

How the Bible fits together: FAMILY

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[0 : 00] Now, as you know, we have recently begun a study on how the whole Bible fits together, and we're basing it around the diagram that is on the screen in front of you.

And the basic principle that lies behind this diagram is the fact that if you read the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2, and if you read the last two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 21 and 22, then you see that there are a lot of similarities.

The same themes are found at the beginning, and they are found at the end, and indeed, these themes run right through the whole Bible. And we are examining these six themes that we find at the beginning, and that run right through the Scriptures to see how the Bible fits together.

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at the theme of land, and tonight we are going to focus on the second theme, family. Now, as we begin to do this, I feel I should make two apologies.

First of all, I feel I must apologize for the fact that when we come to look at this, we will only barely scratch the surface. The theme of family is a glorious, glorious theme running through Scripture, and we can barely come anywhere near doing it justice, certainly in one sermon. So in many ways, I apologize for the fact that we will be skimming through things and not going into things maybe as deeply as we would like. But my second apology is from the fact that the little that we are going to look at is probably going to take us five minutes longer than normal, and that's why we only had two signings before the sermon.

[1 : 46] But my hope that by starting our sermon nice and early, we'll still be leaving at the same time. So with these two apologies in mind, we can turn to look at this great theme. We'll read again from Galatians chapter 3, the passage that we read. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under the guardian. For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Now in order to look at these themes, we are asking three simple questions. What happened in the Old Testament? What happened in the New Testament? And what does this mean for us? These are our guiding questions. And so we begin by asking what did happen in terms of family in the Old Testament? Well, if we go back to the very beginning, Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2, God creates the heavens and the earth and He creates the human race. And immediately, He establishes the family unit. From the very beginning, family was at the heart of God's creation. That was the one thing that wasn't good, not good for Adam to be alone. He made Eve and He joined them together as husband and wife. Now, if you think about family, there are in many ways two pillars in terms of the structure of a family. There are two things that are essential to family. We have marriage and we have children. That's the two central themes of a family. That's how a family begins, both by a couple coming together in marriage and a family grows by that couple having children. So these two themes, marriage and children, are really the foundational pillars of family. And I want us to really try and have these two things in our minds, because they'll come up, I hope, again and again as we go through this. From the very beginning, these two foundational principles are established by God. If we look at these verses, God says to them, be fruitful and multiply. In other words, have children. And Genesis 2.24, He says, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. These two foundational principles are what works together to continue families. Children are born, they leave their parents, they get married, they have more children, those children grow up, they leave home, they get married, they have more children and so on and so on and so on. That's how family grows and that's how God wanted it to be. That's why family is what we call a creation ordinance. Established from day one, it was how God wanted things to be. Family is part of the perfect creation that was set out by God in the Garden of Eden. So it's very, very clear

that God wants family at the heart of creation. God made everything. Family was not just an afterthought, it was not just a little bonus at the side. Family was foundational. Family is at the centre of

God's purposes. So that's stage one, if you like, of what happens in the Old Testament. God establishes family. But as we know, Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve sinned and the result of their sin is that a curse comes upon the world and that curse has an immediate effect on the family unit and these same two areas are affected. These two foundational pillars, marriage, children are both affected. We read this in Genesis 3.16. To the woman, God said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. And so in that verse, we see these two things affected. The marriage relationship becomes strained between the husband and the wife and having children is affected by the curse. And then we see that this immediately then manifests itself in the generations that come after Adam and Eve. The first two brothers born, Cain and Abel, is not a happy relationship. And in the end, Cain murders his brother. And the effect continues. You read into Genesis chapter 4 and it tells you about the descendants of Cain and how the family line continued. And we come to a man called Lamech. And it tells us that Lamech took two wives. Not one as God intended, but he took two wives. And then he starts boasting and he says, Ada and Zilla, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech.

