

A better covenant

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[0:00] Okay, boys and girls, would you please put up your hand if you are a boy or a girl?

! That's most of us really, isn't it? Okay, hands down. Anybody got a birthday coming up? Is! Is it your birthday? This week? Next week? Tomorrow?

Shall we just do a little round of applause? Happy birthday to you. How old would you be? Nine. I can't even remember when I was nine. So long ago. Right, so boys and girls, I want you to help with this. My aim this morning, all together, boys and girls and adults, is to say that in an uncertain world, I would like us to go away glad if we have a covenant with God, or if you haven't got a covenant with God, to wish that you had got one. So that's what I want to do. And I want to think about covenants and agreements in general.

So the world is full of things that are like covenants, agreements and things. Hebrews 8, 7 and 8, sorry, Jesus, God says that there was an old covenant. If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

But God found fault with the people and said, the time is coming when I will make a new covenant. So there's an old covenant and a new covenant. And that's what we're going to be thinking about in a roundabout sort of way. Now then, boys and girls, all sorts of arrangements that we can make.

[1:52] Sometimes promises, sometimes a gift, I give you something, sometimes conditions, I will do something if you do something else.

So there's an if in it. And there's all sorts of arrangements that we can make. And some of them are very much to do with people and love and knowing people. And some of them are like, sort of a bit mechanical. You just make that arrangement without particularly knowing the person.

Although I think it's impossible to have any of these arrangements without some sort of relationship. So hands up anybody who gets pocket money. Oh, nobody. Do you get pocket money? Do you get pocket money?

Right. That's exactly the sort of answer I was hoping for. So you get pocket money. Right. Now then, is it, do they give it to you just because they love you?

Or is there something else that you have to do? So you said you have to work. Do you? Yes. You're allowed to answer. Not always. Not always. Say again, if I get Christmas or for each one, if I clean the car or if I clean for my car for a little, I get about two pounds or something.

[3:11] Okay. We don't have to go into quantities because you're just... Okay. So there's something that sometimes you get some money just because it's your birthday or something like that.

And other times it's if you've done something like if you've washed the car. How do you get your pocket money? Same sort of thing? Or is this a confidential arrangement? I clean my bedroom. I clean your bedroom. And then you get some money for that, do you? Okay. I shall try that at home and see how that works. Okay. So that's a sort of special arrangement because you're a member of the family.

But there is an if. So it's if you clean your room and get it. So there's a little bit of both there, isn't it? Because you're a member of the family, so there's a relationship, but there's an if. So pocket money. Buying and selling cake. Has anybody ever made cakes and then sold them perhaps for a reason?

Okay. Corinne has. And have you made cakes? Made them but hasn't sold them. Okay.

[4:20] Okay. So you made cakes and sold them? Okay. So you made cakes but didn't sell them and you made cakes but sold them. So that's a sort of... I'll give you the cake if you give me some money. Is that how you did it?

Is it? I can't hear. It's the coffee that you made.

Okay. Sell them for charity. Yeah. Excellent. Right. I can do it but if you're probably going to get money, I'll just sell them. You'll just sell them. Or give them away.

Or give them away. Okay. Well, let's just look at those two things. So if you make the cake and sell it, then you have a relationship with your customer that you give them something, they give you something back.

I will give you the cake if you give me the money. And somebody said they just gave the cake. Did you just say you made the cake but gave it? Maybe you gave it to mummy or somebody?

[5:23] I want to ask you, this is a bit of a subtle question. Is there any... if you just give somebody cake, is there any condition involved?

No? No? No condition? No condition? If they like it. If they like it, yeah. I think if they eat it actually. So is that a condition or is that a way of receiving a gift?

Now, here's another relationship thing. This is an arrangement. This is getting married. And we've had various people over the years get married in this church.

And the bit where they actually get married is that one person says... Which way does it go? Will you have this woman to be your lawful wedded wife? I will. Will you take this man to be your husband?

Yes, I do. So those are words which form a contract. And they bind those two people together with words.

[6:27] And... I wonder whether there's a giving there. I wonder if any of the boys and girls or anybody else could say, what gets given in a marriage?

A ring? Well done. A ring. Yes, that's right. Rings get given and exchanged. Is anything else given? Flowers are given. That's right. Flowers are given. That's right. Yes.

I think I need an adult who's thought about this. Is anything else given in a marriage? Does anybody give anything to anybody else? Trust? I think you give each other. I think you give each other. I think actually what you're doing in marriage is that I give myself to you.

That's what you do when you get married, isn't it? I give myself to you. I give myself to you. You give everything to that person. You give yourself to that person in a commitment. And you...

It doesn't always work out like this in this world, does it? But the idea of this is that you give and you'll never un-give. That's what a marriage is supposed to be like. And a will.

[7:34] Here's another arrangement. Do you know what a will is? I'll tell you because I don't want to take... You know what a will is? It's... How long does the product go?

