

Our Covenant God

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Preacher: Zachary Purvis

[0 : 0 0] the text for the sermon this evening comes from psalm 95 so if you have a bible i would ask you to turn there with me psalm 95 let us hear god's own word oh come let us sing to the lord let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation let us come into his presence with thanksgiving let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise for the lord is a great god and a great king above all gods in his hand are the depths of the earth the heights of the mountains are his also the sea is his for he made it and his hands formed the dry land oh come let us worship and bow down let us kneel before the lord our maker for he is our god and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as at meribah as on the day at massa in the wilderness when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof though they had seen my work for 40 years i loathed that generation and said there are people who go astray in their heart and they have not known my ways therefore i swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest so far the reading of god's word well psalm 95 is a rather remarkable psalm firstly because it is so familiar it is probably the most used call to worship in the history of the church the words of the psalm just invite the preacher to use these marvelous joyful words to call god's people to meet before him to sing his praise to worship him we use them this evening if you can think back we use them last week in the morning service to call us to worship but this psalm is also remarkable not just for its familiarity but because of the surprising turn it takes at the end of verse 7 having been so joyful and positive even excited if we are allowed to use that word this psalm takes a decidedly negative turn at the end of verse 7 the mood of the psalm changes dramatically into a very solemn warning but this psalm is also remarkable because it is one of the most quoted parts of the old testament in the new testament in the book of hebrews two whole chapters chapters 3 and 4 are really a reflection on a meditation on an application of psalm 95 where the author of the letter to the hebrews compares the situation of the church in that day to what is described for us in our psalm so the psalm then for its familiarity for its surprising turn for its importance in scripture deserves our careful attention but even more i think what we find in this psalm is a remarkable wonderful summary of what it means to be in covenant with god to be in covenant with god now that word covenant that we as reformed people delight in that we frequently use as one we might think we're rather familiar with but like all words that we think we're familiar with we might not know exactly what we mean when we say we are a covenant people we have a covenant god we are in covenant with god

as a reformed church we believe in covenant theology our confession our doctrinal standard the westminster confession of faith describes how when god relates to humanity he does so by way of covenant that god stoops down to create us finite analogies of himself image bearers and he condescends further to enter into a relationship with us a relationship as his creation a relationship based on binding promises that's what a covenant is a relationship based on binding promises between parties usually one lesser and one greater and the scriptures tell us and our confession tells us how that first covenant was made with adam and his posterity promising life upon condition of perfect and personal obedience of course adam failed we know that god made another covenant the covenant of grace which freely offers to sinners life and salvation by jesus christ one is law the other is gospel and then all throughout scripture we have those specific biblical covenants recorded for us that god has entered into grouped under these broader arrangements god's covenant with abraham god's covenant with moises and the people of israel at sinai god's covenant with david each of these covenants in which god works out his plan successively through history but psalm 95 would also tell us what it means for us to be in covenant with god and it's an interesting kind of instruction because it's a psalm it's a poem but in a most succinct and affecting way this psalm pulls together great themes of biblical revelation to help us more profoundly to know to understand our covenant relationship with our god and the psalm tells us first of all who we are who we are at the most essential level and it does that in the central verse of this psalm as many of you probably know so often in hebrew poetry the heart of the matter the essence of the matter is at the center of the psalm and so i think that's true of this psalm as well for in verse 7 of this psalm we are reminded for he that is the lord is our god and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand you see this is the most essential thing to be known about us that we have a god and so right at the beginning we are reminded of who we are at this most essential level and there are constant voices in our culture aren't there who would speak to us to tell us who we are but at the center of who we are is this simple but so profound confession that we have a god that we are the people of god that is who we are we have been given a name we have been given an identity we don't turn inward to try to find our authentic self as the world would have us to do but you see there is an external word a word outside of us that has been spoken about us that defines us that claims us in our baptism we are baptized in the name of the triune god in the benediction there is a blessing that seals the church in the name of god when we belong to christ we have that name christian stamped on our hearts and god will indeed

