

# The God Who Reassures the Fearful

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good, well let's turn to God's Word, shall we? And we are returning to Genesis after a little break over the Easter weekend. And we're in Genesis chapter 15. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of Bibles around the church.

Do please grab one of those and turn with me to Genesis chapter 15. And we're reading the whole chapter this morning. Genesis 15 and reading from verse 1.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.

But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus.

And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him. This man shall not be your heir.

[ 1 : 2 2 ]     Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look, look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.

Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord. And he counted it to him as righteousness. And he said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.

But he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? He said to him, Bring me a heifer, three years old, a female goat, three years old, a ram, three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.

And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

And when the birds of prey came down on the carcass, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram.

[ 2 : 3 0 ]     And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be servants there.

And they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation.

For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. When the sun had gone down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

[ 3 : 53 ] Amen. And may God bless his words to us this morning. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis 15.

We're coming back to Genesis and to this central piece of the whole of the story of Abraham, Genesis 15 to 17, where we see God binding himself in covenant with Abraham and constituting thus the beginning of the church of God, the household of true faith, which is marked out as belonging to God, belonging to the covenant Lord, through trust in his promise and through obedience to his command.

And these chapters are the very beginning of the Christian church. And they're vital for us today because, of course, as believers today, we share not just the same faith as the saints of old, but also, well, the same flesh with all its weaknesses, and therefore the same fears.

Real believers can very often be fearful, can't they? We often fear about our families, about our health, perhaps, about our work, about the future, perhaps just getting old, approaching death.

And many Christians fear that because of these struggles that they face in life so often, perhaps, perhaps they don't really belong to God at all.

[ 5 : 34 ] There are multitudes of fears, aren't there, that can stalk our lives. And here's a chapter of the Bible that tells us about a God who loves to reassure the fearful, who loves to reassure his faithful ones when they are full of many fears.

And Moses first wrote, of course, to encourage his people, the Israelites, but Paul tells us, remember, that above all, all of these scriptures of the Old Testament are written for us in the church today, all over the world, to encourage us to endurance and to real hope.

And we can learn this from the saints of old. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament is written, isn't it, to fearful Christians who are in danger of giving up the faith because of the struggles they face, because of the opposition that they faced.

And the book of Hebrews does what? It points them back to the saints of old, especially to Abraham. And it reminds them that having patiently waited, having endured, Abraham obtained the promises.

And the message of that book is very simple, isn't it? Follow Abraham's faith. Because that's the way to real assurance. But of course, the key to imitating Abraham's faith is to learn what Abraham learned about the wonders of Abraham's God, the unchanging God of the covenant, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[ 7 : 01 ] And he is the God who loves to reassure the fearful. Look at the very first word that God says to Abraham there in verse 1. Fear not. Fear not.

That's a refrain, isn't it, that we hear again and again and again all through the Bible. It's a message from God to his beloved people to reassure them, to strengthen them, to give them hope. Fear not.

Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. It's what God said to the people of Israel as the Dead Sea was in front of them and the Egyptian army is rushing up behind them. Fear not.

I have called you by name. You are mine. Said the Lord to a believed people in exile through the prophet Isaiah. The New Testament opens with those wonderful words to Mary.

Fear not. Because you'll find favor with the Lord. And remember, fear not. I am the first and the last. Said the risen Lord Jesus to John the Apostle in his prison on the island of Patmos.

[ 8 : 06 ] Well, Genesis 15 is full of that message of God's great reassurance. The chapter divides really into two parallel parts, verses 1 to 5 and verses 7 to 21.

And each begins with God speaking and then a question from Abraham and then a sign of reassurance from God. Verses 1 to 5, the focus is on reassurance about Abraham's offspring.

And in verses 7 to 21, it's reassurance about the promise of the land. And if you look at verse 18, it joins both of those together in a succinct summary really of the chapter.

To your offspring I give this land. But in between those two sections, notice verse 6, that famous verse, which sums up Abraham's response to God's revelation.

Both the revelation in verses 1 to 5 and in the rest of the chapter. So we're going to look at the chapter as a whole because it's all part of one great covenant promise. It shows us God's revelation and it shows us that response of Abraham.

