimony to the constancy of our covenant God, his unchanging ways of grace and mercy, a God we can trust always and forever.

Even in the face of death, we know his promise shall not fail. Even through the pain of fractured relationships, his plan and purpose is not forgotten, is being furthered.

[ 42 : 11 ] And in perplexing paths, well, his pattern is so familiar, it's wonderfully reassuring, driving us to trust in his sufficient grace, and humbling us under his sovereign grace and great mercy.

So if your path just now is painful, perplexing, perhaps you feel the looming shadow of the valley of death itself.

aren't you glad that you can trust in the constancy of our God, the one who is and always will be the source of our life in Christ Jesus?

I surely am. and I hope that all of you this morning are also. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the unchanging God of sovereign grace and love.

We thank you that we can therefore have the great assurance that all of our life, both now and forever, is not in our hands but in yours.

[ 43 : 29 ] That we're bound by everlasting bands of covenant grace. So Lord, hear us. Assure our hearts, we pray, of that great grace and mercy.

And may we sing its praise all of our days. For Christ's sake. Amen.