Is that on the business? Do they want their money for? How to go to the business? It's usually now. Well done. Yes, they write it down beforehand who they want their money or the house or whatever to go to.

And is there any condition in that will? Is there any arrangements in that will? Does anything have to happen in the will?

Exactly. Yeah, you've got to be dead. So there is a condition to it. I give you my house on condition that I'm dead. Yeah. So it... I'm just trying to think about all these ways of making arrangements.

So I'm just going to ask Gero. So when you... In your work, you're a tiler. And when you do some tiling for people, you do the tiles and they give you money?

[8:38] Yeah. And do you feel that you have a relationship with your customer? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Even in something like that, which is on this trade, there's still a relationship there, isn't there?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I'm just looking at all the different sorts of ways that you can have arrangements, relationships, things that you agree together, degrees to which you commit yourself to one another.

And in any of these arrangements, the way to be secure is to have that arrangement, you know, good, written down well, and thought through well and committed to.

So, you know, you've cleaned your room, say, Mum, I've cleaned my room, where's my pocket money? And she must pay up. And, yeah, here's some cake, here's the money, enjoy the cake, eat it.

And getting married, that's the way to make a relationship lifelong, is to say, I won't hold back anything in my life, I will give myself to you, and I will promise to do that until death has to part. [9:53] That's what getting married is. And a will is when somebody dies and says, because I have died, I give you this. And the covenant makes us secure in that.

And God makes covenants. He, and we'll look at this over the next week or so, sometimes a covenant has the, like a marriage, I give myself to you, you give yourself to me. Sometimes the covenant is a bit like a will. This gift will happen only when a death occurs. And in God's covenants, what death would that be, boys and girls?

Yeah, that's right. It's always the answer, isn't it? But that is the correct answer in that case. Yes, Jesus dying on the cross, that will come into operation. And one other thing that I was going to say is that to make these work, somebody needs to take responsibility to make it work.

Somebody needs to take responsibility to make this covenant a success. So perhaps mum will say, I'm going to make sure you have cleaned your room and I will make sure you get the money.

[11:09] I don't know about buying and selling cake. Getting married, both people have to take responsibility to make it work. In a will, I suppose the solicitor drafts it up and the executors make sure it works.

Make sure that what the covenant is there for actually succeeds. And we'll come back to that thought in a moment. So we're going to sing something and then we'll come back to that in a minute.

So we'll sing about the glorious things that belong to the people of God, who are in covenant with God. Glorious things of you were spoken, Zion, city of our God.

He whose word cannot be broken formed you for his own abode. We're going to look at the Bible. We've thought a little bit about covenant-like arrangements. Sometimes they have conditions. Sometimes there is a death. Sometimes there is a gift.

[12:24] Sometimes there is a promise. Sometimes there is a commitment. And there are different sort of mixtures of these things in human covenants. And similarly in God's covenants.

So please look in your Bible. Chapter 8 of Hebrews, verse 7. So mine says, So he talks about a first covenant.

Covenant, in verse 7. And he talks about another covenant coming. In chapter 8, verse 13. He says, There is a new covenant.

By calling this covenant new, He made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

So he compares the old covenant and the new covenant. Of course, if you were an Orthodox Jewish person, you wouldn't necessarily, you take convincing that there would be such a thing as a new covenant.

[14:06] Because the old covenant, the thing with Moses and all of that, is what the Bible says. But the writer is saying that in the Old Testament itself, there is a prophecy that God will make a new covenant.

Because there are problems with the old covenant. And this is one of the themes that the writer to the Hebrews is very strong on. So if you look at chapter 7, verse 22, it says that the writer is convinced that, in chapter 7, verse 22, there was an oath.

This was to do with Melchizedek. And Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. So there is a better covenant.

And there are some important changes in the covenant arrangement. So let's pray. And we'll just think about this. I think we'll think about it quite briefly. So I've probably made it all too short this morning.

But never mind. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your covenant-making person.

[15:22] And help us, as we just think about this now, to appreciate something of the new covenant that you have made.

So that we may be glad about that and glad about this covenant. Amen. Amen. Amen. So I've really just got a couple of things to say about this, because I didn't want to be too long.

Look at chapter 7, verse 11. So I'd like to pick up on the idea of perfection.

So I just wanted to think about this idea of perfection.

So I think the way to understand this perfection is to say it does what it says on the tin.

[16:33] So, boys and girls, this is from an advertisement where you have a tin of something like paint. And it says on the outside of the tin, this paint will make your walls lovely and white.

And if it does that, then it does what it says on the tin. And the Levitical priesthood, back in the old days when they went into the tabernacle and they killed lambs and things like that.

And it sort of says, this brings you near to God. It sort of says, this takes away your sin.

It sort of says, this makes you at home with God. Those are the sort of things that it says.

