

Covenant Confirmed

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[0 : 00] Well, according to Guinness World Records, the most expensive wedding ever recorded took place in France 2004.

It cost an eye-watering \$76.6 million, Australian dollars. The bride is the daughter of Indian billionaire Lakshmi Amitel, who at the time was the third richest man in the world.

And more importantly, he actually went to school with Vijay's dad, Errol. And so here's the happy couple, Vinisha and Amit.

I'm pretty sure I'm butchering their pronunciation. But the wedding was a six-day wedding, and it started with a reenactment of their engagement at none other than Versailles, King Louis' palace. That was followed by a wedding ceremony in a luxurious chateau where a thousand guests were flown in on 12 jets to enjoy 100 courses of food.

[1 : 09] That was followed by a diet. No, it wasn't. No, actually, that was followed by a concert held or done by Kylie Minogue, as you do.

Now, while this was clearly a costly wedding, they obviously wanted to make sure their big day was special. Because the wedding ceremony does something, doesn't it?

It makes a marriage covenant. A covenant is an agreement, a solemn agreement or commitment, where two parties make binding promises that formally forms a special relationship, like a marriage. And after the relationship is formally established, it provides for close fellowship. Well, today, it's kind of like Israel's wedding day.

But it began back in chapter 19 with God's proposal, so to speak. So back in chapter 19, it's on the slide or in your Bibles. But God, remember, he reminds them how he rescued them from Egypt on eagle's wings.

[2 : 18] And then he proposes that if they obey his covenant, and if they agree to the covenant terms, which he's about to unpack in the following chapters, then they will be for him his treasured possession, a holy nation, his kingdom of priests.

So that's the proposed covenant. And Israel says, yes. Or more specifically, they response and say, we will do everything the Lord has said.

And now we'll see this response two more times in our passage today. And it forms kind of bookends around these chapters of Exodus, from 19 to 24, which are all about the covenant.

And so if you like, the 19 is about meeting God and the proposal, that kind of thing. 20 are the 10 commandments God gave Israel directly. 21 to 23 are the case laws he gave Moses to pass on. And then 24 is the covenant ceremony. And so these kind of chapters form a unit themselves. So we come to 24 and their big day.

[3 : 27] But before we get to the actual ceremony, God actually says what to do after, which points to the purpose of it. So point one, verse one.

The Lord said to Moses, come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance.

But Moses alone is to approach the Lord. The others must not come near and the people may not come up with them. Here in verse one, God signals an important step forward in their relationship. You see, previously, no one could go up the mountain except Moses. But here, after the covenant is confirmed, he's saying this is what's going to happen.

After the relationship is formally established, then Aaron plus his two sons, plus 70 elders can all come up to worship God. And in verse two, it signals the last bit of the passage in verses 12 to 18, where Moses alone will go up further and receive the blueprints for the tabernacle, where God can dwell with them.

[4 : 41] But all of this points to the purpose of the covenant. That is, it's about providing closer fellowship with God. Though verse one, it's still at a distance, isn't it?

And it's not all of Israel, is it? And it's still only Moses who can really get close to God later. And there are still limits, in other words.

In fact, the three locations of Israel in this section here seem to foreshadow the three sections of the tabernacle, which we'll hear more about next week. And so just briefly this week, then, the tabernacle was a tent temple that Israel carried around the wilderness where God dwelt.

But the floor plan shows three zones, which kind of match the three zones here. So starting from right, your right to left, you've got people at the foot of the mountain, and that seems to symbolize the outer court where most Israelites could go.

They were free to go there. But we've just heard that only the elders, Aaron and the sons, plus Moses, the 74, can go up a bit further, a bit closer to God, which is like the holy place where only the priests could go, who happened to turn out to be Aaron and his sons.

[5 : 59] And then Moses only is allowed to approach closer, which is like the most holy place, where only the high priest was allowed to go, and only once a year. And so while there's some fellowship, it's limited.

But nonetheless, it's still much better than what they've had. And this is what God wants for his people, a relationship with close fellowship, where he could dwell with them as his people, and they would have access to him as their God.

