

# Covenant Proved

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Date: 09 July 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] we're still walking through our series on encountering God. And what we're trying to do is we're trying to understand all the necessary background information that helps us understand the story of redemption. The Bible is one book. It's one story about one thing that we all need.

And it's about the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, there's so much to this. And so we can't tell everything and get the story told in a short amount of time. And so that's why we've been walking through this. We've looked at creation. We've looked at sin. We're in the covenant now. And we're going to talk about kingdom and fulfillment in a few weeks. But with covenant, we looked at the covenant established last week. And the reason we looked at that is to understand that God does things by covenant. And what we want to see today is we want to talk about the covenant proved. And what that means is God says he's going to make promises. But what really does that mean? And today we'll have, I think, a lot of personal application for you. But if you'll hang on to the truth that we're going to see here, you're going to see how it makes what Christ did on the cross even that much more beautiful. And so I was thinking about the song as we were singing it.

Oh, the gravity of grace. There's nothing, there's nothing more grounding in our lives than the grace of God. And so let's pray and ask the Lord to give us his grace to hear his word.

Father, we thank you again for the privilege it is to be together. And we need and want to hear your word. We confess together that your word is living and active, that it is powerful, that it is sharper than a two-edged sword, that when we read it, when we study it, it will show us our motivations and our intentions. And it is your word that can equip us for life. It is your word that does not return void. It is your word that is our very life and breath. And so we pray that you would give us eyes to see, hearts to believe, and that you would get all the glory and all the honor. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[ 2 : 4 2 ] When I was a kid, my parents, we took one vacation, just one. And we came all the way out here to go to Big Bend State Park. And on our way, we stopped, I think, almost every cave that we could.

I went to Natural Bridge Caverns, I went to Cascade Caverns, and I went to the Caverns of Sonora. And in every one of those, there's something that they all do. If you've got a guided tour, they all do the same thing. You get down to this one part about midway of the tour, and they say, hey, guess what? Click. And they turn the lights off on you. You know what I'm saying?

Like, they do this because they're wanting you to understand just how dark it is, and it feels dark. You see it's dark. You can kind of taste the dark. And then they have you, like, put your hand in front of your face and wiggle your fingers, and they flip the lights back on while you're doing it, you know, and go, ha, ha, I caught you. It's like you need some new jokes, man.

But that darkness that's there, it's such an interesting thing because it never failed that there was always, like, a kid with their parents, a young kid, and sometimes they would start to cry because it was getting too dark for them. And that darkness, it's something that, like, you can't really navigate that. You know, you've got to have some source of light coming in, whether it's from somebody's watch or phone or whatever, for your eyes to be able to adjust and begin to kind of tell what's going on. Without that light, you're just sitting there lost.

You can't move. You can't do anything. And that image of that darkness reminds me so much of what happens in our own lives. That there's so much darkness that comes to us. There's so much darkness that we live in with the trials and the suffering, the affliction, the tribulations, the sickness, the grief, the death. There's so much that comes our ways, and we're stuck in this. And it'd be great, if we could have a formula that says, when darkness comes to you, do these four things, and you'll be okay. I mean, I wish that that's the way it worked, because that'd be easy. Like, I mean, we could just pass that out on little business cards, and everybody'd be fine and dandy.

[ 5 : 10 ] But it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way at all. And, you know, I sometimes think, when I'm in the middle of a difficulty, a trial, I often wonder, you know, Lord, how long is this going to last?

When's it going to be over? The question is very similar to what Abraham is asking in chapter 15 of Genesis.

In verses 1 through 6, he's wondering, like, Lord, how are you going to fulfill this promise that I'm going to have numerous offspring? How am I going to know this? How's it going to come about? How much longer do you fulfill your promise? How much longer do I have to endure the darkness? The only thing that we can really have in darkness that can help us is light. And the only light that there is to help us in the darkness that we face is God himself.

[ 6 : 25 ] He is the light. The more that we see God, the more we see the light is there with us in the darkness. And so I just want to show you today something about God from our passage.