Listen to what I say. I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's revenge Lamech's is 77 fold. And the point that Lamech is the point that's been made by highlighting Lamech is the fact that he is departing from God's intended structure for family. And we see that everything is starting to fall apart. The family unit has been ruined by sin. People are starting to turn away from God's intentions. And the effect is devastating. You have this violent, arrogant person boasting and really sounding like a very unpleasant character. So the point here is that sin has had an effect on the family unit. But at the same time, in Genesis chapter 3, we see that God is also saying that the family unit will be a source of blessing. Genesis 3 15 emphasizes this very clearly. In fact, this is God's immediate response to the fall. We looked at this version on Thursday evening at the question box night. This is God's response to the sin that has been committed in the Garden of Eden. And this is what

God says to Satan, who's in the form of the serpent. And if you look closely, you'll see that this is a family promise. I will put enmity between you and the woman that's talking to Satan here, I put enmity between you and the woman between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Now this is a really, really important verse, because it is telling us what God's response is to sin coming into the world. And God's response to the devil is that the devil is going to be crushed. The offspring of the woman shall bruise or shall crush your head. And we'll come back to this verse later on. But the key point here is that God is setting out what we can call the seed promise. The Hebrew word for offspring is actually the word seed. Your descendants are known as your seed. And so we call this the seed promise or the offspring promise. Sin has come into the world. God is saying, through the offspring of the woman, I am going to crush and defeat Satan. So we have this indication that God is going to work out his purposes through family. God's going to work through family. And if you go then into

Genesis chapter four, we see that in the midst of all the curse and all the problems, there is also hope. Because it says at the end of Genesis chapter four, Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth. For she said, God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel for Cain Kilton. To Seth also a son was born. And he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. And so do you see what is happening here? The main descendants of Adam and Eve through Cain are going further and further away from God. But alongside that, you've got Seth and his descendants, and they call on the name of the Lord. So whilst the family is going down in one way, there is still this measure of hope. And this is the pattern for the whole of the Old Testament in terms of family. There is a continual downward spiral all the way through the Old Testament, as we shall see in a moment, which shows that sin has had a terrible effect on the family unit. But alongside that, at the same time, God uses family as a means of blessing and as a means of hope. God is setting out the pattern for the rest of history. So to go back to our stage by stage process, family is established, family is cursed because of sin.

[11 : 21] And we can then go through the rest of the Old Testament very, very quickly. And I hope that you can bear with me because as I said at the start, we're covering a lot of ground in a very,

very short period of time. You carry on through Genesis. And as we said last time, you come to chapter 11, the Tower of Babel, which is a real low point. Whenever you hear Tower of Babel, you should think lowest point, because it really was a low point. As we said in the terms of the land, at first theme, people were scattered all over the world. The world became no man's land. In terms of family, people are divided. And we see that in Genesis 11, 9. Therefore, its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there, the Lord dispersed them all over the face of the earth. People are scattered, the world is divided.

But God responds to this by calling Abraham. And in Genesis 12, God calls Abraham and he enters a covenant with Abraham. And at the heart of that covenant is family. The Lord said to Abraham, go from your country, from your kindred, from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So God has seen two things here in terms of family. One, he's saying Abraham is going to have a family that will become a great nation. And not only that, through that family, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed.

And so the point is, the blessing was going to come through Abraham's family. His wife, Sarah, as you know, was going to have a baby. And his son, Isaac, was the child of promise through whom God's purposes were going to be worked out. And then when Isaac grows up, he is blessed with a God-given wife, Rebecca, and they in turn are blessed with children.

The family is being blessed by God and God's purposes are being worked out. And you can read Genesis 12 through to 25, 26 to see how it all works out. I'm skimming it very quickly, as I said.

[13 : 47] God is working his purposes out through this family, but at the same time, the effect of the curse is evident. These two things, the blessing and the curse are together, because Sarah, Abraham's wife, Rebecca, Isaac's wife, and Rachel, Jacob's wife, all struggled to conceive. They all struggled to have children. They all felt the effects of the fall. Abraham fathered Ishmael with Hagar and caused all sorts of difficulties with that. Esau, Isaac's son, sold his birthright.