After all, that's why he's rescued them for this sort of relationship. Back in 2012, in the US, a first responder named Cameron Hill rescued a woman who was badly beaten up by her ex-boyfriend, a victim of domestic violence, sadly.

But they met a year later, and then five years after that, they actually got married themselves. And the title says, a domestic abuse survivor marries the man who rescued her.

It's a great story. And now they enjoy close fellowship as they live with one another as husband and wife. Well, God has rescued Israel from their abuse in Egypt for relationship too.

[7 : 17] And so three months later, the time has come for Israel to marry her rescuer, so to speak, God, so that they could enjoy close fellowship and live with each other as God and people.

This was the purpose of the covenant here, which brings us now to the ceremony. So point to verse three. When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice.

Everything the Lord has said, we will do. Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said from the previous weeks. Remember, Israel had heard the Ten Commandments directly from God's mouth in chapter 20.

But over the last few weeks, it's been Moses up the mountain by himself, hearing all the case law and what God will do, like last week. And so he's come back down and now told the people.

And if we're comparing it to a wedding ceremony today, this part is like the consent. You know, in a wedding ceremony where the minister asks, do you take this person to be your lawfully wedded spouse?

[8 : 34] And it's their last chance to run for the door, right? This is it. And in the movies, they say, I do, don't they? Present tense.

Of course they do, though, at that moment. I mean, their fiancées looking beautiful. They've spent all this money, not \$76 million worth, I'm sure, but they've spent all this money. Of course they do in this moment.

But what about tomorrow and next week and next year? Which is why in the Anglican ceremony service, the couple answers, I will. I will today, tomorrow, next week, and as that song goes, when I'm 64, if you remember that one.

And that's what Israel says in verse 3, did you notice? With one voice, everything the Lord has said, we will do.

Only for Israel, they give their consent the day before the actual ceremony. And so on the next day, we read in verses 4 to 6, or the next paragraph there, He, that is Moses, got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up 12 stone pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel.

[9 : 44] Then he sent young Israelite men and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the

other half he splashed against the altar.

Here, this ceremony proper begins with sacrifice, doesn't it? And there are two types mentioned here. The first is a burnt offering, which the next book of the Bible, Leviticus, tells us is about making atonement.

Atonement means to pay for sin. There were five types of offerings that Israel would give, and the burnt offering seems to be for sin in general.

While the splashing against the altar of the blood symbolized that it was being offered to God, since it was his altar. And so the blood of a burnt offering splashed against the altar was offering to God payment for sin.

Now, this may seem excessive for us, but the thing is punishment for sin is death. And there is a certain logic to it, because if you turn away from the God who gives life, then what's left?

[11:04] Death, isn't it? And so to pay for sin requires death, which is what the blood symbolized. But because God wants people to live, it's the death of an animal instead.

And once the payment of blood was made, then God could satisfy his just anger, his justice for sin. As Leviticus goes on to say as well, they have this line that repeats, it is an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

It's done the job of atoning for that moment, at least. And now there can be, because of that atonement, there can now be peace or fellowship, which is why some people write the word atonement like this, you know, at one mint, because that's what it achieves, right?

Two parties now being at one, at peace. And it's why the burnt offering is also made with that second offering, a fellowship or peace offering, because again, that's what atonement achieves. In fact, the fellowship offering, only the fat is burnt on the altar to God, all the meat from the bull or whatever is sacrificed is kept for the people to eat.

[12:17] And they're to eat it together with God as a sign of their fellowship, you see, that atonement has achieved. We'll see this later. But the ceremony proper here begins with these sacrifices because the big impediment to a right relationship with God and to close fellowship with God, the big impediment is, of course, sin.

Now, obviously, weddings don't have sacrifices today. But did you realize that before a couple can get married, they must sign a declaration of no legal impediment to the marriage?

They must sign this declaration and say there's nothing stopping them from being able to formally establish their relationship as husband and wife. Well, for Israel, these sacrifices were a declaration to show that there is now no legal impediment stopping them from formally entering a relationship with God as his people.