[ 9 : 13 ] But first of all, we need to see that this whole chapter comes in response to Abraham remonstrating with God. And Abraham's remonstrance with God demonstrates the need for God's reassurance.

Now Abraham is faithful. There's no doubt about that, is there? After what we've read in chapters 13 and 14. But he is nevertheless fearful. And his questions to God in verses 2 and 3 and again there in verse 8, they make that very plain.

But notice how God doesn't wait for Abraham's questions. He addresses them first of all right there in verse 1. After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, fear not, Abraham.

It's a great comfort, isn't it, that God knows what's bothering us even before we tell him, even perhaps before we even know for sure ourselves. But why did God intervene just then after these things?

Well, these things probably refer to everything that we've been reading about Abraham since the beginning of the story in chapter 12. It's God's first call to Abraham to go to the land and the great promise that God made of everything that would follow him from going to the land.

[ 10 : 31 ] And he's seen already all sorts of trials, all kinds of testings and God already has been true to his word, hasn't he, to Abraham. He's been his protector, he's been his provider, he's blessed those who bless him, he's cursed those who oppose him.

And God has made his name great as he promised. He's the hero who rescued the land of Sodom and so on. But here's the thing, a long time has now passed.

And still, there doesn't seem to be any sign of these very particular things that God promised Abraham. Do you remember? He promised to give him offspring, progeny, a great and huge nation.

And he promised him a land, a resting place for his people, for those offspring to dwell in peace. And all these things, all these things we've read about of Abraham's adventures, they've happened, but not, not those things that he longed for.

And years have passed, probably 10 years by now. And so God knows what is gnawing away at Abraham's mind. But perhaps he wants to draw it out of Abraham so that he can help Abraham face up to these fears and find the help that he needs.

[ 11 : 48 ] So he says to him, Abraham, verse 1, I'm your shield, I'm your rewarder. And verse 7, you see, he says, I'm the one who is directing all of your ways according to the promise of your destiny in this land.

He's reassuring him, but see, that's exactly the problem. Because Abraham's saying, well, that's what's bothering me, you see, because I'm just not seeing it. You keep saying it, but I'm not seeing it yet.

If you look back to chapter 13 and verses 15 and 16, it helps you see, I think, Abraham's point because the promise there is very clear, isn't it? It's for a huge land and it's for offspring like the dust of the earth.

And yet, here we are in chapter 15 and verses 2 and 3 and Abraham's saying, well, look, I remain childless. There's none of these great offspring, not even a single one. My heir is going to be a foreigner, he's going to be their servant.

How do I know you can really do this? And then look at the land situation. Well, it's all very well you saying it's mine, but look at these kings on the rampage everywhere and look at all these hostile tribes that are in it.

[ 13 : 02 ] What have I got? Just these tents that we're living in. It's all very well for me to walk around and name it and claim it in the name of the Lord, but I'm getting a bit skeptical about these prayer marches, frankly.

How do I know I'm going to possess this land? How do I know you're really able to do this? Now, don't be harsh with Abraham because we often find ourselves asking similar things of God.

You read the Bible, it's all about God's promises, it's about everything being yes and amen in Jesus Christ. I came to bring you life in all its fullness. I came to give the victory of deliverance from sin and from death and from hell.

The promise of Jesus is to make us holy, is to make us perfect, complete in Him, like Him. And the Bible keeps saying that, doesn't it? But, when are we going to see it?

Well, be encouraged, you see, because you're in good company. These questions are not the questions of unbelief, these are the questions of faith. See, it's the one who knows God and who honors God and who talks to God who remonstrates like that with God.

[ 14 : 25 ] Verse 2 shows us Abraham's full of respect, O Lord God, O sovereign Lord, is probably better as the NIV has it. He's full of respect, he's full of faith as well.

If you doubt that, read Romans chapter 4 where Paul says, no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but still, he's remonstrating with God with a cry of faith.

It's a cry, isn't it, for understanding, to help him to go on trusting, to go on seeing the invisible that God has promised. Why? Well, because it's hard, isn't it, to understand God and His ways when you're just a human being like us.

It always has been and here's the thing, it always will be. Think of the cry of the faithful all through the Psalms. How long, O Lord? The Psalms are written by great ones of the faith, aren't they?