Jacob deceived Isaac. And then Jacob's own children, as you know, didn't teach each other very well. And they sold Joseph in particular into slavery. So whilst God is working his purposes out through this family, we at the same time see struggle and difficulty and tension. So you have this positive, negative, blessing, curse, tension running through Abraham's family. But the key point in terms of the stages that we're working through is that Abraham's family is chosen. God is going to work his purposes out through them. Now you're doing very well keeping up with us. We're making progress. In the book of Genesis, the focus is on Abraham's family, as we would think of it. It's on Abraham, his children, his grandchildren, his great grandchildren. That's what we would consider a family. That's the focus of Genesis. But in Exodus, the family has grown. So there is now a nation. It's not just a son and a grandson. It's a whole nation. But the key point is that that nation is still a family. It is still a family. Israel was the name that God gave to Jacob. You can read in Genesis 32 and Genesis 35. And so when we say the phrase children of Israel, we are basically saying Jacob's family. Israel was a big family nation. And as I'm sure you know, they were divided into 12 tribes according to their descent from Jacob's 12 sons. And so even though Israel is now thousands upon thousands of people, they are still one family. They were all still related.

And as this great big family, they were God's people. So Israel was like a family nation, if you want to think of it like that. So I hope you can see what we're getting at here. God's family has grown.

This family has grown from just Abraham to now being a big nation, but it's still a family. However, as we've been saying, there's this positive and negative aspect all the time.

And in terms of this nation's history, there is a very negative trajectory in the history of Israel. If you read through the Old Testament, you will find many incidences of family failures. You go into the book of Judges, you read of people like Gideon, Samson, who made terrible mistakes in terms of family. You go to the end of the book, the book of Judges, and you, the way the families are treating each other is horrific. You go further on, you come to David, he committed adultery, he made a terrible mistake in terms of his family. Solomon took 700 wives. Again, he made terrible mistakes in terms of family. And we go through the Old Testament and see that individuals made many, many, many family mistakes. And collectively, the nation, the family nation makes mistakes as well.

After Solomon came Rehoboam, and in Rehoboam's reign, the family split the nation divided to the northern kingdoms and the southern kingdoms. Again, I know I'm going really, really fast. The point of just making is that the families divided now. And then you go further on another 200 years to the

time of Isaiah, and the family are at war. The 10 northern tribes are at war with the two southern tribes. And the point is that everything has got worse. The family, Abraham's family, is now two nations at war with one another. And the key problem in it all is that the people are turning away from God. And if you look in the Old Testament, the people turning away from God is described very often in family terms. Because God says that this family nation of Israel is an unfaithful spouse, and they are disobedient children. Now, I hope you notice that that's our two big themes coming back. The theme of marriage, the theme of children. Israel is failing in both of these areas. Jeremiah says, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so you have been treacherous to me, O house of [18:55] Israel declares the Lord, an unfaithful wife. And Hosea 11 says, when Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away. They kept sacrificing to the baals and to the burnt offerings and to the idols. God was a husband to Israel. God was a father to Israel. But the people, the family, were an unfaithful wife.

And they were disobedient children. They rebelled against him. And by the end of the Old Testament, the whole family has fallen apart. And as Isaiah tells us, all that is left is a stump. And so according to our two big pillars, marriage and children, Israel has failed, both ethnically and spiritually. So by the end of the Old Testament, you have a broken family.

I really hope that makes sense. It's not a very good diagram. And I must apologize because we're trying to cram too much information into one picture. The point I want you to see is that at the top left, you've got the family established. At the bottom right, you've got Israel as a broken family. But throughout all of that negativity, God is always a faithful husband and a devoted father. Remember what I said at the very beginning, God made a promise that when he spoke to the serpent that through the woman's offspring, they would be hope.

That seed promise was made. That seed promise was being established through the godly line that was coming through Seth and his descendants that went through Noah and Shem and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And God is working out his purposes through the family line. And what happens in the Old Testament is that in terms of the family, the focus homes in on one particular tribe.