That God is a covenant-making God. And this is the light we need. Look at verse 7 of Genesis chapter 15.

He says, He said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it. And he said, O Lord, how may I know that I shall possess it?

It's that question of doubt there in verse 8 that I'm keying off of. Because God has promised and promised and promised. You remember back, it's chapter 12 that he's promised these things. And then you have things happening in chapter 13 and 14. You would think that Abraham would get this. You know, as a matter of fact, in verses 1 through 6, He says he believes God and God credited him as righteousness.

[ 7 : 30 ] But even though he's been credited righteousness, Even though that's Abraham's salvation right there, He still has doubts about this. He still is wondering how is this going to happen.

I mean, he knows that he's an old guy. He knows his wife is getting beyond childbearing years. He knows that things don't look exactly the way he thinks they ought to look In order to get out of this situation that he's in.

To be able to make progress and go in the direction that God has for him. So he's asking the question, How am I going to know? That is the question for us. How are we going to deal with this? How are we going to move forward? So what happens is, read verse 9. So let me tell you what's going on here.

I know I have said this before because I use this a lot. There's a lot about this that's really important to remember. As you think through the rest of the Bible and you look at the idea of covenant, It's really important to get this idea.

[ 8 : 56 ] That culture of that time, the background is that, you know, I was going to make a promise to you that I'm not going to kill your goats And you make a promise to me not to eat my cows. Okay? And as we make this promise together, we want this promise to be solid.

So what we would do is we would take an animal and we would cut the thing in half. And we'd put one half over here and one half over there. And you and I would get together and we'd walk through these two halves of these animals.

And I would say, I'm not going to kill your goats. And you'd say, I'm not going to eat your cows. And that became a legal binding agreement between us. Because what we were saying is a self-maledictory oath.

You like that? That's a mouthful. Self-maledictory oath. Self-oath promise.

So maledictory. In other words, may harm and bad come to me. So if I'm walking between these animals and promising not to kill your goats, I'm saying, may I be cut in half like these goats if I kill your goat.

[ 10 : 08 ] That's what that's saying. That's the kind of covenant that they would make. That's the kind of covenant they would cut. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word for covenant means to cut a covenant.

And so that's why they would do that. Well, so God's telling Abram to get these animals and put them there.

So he's putting the animals out. And so a covenant is about to be cut. So look at verse 12. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram.

And behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years.

But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve. And afterwards, they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace.

[11:10] You will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation, they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete. So God is speaking, and he's speaking promises.

He's adding to and padding out and giving us more information about what this covenant is between God and Abram. And a part of it has to do with his descendants going into slavery in Egypt.

Verse 13. How God's going to judge that nation. How they will come out with many possessions.

Verse 14. How Abram himself is not going to suffer this.

Verse 15. And then how he's going to bring them back into the land. Verse 16. So I mean, there you go. You get the land again. Remember? Because the three promises that God makes in the covenant, in big scale, is land, seed, and blessing.

So God's speaking then the words. He's speaking his promise. Now look at verse 17. It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark. And behold, there appeared a smoking oven, or a smoking pot, and a flaming torch, which passed between these pieces.

[12:18] On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants, I have given this land, from the river of Egypt, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. And then he talks about the different nations that are a part of that land that they're going to get.

But here's what's happening here. You've got these animals being sent out. God is proclaiming promises. And then you've got Abram being put to sleep by God, and this smoking pot, and this flaming torch going through the pieces.

Now we know, we all know, this is God. Right? This is God, and this is God by himself. You've got the smoking pot, the flaming torch, which sort of hint at the idea of the pillar of cloud, and the pillar of fire, that will lead God's people later on.

But we know that smoke and fire are always symbols of God and his presence. You can go to Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 19 and see that the top of Mount Sinai is covered with the smoke and the cloud and the presence of God and the darkness that's there.

You can see fire starting all the way back at the Garden of Eden, where God sets a flaming sword in order to keep people out of the presence of the tree of life. You can see God in the presence of fire there on the altar as every sacrifice that is burned.