But David's saying in Psalm 13, how long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you be angry with your people's prayers? Psalm 80. Has God forgotten to be gracious?

[ 15 : 32 ] Are His promises at an end for all time? Psalm 77. And on and on. Well, you see, that's Abraham. He's remonstrating with God.

Because although he did trust God, it's hard to go on trusting God. It's hard, isn't it, to see the invisible. And we need reassurance from God.

And God knows that. And God gives great reassurance. Of course, it is possible to disbelieve God altogether.

It's possible to scorn God, to disobey Him, to refuse Him. That's something quite different. And God won't give assurance and reassurance to anyone like that. But you see, Abraham and all of those who imitate his real faith in God, who are friends of God, however struggling, however fearful, to them, God does give reassurance.

And He does so very wonderfully in both word and in deed. So, if that's how you're feeling this morning, take heart. This is for you. And that's the second point you see, Abraham's revelation from God.

[ 16 : 47 ] It's what God reveals to Abraham in the promise and seal of His covenant that is the means of this great reassurance to him. And see, that's always true. See, if you're a Christian believer who lacks assurance about your faith, you won't get any help at all by examining yourself.

You won't get help by looking inside yourself, looking for evidence of that faith. No, no, no. You'll only get help by looking outside of yourself and examining God and His gospel and His great promises to you and His covenant of grace.

It's not, see, more about yourself, more about your own desires, more about your responses of God that will strengthen you. It's as the old hymn says, it's more, more about Jesus, more of His saving fullness to see, more of His love who died for me.

And that's what God's teaching Abraham's here. The means of reassuring Abraham's faith was revelation from God to teach him more about what it means to be involved with the covenant God.

There's four things here that God reveals to Abraham as He expounds His gospel to him in advance, as Paul says. And He does it in word and in deed, in sign, in the visible sign of that faith.

[ 18 : 08 ] First of all, He reminds Abraham of the sheer authority of His presence. See, verse 1 and verse 7 both draw Abraham's attention to focus on God's personal presence with Him.

And on everything that means for Abraham. I am your shield. That's why your reward must be very great. It's because of who God is and it's what kind of God He is that Abraham can be assured about these wonderful promises from Him and about the wonderful reality of simply being with Him.

It's the same in verse 7. I am the Lord. I'm the one who brought you out of this blind pagan world and into this great blessing of the future. Remember what kind of God I am.

Remember what my presence means to you. See, I'm the kind of God whose very being speaks of the joy of deliverance, of new life, of blessing, of generosity.

And just to have me as your God means that everything that I am is going to spill over and bless your life. It can't be otherwise. He is the great rewarder.

[ 19 : 24 ] And just to know Him, just to travel with Him, therefore guarantees that great reward with utter authority. If you're ever going on a big family outing with young kids and the grandparents are part of it, whose car do the young kids want to go in?

Their parents or their grandparents? Well, I can tell you in our family it was always their grandparents. Why was that? Because their grandparents are the great rewarders. They're the ones who are going to be stuffing their face with sweets and Coca-Cola and all these other things that their parents are not going to give them.

They know whose presence they want to be in. And you see, Abraham knew that that had been true for him. Moses' people knew that that was true for them.

I'm the Lord who brought you out. God had said to them. And he blessed them, hadn't he, with streams in the desert. He blessed them with manna, with quail, with miracles, with all kinds of things.

Don't forget what kind of God I really am and what it means to just be with me. The blessings that flow just from the authority of God's very presence.

[ 20 : 34 ] A bountiful provision and wonderful protection. I am your shield. I myself am your safety. And just to be with me is to be safe.

And they knew that too, didn't they? God's people Israel, just as Abraham did. Again, little children know this, don't they? They wake up in the night with a bad dream and crying and frightened.

What do they want to do? Run into their parents' bed. Not to have a talk, not to have a great reassuring word, but just to snuggle up there in the presence of mom and dad.

They're back to sleep immediately, aren't they? Because they're safe. And see, as Christian believers, so often we fear because we forget what kind of God we really know and we really serve.

And we forget just the authority of blessing, of simply belonging to him, being with him, having his presence always with us. He's the rewarder of those who seek him, says Hebrews 11.

[ 21 : 43 ] And sometimes Christian believers fear and doubt because they doubt that. And so their life's just a pale shadow because they forget what his presence really means and what he's really like.