[20:55] And that's the tribe of Judah. By the end of Genesis, it tells us that the scepter shall not depart from Judah. So God is focused on this one child. Judah was one of Jacob's 12 sons, one of the 12 tribes. And the focus is coming in on them. And the line of Judah becomes important.

And we see that the line of Judah is preserved by various events in the Old Testament. One of them is one of the family highlights in the Old Testament, the book of Ruth, where the line of Judah is preserved there. And the focus eventually lands on a man called Jesse and his youngest son, David, who are of the tribe of Judah. And in them, the royal family is established. And that royal family are given many, many promises. God says to David, when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your father, I will raise up your offspring after you notice again, same idea offspring, offspring, offspring, who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son. Same thing is emphasized in Isaiah 11. There shall come forth from the shoot, from a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his fruits shall bear fruit and the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him a spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The key point is that the seed promise still stands. God has not given up on his family promise. God has not given up on his promise to Abraham and God is going to bless all the families through the offspring of the woman. And so we have this message of hope from the Old Testament. Yes, at the bottom you've got all this negativity, but in terms of a positive hope, the prophecies of the Old Testament from Genesis 3.15, right the way through are saying that there's this seed or offspring promise that God is going to keep. So that's how the Old Testament ends. The nation family has fallen apart. The seed promise still stands. Now, what is the first thing you read in the New Testament?

Turn to Matthew 1 if you've got a Bible in front of you. Turn it over. What's the first thing that you read in the New Testament? What is that? It's a family tree. The first thing you read in the New Testament is a family tree. The genealogy of Jesus Christ going all the way back to Abraham. Now, why does the New Testament begin with a family tree? Because God is fulfilling the family promise.

God is fulfilling the seed promise. The family promise still stands. Everything that the Old Testament is pointed to is now being fulfilled. It is fulfilled by the fact that God's own child, God's own beloved

son, Jesus Christ has now come. Everything that the Old Testament promised is now being fulfilled. At the heart of it all are these same two pillars, marriage and children. Jesus brings both of these things to a whole new level. Jesus teaches us some amazing things about God's family. Jesus emphasizes that we can all, all be part of God's family. He calls people like Zakeis, a tax collector, a son of Abraham, and he emphasizes that everyone, not just the Jewish nation, can become part of God's family. Membership of God's family is not a physical matter, it is a spiritual matter. And do you see the connection God said to Abraham in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed? Jesus is coming and saying all the families of the earth can come into God's family because it's not about being an Israelite. It's a spiritual matter. He emphasizes this in John chapter 8 very clearly. I won't read it through because we're running out of time, but the people were emphasizing that Abraham was their father and Jesus was saying it's not your physical descent from Abraham that matters. He says, if you were, if God were your father, you would love me for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me and Paul sums it up in Galatians 3 which we read when he says, know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. The point Jesus is making is that it is a spiritual matter, not a physical matter. Those who are of faith are Abraham's family.

[26 : 16] And Jesus emphasizes the two great pillars that we have been talking about. He makes it beautifully clear that all who believe are now God's children. He says, do not cling to me for I've not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God. As John 1 says, he came to his own and his own people did not receive him, but to all who did receive him who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. That's what Jesus is emphasizing. That's why he told us to pray our Father. Jesus is saying that we can all become God's children. And at the same time, he also describes himself as the bridegroom. Mark 219, can the wedding dress fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. John 1722, the glory that you've given me, I've given to them that they may be one as we are one. I am them and you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and loved me, loved them even as you loved me. Jesus's goal for us is oneness with him, which is of course the goal of marriage, that we will be one with him, a bridegroom and his bride. And so Jesus is bringing the whole concept of family to a new level. He is saying that we can become God's children.

