

The Wonder and Weight of Covenant

Exodus 24:1-18 Pastor Bland Mason 7.9.2017

BIG Idea: God's covenant promises call for a response

INTRODUCTION

- I have been pastoring since I was 23 and over those years I have been in 100's of homes for the first time. Sometimes it was a cup of coffee to connect with a family, other times it was to be involved with a community group meeting regularly in someone's home. One of the things that amaze me is the range of house rules people have. For example, in Kentucky where I was for 13 years, it is a little unusual to take your shoes off at the door where up here it more the rule than the exception both for pragmatic purposes as no one wants salty snow tracked through their home and because of the influence of cultures where wearing shoes in someone's home is considered crass or rude.
- Once they are inside, I have found people act all kinds of ways based on who they are and what their relationship with the owner is. Some people always bring a gift, and come into the home as if they have been invited into have tea with the queen of England. They sit only when their host sits and are always concerned about putting a drink down on a coffee table without a coaster. Others walk into a home for the first time and make themselves at home no matter how little they know the host or hostess.
- ILL – A guy I went to college with came home with me for weekend to just hang out. I grew up in a pretty rural area on the Chesapeake Bay. My parents had built a house on this old farmland. It wasn't particularly big but it was fairly new. My friend went through the house inspecting everything and then told my parents he really liked it and asked how much they paid for it.
- When it comes to people's homes, some people are too comfortable with the owner and treat the house rules. Other people are so timid about the owner and now wanting to offend them that they can never relax.
- This is two ways I find most people approach God. On the one hand some people just presume upon God's grace and treat him and his house rules with flippancy. So they claim to have a relationship with God but God seems to always be cool with how they live their lives, no matter how it contradicts his Word.
- On the other side some people are always living in fear of how God feels about them, concerned that they at any moment may offend God so greatly that they never really trust God's grace or enjoy being a part of his family.
- For the last few weeks our series in Exodus has focused on chapters 19-24 and the idea of Covenant. We have framed out the idea quite a bit. Last Sunday Fletcher highlighted how the promises of God give us the strength we need to face whatever. Today's text is the official ratification of the covenant by God and the people. The scene here is a bit like a wedding where a couple makes promises to each other with formalized actions and language.
- What we see here has a wonder and a weight to it. On the one hand the wonder is of God pursuing relationship with broken people and his willingness to bear the cost of making that relationship possible. He is the one who redeems. He is the one who rescues. On the other hand, the significance of who God is and the sheer significance of his glory has a weight to it.
- This brings us to our **BIG Idea for today: God's covenant promises call for a response**. The wonder of it connects with us who walk in fear all the time and wondering how God feels about us. The weight of it calls us to not treat God and his promises lightly and respond in worshipful obedience to him.
- To see the wonder and weight of the covenant and how it calls for a response, we will work through some questions... What is the covenant? How is the covenant formed? Why the covenant is formed? And then we'll hit some proper ways for us to respond. Going to look at a lot of Scripture today but we are going to look at how this one event in Ex 24 connects with everything before it and everything after it in Scripture.

1. What is the covenant? A partnership with God based on the promises of God. (24:1-4)

- Covenant - A partnership with God based on the promises of God. Promises of God, commitments of man. God ALWAYS initiates the covenant, mankind responds.
- Covenants in Scripture
 - humanity > Noah/humanity > Abraham > Israel > Davidic > Jesus
 - 1. Humanity -Garden of Eden – God made mankind in his image and God gives them the garden to live in and rule over. Mankind rebels against God and rather than trusting God, rejected his rule and substituted their own rule. PAUSE – this has been and always will be the nature of sin. It is rebelling against God’s rule and is at the very core of what is wrong with me and all of us.
 - a. After the fall of mankind into sin, we see 4 Old Testament Covenants:
 - 2. Noah – just cleansed the world, promises of God. Interesting because God knows that mankind will rebel against him yet God remains faithful.
 - 3. Abraham – promise of God to establish a people, bless and multiply Abraham’s family and give them a land so that the whole earth is blessed by his family.
 - 4. Israel (people) –Exodus, deliverance, provision laws, pointing to a people dwelling in the promised land. (Exodus 20-24)
 - a. Exodus 24:1-4 *Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.” Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. (ESV)*
 - 5. David – God would establish David’s kingdom and bring a new king to rule over God’s people forever.
- God is restoring his partnership with mankind in the world. But God’s people failed over and over again to keep their commitments and to honor God. There was talk of a new covenant by the later prophets in the OT, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.
 - 6. Jesus showed up on the scene fulfilling these prophetic promises and called people to become part of the new covenant people. He is from the family of Abraham so he will bring the blessings of Abraham to the whole world. He is the faithful Israelite who can truly obey the whole law. He is the King from the family of David so he will be the one to bring peace and God’s rule for all of God’s people.
- Covenants progressively moved throughout Scripture toward Jesus. You can argue that revelation of the covenant promises is a CENTRAL purpose of Scripture itself.

