

God's Grace Triumphs Over Man's Foolishness

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this evening and Paul Brennan has been! preaching through these early chapters of the book of Joshua and we come to Joshua chapter 9! this evening Joshua chapter 9 if you don't have a Bible there are some red Bibles at the sides and at the front and at the back and if you need one don't be shy go and get one and then you'll be able to follow us.

I think in those Bibles it's page 184 near the beginning of the Old Testament and we're going to read the whole of Joshua chapter 9.

And this follows on from the exciting story of the battle of Jericho and then the taking of the city of Ai. And Joshua 9 verse 1 says as soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the great sea towards Lebanon the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites as soon as they heard of this they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.

But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn out sacks for their donkeys and wineskins and worn out and torn and mended with worn out patched sandals on their feet and worn out clothes and all their provisions were dry and crumbly.

And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel we've come from a distant country. So now make a covenant with us. And the men of Israel said to the Hivites perhaps you live among us then how can we make a covenant with you?

[1 : 54] And they said to Joshua we're your servants. Joshua said to them who are you? Where do you come from? And they said to him from a very distant country your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God.

For we have heard a report of him and all that he did in Egypt and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to Sihon the king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who lived in Ashtaroath.

So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them we are your servants come now make a covenant with us.

Here's our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you but now behold it's dry and crumbly. These wineskins were new when we filled them and behold they've burst and these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey.

So the men took some of their provisions but did not ask counsel from the Lord and Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them and let them live and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

[3 : 10] At the end of three days after they'd made a covenant with them they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived among them. And the people of Israel sent out and reached the cities on the third day.

Now their cities were Gibeon, Chepharrah, Beeroth and Kiriath-Jerim. But the people of Israel didn't attack them because the leaders of their congregation had sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel.

Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. But all the leaders said to their congregation we have sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel and now we may not touch them.

This we will do to them let them live lest wrath be upon us because of the oath that we swore to them. And the leaders said to them let them live.

So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation just as the leaders had said of them. Joshua summoned them and he said to them why did you deceive us saying we are very far from you when you dwell among us?

[4 : 22] Now therefore you are cursed and some of you shall never be anything but servants cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. They answered Joshua because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you.

So we feared greatly for our lives because of you and this thing. And now behold we are in your hand whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us do it.

So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel and they did not kill them. But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord to this day in the place that he should choose.

Amen. May God bless his word. Well good evening folks good to see you and please do have Joshua chapter 9 open in front of you that would be very helpful if you have got sight of that.

So Joshua 9 please do have that ready. Now with Joshua chapter 9 we enter a new phase in the conquest at the beginning of this chapter.

[6 : 00] We've just witnessed the defeats of two cities of Jericho and Ai and now in chapter 9 verse 1 we see this grand coalition of forces coming together to take on Joshua and his army.

Kings drawn from across the southern region of the promised land they draw together and they've heard what's been going on you see that there at the end of verse 1 they heard this and they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.

But before we get to learn the outcome of this great alliance this great battle that's looming before that happens the focus shifts to one group in particular the people of Gibeon.

Now that was a little city a bit west of Jericho and a bit north of Jerusalem and this people take a slightly different approach when it comes to Joshua and the people of God.

Rather than fight rather than flight they opt for a third way they opt for fraud that's their approach for saving their own skins.

[7 : 16] They opt to deceive and infiltrate and their plan works. It seems that after the dizzy heights of the defeat of Ai and Jericho the covenant renewal we saw last week at Mount Evil things come crashing down to reality.

God's people make a huge mistake here and they've got to live with the consequences. They rashly and unthinkingly enter into a peace treaty with one of the very people they're meant to devote to destruction.

It's one of those heart sinking moments. Have you had that? Where you realize you've made a massive mistake and there's not much you can do about it. The heart sinks. This is one of those moments.

But God is sovereign and in his sovereignty he uses even this event in Joshua 9 he uses even this for his own purposes and for his own glory.