He is saying we can become the bride of the bridegroom. And so Jesus is fulfilling the Old Testament family promises. If we remind ourselves what the Old Testament promises were, the Old Testament family promised that the seed of the woman would come and that a descendant of Abraham would come and that a royal Davidic king would come. All of these are family promises and they are all fulfilled in God's own Son, Jesus Christ. He is the one who has come to fulfill these promises and he has come so that we can share in these privileges ourselves. He makes us one with him like in a marriage and he makes us the children of God. So Jesus is bringing everything to a new level. He is saying we can become children of God and he is saying we can be married to Christ. That's basically what he is saying. These two pillars, these two family pillars he is saying you can be married to me and he is saying you can become children of God like me.

And that's a big, big claim and we could easily ask ourselves well how does that work? How is that possible? And the amazing thing is that if you read on in the New Testament you find the answer because when you go into the epistles of the New Testament, the letters, we are given amazing teaching that tells us how all this works and in particular we are shown how this works by two amazing New Testament doctrines. We are married to Jesus by our union with Christ and we become God's children by adoption. Now these two things union with Christ and adoption are absolutely central to the New Testament and the point I want to, I hope I'm bringing out clearly is that they are both family doctrines and it's the same two pillars, the pillar of marriage and the pillar of children. We are united in marriage through our union with Christ and we are adopted as God's children and I hope you can see how just amazingly this fits together. Go back to Eden, the very beginning God establishes a family at the very start. You go all the way through to the New Testament and the heart of the theological teaching is two family doctrines, adoption, a family doctrine, union with Christ, a family doctrine. And I want us to spend two, three minutes looking at both of these because these are at the heart of God's purposes for us. In terms of adoption we read Genesis chapter Galatians rather chapter 3 and into chapter 4. I'll just read it again because it's really important. So then the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be

justified by faith but now that faith has come we've put on Christ. There's neither Jew nor Greek, there's neither slave nor free, there's no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus and notice this verse and if you are Christ then you are Abraham's offspring.

I hope you can see how that connects right back to Genesis 12. Heirs according to the promise. I mean that the heir as long as he's a child is no different from a slave though he is the owner of everything but he's under guardians and managed until the date set by his father and the same way also when we were children we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world but when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba father so you're no longer a slave but a son and if a son then an heir through God. Paul is saying that if you put your faith in Jesus Christ you are adopted as God's child in other words you are brought into the family and this is how we become like Jesus. Jesus is God's son by nature he always has been always will be the begotten only begotten son of God. Jesus is God's son by nature we become God's sons and daughters by adoption we are adopted into his family and God the spirit as we read the spirit of his son comes into our hearts we are baptized with the spirit the spirit indwells us and enables us to recognize God as our father and we cry out Abba Father. Now this is the great goal of the gospel this is what God wants for you. Now this is really really important it's not simply the case that God wants your sins forgiven it's not simply the case that God wants you saved from hell it's not simply the case that God wants you to renovate your life it's not simply the case that God wants you to be at peace. God wants all of those things for you but God's plans for you are higher and better and greater than that. God wants you as his child. God wants you as his very own son or daughter. That is the highest level of privilege and that is what God wants for you. So we are adopted, we become children of God and all of that is made possible by the fact that we are united to Christ. That brings us onto the second big doctrine, union with Christ and we can go to Romans 7 to learn a little bit about that. Do you not know brothers, but I am speaking to those who know the law that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from the law and if she marries another she is not an adulteress.

[34 : 37] Now Paul is just setting out the fact that there is simple truth that if you have a married couple, if one dies the marriage has come to an end because it is until death that parts the husband and wife. But notice what he says next, likewise my brothers you have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. If you have the authorised version in front of you it will say that you may be married to another and that is a good translation because although it is not literally the word married that is what Paul means. That you may be married to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God. And the same comparison is made in Ephesians chapter 5. Paul talks about husbands loving their wives but he says that a husband should love his wife as he loves himself but the mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. In both these passages Paul is using marriage as an image for our relationship with Christ and just as our wife is united to her husband so by faith and through the work of the Holy Spirit we are united to Christ and we benefit from all that Christ has done. As the Bible says we died with him, we are raised with him, we now live with him, we are united, we are one with Jesus Christ. And this theme takes us all the way to the very end of the Bible when you come to the book of Revelation and how are we described in the book of Revelation chapter 21. We are the bride of Christ and we are the children of God. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city, New

Jerusalem coming down from heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And then a few verses later says the one who conquers will have this heritage and I will be his God and he will be my son. We shall be married to Christ and children of God the Father. And then in verse 27 of Revelation 21 we read that it says nothing unclean will enter this city, not anyone who does what is detestable or false but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Now what is the Lamb's book of life? What is it?

