

I will be your God, and you shall be My people

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Date: 08 March 2020

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[0 : 0 0] turn to God's word, let's pray together. Father, we are so conscious that as we come to your word, we need your help. So by the power of your own Holy Spirit and for the glory of your beloved son Jesus, please help us and be at work among us.

Amen. Tonight I'd like us to turn back to Exodus chapter 6 and I want us to focus on what I think is one of the most important phrases that you will find in the whole Bible. It's a phrase that as we shall see appears in lots of different places and it's one that in many ways really sums up what the whole Bible is about.

So it's a phrase that we need to know and one that we think about and one which I hope we will see is absolutely amazing. And that's the phrase that we find in Exodus chapter 6 verse 7 where God says therefore to the people of Israel I am the Lord and I will bring you out under the burdens of the Egyptians I will deliver you from the slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment and then in verse 7 we have the key phrase I will take you to be my people and I will be your God.

Here in Exodus 6 God is reinforcing to Moses what his purposes are for his people and this is really a key moment in the great story of redemption that's working its way out through the Bible.

If you think of the whole Bible story and the whole narrative is very much the fact that God created everything so good and so perfect in the beginning and that was broken by sin.

[2 : 1 8] That sin affected humanity and creation and more seriously of all it broke the relationship between God and with us.

And the rest of the Bible and really the rest of history is the story of how God is putting that right. And the message of scripture is a great message of restoration as God seeks to undo the damage caused by sin.

and there's various key moments that take place. The first one really in many ways well there's a few I should probably I shouldn't say the first one but one of the very first ones the very important ones is when God comes to Abraham in Genesis 12.

There's a sense in which Genesis 12 is the starting point for God's saving work. The reason I was a bit hesitant to say the first one is because there's an important significance with Noah as well but my sermon will be too long if I go all the way back to Noah.

So we'll start with Abraham key moment where God comes to him and begins this work of restoration. You then have Isaac Abraham's son Jacob Abraham's grandson then we come to Moses later on we come to David and ultimately we come to the fulfilment of all that the Old Testament is pointing towards Jesus Christ.

[3 : 4 9] Now these big moments in scripture Abraham Moses David and ultimate fulfilment in Jesus are all connected by a key word and that key word is the word that really lies at the heart of God's saving purposes and it's the word that lies at the heart of the Bible's message.

that word is covenant. Here in this chapter as we see in other places God is entering into a covenant with his people.

He's entering into that committed relationship with them. Here we read in this chapter about how God in describing what he's going to do speaks about the fact that he'd established his covenant with Abraham and that he was going to continue to remember this covenant that he made.

And so this theme of covenant is a key thing running through scripture. God makes a covenant with Abraham with Moses with David and the New Testament is of course what we would really call the new covenant pointed towards in the Old Testament the fulfilment of everything that God had pointed towards.

We say Old Testament New Testament we could just as easily say Old Covenant New Covenant that's what we mean. But we have to ask the question well what do we mean when we talk about covenant?

[5 : 26] And if I was to say to you can you describe God's covenant in one sentence? What would you say? Well I think the answer to that question is that if you want to describe God's covenant in one sentence you do so as follows.

God says you will be my people and I will be your God. That's really what lies at the heart of this whole concept of covenant whereby there's a relationship between people and God and at the heart of that relationship is that we are his people he is our God.

And we see that language again and again and again. God speaks it to Abraham. After the exodus later on beyond this point we have the same thing. God says I will be your God and you shall be my people.

The prophets reinforce this kind of language. We read from Ezekiel at the very beginning God says I will be their God they shall be my people. Zechariah says the same thing they shall be my people I will be their God.

And you have the great new covenant promise in Jeremiah 31 verse 33 where God says this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

[6 : 57] And this phrase comes up again and again and the emphasis continues into the New Testament. Paul speaks of it in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 again saying I will be their God they shall be my people.

And Hebrews 8 verse 10 says for this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days declare the Lord. I will put my law into their minds and write it onto their hearts I will be their God and they shall be my people.

This is the phrase that lies at the heart of the Bible's message. And this is the phrase I want us to think about tonight. God says you shall be my people and I will be your God.

I want us just to do two things tonight. First of all we're going to think I suppose in kind of the big picture because this phrase points us to three foundational truths that lie at the heart of Christianity and I want us just to think about these big truths together and then the second thing we want to do is to actually look at this phrase itself in just a wee bit more detail.