This chapter contains real warnings for us but it's also a chapter that is soaked in the grace of God. He can take even our terrible mistakes and use them for his ultimate purposes.

[8 : 35] From the perspective of Joshua and all the people this is a total mess. It's a mess of their own creation. But as we'll see it's a mess they live with and in the end it's a mess that's redeemed.

So three parts to our time together this evening. The first we see the mess created verses 3 to 15. We see here the foolish failure to seek God's will.

It's a mess created. Now the plan that's hatched by the people of Gibeon is pretty high risk but it's very well conceived.

They've heard enough about the people of God to know that they need to develop a plan to avoid being destroyed and wiped off the map. They've seen what's happened to Jericho.

They've heard enough to know that these are people to fear. Look at verse 3. They've heard what Joshua has done to Jericho and Ai and they figured we're next in line.

[9 : 39] What are we going to do about it? They've also heard it would seem that only certain peoples were marked out for destruction.

They knew they were in the firing line. Now Deuteronomy chapter 20 is crucial for our understanding here. Don't need to turn there. But in that chapter it sets out the nations who lived in the promised land who God's people would have to wipe out.

And it's the exact list that we see here at the start of chapter 9. The Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites. Deuteronomy!

20 says you must devote these people to destruction. You must drive them out. But Deuteronomy 20 also sets out what Israel were to do with all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of the nation in Canaan.

And it tells them that when you come across people from far away, God's people are to offer peace. And if that offer is accepted, then those people are forced to become laborers and slaves for the people of Israel.

[10:57] Israel. So Deuteronomy 20 says it out very clearly. And that is the card that the people of Gibeon decide to play. Look at verse 6.

We have come from a distant country. So now, reading between the lines, Deuteronomy 20, make a treaty with us.

Make a covenant with us. We are not one of the people you need to destroy, basically. We are from a far away place. Make a peace treaty with us. We are not one of the nations on your list to destroy. You can make peace with us. And to make the case, they've really gone above and beyond. Look at all the lengths they've gone to to make things look very convincing. They wear worn out clothes. They have their dirty shoes from the back of the cupboard. The wine skins that are cracked and beginning to crumble away. they've brought crumbly bread with them. It's not fresh.

[11:57] They've been on the road for a long time. They do all of this to make it look like they are indeed from a distant country. They've been on the road for many, many weeks. We're not locals.

We've come from a long way away. Now, before we jump in too quickly and criticize Joshua and Israel for falling for us, we've been let in on the secret.

As the readers, we know who these people are. Look at verse 4. verse 4 tells us what they're up to. Joshua and the rest of the people do not find out their real identity until verse 16.

But, their suspicions are raised, aren't they? Look again at verse 7. the men of Israel said to the Hivites, perhaps you live among us.

Then how can we make a covenant with you? They're suspecting that maybe these guys are locals after all. And so they press them. And then you get the rather evasive reply, we are your servants.

[13:01] They dodge the question. And again, doubts remain. And so Joshua, end of verse 8, asks them again, who are you? And where do you come from?

This time a more lengthy and pious sounding reply comes. And much of what they say is undoubtedly true. Look at what they say. We come from a very distant country.

Your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God. We have heard a report of him and all that he did in Egypt and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan.

They've heard these things. That's probably true. They cite the battles against the kings of Sihon and Og. But wisely they don't let on that they know about Jericho or Ai because how else would they know about that?

There's no 24-hour news, no Twitter. They couldn't get the news that quickly. We come from a long way away. We've not heard the latest news. We don't know about Jericho and Ai. Look at us.

[14:04] We're worn out. Look at our shoes. Look at our clothes. Look at our bread. Their basic plea is we're from a long way away, from a distant country.

We've heard about your God. We want to make peace with you. Let's make a covenant. What would Joshua do? Look at verse 14.

They take their provisions. They do a bit of examining, trying to get the truth of the story. Are they really the people they say they are? But crucially, here's the thing.