But the writer's saying, it never did what it said on the tin. The blood of bulls and lambs and goats doesn't actually bring us to God.

[17:42] And going into a tabernacle doesn't actually, a tent on earth doesn't actually draw us into God's presence.

And it doesn't actually make us different people. That would be to do what it says on the tin. That would be perfection.

That's what he means by perfection. That it does what it's supposed to do. That's my understanding of this word. And in verse 11, if perfection could have been gained by that old system, then there wouldn't need to be a new system.

But there does. But perfection could not have come that way. That's why God promised a new priest and a new covenant.

And the new priest and the new covenant, for example, it says in 725, Jesus can do the things that the old covenant looked as though it was doing but couldn't manage.

[18:48] So 725, Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

That idea that what the Levitical priest couldn't manage, Jesus can do. He can save completely. He can save, in the old translation says, to the uttermost.

He can really save. And that's brilliant, isn't it? That all sorts of things claim to be able to save us, to make our lives what they should be.

But Jesus can actually do it. He can forgive our sins, make us new, make us right with God, bring us through this life, and bring us through to heaven.

[19:57] He can save completely. He can do it. Chapter 8, verse 12 spells this out in a different aspect.

In the new covenant, chapter 8, verse 12, I will forgive their wickedness. I will remember their sins no more.

So the old covenant sort of seemed to take away sin, but it couldn't really do it. There wasn't enough power in the blood of a lamb or a goat to take away sins.

But in the new covenant, sins are taken away. I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.

That's our redemption, brothers and sisters. Our redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Every evil deed, every wrong thought, every stupidity and foolishness, every stain, everything that is against us in the court of God, wiped away.

[21:12] I will forgive their sins and remember their wickedness no more. Isn't that brilliant? All the things that we have on our consciences, because I said that, I did that, I was so stupid, so malicious, so cruel to say that, God says, all wiped away.

All wiped away. That's what the new covenant does. I will forgive their sins and remember their wickedness no more.

And I want to pick up one other little bit here. And I think that's as far as we're going to go this morning. In chapter 7, verse 22. Is that what I mean?

Yes, it is. Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. And if you go through Hebrews, there are a number of references to the role that Jesus plays in this covenant. One place it says he's the mediator of the covenant. And in this place he says he's the guarantee of a better covenant. So this is somebody who takes responsibility to make the covenant work.

[22:21] So anybody done any deals on eBay? Okay, everybody else not owning up having done a deal on eBay.

If the deal goes wrong, what do you do if the deal goes wrong? If you can sort it out with a person, you won't go to the resolution centre.

You go to the resolution centre. Thank you very much. So eBay takes responsibility and says we will make this succeed. That's why they ask us to do our trade on eBay.

We will take responsibility. If there was a default, we'll make sure you get your money back. If the goods went to the wrong place, we'll make sure they get to the right place. You won't lose out because we will take responsibility to make this arrangement succeed.

Now when God makes a covenant with us, he says, I am so intent on this. I will take the responsibility to make this covenant succeed.

[23:40] Whatever it takes, I will do to make sure that those people that I committed myself to get to heaven. Whatever it takes for the forgiveness of their sins, because they've messed it up.

It's not me that's messed it up, says God, it's them. I will take the responsibility to make this succeed. And that's why it says Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant.

Because he single-handedly says, I will make this succeed. I will guarantee that this covenant works.

I will guarantee that those people, and let me tell you, I picked them up from the gutter. Those people will get to heaven.

I will make this succeed. He is the guarantee of a better covenant. He is the mediator.

[24:47] But this one says he's the guarantee. He personally pledges that whatever is necessary to make it work, he will do. And if there is any problem, he will pay.

And of course, as we were just saying earlier, what this means is that there's a huge problem, which is our sin. And he says, I will pay for that.

I will make sure that that is fully covered. I will make sure that that is not an obstacle to this arrangement succeeding. Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant.

And so I'm going to leave us with that. Sorry, I've underestimated. I thought I would be over time, but I'm under time. This leaves us not with an idea of a covenant and an arrangement and a contract, but it leaves us with a person.

And he says, the security of this is with me, says Jesus, the guarantee of the better covenant. I will make sure this succeeds.

[25:58] I will personally make sure that each of those people for whom I died get safe to heaven. A sovereign protector I have. I'm seeing it forever at hand.

And the price, says Jesus, on this, I will pay personally. And that's what he did when he died on the cross. When that time when the sun went dark and somebody shouted out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And the earth quaked. At that moment, Jesus was paying to make a success of this salvation story for you and me.

Isn't he great? So that's as far as I'm going to go. I shall make it last a little bit longer next time. It's a learning process, isn't it?

We're going to close by singing, Jesus is the name we honour. Jesus is the name we praise. Majestic name above all other names. The highest heaven and earth proclaim that Jesus is our God.

[27:06] Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing. Let's close by singing.

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