2. How is the covenant formed? Affirmed in word, sealed by ceremony, but enacted through life. (24:5-8)

- When you go to a wedding and witness what the bible says is a marriage covenant, the couple affirms certain things and it is most often surrounded with a ceremony meant to convey the wonder and weight of what is happening.
- We see this happening throughout this chapter but vv.5-8 are key. Follow along in your bible.
 - v.5** *And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.* – Not to atone but to celebrate and commemorate the covenant. When couples decorate their wedding ceremony with flowers and force bridesmaids to wear brightly colored gaudy dresses it is meant to honor to ceremony and make it more celebratory.
 - v.6** *And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar.* This was to represent before God that this was a binding covenant.
 - v.7** *Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people.* [highlighting the

requirements of God's law] *And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."* This is the "I do" part of the ceremony. LISTEN – THIS IS not a compulsory response. "I guess we should obey." But the people JOYFULLY AND HAPPILY choose faithfulness and obedience to God. They saw all God had done to bring them into his family and in light of him giving his family rules to them they say, "Yes! We will listen to everything you have said and obey!"

v.8 *And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."* Most likely Moses threw the blood on the 12 pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel. But the symbol was clear: this blood binds you to this covenant. To break this covenant will cost you your blood just like it cost these animals.

- So the covenant was affirmed with the written word of God's Law, sealed with this ceremony but it was enacted in daily life as the people obeyed. The covenant was displayed not by how Israel acted when they were in a worship service of God but by how they lived in every dimension of their lives.
- The new covenant that we have with Jesus was enacted the same way. He affirmed the **Word** of God's Law and said that he came to perfectly fulfill the Law. In fact Jesus is described as the living Word in John 1. He embodies all the Word of God. The **ceremony** was the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross at Passover as the ultimate Passover Lamb. His blood ratifies the covenant with God.
- In Exodus 24 the blood was a sign of the covenant being ratified but with Jesus, his blood is both the confirmation and the means of the covenant. He completed ALL of God's law for us and PAID for all of our sin. He completed all of OUR part of the covenant because we couldn't.

3. Why was the covenant formed? Relating to God rightly to display God's goodness to the world. (24:9-11)

- The focus of every covenant through Scripture culminating in the new final covenant through Jesus, is the restoration of relationship between God and man of God bringing mankind back into his presence. What was lost in Eden is being restored by God through covenant.
- Exodus 24:9-11 Follow along in your bible.
 - v.9** - *Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel.* Moses was the mediator but the fact that he brought Nadab and Abihu (priests) and seventy elders, means something more was going on. Up to this point no one else had been able to experience God's presence. The priests came up and the elders came up to represent the people. This was a sign of peace and fellowship with God.
 - v.10** *There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.* This is Moses trying to describe what they saw. They didn't see God in his fullness as we will find a little later in Exodus 33 but the description of what was under his feet, which is bizarre unless that is all you can see clearly. What's awesome is this idea sapphire pavement that's super clear echoes in the end of the book of Revelation in chapter 21. It is the description of the new heavens and new earth where God's people dwell with him forever.
 - V.11** - *And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.* Though these were sinful men, God didn't incinerate them. He gave grace because they acted in faith. They believed God and trusted him and so he welcomed them into his presence as an act of grace. And they ATE before God. It sounds weird... like they got hungry and thirsty until you think about the fact that meals happen where relationship exists. Rarely do you go enjoy a dinner with strangers but those who have a relationship EAT together.
- ILL – one of my favorite memories of starting City on a Hill was when we were still small enough to enjoy meals together. When we met on Sunday nights during our core building days we would do it once a month and after we launched on Sunday mornings, we tried to do them quarterly and especially around

Thanksgiving and Easter. Incredible times of sharing good fellowship together. A few weeks ago the members enjoyed an amazing cookout at one of our members homes. You eat with those you love, you eat with those you are relationship with.

