

# Covenant

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     What a great covenant day. I was just thinking about those covenant promises and also the readings that we had and that sense about remaining in God's love, but also that sense of in the Jeremiah reading, for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. That's a pretty good deal, isn't it? I will remember their sins no more. I don't know about you. Whenever you have a disagreement, and for those who are married here, I'm sure there are those moments, what is the thing that comes up first? It's like Dinerod, isn't it, really?

All the mess from the past comes up as you try to drag up all the stuff just to score some points. This is a great deal because God is saying, I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. That is a great covenant relationship.

What's your relationship with Jesus like today? Let's not mess around and let's go to the heart of it. What is your relationship with Jesus like today? What does new life in Christ look like for us?

For those who continue to invite Jesus in to have that deep, deep relationship with him, it's wonderful when that happens because like many here, I lived my life as a nominal Christian for many years without connecting into the vine. I was associated with it, but I wasn't fully connected.

connected. And I love that when we see, as Mike preached last week on intimacy, of when that realisation is that we come into that relationship with Jesus that is truly intimate.

[ 2 : 0 5 ]     I'll tell you a story that probably isn't strange to you, but will be strange to many who don't understand the vine. And I'll call him Ben. Ben was 12. Ben was 12 and he used to come, and I first met Ben in 2001. He was there with his football at half past eight of a morning in the summer, playing in the churchyard outside of the church. I went over to Ben. Ben was a notorious kid from our area. His father and his brothers knew the Queen were a lot of friends. They were detained at her pleasure. And on numerous occasions.

And Ben was streetwise. When I met Ben, he gave me that look of, so what do you want? And I said, mate, what's been the highlight of your summer holiday? And he said, I found 50p on the street.

That was the highlight of his holiday. And that's where Ben was. I made a bold step and I said to Ben, do you fancy coming on a youth group? It was actually called Youth Alpha. But do you fancy coming on? And he immediately said, he sort of looked me up and down. Like people do, you know, sussed you out. What's your game? What's your angle? This kid was truly streetwise.

And he said, yeah, if there's football involved. I had no clue how I was going to work Alpha and football together. But we did because Ben was coming. Ben came along week by week with his football.

And we got to the Holy Spirit day. And he came along and, you know, you have those expectations, don't you? But you're not surprised and you think, you know, Ben probably won't get into this. But we chatted on the weeks before. And he'd said, if I'm going to experience God, if I'm going to get into this relationship, I want it large. It was a bit like ordering a Big Mac. You know, I want it big.

[ 4 : 17 ] And I suppose looking at that banner, with God, all things are possible. Ben, on the Holy Spirit day, went up with all the rest of the young people. And there was an invitation to light a candle. And then if you wanted to, you could go off and do what you wanted, or you could stay. Others went up, lit a candle off it. But Ben stood there.

Transfixed. It's the first time I've ever seen Ben stand still for so long. One of my colleagues just went up beside him and said, Ben, are you all right, mate? And he said, I know that God is real because it's like electricity in every part of my body.

Ben had an encounter, a life-changing encounter, a covenant, life-changing encounter with God.

But it didn't end there because God hadn't finished, but because with God, all things are possible. And Ben said, I want to get baptised. And we said, that's great.

But he said, what I would like more than anything is for my dad to be there and see me baptised. Now, this was a bit difficult because his dad was elsewhere most of the time.

[ 5 : 48 ] But with God, all things are possible. And he happened to have parole. This family is notorious. And on Ben's baptism day at the Baptist Church, as we fully immersed Ben, and he made the statement, and people, friends, community came along.

And then my colleague had a great moment. And he said, is there anybody else here who would like to make that decision and enter into a relationship and give their life to Christ?

There was a gasp in the room. A gasp. Because his dad was running down the aisle taking his jacket off.

He gave a testimony, which even I think would have made Mother Teresa blush. He told it as it was about his life, but how it needed to change.

And because through Ben, he had seen a change and saw in Ben the life that he wanted and had always wanted. And we stepped out of the water and let Ben baptise his dad.

[ 7 : 09 ] Life-changing, covenantal decisions are made. And we need to be in that place where we can make those decisions, as Ben did.

Because covenant, we use lots of churchy words. And I can invite you and say, would you like to come to Vespers with me? You know? And most people say, sorry, I'm not really into scooter rallies.

And then we use other churchy words like hassocks and cassocks. And you see, the thing is, is you wear a cassock and you kneel on a hassock. Because a hassock doesn't cover much.

Really? And that is why. It's churchy words. And I was thinking about this covenant relationship during this week. And I thought, guys, I'll just remind you that Valentine's Day is coming up.

Okay? Now, I just, we're talking about new life in Christ and growth. And if I arrived with these, do you know, I'm just not going to get much of a result, am I really?

[ 8 : 20 ] There's a slide coming up. It's not good. And the thing is, it's about growth. I'm not a great gardener. You know, I don't garden a lot. And I don't really know.

But I know what new growth looks like. And I know that it looks good. And if I go off pruning and cutting, I'm probably cutting away stuff that I shouldn't be.