Well if you go back to Genesis 5 it gives you a genealogy that talks about the book of the generations of Adam. And if you go to Matthew chapter 1 which we did a moment ago it talks about

the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. And I think part of the reason why Revelation uses the language of our book of life is that this book is God's great family tree. This is the list of every family member. If you are trusting in Jesus then your name is in that family tree. You are a branch in God's great family.

And so we've gone from Genesis 1 to the very end of Revelation and you've been so patient because that was a huge huge amount of information. But I really hope that you can see the theme that's running through it all. The fact that God wants us as his family member. And all of this is possible because of the cross. You go back to the seed promise in Genesis 3.15 it says that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head but the serpent will bruise his heel. In other words the woman's descendant is going to get hurt in the process.

And that's exactly what happened on the cross. And that's why the book of life is the Lamb's book of life because it's accomplished through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

[38 : 39] Where the woman's offspring was bruised but there he crushed the head of the serpent. And now we are united to him and we are the precious children of God. So I hope we can sum this up in our diagram. Jesus fulfills the seed promises by coming as the offspring.

Through the cross we are united to Jesus like a marriage. And through the cross we are adopted as God's children. These two great doctrines run through the New Testament. And at the very end we have this picture of God's family in the new creation. The bridegroom unites us to himself and our elder brother opens the way for us to become the children of God.

Now remember what I said at the beginning. I hope you can remember this. I think I've bombarded you with information. But remember what we said at the very beginning about Israel. It became a nation but it was a family. It was a big family nation. And God's people in the New Testament are described as the new Israel. The true Israel. Because as a great multitude of God's people we are all one family in the new creation. From the beginning God established family. And at the very end we have a great family reunion. The Bible fits together perfectly. Perfectly. So as I said I'll know off a lot of information there. Our last question and we'll go through this quickly. What does this mean for us?

What does it mean for you? Well as family members we have many privileges. In Galatians 3 we read Paul say if you are Christ then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. As God's child you are an heir entitled by unreversible right to all of God's privileges and blessings. That points us back to what we were looking at last time.

The land. We are to inherit the land. The new heavens and the newer and all the amazing blessings that will come with it. God wants to show his children with amazing blessings and we thought about that in the land two weeks ago. But how all the kersh, all that spoils this earth will be gone and as God's children it is promised to you. God has written it as your inheritance. You are an heir. But we are also secure in God's family. In the Bible marriage was not just about romance. Marriage was also about security and marriage should still be about security because when two people join together in marriage they are committing to each other they are making a pledge to death and nothing should separate them. The family unit was always intended to be a place of absolute security. If you were in a family you were protected, you were looked after, if you were in trouble your family helped you, if you were in need your family provided, the family cared for each other, you were secure or you were certainly meant to be secure in that family. Well in God's family you are secure. You are totally secure because that's why Jesus said my father who has given him to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand. That's telling us that the family is a place of security. No one can snatch you out of your father's hand. Your name is in that book of life if you are trusting in Jesus.

[42 : 55] You are totally secure. No one can threaten you. No one can take you. No one can snatch you. No one can hurt you because the father is holding you in his hand because you are his child. You are totally, totally secure in God's family and not only that in God's family we are united together because our relationship to God in Christ gives us a relationship to one another. That's why we call ourselves brothers and sisters because we're all part of the same family. Christ is our elder brother. God is our father and we are all one. That's why Paul says it's not as a matter of your slave or free, a man or a woman, a Jew or a Greek, no difference because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, all God's children. We have this amazing relationship with each other which is why we can and we should hold on to each other as a family. That's why as we come together each week as a church the family is coming together and if you are wanting to become a Christian or

thinking about becoming a Christian or worried about what it's like it's just a family homecoming.