save everyone who knows who bears the name of his son it is god's speech that defines us that defines reality just as he created the world out of nothing so too he makes a people for himself out of nothing drawing us from death to life in the savior so that we are not our own but belong body and soul to him the great and glorious god becomes our god and we who are a sinful and rebellious people become his people don't know how many times you've thought about that that statement that is so simple but it can be easy because it is so simple so familiar to us to forget how really glorious how surprising that fact is the god who is the god who is the creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible the god who exists in a splendor unimaginable to us the god who knows more than we can even begin to think about what he knows the god who accomplishes everything according to his purpose the god who has a plan in detail for each one of us the god who knows the end from the beginning the god who is greater than all the grandeur of the light years of the universe that we can see through telescopes that god desires to be our god that god desires to enter into a relationship with us that is remarkably intimate and caring and providing we have a god with whom we have a relationship and that relationship is between a shepherd and his sheep we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand our god is not distant he is not indifferent to us but he is near to us and it is with his hand that he reaches out to guide us to protect us to care for us that is first of all what it means to be in covenant with god to belong to him we see this care that he has for his people most clearly in our lord jesus christ don't we the good shepherd the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep for the sheep for this covenant relationship that is established between our great and glorious god and us a needy and sinful people comes at a great cost a great price to be paid but not by us it is paid by god that's the nature of his life his love that the good shepherd lays down his life for his people that's the extent of his care we have a god on whom we can call in our need and he pays to save us from our sin to restore us to himself and that's what this psalm is a great celebration of that truth that great truth that jesus christ god come in the flesh for us that our god makes us his own and though we would so often wander like wayward sheep that he gives us an identity he gives us a home he gives us a name through the blood of the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep so that every day every hour in every circumstance we can be sure that he is caring for us watching over us providing for us and when we reflect on who we are to whom we belong this psalm would say we are to be a worshiping people that's the second thing we see here

this psalm would have us to ask what is the character of our god who is our god to whom we belong so that we might worship him for who he is and what he's done and this little psalm describes our god in terms of being the creator and the redeemer the creation is celebrated in this psalm to remind us that the god whom we are called upon to worship the god who is in covenant with us is the god who has the power to accomplish all things that he has promised the god who brought the world into existence who raised up mountains and cast down valleys who ruled over the sea and made the dry land that god can take care of you and me verse 4 in his hand there's the hand of god again in his hand are the depths of the earth you see that hand that cares so intimately for you and for me is also the hand of such great power that all the mountains of the earth can be in that hand that all the depths of the sea can be in that hand from the greatest heights to the greatest depths in this world god is not just there but he is in control sustaining preserving and there is no limit to his power that's why in verse 3 he is defined as the one who is the god above all gods the king above all kings there is no power beyond his power there is no authority beyond his authority and that's something that's so important for us to come back to again and again even here in this church as a little reformed community because i think sometimes we can begin to feel that we are such a small community and that might make us feel that perhaps god is not thinking of us quite as often as we thought or that maybe is not quite as in charge now we might not be too impious to think that or say it out loud but we can feel it sometimes we can wonder when we're tired of the same struggle when we feel like we're treading water when we feel like we're drifting from where we want to be to feel that god is not really as in charge as he is made out to be we might look around and wish to see a church that is greater in numbers we might look around scotland and wish to see a church that is stronger and more vibrant greater in numbers but we must remember are the people gathered here now unimportant to our god is the lord not accomplishing his purpose is the god who made us the god who made scotland not faithful to care for us you see that is the assurance we have here that's what this psalm rejoices in that our god is the great god over all things and that what he accomplishes according to the pleasure of his will is what he delights in and it is what we should delight in and that nothing will hinder him in his purpose in his power he's not only the great creator god he is also the great redeemer god oh come verse one says oh come let us sing to the lord let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation now that phrase god is the rock of our salvation is a fairly familiar image particularly throughout the psalms