Though the fact that these two sacrifices, as we'll hear later on, will be offered every single day, that's a lot of animals and a lot of blood, shows that they didn't fully deal with sin, not permanently. But for the moment, they were at least ceremonially cleansed and ready for their vows, so to speak. So verse 7. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people.

[13:49] They responded, we will do everything the Lord has said we will obey. Moses reads out the book of the covenant, even though they've heard it just the day before.

But that's, you know, like a wedding too. They kind of read their vows or say their vows again, even though they've heard them at the rehearsal the week before. But they say them again, or in this case, read them again, because it's what they're officially agreeing to.

But unlike a wedding, these two parties here are not equals, are they? At a wedding, the man and woman are equal. And so in the Anglican service, they say exactly the same vows, even though they may keep those vows in different ways as husband and wife.

But here, God and the people are not equal. So they don't say the same vows. Rather, Moses reads out their obligations and the people formally vow to obey.

We will obey, they say. And with those vows in place, then something unusual happens next. Blood is sprinkled on them. Verse 8.

[14:59] Moses then took the blood that was in the bowls set aside and sprinkled it on the people and said, This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

This is the only time, scholars tell me, that in the Old Testament where blood is sprinkled on all the people. Usually it's splashed on the altar to show that it's offered to God, like in verse 6.

Or it's splashed on objects to show that the sacrifice is ceremonially cleansing them. Though later on in Exodus, blood is sprinkled on Aaron and his sons and their clothes so that they will be consecrated.

That is, set apart to become priests. And so I wonder if the blood sprinkled on all the people here symbolizes that they are being consecrated, set apart to be priests, a kingdom of priests. After all, isn't that what God offered to make them back in chapter 19? A holy nation and a kingdom of priests? And so this bit is a bit like the ring at the wedding.

[16:14] Just as a ring at a wedding symbolizes the person is set apart for another person, for another as their spouse. And so the blood on the people symbolizes that they are set apart for another as his priests.

And with that, the ceremony has finished. And the result of it? Well, point three, verse nine. Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel.

Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites.

They saw God and they ate and drank. Here they share fellowship with God, don't they? No doubt using the meat from the fellowship offering they've just made.

Here is the result of their covenant relationship, you see. A close fellowship with God himself. I'm not sure we grasp how significant and privileged this was for them or that they would have felt it was.

[17:25] I don't know if you heard, but during the Queen's Jubilee, Paddington Baird met her. Have you seen that thing? That's been doing the rounds on Facebook and the like. But last Saturday, the Queen met the 2022 Australians of the Year via Zoom.

I don't know if you can see that, but there's the Queen on the TV screen. It's not bad at 96 years of age, is it, operating Zoom? And it included Australian of the Year, Dylan Alcott, who is, of course, the wheelchair athlete.

When he told his mum that he was meeting the Queen, he said, we read that his mum cried because she was so overwhelmed with the significance of the moment.

The Senior Australian of the Year, Valmay Dempsey, who was honoured for her work with St John's Ambulance, when she was asked about meeting the Queen, she said, that was far greater than any dream I've ever had.

I feel so privileged. Now, if that's how people respond to meeting the Queen via Zoom, imagine eating and drinking with the King of the Universe.

[18:40] Live. How privileged would that be? You can get a sense of it, by the way, the writer adds in verse 11 that God did not raise his hand against them, implying that normally he'd have to because the sinful people don't mix with the Holy God any more than oil and water.

But you see, this is the result of the covenant. For now, the sins have been atoned for by the blood of the sacrifices. So now they can have the privilege of fellowshiping with God.

This is what God wants for his people, a relationship, a formal relationship that comes with close fellowship where he can dwell with them as his people and they have access to him as their God. In fact, in verses 12 to 18, God calls Moses further up the mountain and he takes Joshua but then Moses alone approaches the cloud and he's given the blueprints for the tabernacle as I mentioned before.

We'll see next week that there are limits to this fellowship with the tabernacle as well just like this week. After all, in verse 1, remember, these 74 people could worship at a distance.