When you come into God's people you are just joining the family and we long to have you with us. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. So we have amazing privileges and there are many many more but you've been so patient and I've taken too long as always. Lastly we also have responsibilities. If we are family members we have responsibilities. In terms of marriage there are two great responsibilities, two great goals, faithfulness and fruitfulness.

God said at the very beginning Adam and Eve were to be joined together and to stay together and they were to bear fruit. So they were to be faithful and they were to be fruitful. And we are exactly the same as God's people. We are to be faithful to our saviour. That's why the Old Testament family fell apart because they were unfaithful but we are to be faithful to God, faithful to his word, faithful to our fellow Christian, faithful to our bridegroom, faithful to God, to our saviour. But we are also to be fruitful. Now this is very interesting because in Romans 7 we read this verse, I'll read it again. Paul's talking is using the image of marriage to describe our relationship to Jesus. Likewise my brother, you've died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another or be married to another to him who has raised you from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.

So that is saying our marriage to Jesus, our spiritual marriage to Jesus should bring fruit. Now what does that mean? What does that mean? Well it might refer to bearing the fruit of the spirit in our lives, to living in the way God wants. It may well refer to that and in some ways I'm sure it does but I think there's a bigger dimension to it. Because when you talk about a family, the idea of being fruitful in a family is for the family to grow. That's what God wanted for Adam and Eve. He said be fruitful when he said that he meant I want you to make this family grow. And the same principle applies to us as Christians. God wants us to work to make his family grow. In other words we are missionaries in God's family.

We are here to call other people in. God wants his family to increase. We are to be part of that. So faithfulness, fruitfulness, that's the great responsibilities in marriage. In terms of children there's another two great expectations. Obedience and dependence. In the Bible children were to be obedient to their parents. Honor your father and mother, a vital principle in the Ten Commandments and running through the whole of the Bible. The same applies to God. We are to honor him, we are to obey him, we are to listen to his word, we are to do what the father wants. So as God's children we must be obedient. But the expectation of children in the Bible is also that they would be dependent. And this tells you and me that we honor God. We please God by depending on him. [47 : 49] Now that's so important to remember. It's so easy to feel like our failures and our weaknesses are just such a disappointment to God. And a reason for us to keep back from God and to say, oh God just wouldn't want to know me. But God wants us to depend on him. God wants us to come as children and say, Lord I need you and I can't do this without you. That's why we are to cry, abba father. That word cry means a desperate cry. Please help me. It's a cry of dependence. And always always remember that it pleases God when you tell him that you need him. Pleases God. You wake up tomorrow morning and work is our real thought and you say, Lord please help me. God wants you to be that dependent on him. When you are struggling with decisions, with difficulties and you lay it before the Lord and you say, please help me Lord. That is what God wants to hear. God doesn't want you to come to him in self-sufficiency. God wants you to come to him in dependence. And if you are maybe not sure if you are yet a Christian or if you want to become a Christian and feel that it's all that you're not good enough, please, please listen to this. God wants you just to come to him in dependence and say, Lord I just need you. God wants us to depend on him. So we are to be faithful and fruitful. We are to be obedient. We are to be dependent. But the very last thing I'm going to say is this. At the heart of God's purposes for you and for me is that we would be in his family.

And at the heart of family is love. Love is the foundation of any family. And in God's family, you find the best, greatest, most amazing love. Because when you come into God's family, you will find a bridegroom and a father who will say to you, I will love you eternally. I will love you forever.

I will never, ever stop. That's why we read at the very start from 1 John chapter 3, see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God. Family goes from the beginning of the Bible to the very end of the Bible because God wants you as his beloved bride and as his beloved child. You come into God's family and you will find love that is beyond anything that I can describe. And if you trust in Jesus, all of this can be yours.

The gate into God's family is open for you. God is calling. Please come in. Amen. Let us pray.