god again and again is referred to as that rock of salvation that image that brings with it a great sense of stability reliability reliability solidity god can be depended upon when he makes a promise god can be depended upon when he says he will save but when psalm 95 here speaks of god as the rock of our salvation particularly when it goes on to speak of meribah and massa there's another sense in which rock is being used here one that is full of significance that we should not miss you remember israel coming out of egypt camping at rephidim that place later becoming known as massa and meribah the place of grumbling and complaining exodus 17 we have there that remarkable story of israel complaining that god brought them out into the wilderness to die why did we ever leave egypt what a remarkably short memory those people had how quickly were they inclined to say oh we had it better in egypt and how they complained against moises that moises had brought them out in the wilderness to die how they suspected that god's purpose for them was not life and salvation but death and destruction and when they were thirsty they complained they grumbled but what did god do he sent his prophet moises with his staff that staff that had parted the red sea that staff that had led the people through the sea on dry ground and moises struck the rock there and from that rock poured forth water living water the water of life water to assuage the thirst of these people so that they might know that god's plan was not that they should die in the wilderness but that they should be delivered psalm 95 is speaking about that rock the rock from which the water of life flows forth and so these people who sing this psalm rejoice that god is their savior their provider the one who gives them the water of life as we read from first corinthians 10 paul says that that rock that rock was christ that rock represented to the people the presence the power the provision of christ for them in their need so this rock here is not just a dry but solid rock it is the rock from which comes forth the water of life it is the rock from which comes forth water to give relief to the thirsty to give life to the dying to bring salvation that rock is our savior that rock is christ so here is a great cause to rejoice in the gospel the good news that we are not left to die in the wilderness but that our god is faithful to deliver us so we ought to come to him with hearts full of gratitude come into his courts with thanksgiving and his gates with praise you see that is what we do here sunday by sunday as we gather together we come to reflect on who our god is as creator and as redeemer we come to sing his praise we come to be reminded of his promises we come to be filled again and again with that amazing truth we have a god the great god who cares for us the great king above all gods

[20 : 20] there is no power that can stand against him this is why our forebearers delighted to sing the psalms because the psalms are and need to be so precious to us they so remarkably lift up for us the character of that god the deliverance that we have in him they would bid us to bring our concerns to him like a little child coming to his father not out of fear but because he knows his father loves him the psalms call us to worship him the psalms call us to find our identity in him and that picture of worship that is presented here for us is so impressive isn't it it is a picture of great joy and great reverence we are to be joyful in the presence of god and we are also to be reverent let us kneel before the lord our maker as psalm 2 says rejoice with trembling because somehow coming before this great king is both the deepest and profoundest joy of our hearts and also the most solemn reality of our lives so we are called to worship this god because we are his covenant people in this great relationship with him which god himself has established for us at great cost in the blood of his own son and then comes that turn that surprising turn in the second half of verse 7 the psalm here issues a warning a most solemn warning for us the psalm says that as we come with our praise to god as we come to worship him to thank him for all that he has done let us never forget to listen to him you see we must never be so carried away with our activity that we fail to listen that we become apathetic that we grow indifferent ungrateful to all he has done for us forgetful to the death from which we have been delivered here is a direct application the psalm says today today

Hebrews 3 and 4 would remind us today means every day of our sojourn as the people of god today hear his voice today you if you hear his voice do you hear his voice of course you do because the word has been read the word is being preached that is the word of our god and god would say to us here don't close your ears don't neglect your god and do not harden your heart as at meribb as on the day at massa in the wilderness when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof though they had seen my work what was the essence of the test to which the people put god there at rephedim they grumbled they said you know i don't think god is really with us and don't you see how fundamentally that is a betrayal of god by his people god who created us god who redeemed us who has loved us who gives his name to us to his people and then to be told by his people we're not so sure about you we're not so sure about your purpose or your love we're not so sure about your power or your strength maybe we'll hedge our bets a little bit after all what do you seem to be doing for me right now you notice that little phrase at the end of verse 9 though they had seen my work you see this is describing a people who saw who didn't just read about who didn't just hear preachers talk about but who saw the plagues on Egypt who saw the angel of death's effect on the firstborn of Egypt who saw that they had been passed over who saw the pillar of fire and of cloud who saw the red sea open before them who saw the manna from heaven and tasted it and swallowed it and they put their god to the test they said is god really with us does god really care does god care whether we are faithful to him or not is god going to provide for us today right now or are we just sort of on our own here need to do the best we can according to our own wisdom you see each of those questions the people ask comes expecting a negative answer no god doesn't know no god doesn't care no god won't act so i'll follow my own heart my own ways but psalm 95 pleads with the people of god as hebrews 3 and 4 plead with the people of god don't think that way don't be that way listen to the word of god believe the word of god follow the word of god and that's the only way to avoid that really terrible curse here i loathed that people for 40 years said the lord and i declared in my wrath they shall not enter my rest that should be a most chilling word to us as the people of god spoken not to the world of idolaters spoken not to the world of unbelief but spoken to those who had seen the great redeeming work of god who had just brought them out of egypt what was the rest that they