- What a crazy picture that GOD experienced a meal with these elders as a sign of the covenant relationship.
- The new covenant with Jesus has a meal as well. On the night Jesus was betrayed by Judas he gathered with his disciples.
- Matthew 26:26-28 ²⁶*Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."* ²⁷*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,"* ²⁸*for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*
- Every time the church celebrates this meal we do so not to GET a relationship with God but because Jesus has already provided it. The meal is to remember what WAS done at the cross but is also an act of communion together with Jesus and God. We eat the bread and drink the cup in the context of relationship.
- QUESTION I get sometimes – How do you know that God accepts you in relationship? How can you know for sure? What if you doubt? How can you ever do enough? Traditional and proper Christian answer: Jesus. Absolutely correct, but how can we know that we know that we are accepted through Jesus? Because it is a covenant. God has created covenants with mankind from the point we first sinned and rebelled against him for the purposes of bringing us back into right relationship with him. He has relentlessly pursued us as a father pursues a lost child.
- And this partnership with God based on the promises of God comes through Jesus, not through our obedience or some path that we take or ritual that we complete. Grace and forgiveness is offered fully, freely, and forever through a covenant relationship with Jesus.

Responding to the Covenant

God's covenant promises call for a response. How do we respond to the wonder and weight of the covenant? BOW – I wrote it before I realized it created a word. Cheesy but maybe it will help you to remember this week how to respond to the wonder and weight of God's covenant with you through Jesus.

1. Believe

- a. The Israelites believed what God has promised. Christians believe what Jesus promises but it is a FIGHT of faith. This is something God has been teaching me some recently. Faith in the gospel is all that is needed to enjoy the covenant blessings of a relationship with God but that doesn't mean faith is easy. The first message Jesus preached was *"Repent and believe for the kingdom of God is at hand."*
 - i. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim 6:12 *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.*
- b. For those who have not taken the step of faith to become a Christian, Jesus' offer of covenant relationship is for you... Revelation 3:20 *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* (ESV)

2. Obey

- a. Twice the Israelites affirmed their desire to whole-heartedly obey God. Commitment flows into and out of covenant. Marriage covenants involve serious commitments to act in certain ways.
- b. Army oath of enlistment – "I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

- c. There is a weight and seriousness to that oath. There is no footnote clause that says, “unless I really don’t feel like it today” or “unless I don’t like the rules.”
- d. If we have been brought from death to live, from strangers under God’s wrath into adopted children in God’s family, how much more should we want say to God, “Yes, Lord! I want to obey you. I want to follow you. I want to live for you. I want to serve you. I want to make my life about honoring you with my words and my actions.” For some of you that needs to be your prayer today because you have not fully obeyed Jesus and are hanging onto some sin in your life.

3. Worship

- a. This whole text is an act of worship to God. To worship in response to God’s covenant promises means to glorify God. How often do you find yourself worshiping God? Is it only on Sundays when you gather here? This is one way we do it but a life of worship is one where we constantly find our hearts drawn to honor the goodness and mercy of God to us. It is a life where we find Jesus on our minds, our hearts, and our lips often.
- b. Worship is not exclusively music but music is a central mode of worship. Worship is the soundtrack of the covenant. We have soundtracks for our workouts, our morning commutes, for our dinner party, etc. Do we have soundtracks of worship that move us to praise God?

CONCLUSION

- Because of Jesus’ death you who have been fearful of God and breaking his law can rejoice in God’s presence. The wonder of the cross is what frees us from fear.
- Hebrews 10:22 *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

On the other hand, those of us who have found ourselves treating God and his laws flippantly, the seriousness of the cross, the death of God’s Son on our behalf awakens us to the weight of the covenant God makes with us.

Hebrews 10:26-29

[26] For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, [27] but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. [28] Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. [29] How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (ESV)

For those of us who are in that camp, we need to repent and see the wonder of the cross again.

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