Look at the end of verse 14. The men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord. And so they go ahead and make the peace treaty.

It's the age-old temptation, isn't it, to walk by sight and not by faith. And we know this is an absolute mess. We know the full story as the readers.

[15:07] We've been told who these people really are. These people should have been devoted to destruction like Jericho, like Ai. If only they had sought the counsel of the laws.

And quite unusually for the Old Testament narratives, we get a very clear interpretation of the actions of the people involved. Normally we'll have to figure it out for ourselves. But here in verse 14 we're told exactly the problem.

They did not ask counsel from the Lord. Now there was provision for Joshua to do exactly that. In the book of Numbers, you can read there, there was an appointed means by which Joshua could discern the will of the Lord. It's all very clearly laid out. But he didn't make use of it.

The writer is very careful isn't he to record that for us there in verse 14. The implication being that if he had, if Joshua had sought the Lord's will on this, then that treaty with Gibeon would never have been entered into.

[16:14] That's the implication. And it wasn't that Joshua didn't exercise discernment. It wasn't that he didn't ask good questions, he did. He even took their provisions to examine them closely.

He used common sense. And I think if you and I had gone through the same process as Joshua, we would have come to the same conclusion. The problem was this.

It's not that they were sloppy in their investigation, but that they were alone in their decision. It wasn't they didn't think, the problem was they didn't pray.

You see, common sense, thinking rightly, can only get us so far. And to only do that is a failure to remember our creatureliness.

It's a failure to recognize that we have a creator. We have a father in heaven. On the face of it, if you or I had been there observing this, we would have said, Joshua's probably made the right call here.

[17:20] It seems like the right wise decision. He knew what to do with the nations far off. He was following the instructions. He pressed them to get the truth. But there is a danger that if we ever find ourselves relying solely on our common sense, if we think that a decision is just so routine, so matter of fact, so obvious, that we don't need to resort to using the means that God has given us to make decisions, then we may well make the same mistake that Joshua does.

If we fail to consult God's word, if we fail to make use of one another, he's given us each other, hasn't he? Given wisdom amongst us. He's given us the ability to pray.

Joshua 9 is the literal embodiment of Deuteronomy 8 verse 3, where the Lord says, the man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

See, Joshua made a decision based on bread, literally the crumbly bread in front of him, rather than seeking the Lord. And we never grow out of complete dependence upon him for all things.

And how much more so now? All the provision that God has given us, all who call on the name of the Father, have immediate access to the throne room of heaven, because we come in Jesus' name.

[18:54] We've got a wonderful, astonishing privilege, haven't we, as being part of God's people. Anytime we can pray to our Heavenly Father. And we've been reading recently James, haven't we?

James chapter 1 verse 5 says this, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. And so as a church, as we make decisions, as we plan, as we reach out, prayer, prayer, prayer, it must be our starting point, must it? It must be our foundation, our beginning point, our end point. Even when the way forward seems absolutely obvious, even then, we're to pray, because doing so expresses our total dependence upon him in all things.

As individuals, prayer is to be our standard operating mode. It is the means that God gives to us to speak to him, to seek him, to submit to his will.

So we're to ask the Lord to help us, to do what is right, to do what is wise. One preacher put it this way, and this is a good prayer to pray as we face decisions, big decisions, but small decisions as well.

[20:22] Here's the prayer. Lord, keep me from being sinful, and keep me from being stupid. That's a pretty good prayer to pray, isn't it? Pray to do the right thing, and prayer to do the wise thing.

And we might well serve ourselves a lot of time and grief if we took time to pray like that before marching on with our plans. The job offer that comes along, the salary is good, the prospects look bright, the location works, we run the numbers, we chat to friends, but never once do we ask, never once do we ask the Lord, what would serve Christ best?

What would serve his church best if I was to take this job? Do we stop to pray that? Or perhaps a new relationship begins, and you ask, do we enjoy time together?