[13:37] Or you can see God as the angel takes the coal from the fire and touches the lips of Isaiah. The smoking pot, the flaming torch, it's God. And it's God by himself.

And so what's not happening is God and Abraham are not walking through these pieces together, both making some sort of promises to one another. This is God by himself, on his own, walking through these pieces, making a self-maledictory oath that he is going to provide and fulfill the promises of land, seed, and blessing to Abraham and to his offspring.

In other words, God is saying that if I do not fulfill these promises, if I do not fulfill these promises, then may I be done as these animals. May I be killed.

Now, what happens if you could cut God in half like one of these animals? He's not God. So God, by himself, on his own, makes a self-maledictory oath binding himself to fulfill all these covenant promises by himself without anyone's help.

He is swearing to his own hurt. I will do these things. And here's what you need to remember. Remember, this is all in reference to the question, how will I know?

[15:14] Here I am in a land of doubt and confusion. Here I am in the unknown. Here I am ignorant of what's going to happen. You've made these promises. How am I going to know that's going to come about?

How am I going to know that you're going to do this? How am I going to know that this is the way things are going to be? How am I going to know? And God's answer is, I am the self-swearing God. That's how you're going to know. Now that doesn't sound to us like something that really hits us sometimes. And I think it's because we've gotten too used to the world around us.

But here's the issue. The issue is that God swearing to fulfill these promises is the most sure thing in all of reality.

Let me say that again. God swearing by Himself is the most sure thing, the most certain thing, the most real thing in all existence.

[16:23] I know that's hard to believe sometimes because we grow up with the pagan notion that if I see it, I believe it.

So I was trying to think, what's something that we have in our experience that would help us understand just how sure God's promise, God's word is?

I thought to myself, well, we could talk about pinky swearing. I don't know what pinky swearing is. I never did that. That's weird. I did do the thing, cross my heart, hope to die, stick a, yeah, stick a needle in my eye.

That's not sure because I'm not going to do that. Oh, my goodness. That's crazy. So then I started thinking about, I took a trip once with a friend of mine.

He used to work for Letourneau. I don't know if you know who R.G. Letourneau is or was, but R.G. Letourneau was an engineer. He was a part of, World War II is a part of the ministry of Billy Graham.

[17:28] But he was from Longview, Texas and there in Longview he established this plant where he designed and built all kinds of things. He's kind of famous for offshore drilling rigs. That's one of his things that he helped to develop.

But he also developed these earth-moving machines. The largest, world's largest earth-moving machines that are electric powered. So it runs on a generator, right?

But it's got this massive engine that runs the generator. The engine on this thing is like an 18-valve thing or 18-cylinder thing. It's huge. And a friend of mine worked there and he took me for a tour.

And I got to go see this earth-moving machine. I'm going to tell you something. That is cool. The tires on this thing, it had like, you know, double sets of tires and it had like four sets down each side. But one tire was 12 feet tall. It was huge. It was huge, right? And the bucket on this thing, the bucket on this thing, it might fit within the walls, but it might be just outside the walls of this.

[18:36] I mean, that's, it was just huge. Three flights of stairs to get up to the cockpit. And my friend took me up into the cockpit. I got to sit there and he says, I wished it was on the demo track.

I could let you drive it. And I was like, like, I was like, oh, I'll have to drive one of these things. That'd be so awesome. But we were like right next to the building and so they were afraid I would destroy everything. And that, that's probably true.

I can't back up worth anything. But I'm sitting there and I'm looking at this thing. It's, it's enormous. And I asked him, I said, well, what's going to happen to this?

Who uses this? He says, well, this one is actually going to be, once it's tested and passed the test, it'll be broken down. It'll be palleted up and it'll be shipped to Siberia because they're digging away some of the mountains there in Siberia.

And I thought to myself, that is incredible. And that's what I was thinking about. How sure, how certain is the word of God and the promises of God?

[19:43] Because as humans, we now have the ability, whether you, whether it takes all of our lifetime or not, is immaterial. We have the ability that if we wanted to, we could pulverize and move a mountain.

when I walk up to a mountain or if I just walk up to big rock, I could try to kick it, hit it, push it, it's not moving.