Remember the parable Jesus told of the talents and of the different servants and the one talent man who just went away and hid his in the ground. Why? I knew you were a hard man, he said of the master.

There was no evidence of that whatsoever. He was the master who dished out talents to his servants, given them great rewards to go and use. But he had a total misconception of the nature of his Lord.

And that may be some of us here this morning and perhaps that's the word that we need from the Lord. And remember Jesus' words. How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

Don't forget what kind of God we know. Don't forget the authority that is just in his very presence to provide and to protect. But secondly, God reminds Abraham of the sheer scope of his promise.

[ 22 : 58 ] In verses 4 and 5, you see, he promises Abraham an heir from his very own body and he promises him offspring like the stars of heaven, absolutely innumerable. In verses 18 to 21, he promises him a land of vast proportions, actually one far greater than Israel ever actually possessed all through their history.

The height of David and Solomon's empire, they held sway over these lands but never actually possessed it. You see what God's saying? Don't forget how big my plan and purposes are.

Don't forget what I'm doing and don't forget that what I've called you to be part of is my plan of salvation for this whole vast world. This is all about the story that is taking us back to Eden that was lost.

This is about the promise that goes right back to the beginning. It's the promise to reverse the whole curse of sin. And that's going to happen through the offspring who is to come.

This is about the great reversal of the curse of Babel that scattered humanity and set them at odds to bring together again all nations under him. That's what you're part of Abraham.

[ 24 : 15 ] It's as big as that, a cosmic salvation. Now we don't know exactly how much detail Abraham grasped or exactly how God's plan was going to come to fulfillment but remember what Jesus said in John's Gospel chapter 8.

Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day and he saw it and was glad. And I think when you take that along with chapters like Hebrews 11, I think Abraham probably knew an awful lot more than we normally give him credit for.

But whatever the detail of that might be, this much is surely plain. But in this encounter God is setting Abraham's personal story in his life and his lifetime into the big picture of God's story of promise with its ultimate fulfillment in the glory of the Christ who is to come.

And that's so important, isn't it? Because we will never understand our life and our own story personally unless we see that that too is part of something far, far greater. Our life story is only going to make sense as part of that great story of God from eternity to eternity.

See, we've got such small vision, we can only see the present, can't we? We know a little bit about the past perhaps, but we don't know about the future, we don't know what's going to happen even this next week in our lives.

[ 25 : 43 ] And that's hard, isn't it? It's hard to not know these things. But when we remember the big story of what God is doing through Abraham's promise of the offspring, then we remember, don't we, that whatever our present struggles are, whatever our present questions are, we are part of something wonderful, something that is eternal.

And we have that certainty that all things work together for the good of those who love God through Jesus Christ. Can God be relied upon in this?

Well, just look at the vastness of the starry sky, he says to Abraham in verse five. Look at the stars. And he has promised a people without number to be his own.

And he's promised a vast land, a whole new creation indeed. And that's what our lives are part of, you and me, who are following the Lord Jesus Christ. But look at verse eight, you see Abraham's just like us, Lord, how am I to know?

How am I to really know deep down this is true? Well, look at the third thing that God reveals to Abraham here, the depth of his pledge.

[ 27 : 11 ] that's what this strange ceremony is all about in verses nine to twelve. It's a public act of commitment on oath. It's a covenant agreement, a binding agreement that God makes with Abraham between two parties.

Verse 18 makes that explicit, doesn't it? On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying to your offspring, I give this land. Notice both the promises brought together there, the offspring and the land.

And these verses nine to eleven, they seem very strange to us. We would go down to a lawyer's office, wouldn't we? Pay a fat fee and draw up a binding contract. But in Abraham's day, Israel would be very familiar with this.

It was common to the culture of the day. They made a covenant. The first readers, the Israelites, would be very familiar with this. They were the covenant people. They knew all about God's covenant. He made a covenant with them, solemn at Mount Sinai, in the fire, and in the thunder.

Moses was constantly reminding Israel, wasn't he, to remember the covenant. Do not forget the covenant. Reassuring them that God would never forget the covenant he'd made with them.

