

Scripture Reading Exodus 19:3–6

Sermon Text Hebrews 8:7–13

A married couple was celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. At the party, everybody wanted to know how they managed to stay married so long in this day and age. The husband responded, "When we were first married, we came to an agreement. I would make all the major decisions, and my wife would make all the minor decisions." At which point, the wife took up the tale, saying, "In 60 years of marriage, we have never needed to make a major decision." It seems that the couple's marriage covenant was a one-way street. She made all the decisions!

However, a covenant is an agreement between two people or groups of people where both parties must uphold their part of the agreement. The Hebrew word translated as covenant conveys the sense of cutting, and to this day, you will hear people talk about cutting a contract or agreement. Human covenants, contracts, or treaties might be between equal parties or between a superior and a lesser party. In the case of divine covenants that we will consider today, they are between a superior and an inferior party because they are between God and humans.

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes covenants with individuals and His people, and it is through these covenants that God demonstrates His grace and advances His plan and offer of salvation to the world. Sometimes, the covenants that God makes with humans are conditional and conditioned on human actions, and sometimes, they are unconditional, meaning that God will fulfill the covenant, no matter what humans choose to do. In either case, God always fulfills His part of the agreement, for God is holy and cannot lie. The Old Testament of the Bible is sometimes called the Old Covenant, and the New Testament is sometimes called the New Covenant because the Old Testament contains God's covenants with men before the enactment of the superior New Covenant described in the New Testament.

Perhaps you have noticed that some of my sermons cover a lot of ground, like the sermon on Joseph a couple of weeks ago. My intent in these types of sermons is to raise the level of biblical knowledge in the church. It is important to understand the big picture of the Bible to see the glory of God and how He is working in human history for His own glory and to bring about glorious things for all who fear Him and trust in His Son. As I have grown in my knowledge of the Bible, my faith has been greatly strengthened, resulting in hope and joy in greater measure, particularly as I face trials and difficulties. I want the same for all of you in increasing measure so that your joy might be complete (John 15:11). So today, the focus of the sermon is on the New Covenant in Jesus' blood, but I will use our time together to grow in our knowledge of covenants and how God has moved and worked through human history.

The Old Testament covenants begin with Adam and Eve. Before the fall, when Adam and Eve were innocent, the condition of God's covenant with them was that they would not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as described in Genesis 2:16-17. That is referred to as the Edenic Covenant. As long as they obeyed God's prohibition of eating from that one tree in the Garden, they could remain in the blissful paradise God had provided for them. They would still be there had they not disobeyed.

We all know that did not turn out well, which led to God initiating the Adamic Covenant, or the Covenant of Grace, in which God promised to send a Savior to destroy Satan's work, as described in Genesis 3. Notice that no conditions needed to be fulfilled by humans as part of the Adamic Covenant. God acted out of His love and for His glory, and nothing that humans did in the future would change the outcome. God would send His Messiah into the world, and nothing would change that.

Later, when human corruption and depravity reached a peak, God sent the flood to wipe evil humans from the Earth. After the flood, God initiated the Noahic Covenant, an unconditional covenant where God promised never again to destroy all humanity with a flood. God gave the rainbow as a sign of the covenant. So, every time we see a rainbow, we are reminded of God's promise to Noah and subsequent generations. As terrible as the flood was, it purified the world and enhanced humanity's knowledge of God, which was essential for creating the conditions for the coming of the Messiah, the Savior that God promised as part of the Adamic Covenant when Adam and Eve had fallen into sin.

God's Covenant with Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant), described in Genesis 12 and other places, advances God's plan of salvation for humanity and further prepares the world for the coming of the Messiah. On the condition that Abraham trusted God, left his home, and went to the land God would show him, God promised to bless Abraham, make a great nation of his descendants, and, most importantly for all of us, God promised to bless all the families of the Earth through Abraham. God did bless all the families of the Earth through Abraham, for it is through Abraham's descendants that the Messiah Jesus Christ entered the world to offer salvation to all who place their faith in Him.

Faithful in His covenant with Abraham, God brought forth the Nation of Israel from his descendants. You will recall from two weeks ago that during the severe seven years of famine that engulfed Egypt and the surrounding regions, Joseph moved his entire family to the eastern part of the Nile River delta. There, they were provided for and sustained. Jacob's family became the Nation of Israel, but after the death of Joseph, they soon fell into slavery in Egypt, where they lived for 430 years until God raised up Moses to lead them in the Exodus.

The Exodus set the stage for the Mosaic Covenant, God's Covenant with Moses and Israel described in our Scripture reading. In the Exodus, God removed His chosen people from Egypt by His power and might. The scene described in our Scripture reading takes place in the wilderness of Sinai at the base of Mount Sinai in the eastern part of Egypt, just outside of the promised land of Palestine. Mount Sinai rises to 7497 feet, over 1000 feet taller than Mount Washington, which stands 6288 feet above sea level. Sometimes in Scripture, Mount Sinai is referred to as the mountain of God where Moses encountered the burning bush.