It feels really sure. But it's not. God's promises are more sure than big rock.

God's promises are more sure than the Rocky Mountains. God's promises are more real, more sure, more steadfast, more in line with all of reality and existence.

There's nothing in our experience that can even match what it is that God is in His sureness of His Word.

[20:52] I mean, you might look at, I mean, let's just take and put my hand down there and take a hammer and swing it and hit my hand. And that's not sure that that's going to do anything or be anything compared to the sureness of God's promise.

He swears by Him Himself. His promises are more sure than anything in the universe.

So, when our life is full of darkness and when we feel as though we've lost the way, when we need that light, the light that comes from seeing God, understanding God as He's revealed Himself in the Scriptures, because that's what we're talking about here.

What we need is we need to see God as He's revealed Himself in the Scriptures. God's Word about Himself, God's promises are more sure than anything in our experience.

Here's the thing. When we're talking about Abram, it feels like such a big, massive promise promise. Because Abram is in the lineage of Jesus. And I'm not.

[ 22 : 20 ] And so, to me, it's an argument from the greater to the lesser. If His promise is so sure to Abram, then what about the little promises He gives to me?

Oh, so sure. And I just want to take one little promise. It's in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5.

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have. For He Himself has said, I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.

I just want you to think about that because, I don't know about you, but there's a lot of times, there's been a lot of times in my life where there's been some kind of suffering, some kind of grief, some kind of trouble, some kind of affliction that's come my way from whatever region, whatever source, and it's real easy and very tempting to think the thought, where are you, God?

And my experience is, is that I'm standing there feeling all the feels, getting totally thrown out of being discombobulated and just, just a mess.

[ 23 : 38 ] In case you haven't noticed, I'm a very emotional person and I can get a mess quick. And in the middle of that moment, I, it feels more real than anything else and what I'm telling you is that we have got to disbelieve ourselves and believe God's word.

That you may feel like He's not there, but what you feel is immaterial because He said, I will be with you. Do you understand?

If, if He swears by Himself, then we cannot sit there and look at our feelings as though it describes reality.

our feelings come from a sinful heart that's deceptive beyond all reason. So what we feel in that moment is immaterial compared to what God has said.

It doesn't mean it's unimportant. So for the Christian who's wondering, God, where are you when I feel depressed?

[ 24 : 46 ] Where are you when anxiety is plaguing? Where are you when my children are doing crazy, sinful, terrible things? Where are you when my marriage is falling apart? Where are you when the finances just won't make it?

Where are you when that shooter happened? Where are you when all of these things we could come up with? Where are you? The answer to that question is, I will be with you. He hasn't promised to remove the darkness.

He's promised to be with us. It's what Isaiah was saying. When you pass through the waters, not, you're not going to have to pass through the waters.

When you walk through the fire, you're not going to have to go through the fire. When you do, I will be with you.

This covenant making God whose word is more sure than big rock has promised to never leave you or forsake you in the middle of your darkness.

[ 26 : 07 ] So, it only brings one final question for me. And that is, if in darkness I need light, light comes from who God is as he's revealed in his word, then whatever darkness I'm in, how can I live?

What do I need to do in the middle of that? God? I mean, we need to see glory. We need to see God. We need to see his light.

So, let me illustrate it this way. Moses is there on the mountain and the nation of Israel, they're doing their thing and he's up there on Sinai and he asked God, said, God, let me see your glory. You know the story? You know what I'm talking about? Yeah, let me see your glory. And it's interesting because God's response is this. He says, I will make all my goodness pass before you. I'll make all my goodness pass before you and then I will proclaim the name of the Lord. You can't see my face. So, what you initially asked for, that's not going to happen.

[ 27 : 13 ] But what I am going to give you is I'm going to pass before you and then I'm going to proclaim my name. In other words, Moses saw the glory of God and we know that because his face shone with brightness, and everybody was scared because his face was glowy.

But the bulk of the glory that Moses saw was what he heard God say. The bulk of the glory that Moses saw was what he heard God say.