[ 28 : 24 ] Why? Because it was a bond sealed in blood. It was sovereignly put in place by the Lord God himself. And you see, the symbolism of this ritual speaks of the sheer depth of God's commitment to this promise that he has pledged.

Verse 10, you see, they cut up the animals. And that signified the covenant curse. The penalty of breaking this covenant would be death.

Death of the party involved. And normally when a covenant was made, both parties, both parties walked together through the middle of these divided up animals to signify their binding commitment to that covenant.

You notice here in verse 17, something very strange. What we're being told there is that here it was God alone who walked through the pieces. God appears to Abraham in the fire and in the smoke.

That was very familiar and obvious to Moses readers. God appeared to them always in the fire and the cloud, didn't he? He appeared in the smoke and the fire at Sinai when he made his covenant with them.

[ 29 : 36 ] And here is God in the fire sovereignly committing himself to Abraham by this extraordinary blood oath. He swore by himself.

That's how it's put in Hebrews 6. He swore on his own life. How am I to know that you will keep this promise, says Abraham?

God here is saying because I pledge myself even to the death that this will be so. That's the depth of God's pledge to Abraham here and to all Abraham's heirs.

What God is saying is his death may be the price. His blood may be required. Be it so, but this promise will not fail.

The Israelites knew, didn't they, just how much, you could say, personal suffering God had brought upon himself for their sake in order to keep his covenant promise with them.

[ 30 : 47 ] When they rebelled against him, refused to enter the land, did God abandon them as they went back into the desert? No, he went with them. He lived with them in his own tent.

He tabernacled with them in the heart of their judgments. He humbled himself. Think of that. The God who made earth and heaven humbling himself to live in the midst of his people in a tent.

It's extraordinary. But how much more so is it extraordinary for you and me today? Do you doubt sometimes that God will really ever let you possess what he has promised to you in Jesus Christ?

Do you doubt that you'll ever receive that blessing that he's called you to? Do you doubt sometimes whether he who has promised really is faithful to his promises?

Well, friends, he tells us, remember the depth of his pledge. Abraham, you see, looked forward on the strength of this pledge, but we look back, don't we? We look back on that pledge made good.

[ 31 : 56 ] And it did cost the blood of the Son of God. It was a covenant sealed in blood, just as God said.

The New Testament tells us that that is the only way that we have access to the holy place of God's presence, through the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, through the way that is opened up to us by his flesh.

That's the only way we can draw near, isn't it? As Hebrews 10 tells us, in full assurance of faith. faith. That's how we can hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, because he who promised is faithful.

He kept his pledge. And that's why we're standing still on those true promises. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things, all the things that he has promised for us for all eternity in the future.

We know so much more than Abraham, don't we, the depth of that pledge. But notice the fourth thing here, the shape of God's pattern that he reveals to Abraham.

[ 33 : 19 ] Verses 13 to 16, I think, are very revealing. There's no false assurance here. There's no cheap grace. God's plan, he says, is going to take a long, long time. It's going to mean a lot of waiting for God's people, verse 13.

It's going to mean a lot of affliction, real affliction. It's going to mean enduring much suffering before at last there is that great victory and that great reward. Why?



Why so long? Well, ultimately, I suppose it's a mystery. It's God's time. But one thing we are told here is that God is astonishingly patient with sinful and wicked human beings.

He is slow to judge. He says to Abraham, he won't dispossess the Canaanite peoples, the Amorites, verse 16, and that's a way of summarizing those ten peoples that we see in verses 19 to 21.

He'll only dispossess them when there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever left that their wickedness has become so vast, so complete, that it's beyond hope of anything other than just judgment.

[ 34 : 29 ] He won't do it before. But notice the pattern, you see. Because of God's slowness to judge, because of God's desire to save and to bless, his people must suffer and endure days of darkness and pain and affliction.

They must pass through many tribulations before they enter the promised kingdom just because they are the people of the God who is slow to anger, who's abounding in mercy.

See, his pattern shapes their pattern. Because it's the pattern of God himself. It's a pattern that's seen most clearly in its glorious fulfillment in the seed of Abraham and the Messiah and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his suffering and death. In his glorious resurrection. Because only ultimately in that great fulfillment at the cross could God himself be vindicated and shown to be just and the justifier of the ungodly.