So if you like we kind of maybe you could say we're going to look with binoculars and then we're going to look with a microscope and we'll look at the big picture and then we'll focus in in a little bit more detail.

[8 : 25] So first of all this phrase you'll be my people and I'll be your God reinforces three foundational truths that lie at the heart of Christian theology.

Number one at the heart of this phrase is a relationship between two parties God and people. Now that might seem extraordinarily obvious and it is but this is the key thing I want us to recognise first and foremost this phrase is talking about the relationship between God and people.

Now that's an easy thing to say and it seems almost obvious but when we stop and think about it it is utterly remarkable because we can say that here's a relationship between God and people as though it's not that big a deal that they go together.

but stop for a moment and think about how utterly massive God is.

[9 : 43] Think of God as the creator of this whole universe. Think of the mind blowing breadth and size and mass and energy in the universe. The fact that it's bigger than anything we can comprehend.

The fact that we are like the tiniest specks imaginable in that massive universe and yet the universe is just like a bit of dust in God's hand. He is utterly enormous eternal infinite immeasurable mind-blowingly big and powerful and wise and glorious and we are so so tiny in comparison.

And so when we say there can be a relationship between God and people we're not saying between God and people we're saying between God and people and on the surface it seems utterly impossible and yet that's exactly what this phrase is saying.

God wants a relationship with people and God is willing to enter that covenant relationship with people and at the heart of that lies the glorious truth that God and people God and you belong together and that's what the Bible is all about the connection between God and us and at the heart of the Bible is the fact that God and people belong together that was how things were made in

Genesis 1 that was how things were always meant to be the climax of creation week the biggest and best moment in God's eyes is when humanity is created God and humanity together as they belong and the Bible gives us more details as to how that works itself out God and humanity belong together in terms of likeness so God is our creator we are his creation and humanity is the unique aspect of that creation because we are made in the image and likeness of God we are created in a way that means that we are like

God in a way that nothing else is and our very nature is such that we belong with God it's who we are so we belong together with God in terms of likeness we belong together with God in terms of fellowship in Eden in Genesis 1 God and humanity dwelt together and that was always God's intention and plan from the beginning that God and people should be together our ongoing existence is always meant to be in contact in fellowship in company in community with God we belong with God we belong together and God and humanity belong together in terms of service that's why humanity was made that's part of why humanity was made to live for God Adam had the role where he was to govern and care for creation in the place where he had been set serving [12:58] God and fulfilling a purpose for him that's our purpose in life to live for God because we belong together we belong in a relationship with God in likeness in fellowship in service and in many other ways our nature belongs with God our existence belongs with God our purpose belongs with God at the heart of all that humanity is is the fact that we belong with God and that means that you and God belong together now that might sound like a very simple thing to say but I really want you to think about that and to really let that be written on your heart that you and God belong together and if you think back to like all the big truths of the world so

I'm not really an expert in all of this but I think when you think of the big truths around the universe it's what we call metaphysics it's like the discussion of just what exists and what's there and all the big stuff that really holds the whole of the universe together things like laws of nature things like gravity and physical matter and cause and effect and energy and these kind of things these are the big foundational principles of life and if you're thinking what's the building blocks of the universe you'd say well energy and matter and gravity these are the foundational truths that lie at the heart of the universe and of course that's true but there's one other foundational truth that I want you to never forget that sits alongside gravity and energy and time and cause and effect and that is the foundational truth that you and God belong together and that is even more foundational than gravity and time and all of these other things that's at the very heart of all that we are and it's something that we must think about and must grasp you ask the question where do you belong where's the place where you are really you where's the place where you are complete and where you fulfill all your purposes all around us there's a world desperately trying to find answers to those questions where am I really me where do I find my true meaning in life where do I find my true purpose where do I really belong and the incredible answer to that question is that the place where you belong is with

God you belong with him and that's why every alternative that the world offers an answer to that question is rubbish in comparison because the Bible says you belong with God and whoever you are if you are a Christian or if you're not a Christian please let this be something that you think about it's so easy to think to yourself you know I don't belong with these Christians they seem to be different they're at a better standard I don't belong with those kind of people I'm just I'm not at that level it's so easy to feel like that when we're not yet a Christian it's easy to feel like that as Christians you look at everybody else you think they're so much better in God's side than I am they don't have the struggles that I have it's so easy to think you know