would not enter it was it seems to me the promised land that land that god had said i will give you a land flowing with milk and honey where you shall have rest from your enemies where you shall have fellowship with me where you shall have blessedness a land that was to be a foretaste of the new heavens and the new earth that shall yet come into being a land that was to be a symbol of the eternal rest to come how often are we like israel at rephedim you see that's why the story is repeated for us so often in the scriptures because israel's story is so often our story isn't it we might think that when christ walks among the lamp stands in the book of the revelation there are solemn warnings there aren't there that lamp stands can be removed and one of the solemn duties of studying church history is to notice when that has happened when the people of god seem to have hardened their hearts against him seem to have closed their ears to his word despite all that god has done and have stopped listening to their god so how do we avoid that how do we avoid hardening our hearts we must always listen to the word of god to the voice of our shepherd you see it is the word of god that keeps the message of god central to his people that word that holds up for us again and again the great redemptive work of god in his son our lord and savior jesus christ because though those people grumbled they found water in the desert and so the story of israel at rephidim is a warning to us but let us loved ones not lose sight of the fact that there is great comfort here as well because the god to whom we belong provides for his people he says there is hope for sinners there is good news even for those who grumble even for those who struggle with ingratitude don't you see he says my gospel for you is that free it is christ performance for you and so every christian must say the lord jesus christ lived and died for my sake for my lasting good let me therefore live for him secure in the love with which he loves me god has provided a righteousness of his own for us and therefore we have peace with him let us then follow our shepherd let us hear his voice and follow after him with joy and thanksgiving when the book of hebrews turns to this psalm in hebrews 3 it begins christ was faithful over the household of god and that it appeals to us in him to be faithful not in our own strength not with our own wisdom but as the covenant people of god who have been redeemed who have seen the deliverance of the lord who have heard the word of their shepherd who believe and follow him that good news that gospel of salvation in christ that should be the wind in our sails to fill us with gratitude that we might be renewed in our listening in our obeying in our following him filled with joy filled with thanksgiving eager to do his will and so psalm 95 brings together for us these great pieces

of biblical revelation to instruct us to remind us above all that we have a god to whom we belong we are not our own that we are to worship him that we have not yet fully entered the rest that is promised to us that like israel we are still a wilderness people still a pilgrim people and we need to keep our eyes focused on where we are going and it is the Lord Jesus Christ who will lead us there as our good shepherd so loved ones let us listen to his voice let us hear his voice that we might know that to all those who are in Christ Jesus who bear his name as his people as his covenant people there is indeed a great day of rest coming amen let us pray together oh

Lord our God we are so thankful that you indeed are our God that you have not left us to suffer in our sin and misery but have redeemed us we are so thankful to know how we may worship you our creator and our savior through your word help us to know that we may always call upon you in our need help us to trust you we ask that you would encourage us in the gospel that great truth that the Lord Jesus Christ came to save not the righteous but the wicked so fill us with joy and thanksgiving we ask that we may always walk in the paths to which you call us for we pray in Jesus name amen let us stand together then to sing our final item of praise a song of thanksgiving to the

[33 : 04] Lord how firm a foundation all of hi you can ask anything