And even, you see, as God intimated that future pattern for his chosen people as a kingdom of priests, his Israel, who were to manifest God's nature to the world.

[ 35 : 53 ] Even as he does that, Abraham himself has also shown that he's got to expect that pattern in his own life personally. He too must wait for God to fulfill his covenant to him.

And actually that's symbolized even here, I think, in verse 11 where he waits all day until nightfall, fighting off these birds of prey. That's surely symbolic of the enemies and the battles to come.

And likewise, verse 12, look, he also himself intensely feels the dreadful great darkness of all this covenant was going to signify. He feels it himself.

Because God was showing Abraham that that was what shaped his life as well.

Somehow mysteriously, he's going to share in the true experience of his seed, the Christ who was to come. Even as he plays his own personal part in God's great plan and purpose.

[ 36 : 57 ] You see, friends, it's the same still for every true seed of Abraham in Christ. That's the unmistakable mark of the true Christian believer according to the New Testament.

Not that they should be free from all struggles and afflictions in this present age, but rather that their lives, that our lives as true children of the promise will likewise be marked by persecution and by struggles and by groaning and by patience and endurance.

That's the New Testament pattern, isn't it? Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God. That's the pattern of true faith, of true faithfulness.

God's grace. That is a pattern shaped by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And it's been granted to you, says Paul, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

And for the sake of our part in this wonderful privilege of bringing the message of covenant grace and God's mercy to the world. That's the true gospel of God.

[ 38 : 09 ] God. It's being preached in advance to Abraham here, as Paul says. But it's the same unchanging gospel, isn't it? Of a God whose presence overflows with all the provision and the protection that we need.

And whose promise is of a salvation that is vast as eternity. And which is pledged unmistakably in the blood of God's own son.

And whose pattern will be played out in the life of every true believer. Every true heir of Abraham, the man of faith.

Abraham were remonstrated with God. He needed God's reassurance because his experience didn't seem to him to be really what God had promised him.

But God revealed to him more of the truth about his plan and purpose. And that was the means of his reassurance. A reassurance that will be real, that would buttress his faith, strengthen his faith in the true gospel.

[ 39 : 20 ] And what was the result then of that reassuring revelation? Well, look at verse 6. Abraham's response to God. He believed God.

Or better, he trusted him. The root of the word means stand firm. We could say Abraham stood firm on God's promises as he was fortified by those promises and the pledge of God's covenant.

Not that this was a sudden thing, a momentary thing, as if he sort of made a decision for God as a one-off. That's not how the New Testament talks about Abraham's faith. And Paul and James and Hebrews and others talk about these words.

They refer to every single stage of Abraham's life. Right from his call when he, by faith, obeyed and went, right up to when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. It's not some kind of easy believism that's being taught here.

It's the exact opposite. Abraham believed God. That means that Abraham believed. That means that Abraham believed. He kept on believing. He stood firm. He stayed firm. He trusted God all through every stage of his battles and struggles and his waiting.

[ 40 : 31 ] Best summed up, I think, in Hebrews 6, verse 13. For when God made a promise to Abraham, he swore by himself, saying, surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. Not because he was perfect. We've seen already. He was far from perfect.

We'll see it again. Not because he deserved it. But rather, look at verse 6. Because God counted it to him as righteousness.

That is, God declared Abraham to be right with him. To be his friend. As James puts it later. Because Abraham believed God to be who he said he was.

The rewarder of those who seek him. And he stood firm, trusting him. Trusting that he who had begun a good work in him would surely bring it to completion.

[ 41 : 37 ] At the day of Jesus Christ. Trusting that he was. Trusting that he was. Friends, it can be very hard to trust God, can't it? Because we're human. We're frail flesh.

And we fear. And life is tough. And God often moves in ways that are deeply mysterious to us. But be in no doubt, he is performing wonders.

And we can trust his promises. They're pledged in the blood of his own. So with Abraham, fear not.

Trust God. Wait patiently. And we also shall obtain his promises. Because he's promised it to us.

In the blood of his own son, Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. And the words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

[ 42 : 46 ] It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus. And this hope we were saved. And we wait for it with patience.

Lord, grant us, we pray, the reassurance of your presence in the remembrance of your promise. So that we also, like our father Abraham, may receive at last that prize.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.