Are we compatible? But we never ask, we never pause to ask or seek the Lord. Will this person really help me to serve the Lord, to grow to maturity in Christ?

Are you facing significant decisions right now? If so, have you brought it before the Lord? God, or are you marching on under your own steam?

[21 : 50] Because, well, it's the obvious thing to do. Be careful. I think Joshua 9 would warn you. There's a real mess made here because of Israel's foolish failure to seek the Lord.

Verse 14, they did not ask counsel from the Lord. And so, as we face any decision in life, no matter how big or small, are we seeking the Lord's counsel?

So, it's a real mess made. But secondly, it's a mess that they've got to live with. That's the second thing, verses 16 to 26. A mess lived with.

We see here the faithful fidelity to oaths made. So, they make the treaty with Gibeon. Three days pass, look at verse 16, and then the shocking truth comes to light.

It really is one of those, what have we done moments? How could we be so naive, so stupid? They realize that these people they made a covenant with, they're one of their neighbors.

[23 : 00] These are one of the people they ought to have wiped off the map. And so, verse 17, they gear up for war. Look at verse 17, the people in Israel, they set out and reached their cities on the third day.

They arrived at Gibeon ready for war. But, they don't attack them, verse 18, because, well because of the oath.

They swore just three days earlier. Now, a big question arises, you can imagine it. You can imagine the discussion in the Israelite camp, the campfires, the army, talking over their dinner.

Surely, that covenant is null and void. We were duped. It doesn't stand. We can attack the Gibeonites. You can imagine the lawyers amongst them, arguing over the minutiae of contract law. Their offer is based on lies, misrepresentation. Can't we just tear up the covenants and get on with war, treat them as the Hivites they are? Can't we just do to them like we did to Jericho and Ai Ai?

[24 : 09] And look at the end of verse 18. The congregation murmured against their leaders. They're complaining, having discussions about the wisdom of what's happened.

covenant. But again, the leaders affirm the covenant that was entered into. Verse 19, we swore an oath. We must let them live and they'll become slaves and servants.

Now this oath, this covenant, it was an absolute mess. Everyone can see that, but it was a mess that they would have to live with. They were to remain faithful to the oath they had made, even if it was in hindsight a bad one.

They didn't compound the first sin with further sin. To go back on the covenant they made before God, that would be worse. No, no, they made the oath, they would have to honor it.

God. We sung a version of Psalm 15 just there. And here's what verse 4 of that psalm says. And this is really a summary of the principle at play here.

[25 : 24] The psalm begins, who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right. And then verse 4 says, who swears to his own hurt and does not change.

So when you make a promise or an oath, you keep it. You keep it. Even if it's to your own detriment, even if it's to your own hurt, you keep it.

An episode a bit later in the history of God's people shows that Joshua was right to stick to this oath. In 2 Samuel, you see there a three-year famine in the land of Egypt, in the land of Israel. Israel. And the reason given for that famine was Saul putting to death some of the Gibeonites, some of these people that Joshua made a covenant with. Saul broke that covenant years and years later.

And the consequence, three years of famine. This was an oath that the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, verse 18.

[26 : 36] This was a covenant made in the name of the Lord. And so they would have to honor the Lord by keeping the covenant they had made. His very name was held up and bound up with the keeping of this covenant.

To go back on it, to go back on the oath, would be to dishonor the Lord. They couldn't do that. And so the lesson here is surely this. An oath that is solemnly made in the name of the Lord, it must be fulfilled.

We can't go back on them. Even if in hindsight they were entered into foolishly like this one. This was a textbook foolish decision. But the oath was made in the name of the Lord.

They would have to keep it. Yes, it was a mess, total mess. But they were to live as faithfully as they could in the midst of that mess.

Now I don't know about you, but that's somewhat encouraging, don't you think? At least to me. Have you made messes?

[27 : 46] Have you made oaths foolishly? Well, it's been done before. And our task as God's people, when we get into that situation, is to live faithfully, to be faithful to that oath.