God would never want to know me there's too much wrong with me there's too many mistakes in my life I've mucked up too much it's so easy to think God would just want to keep me at arm's length I want you to know that all of these thoughts are 100% wrong they're 100% theologically untrue now they're so easy to think because I've thought them many times but they are utterly and completely and eternally untrue because if one thing is true about you it's that you belong with God and if you are seeking God always remember that he is seeking you far more and you belong with him far more than you realize

God is looking at you and he's saying come back to where you belong come back home Jesus said come to me and that's why becoming a Christian is such a brilliant thing because it's often easy to think that something new is going to feel weird and scary and uncomfortable so you go to live in a new place you think oh this is this is uncomfortable you go to start a new job it feels uncomfortable

you go to begin a new hobby it feels uncomfortable something you go to something new and you think oh this is going to be difficult and awkward and I'm not going to fit in it's so easy to think that that's going to be true of you if you become a Christian you think it's going to be uncomfortable I'm not going to feel like I belong and it's going to feel strange and it's going to be awkward in my life that is 100% not what it feels like when you become a Christian because when you become a Christian what does it feel like it feels like coming home and that makes perfect sense because coming to faith in

[19:02] Jesus and coming into a relationship with God is exactly where you belong that's the foundational truth being set before us here God wants a relationship between God and people humanity and God belong together but of course the second foundational truth that lies behind all God's covenantal work across the ages of the history of salvation is the second key biblical truth the fact that this connection and this relationship has been spoiled and and what ultimately happened was that humanity turned away from God by sinning we were created by God we belong with God we had so much fulfillment and purpose with him but we've ruined that by rebelling against him and turning away and it's as though we had all the privileges and blessings of knowing

God and all that he is and we've turned away from that and that's really what sin is sin is just the opposite of everything that God is sin if you like is ungodness whereby it's the opposite of everything that God is and we've gone chasing after that and stained ourselves with everything that God isn't everything that God cannot be and everything that cannot belong with God so we've we've been made to belong to God and belong with God but we've marched into a realm of sin where God doesn't belong it's the opposite of everything that God is and so we've wandered willingly into a territory where we've brought ourselves into a condition where there's all this pollution and brokenness that does not belong with God and that's why sin is so awful because it brings separation from God it's so easy to think that sin is just this sort of we think where we just don't do the things that we should do and where we make mistakes it's far far far worse than that it's it's just driving a wedge and a gulf between us and God and we should always remember that when we face the temptation to sin think this is going to push me away from God and all of this is why the ultimate consequence of sin is death and death as you know is a separation that's why death is such an agony it separates things that belong together that's what death does so it separates husbands and wives who belong together it separates children and parents who belong together it separates friends who belong together it separates body and soul which belong together and above all else it separates

God and humanity who belong together sin separates that which belongs together so we must never think that sin is a small thing it's an utterly horrible thing and it's wrecked our relationship with God and it's brought us into a place where we do not belong if you look at the world around us and if you look at all that's going on in the news and stuff like that I don't think anybody in their right minds would say I'm so glad there's all this suffering in the world I'm so glad there's all this illness and cruelty and exploitation every one of us can see that something is not right something's far from right in our world and that is because sin has brought us away from where we belong it's brought us to a place where no one is at home so key truth number one

God and humanity belong together key truth number two sin has spoiled that connection but key truth number three is that God is going to put things right and that's really what the whole of the Bible is about the great purpose of scripture the great purpose of the narrative running through the narrative of scripture is that this relationship between God and humanity would be put right that's why Christ ultimately came to restore this broken relationship and if we go back to the Old Testament and if you see this story being worked away across the ages of history we see that that restoration work is being initiated through this great word covenant God came to Abraham and made a covenant with him and with his descendants and this built up and built up and built up through the Old Testament pointing towards the new covenant when ultimately

Jesus would come and fulfill all God's saving work at the center of God's covenant plan is that the relationship with God and people will be restored that's exactly what God wants and that's why we can sum up the Bible's message in this great statement where he says I will take you to be my people and I will be your God and these I think are among the most beautiful words that we can ever read and I want us just to unpack these words so we maybe put down our binoculars and we pick up our microscope and just focus in on just exactly what God is saying and keep Exodus 6-7 open before you as we look at these words I will take you to be my people and I will be your God