Because it's going to burst into new life. The thing is, this guy here, it's got it right. Look at that. Well invested.

Well done, guy. I think he's going to get a result. But as we see from the next slide as well, so often we ignore. Here's the guy who didn't get it right.

And we need to invest. Let's just start our next slide. And Jesus said, I am the vine. You are the branches.

[ 9 : 18 ] If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. And if you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that has been thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. I don't hear the Lord condemning me with that, but encouraging me to remain more and more in him.

Covenant can be one of those words. It can become something that we do once a year. Or it can be something that we live. I remember a couple of years ago at a fact service here, our children's service.

There was a large white thing down through here, which was the vine. And people were encouraged to come and write their name and say where they were connected. And I remember a dad that was sat just about there.

And he looked at it and he said, do you know what? I get it. I totally get it today. This is it. And I want to be connected more in.

[ 10 : 24 ] Where are we with that connection? You see, I think sometimes God needs to do a bit of pruning. And I guess my challenge to myself on Covenant Day is if I'm the same as I was a year ago at Covenant Service, then I haven't been grafted into the vine.

What difference does it make being grafted in to my daily life and my witness in the change that it makes in people's lives? To see the fruit.

To see what fruits in me and what that can be to the community that we're called to serve. I was just thinking about Adele's calling.

I remember the day that we were struggling with this calling thing, Mandy and I. And I think Mandy's defining moment was said, I know even you can't be nice for that long. It must be God.

You've changed. And I think when we're talking about this pruning, I suppose I want to ask you today, is what has got to be cut away in our lives for us to bear the fullness of the fruit?

[ 11 : 35 ] And we won't know what that fruit looks like until we're fully connected into the vine. How are we going to make that connection? You know, if anybody's tried to live that life not connected into the vine, I've been there.

I've been there. And it's tough. It really is. Because one thing I sense God did for me many years ago at a New Wine Leaders Conference is showed me what needed to be cut away.

And one of them was comparison. Comparison with other people. It is the death nail in a Christian's life. To compare yourself to what somebody else or another church is doing.

Don't do it. Just enter into that deep relationship that he wants with us. And he will show you what that fruit looks like. And what that looks like for you.

Covenant is more than words and ritual and ritualistic language. So, can I ask you before we move on?

[ 12 : 51 ] What is draining the life spirit of God from your life? What is stopping you entering in to the fullness of that covenantal relationship we've just talked about?

And only you and God will know that. And only he will know if you allow him what bits to prune and cut. And secondly, in order for that to happen, what needs to be pruned?

And will you allow him to do it? Which is the question. What saddens me is when I hear of Christians who have allowed spiritual starvation to define their life in ministry and stunt their growth.

A few years back, there was a comedy series. I don't think it actually was a comedy series. It was called Rev.

And I think it was a really interesting and perceptive comment on ordained ministry. Adam Smallbone was a guy who really had got to a point where he had lost that disconnection with the depth of that relationship.

[ 14 : 11 ] Because things had dragged him away. Churchy stuff. Trying to keep it going. And then disillusionment sets in and everything else.

Rather than being connected into the vine, he became disconnected. And one morning in his desperation or night, he decided to take up his cross.

And we heard Russ say earlier about this thing, put me to suffering. Suffering can be created in all sorts of ways. And he took his cross and he carried it to a hill, symbolically, as the sun rose.

I can't watch this clip without weeping. Because I think we're all looking for this encounter, which is ready and waiting for us in the vine. When in the vine is.

When in the vine is. When in the vine is. When we turn in the wind and sit down. When we turn. In the water's water's water's water's water. When we take it from■■■■.

[ 15 : 21 ] And he noises about banks. And he means that to ■■■■ us a few cycles. When we turn.

Dance, dance, wherever you may be, I am the Lord of the dance, said he. And I'll lead you all wherever you may be, And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

I danced for the scribes and the Pharisees, They wouldn't dance, they would not follow me. So I danced for the fishermen, for James and John, They came with me, so the dance went on.

Dance, dance, wherever you may be, I am the Lord of the dance, said he. And I'll lead you all wherever you may be, And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

Nurse likt P ■■■ēnos Have cuando interact, con con con. Yes. You're in a good mood then.

[ 16 : 37 ] Not really. Oh? Why's that then? I'm trying to keep something alive but I don't think I can do it. Ah. Ah, you know, I've learned a few things over the years.

Oh yes. You can't, you can't make an omelette without cracking some eggs. Right, thanks. It doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger.

I see. We are what we eat. Yep. You buy cheap, you buy twice. The open hand has the strongest grip. It's okay, you can stop now. Never parachute into an area you've just bombed.

Well that's a good one. Adam, Adam. We all have our crosses to bear.

Yes, yes we did. I understand, Adam. I will always be here. I will always be here. I will always be here. I will always be here.

[ 17 : 42 ] I will always be here. I will always be here. Yes, I will close it. We'll always go. But we'll be here. I'll decide. I'm not Butter. I am family I'm trying to keep something alive but I don't think I can do it.

Adam, Adam. We all have our crosses to bear. I understand Adam. I will always be there.

I will always be here.