And so if we wish to see God, then we need to run where God reveals himself and where he reveals himself are the scriptures. God so I'm going to tell you three things you need to do.

Whatever situation is coming, all part of your life, if you want to see God, you want to understand God, you want to know him and his glory so that he is there and you are comforted because he's there with you, then three things you need to do.

Number one, you need to be under the preaching of the word of God. You need to be under the preaching of the word of God. And when I say preaching of the word, I'm talking about what Paul the Apostle is talking about when he charges young Pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, that he must preach the word to the church.

[ 28 : 39 ] He must preach the word to the church because there's coming a time when they will believe false things and this preaching is what will help instruct, train, equip, rebuke, and admonish God's people to believe what's true.

If you think about ordinary personal daily devotion, now some of you may not fit this category, but if I had a penny for every time somebody said to me, I just don't get anything out of reading the Bible on my own, I would be a rich man.

I hear that a ton. And personal devotions have their place, and we're going to talk about that in a second. But I want you to understand the preaching of the word of God is something different from your personal devotions, and you need both.

In the preaching of the word, you have God who's given gifts to the church called pastors, teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry.

He's given pastors to the church to shepherd your souls. It's my job to get in your face and in your ears with the word of God and preach it to you and pray that the Lord would get this into your heart and change you.

[ 30 : 02 ] When you do your own personal devotions, nobody's doing that. The preaching of the word of God, let me just say it this way, you will get more out of the weekly preaching of the word of God than you will a year's worth of half-hearted devotions.

And I believe that very firmly. And so you need to be in there and you need to squeeze everything out of devotions, out of the preaching that you possibly can.

But the second thing is that you don't need to neglect the personal devotions. That needs to be there. And let me tell you the difference. Preaching is like heart surgery. Preaching is like debriding an infected wound.

Preaching is like setting a broken bone. And daily devotions are the daily nutrients instructions that the doctor gives you for recovery and building back so that you're stronger.

Your daily time in the word of God is that daily consuming so that you can grow stronger. it doesn't ever feel like it sometimes but it's there.

[ 31 : 12 ] And it doesn't have to be a complicated thing. I'm going to talk about this for just a second. It doesn't have to be complicated. You know what I'm saying? There's nothing in the Bible and all the Bible that says you need to read the Bible in a year.

There's not a verse that says that's what you've got to do. It just says you need to read it. And so here's my uncomplicated way of doing devotions. Read a chapter a day. Read a chapter a day. Matter of fact, I've got a little acrostic for you. Prep. Here's how you do a devotion. Number one, pray. Pray for God to show you himself in the word.

You need to pray because here's the thing. You ever walked into a room and you want to talk to somebody and you know that they're not engaging with you because they're still watching the TV or still looking at their phone and you're talking to them and they're talking to you and you kind of get like this half-hearted sort of interplay between the two of you?

We need to pray because we have a tendency to walk up to God unengaged. God's always ready but we have a tendency to be unengaged and so you just need to get right there and say pray, pray, Lord, help me to be engaged.

[ 32 : 21 ] Help me to be engaged. Secondly, read one chapter a day. Read one chapter a day. Third, you need to examine what you read and I can give you three questions. Now, in the little handout, I've got handouts that we give out every Sunday.

These questions are up there if you don't want to write them down. So you grab one before you leave. What does this show me about God and his ways? What does this show me about man and his issues? What do I need to think, feel, and do because of what this means?

You're not going to read a chapter a day and then ask yourself, well, what does this mean to me? Because what it means to you is not the point. The point is, what did God say?

That's the point. So what does this show about God? What does this show about man and sin and all those issues? And then what do we need to think, feel, or do because of what this means? I mean, if you were to read Psalm 23, you would answer these questions like this. It shows me that God is the shepherd. He's the leader. He's the guider. He directs me. He loves me. He cares for me. He provides for me. And you'd answer the second question because I need it. [ 33 : 29 ] somebody to keep me from falling in the water and drowning. And so what do I need to think? I need to think, God is my shepherd. That means he's my boss. That means I'm supposed to do everything the way he has said.