[25 : 27] I'm going to say seven things and we'll do them really fast so we don't take too long whenever you read a sentence in the Bible sometimes we're drawn to the big words and the big words in the Bible are brilliant but never forget that the little words in the Bible are amazing as well sometimes they're the most amazing of all and in this statement the first thing I want to notice is the smallest word but it's maybe one of the most amazing God says I will be your God I will take you to be my people and what I want you to notice is that you would think that surely it should be the other way around God had made everything perfect we turned away from him we mucked it up we broke the relationship we caused all the problems you'd think that it would be us begging

God to have us back but the message of the Bible again and again and again and again is that God is the one who takes the initiative we've mucked up we've left everything in a mess and yet God comes and says I will put this right I will fix it and that's what we call divine initiative in terms of God's saving work and it's one of the most amazing concepts in scripture the fact that we've mucked everything up we've done all that's wrong and yet God comes and he initiates and he begins to put things right and this is the amazing thing when God uses the pronoun I he's telling us what he thinks and he's telling us what he wants to do so what does God think of you what does God want to do when it comes to your life he wants to come and get you and he's not going to wait for you to take the initiative he's coming for you because he wants you he wants to be in a relationship with you he at the heart of this covenant promise that we have in scripture is the God who says I I will come for you I will rescue you the second thing I want you to notice is the word will or the phrase will be I will take you to be my people I will be your God I love that word because it speaks of an ongoing promise and this is one of the amazing things about God is that he is absolutely not inconsistent or unpredictable that was one of the great contrasts between God the God of the Bible and all the gods of the other nations in the Old Testament the other nations gods were unpredictable capricious sometimes even violent gods who you had to kind of always tiptoe around and make sure that you appeased them and didn't upset them and the whole thing was just a kind of horrible unpredictable mess the God of the Bible stands in total contrast to that because he is the God who is the great I am he is who he is and he always will be when God says he will do something he will do it so when God says I will be there is an amazing amazing permanence about it it is a promise that is always going to be kept a promise that is always going to be there the words will be when God says I will be it is just like a never ending horizon that goes on and on and on there is no end to the words will be God says I will be he is making an eternal unchangeable commitment to you the next thing the third thing I want you to see is that we will be something as well

God says I will be but he also says I will take you to be and so he's going to make something out of us as well it speaks of the amazing transformation that God brings in the experience of his people you remember that it's all gone wrong for humanity that's the easiest doctrine in the Bible to prove that everything has gone wrong for humanity because the world is still a mess today as it has been across all the ages of history we see all the brokenness in the world and God is saying I am going to change that I'm going to fix it I'm going to take you to be something different humanity is in a mess because of sin maybe you feel a mess inside maybe everything has gone wrong maybe on the outside everything looks brilliant in your life maybe on the inside everything feels a mess God is saying that if we trust in him we will no longer be what we are and when we feel all caught up in the muck and brokenness of sin that is such an incredible comfort for us

[31 : 01] God is saying I will change you I will transform you I have something so much better for you and that's the amazing way in which faith in Jesus Christ transforms our lives God does not leave us where we are he comes and makes us something else so what will we be well he says I will take you to be and this is the next thing the fourth thing I want to highlight this word we will be his he says I will take you to be mine and here we see that God is making a statement of possession we shall be his his own precious beloved possession now I look at my life and I can see so many ways in which I have neglected my possessions often I well I don't

I was going to say often I don't wash my car the truth is I never wash my car often I've neglected stuff that's mine and I'm sure you've been the same and we live in a world that's very disposable about possessions today but God never ever neglects something that's his and God wants you to be his and his possessions are incredibly precious they're beautifully cared for they're of the utmost importance to him God is saying that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian then you are mine you are one of my precious possessions and this is why the Bible can say that God is

jealous he's not jealous in the sense of two children fighting over a toy or jealous as we can sometimes be when someone else gets a better car or a nicer phone than we have but God's not jealous in that way but he is jealous in the sense that he is fiercely protective of anything that's his and just think about how much you want to protect that which is yours think about the things that are most important to you and how much you want to protect that that's just a glimpse of how God views you if you are a Christian or if you become one God looks at you and says you are mine and here's where we have to remember that when God says you will be mine there's that never ending to it God saying you are mine and you always will be because we belong together so God is saying I God is saying will be God is saying that we shall be something as well we will be his his what we will be his people I will take you to be my people now that word people is a brilliant word is that word singular or plural is people singular or plural sometimes we say in like a plural way so we say look at all those people meaning there's loads of them but sometimes we use it singular we'll say like the voice of the people in an election or something like that so we kind of it's a funny word it's kind of singular and plural in many ways it's both