Perhaps we like to pretend that life is neat and tidy, we don't make mistakes, but that's not reality, is it? Life's often a mess. People do make foolish vows. Perhaps you've made a vow yourself that's foolish.

You look back on it, you think, I wish I hadn't done that. You promised to do something for someone, but something else has come up, a better offer. And the temptation is there, isn't it? To go back on your word, because to keep your word, well, it's going to be to my harm, actually. It's going to be complicated and difficult, a bit costly. Perhaps more seriously, you entered into a marriage, hastily.

And it's difficult. It's hard. be faithful to your vow, even if it's messy. Because at the very heart of marriage, it's not an emotion or a feeling, but a commitment to actively love, now and in the future.

[29 : 03] You're to keep that vow. You do the acts of love, despite your feelings, despite what you might get out of it. You are to keep your oath. Perhaps you've made vows of church membership, again, which is a public vow made in front of other people in the name of the Lord.

Maybe that's here or somewhere else. Are you demonstrating fidelity to those vows? Even though it's difficult, even though it's hard at times, even when it's easier not to keep those vows?

See, our culture encourages us to hold lightly, doesn't it, to such vows and oaths. It makes divorce ever easier to obtain. It tells us the main consideration is your own happiness, your own satisfaction.

If a vow is taking too much of your time, if it's demanding too much of you, then just set it aside. If keeping the oath doesn't make you happy anymore, ditch it. Well, this passage says the opposite.

This passage says, when you make a vow, you keep it. So yes, we might be in a real mess. Life may well be very hard because of our past mistakes or foolishness.

[30 : 19] Yes, we may have confessed our sin and repented, but even though we're forgiven, we still have to live with the consequences of our sin. We don't get to lay down oaths rashly made. We don't get to set them aside.

No, we must keep them and remain faithful to God and to the people to whom we made those vows with. The very same message we find on the lips of Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount, isn't it?

He says this again, you've heard that it was said from those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it's the throne of God, or by the earth, for it's his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it's the city of the great kings.

And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no. Anything more than this comes from evil.

See, in both the closest and most extensive of our relationships, Jesus expects God's people to be those who keep their word. Because God is faithful, because he is a keeper of his promises, because he is utterly trustworthy, his people are to be likewise.

[31 : 39] We are to be trustworthy and keepers of our word. So you and I, we are to be men and women of our word.

We are to be known as trustworthy people. What we say, we do. And sometimes, often, keeping our word is inconvenient.

But rather than seek a way out, we are to keep our promises. Even though the Gibeonites were liars, deceptive, God's people had to demonstrate fidelity to the oath they made.

They couldn't wiggle out of it. It was a mess to be lived with. This passage teaches us to be faithful to oaths, even those ones that we make rashly.

And that can be a difficult thing to come to terms with, can't it? If you find yourself in that position, it's hard. But here's the final thing we see in this chapter. And this chapter teaches us that even the worst of messes can be redeemed.

[32 : 53] Verse 27, at the very end. We see here a mess redeemed. We see the family fellowship that the Gibeonites witnessed.

Notice what Joshua does. From verse 22, he addresses them, why did you deceive us? Now, therefore, you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood, and drawers of water for the house of my God.

And look again at verse 27. But Joshua made them that day, cutters of wood, and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord to this day, in the place that he should choose.

So not only did the people of Gibeon get to keep their lives, but they were to serve the people of God, and specifically, they were going to serve in the altar.

They were going to be working in and around the house of the Lord, the very heart of God's people. They were to witness the family fellowship, the worship of God's people.

[34 : 05] And so what we see here is God and his amazing goodness and grace and sovereignty. He's using even this foolish oath for good. Not only were these Gibeonites allowed to live, but they got to serve in the tabernacle.

They would, in their day-to-day work, watch the gospel lived out day by day. Not only in the lives of God's people, but in what was happening daily in the tabernacle.