I need to walk in his way. I need to follow after him. So am I doing that? Am I doing that with my finances? Am I doing that with my marriage? Am I doing that with my parenting? And right there, you just had a devotion, and at the end of that, as my shepherd. Could you please help me? Now listen, don't start in the Old Testament. It's hard. It's hard. Start in the New Testament. Matter of fact, if you've never done this before, start with the Gospel of John. It's got 21 chapters. In 21 days, you can read through the Gospel of John. And then when you're done with the Gospel of John, go back and read it again. You will never exhaust what God's word says. And so become an expert in the Gospel of John and read it for the next four months, just over and over and over again. And when you've done that for about four months, then go be an expert in a New Testament epistle. [ 34 : 42 ] Pick Ephesians. It's got six chapters. It might not take you four months to be an expert there. Read it one chapter a day, every day, and repeat and repeat and repeat.

The goal is to see God. Third, study the Bible with other Christians. There's something about studying the Bible with other Christians that helps us in ways that sermons and daily devotions can't.

If preaching, I was like, what is that? I felt the brightness hit me. And then the glory of the Lord. No, I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. If the preaching is setting the bone, and daily devotions are the daily nutrients we need to get well, then Bible study with Christians is physical therapy. And you need all those. Right? Because when you study the Bible with other Christians, what you're doing is you're stating out loud what you think that passage says, or you're talking about what it means, and you're talking about how to apply it, and as you see other people look at their life and talk about how they apply it, you begin to see that there's some commonality and some things, but you also get to see where you say something that's not true, and somebody corrects you. And that's a good thing. It's not good for you to say dumb things about the Scripture and somebody not corrects you. You need to be corrected. I need to be corrected. If you don't think I'm right, go ahead. That's great.

[ 36 : 19 ] studying the Bible together gives us that opportunity to do that. And, you know, I'll just tell you right now, we have Sunday school on Sunday mornings at 10 a.m.

You can come. You can be a part of that. Wednesday night, we're doing something on evangelism, 6 p.m. The goal is to come, participate, because if you don't, you won't get that physical therapy that you need.

And in the fall, we're going to go back and have daytime Bible study, and I got my sight set on a few other things to do. Because, listen, here in a town like this, I know you have no end of Bible studies to choose from to go to.

And if it's working for you, great, go. That's fine. I'm not here to try to win my world, but I just need you to understand what it is that we're trying to do here.

because you could go to all these other Bible studies, and I'm sure you could probably fill up your calendar every day of the week with a Bible study. Somebody's got one at a church, somebody's got one in their home, somebody's got one in their business.

[ 37 : 25 ] You could probably drive to Bandera, pick up a few Bible studies, over to Kerrville, probably pick up a few Bible studies. There's no end to them. All I'm telling you is this. I will shepherd you through the Bible studies that I do.

I'm not going to try to shepherd you through somebody else's Bible study. That would be like commandeering their control over something, and that would be ridiculous. But if you want me to shepherd you through the Word of God, then you should come to the Bible studies that I'm doing. Why is that? Because I'm better than everybody else? No, because God's calling me to shepherd. 1 Peter 5, Peter says to the elders of the church, he says, shepherd the flock of God among you.

How can you shepherd the flock of God among you? If you don't have a flock. I know that we're all belong to the Lord, but there is something about that the pastor and the shepherding God has called, and it is my job and my responsibility and my priority to shepherd the sheep who call themselves First Baptist Church.

God's my number one, my family's number two, you are number three. Already, what about Medina? They're number four.

[ 38 : 48 ] You have to understand that. And it's not my goal to make a name for myself. It's my goal to shepherd you through the Word of God.

Because the only way, the only way that you're going to see the light that you need to see is through the Word of God. And there's not a shortcut.

There's no shot that says, Word of God, stick it in, and now I'm surviving. No, it's preaching, daily reading, and Bible study, and that's it. So my encouragement to you, get into the Word of God.

Let's pray. Well, let'sNINGNINGNING