While the Israelites were camped at the base of the mountain, Moses went up the mountain to God and God called to him to reveal the covenant that He would enact and ratify with the people of Israel. In our text, God told Moses exactly what to say to the Israelites. God says that He carried the Israelites out of Egypt on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself. It is interesting that when young eagles are learning to fly, the mother flies beneath them with outstretched wings, ready to catch them if they falter or fall. So, too, God's power and protective hand delivered the Israelites from Egypt.

Now that God had reminded them of what He had done for them, He laid out the conditions and benefits of the covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, that He would enact with them. The Israelites were to obey the voice of God, meaning that they were to obey all that God commanded them through the Law of Moses. In exchange, the Israelites would receive special protected status as the people of God. The nation of Israel, if it obeyed, would be the possession of God, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

It is easy to gloss over what God was willing to give Israel in exchange for its allegiance and loyalty. We live in a world where the security of any nation cannot be guaranteed. Yet here was the God who created them and knit each of them together in their mother's womb, the God who spoke the universe into existence, was calling them into a loving relationship with Him. Israel was called to be a special treasure of God.

In the verses following our Scripture reading, Moses called the people together and set before them the words which the Lord had spoken. In Exodus 19:8, the people spoke with one

voice, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" But when Moses was delayed in returning from his mountaintop meeting with God in Exodus 32, the people convinced Aaron to fashion an idol in the form of a calf of molten gold. What were the people thinking? The bigger question, I suppose, is what was Aaron thinking? Aaron had been at Moses' side as God performed mighty miracles through him that resulted in Pharaoh's release of the Jews from Egypt. Yet there he was, embracing the sin of the people and leading them in breaking God's covenant with them. The Israelites were frequent flyers when it came to breaking God's commands, and it would not turn out well for them.

The other important covenant of the OT is the Davidic Covenant, initiated by God with David and his descendants about 500 years after the Mosaic Covenant. In this unconditional covenant, God promised that David's kingdom would be without end. God says to David through the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7:16), "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." Like the Israelites, David was an imperfect vessel who broke God's commandments. But God was true, and the ultimate fulfillment of all the OT covenants is found in the life, work, and sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah.

When we consider the OT covenants, humans, since Adam and Eve, have broken God's covenants, but God remained true. Often, biblical covenants were solemnized by the sacrifice of an animal, giving rise to the Hebrew idiom "to cut a covenant," as I mentioned earlier. The blood sacrifices of the OT covenants prefigure and point to the new covenant in Jesus' blood, which He shed as a sign and seal of the redemption that He purchased for us and the people of faith for all time.

We shouldn't confuse a covenant with a contract. Contracts always have end dates, but Divine covenants are permanent agreements because God is eternal and unchanging. Contracts often concern delivered goods or perhaps the commitment of manpower and skills, but covenants cover a person's total being.

While we see human failure repeatedly in the OT, we also see that God is faithful and, by His grace, upholds the promises He made in the covenants. Our sermon text specifically addresses the Mosaic Covenant, Israel's failure to obey God's commands, and God's initiation of a New Covenant. The OT Covenants had served the purpose of setting the scene and creating the circumstances for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, who would be the mediator of the new, superior, and final covenant between God and man.

As the writer of Hebrews says in verse 7 of our text, if the Mosaic Covenant had been perfect, there would have been no reason to enact a second covenant in Jesus' blood. The Book of Hebrews is written to the Hebrews. The author goes out of his way to prove to his readers that a New Covenant was promised by God, probably addressing Jewish skeptics of his time who did not believe that a new covenant was necessary nor that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah for the Jews. We do not know for sure who the author of the Book of Hebrews is, but He proves to his Jewish readers that God promised a New Covenant to replace the Mosaic covenant by quoting the prophet Jeremiah, Chapter 31, through whom God says in our text,

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will bring about a new covenant
With the house of Israel and the house of Judah, Not like the covenant which I
made with their fathers On the day I took them by the hand To bring them out of
the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care
about them, says the Lord.

The Prophet Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry to what was left of the Jewish nation in 627 BC, about 40 years before it would be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and carried into exile. Even though the Jewish nation was thoroughly corrupt and had abandoned God and His commandments, God would uphold His promise made in the Adamic Covenant by initiating the New Covenant described by Jeremiah. God initiated the New

Covenant in first-century Israel with the advent and sacrifice of His Son. But as God promised to Abraham and confirmed in the Prophet Isaiah (49:6), all the families of the Earth would be blessed by the coming Messiah, who was the author of the New Covenant in His blood.