They would see and facilitate the slaughter of lambs and bulls and goats for the sins of the people. You can't get a more visual demonstration of what's required to forgive sin than that.

The gospel was played out in front of their eyes as these animals were brought in for sacrificing for sin. And so you see, God is so good and gracious and powerful.

God, that he can overrule even our foolishness and our sin and turn it to something amazing where he accomplishes his great purposes. Fast forward a few centuries and you find in the book of Nehemiah, the Gibeonites, this very people.

[35 : 18] They are there rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah chapter three, we read this. And next to them repaired Methiliah, the Gibeonites, and Jadon, the Moronathites, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah.

And then later on in Nehemiah we read that 95 sons of Gibeon were there, rebuilding the walls with Nehemiah. Isn't that astonishing? A people that should have been set apart for destruction are wonderfully brought in and included in God's amazing family.

Even these Gibeonites who with all their mixed motives, their imperfect motives, even to them the Lord shows grace. Joshua is an extraordinary book isn't it?

It's not what you expect as you launch in. Who are some of the key characters, key individuals that are brought in and included? Well we have Rahab in chapter two, the Canaanite prostitutes with our whole household, wonderfully saved from destruction.

So too the Gibeonites, saved from certain destruction. It's a wonderful, vivid illustration, isn't it? That God is more eager to save than to condemn.

[36 : 41] 2 Peter 3 verse 9 says this, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises, as some count slowness, but is patient towards towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

That is the God of the Bible. Not just the God of the New Testament, but the God of the whole Bible. He desires to save, and he will save even those who come with imperfect motives, like these Gibeonites.

God of the Bible. And perhaps that's you here tonight. You're here with imperfect motives, perhaps. Maybe you're here because, well, some guy or girl's caught your eye. You think your chances are improved by being here.

Well, if that's you, you're very welcome. Maybe you're here because you're on some quest for self-improvement, and you think the spiritual aspect's got to be there as well.

I'm just here to improve myself. Well, you're very welcome. Whatever your reasons are for being here, you're welcome. But now that you are here, consider what's at the very heart of the Christian message.

[37 : 55] Consider the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. What matters is where you end up in the Christian life, not necessarily how you begin out, how you start out.

The Gibeonites, they started out with fraud, didn't they? But they ended up in the very heart of the worship of the living God. Might that be your story tonight, I wonder.

God is a God who works out his purposes in the real world, not the ideal world. He works out his purposes in a world of mess, a world in which men and women, just like you and me, make foolish choices.

We enter oaths rashly. We make promises. We shouldn't make. But he is a God who works in all our mess and brings all things to work according to his plan and his glory.

And so you may be looking at the life that you're living, the mess you've landed yourself in. Perhaps you have to live with oaths rashly made. you need to remember that God can use such things in his sovereignty for good.

[39 : 09] You may not see how at the moment, but one day you will. He is at work and you can trust him. Not that that is ever an excuse for complacency or carelessness or prayerlessness or for believing that mistakes do not matter very much.

Oh, it's okay. The Lord will sort it out. No, no. But knowing this, knowing this, the knowledge, the assurance that God can overrule in spite of everything, that is the wonder, the glory of being in his family.

This is the God we serve. And aren't you glad that our God is like that? That he is sovereign over all things and that he is abounding in grace and mercy even in the midst of our mess.

He can redeem it. Well, let's pray, shall we, before we close our time together. Our Father, how glad we are that your word is not not a word of pious platitudes but actually is a gracious word to the real world.

That you are a God who deals with reality. That you are a God who deals with mess. And how glad we are for that. Each one of us can point to mess in our own lives and yet you have called us to be part of your family forever.

[40 : 53] And so would you help us to be people who do make wise decisions that we would seek your counsel. That we would bring all things before you in prayer. prayer. But Lord, when we fail, would you remind us again and again of your great grace.

How glad we are that you are a God of grace. Help us to be a thankful people. A people who rejoice because we belong to a God like that. So help us now, we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.