[20:02] And so, here in verse 10 when it says they saw God, it would have been from a distance. In fact, verse 10 suggests it was only his feet and the pavement beneath it that they saw.

They still saw God but it wasn't face to face. And even when Moses goes up to God, his glory is hidden by a cloud. There are limits to how close they can get, how much access they have. And yet, it's this covenant relationship that creates closer fellowship than they've ever had before. Like a wedding creates for a couple. And it's this covenant that seems to be the focus of our passage.

Because if we realise that 12 to 18 kind of goes as the introduction to next week with the tabernacle and that leaves us with 1 to 11 and you notice how the names are repeated verbatim at the beginning at the end when God describes the fellowship and in the middle the meat of the sandwich is what makes that fellowship possible.

The covenant with the blood of the sacrifices and the people's promise to obey. And yet, we heard in our second reading there was something wrong with that covenant.

[21 : 24] Do you remember our second reading? For if there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, the one we see in Exodus 24, no place would have been sought for another. So what was wrong? Verse 8, God found fault with the people.

They couldn't keep it. They kept breaking it. And so the passage goes on to say that God will make a new covenant with them, with us.

And this new covenant comes with the Spirit who puts God's laws in our minds, His law of love that we might be moved, motivated, encouraged to obey it.

And this new covenant comes with full forgiveness where He'll remember our sins no more such that when we don't always obey, we can be forgiven and continue in close fellowship with God. Even closer than Israel had for God ever dwells with us by His Spirit. That's closer than Israel ever had God in us.

[22 : 26] And we have access straight to God's throne by prayer. that's greater access than Israel ever had. And it's all though because of the blood of this new covenant which is not an animal's blood but Christ's.

As Jesus Himself said at that very first Lord's Supper, this cup represents the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you.

In fact, Hebrews goes on to say in chapter 9 that the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

How much more then will the blood of Christ who through the Spirit offered it to God cleanse our consciences inwardly from acts that lead to death.

You know, real inward forgiveness so that we may serve the living God. You see, Jesus' blood is really what cleanses us inwardly and permanently.

[23 : 33] It's what gives us full forgiveness for our sins that lead to eternal death and gives us instead eternal life where we can serve the living God now and forever.

Of course, to be part of this new covenant with these better promises and better blood, we need to believe in Jesus. And so have you?

Have you put your trust in the one whose blood forgives you? Have you vowed to then follow him, not just as your saviour but your Lord?

And for us who have, then do we appreciate this new covenant? And in particular, do we appreciate the blood of Christ that made it all possible? The wedding I mentioned at the start cost \$76.6 million.

But what it cost God to make this new covenant with us was so much more, wasn't it? I mean, how do you even put a price on the blood of God's only son?

[24 : 39] Do you think God would say it was worth less than \$76 million? What would you think it would be worth to God?

Well, actually, you. Because his blood was shed for you. That's how much you're worth to God. Isn't that extraordinary? So do we still appreciate it? Are we still amazed by it? Are we still thankful for it?

Or have we become so overly familiar with it that we take it for granted? there's lots of other applications we could draw from this passage like in response, are we seeking to keep our vow to trust and follow him?

Are we seeking to serve him in our lives as his priests who help others come to him? Are we enjoying our fellowship with him by reading his word? Are we making the most of our access to God by praying regularly?

[25 : 43] We can focus on all those things, but for today, I simply want to ask you to spend a moment reflecting on all we have in this new covenant and particularly the blood that made it possible, that made things possible like the privilege of close fellowship, such that God's spirit is always with us to help us, that made things possible like the full forgiveness which guarantees life eternal, reflect for a moment at the great cost of Christ's blood for you, that made that possible.

Our next song says, once for all, the king has paid it all, all the glory to his name. So let's pause for a moment, I want you to bow your heads and just spend a moment quietly reflecting on this and perhaps even say a heartfelt prayer of thanks to God for this blood of Christ shed for you.

And I'll close in a moment. Let me close. Gracious Father, may we ever rejoice in our new covenant with you and never take the blood of Christ that created it for granted. We ask it in his name. Amen.