So, the New Covenant is different from the Old Mosaic Covenant, which was broken and abrogated by the people's sins. In verses 10-12 of our sermon text, we find a description of the superior nature of the New Covenant enacted by the blood of Christ. Brothers and sisters, as believers and disciples of Jesus Christ, we are heirs of the promises of the New Covenant, and they are these as described in our sermon text. Here are God's promises to us in the New Covenant:

First, God has put His law into our minds, and we know that His law is right, and He has written it upon our hearts. And so, we have an inner inclination to obey God. And when we do not obey God, our conscience pricks us and that still small voice reminds us that we are breaking God's commands. Have you ever noticed how teenagers often walk around, zoned out to all others as they listen to their music on their wireless AirPods? One Sunday morning, a Sunday School teacher was discussing conscience and asked one of her students, "What is that small voice you always have with you?" "My headphones," the boy replied. The boy's knowledge of the Bible was not great, but the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts when we sin. Many Christians, as they grow in their walk, also grow in their knowledge of how sinful they are because their conscience is developing, which is a good thing because it drives us to Christ.

Second, as believers, we are in relationship with God, for God promises, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Dear friends, as I have mentioned several times, that is a theme that runs throughout Scripture, and it speaks of the great blessing that we have as disciples of Christ. God created 200 billion trillion stars, black holes, quasars, the solar system, innumerable species, all of life, and all intelligence, which we try to imitate poorly with our crude artificial intelligence. That same God who is without beginning and without end declares His intention and desire for a relationship with all of us who believe in His Son. I am blown away by that whenever I think about it. But what troubles me the most is how so many in the world reject God's advances and reject His Son.

Third, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, the people of God who trust Jesus as their Savior know God because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As a believer, there is something supernatural going on in your life. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" The Holy Spirit is alive and active in you, and we can take it with certainty that God is working all things for your good, as we learn in Romans 8:28. Are you struggling with the burdens of life? Are you weighted down by difficulty and problems? Take comfort: God loves you, and as His child, He is taking your troubles, your concerns, your circumstances, your financial situation, your talents and abilities, and all that you are as a person and working all of these things together in a supernatural way for your good that you might be conformed to be more like Jesus. There is power in life in Christ, and that power is the Holy Spirit working in you and equipping you to make you a better disciple of Christ in this life, but also preparing you to properly worship and serve God when you show up at the gates of heaven.

Finally, fourth, in Christ, your sins are remembered no more. Because of Christ and your faith in Him, God has blotted out your sins and remembers them no more. God had to make payment for sin, and as I like to say, salvation is an inside job; God had to accomplish it because if there is one thing we learn from the covenants, it is that sinful humans will break them just as the Israelites continuously lapsed into sin and disobedience. We are no better, but because of Jesus, our sins, which God knew before our creation, every lie, every lustful or covetous thought, every moment of rage and infidelity, are remembered no more by our perfect in holy God. As we read in Psalm 103:11-13

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our wrongdoings from us. ¹³ Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.

Because of the work of Christ, the sin debt of all who truly believe in Him has been removed as far as the East is from the West, and we have assurance of salvation. In his book *Too Busy Not to Pray*, Pastor Bill Hybels suggests, as you are waiting to board a plane, observing the difference between passengers with a confirmed ticket and the ones who are on standby. You might find that those with confirmed tickets are reading books, chatting with their friends, or sleeping. While those who are on standby fidget and pace as they hang around the counter. Hybels suggests that the difference you observe between the passengers is the confidence factor. There is confidence that you will get to your destination if you have a confirmed ticket.

Too often, Christians fidget and pace like those who are on standby for a flight when they can know that they have a confirmed ticket to heaven. The Apostle John writes in his first letter, Chapter 5, verse 13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." The plain meaning of that verse is that true faith will result in eternal salvation. Christ has paid our sin debt in full and removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west, and by the blood of Christ, we are justified before God and reconciled to Him.

But if we have been saved by God we must work for God. We are not saved by our works, but by our works, we prove our relationship with God and His Son. Jesus says in John 15:8, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." Those you meet in heaven will have a history of service to God; they will have a Christian resume. If you claim to be a cardiac surgeon and have no training or experience on your resume to back it up, who is going to let you do their heart surgery?

So, too, if one claims to be a Christian and has no Christian resume, we would certainly hope it is not because that individual never really believed. The bottom line is this: as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, we have been "...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." True faith results in service to God. True faith results in works that bring God glory. True faith demonstrates love for God by doing good for others. True faith shares the good news of Jesus in the community and the world.

We find this prayer in George Washington's diary. Washington wrote,

"Let my heart gracious God, be so effected with Your glory and majesty, that I may fulfill these weighty duties which You have required of me. I have called upon You to pardon me of my sins. Thank You for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered on the cross for me. You gave Your Son to die for me and have given me assurance of salvation."

Dear friends, because of the New Covenant initiated in Jesus' blood and your true faith in Him, like George Washington, you have assurance of salvation, and no one will snatch you from Jesus' hand (John 10:28). Our assurance flows from the unchanging and faithful nature of God demonstrated in the covenants He made with humans. On that, we can rest secure. Amen.