I think that is brilliant because it sums up exactly what we are when we enter into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ because individually personally we are his through our own faith in Jesus Christ we are his own individuals we are his but at exactly the same time we come into that relationship with God not just as individuals but as part of a collective people and we remain as that collective people we are his as his people so when God sees you he doesn't just see you as his child he sees you as one of his children that's why as Christians we belong together that's why love for one another is foundational to our Christian lives we together and together with all other believers are his people that's why it's brilliant to say

Jesus loves me and it's brilliant to say Jesus loves you but best of all is to say Jesus loves us because together we are his people and that of course should shape the way we live God promises to be faithful to his people but he expects his people to be faithful to him and to be faithful to one another that's why we are to live lives that are not just about ourselves and God but about how we can support and love one another as a family as a community as God's people together so God is saying I will be I'll take you to be my people then he says that he will be you and I just want to stop there here we see

[36 : 59] God saying I'll take you to be my people and I will be your and in that word your God is making an eternal commitment to you God who is infinite eternal and unchangeable God who exists forever God is saying that what I am I will be for you I will be infinitely eternally and unchangeable unchangeably for you so God can say I can exist forever I will exist forever that's obviously true but what God is saying here is he's speaking about the truth where he says I will exist forever for you God is saying I will be your something I will be something for you and that raises the last point we want to make what's

God going to be he will be your God I will be you will be my people I will be your God and it's all culminating in the fact that God is restoring this beautiful relationship between us and him whereby we are his people and he will be our God again we say this so often but it's so important I think to think about it in our relationship with God what's he going to be for us he's going to be God for us now think about everything that God is as we were saying God is absolutely mind blowingly huge he is infinite in his power in his being in his authority and in everything that he is think about all that God is think about his creative power how he could just speak and the whole universe came into being think about how he is able to sustain all things that from the tiniest particles and atoms circulating and orbiting the nucleus within the atom to the planets orbiting through the galaxies God sustains all of these things think of the way he cares for the creation for the flowers in the field for the birds flying in the sky for the way he orders all things in our lives think of God as the God of truth and righteousness that he has this standard of behavior and conduct from which he never compromises we see a world full of broken promises of selfishness of sin of exploitation God is never ever like that because he's righteous his standards of moral conduct never ever change he never compromises think of God's patience and compassion he has this absolute bottomless supply of patience and compassion whereby he shows such tenderness and warmth and gentleness extraordinary care and goodness think of

God in terms of his holiness his purity the fact that he is utterly pure there's not a trace of any of the horribleness of sin in God you look at all the muck and brokenness in the world and you can say God is not like that think of God's glory and strength the fact that you couldn't even get a glimpse of

God without it just being utterly mind blowing his power and strength is immeasurable his mercy his grace and his love are beyond anything that we can really know Paul speaks about that that speaks about the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge God is so many many things God is so many amazing things and God is saying I will be all of these things for you so my strength my power my truth my uprightness my holiness my patience my compassion my grace my love is for you and that is what

God means when he says I will be your God and that of course is why idolatry is the craziest thing in the world that's why the first commandment is don't have another God instead of me because a statue of wood and stone or a big bank balance or a good following on Facebook or a successful job or a big house or whatever other idols we have none of these things can be for us what God promises to be when

[42 : 47] God says I will be your God he is saying I will use all of my God ness for you and that is why when God says you will be my people and I will be your God he's saying the most incredible thing it's the most extraordinary privilege that we could ever have that relationship with the God who wants to love us protect us provide for us and be God for us forever and I think it's I think it's the second most incredible truth in the Bible that God says

I will be I will take you to be my people and I will be your God I think it's the second most incredible truth in the Bible do you know what the first and most incredible truth in the Bible is that Jesus died to make that possible God the son would taste death so that God could say I will be your God and you will be my people and so it's an utterly magnificent phrase it's an amazing promise promise but I want to close by saying it's also an invitation because when God says

I'll take you to be mine and I'll be yours he's holding out his hand to all of you and he's saying this promise is for you as well and that's why all you actually have to do to become a Christian is listen to that promise and say to God yes please may it be so and may God grant that that's true of us all Amen let's pray