

12-13-15

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Preacher: Jordan Leach

[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Can everybody hear back there? I'm going to have to get a little taller.

! Can I open up some prayer?! Lord, you've been so good to us in freeing us from the requirements of the law, from the hard requirements of this world, giving us freedom in Christ through his completed and finished work on the cross.

Lord, and we can live now in his resurrected power. And Lord, we praise you. We praise you for your son and for the gift that he is to us. Lord, I pray that you would help us as we open your word, as we contemplate about the covenants you have made with men, covenants for the purpose of restoring us to a right relationship with you.

Lord, I pray that you give us wisdom because, Lord, these truths are too big for us. Lord, they're complex, but, Lord, they're good for our souls, and we pray that you might help us to understand your word today.

Lord, we pray that you would bring freedom through your word that we may praise your son more. Thank you for this time to meet together. We're so blessed. Amen.

[1 : 34] Amen. All right. So, in this series, kind of the idea is we're doing an Advent series.

And the purpose of this series is to show that the birth of Christ is not just an isolated event in history, right? We don't just celebrate his birth, but there's actually a lot of God's redemptive story at play here.

So, God is working to reestablish his relationship with mankind, and Jesus' coming is a crucial piece in that puzzle.

So, our series that we're going through is really kind of helping us connect with some of these bigger themes to show us that the birth of Christ is more than just a cute manger story that actually has a lot of significance for all of history.

So, a couple things we want to show is that the birth of Christ is timely, it's necessary, and it's perfect. So, today, the topic we're going to be going through is the covenant, right?

[2 : 46] So, hang on. We'll probably move fast in some places. Hopefully, we don't get too much in the weeds, and we can still get the beautiful picture of Christ.

And hopefully, by studying the covenants, we will come to better understanding the great gift that Christmas is. So, that's the goal of today. So, I want to start by a little story, though, before we get into all that.

About four years ago, I was in Bolivia. I took my then-girlfriend to Bolivia with me, and we went to Bolivia to meet with, or to help some friends that are there.

I have some college friends that are serving down there to help prevent child trafficking, right? And so, we took this trip together, and the biggest purpose in this trip was to serve my friends, to serve the Bolivians, and then I had this side hope that I might grow a little closer to my girlfriend, and it might be a pretty good step in our relationship.

But about eight days into the trip, we realized that that wasn't really happening. We were kind of in a rough place. We weren't really flourishing and helping one another serve.

[3 : 59] We were kind of at odds with one another. And so, this was a little rough, right? Because this is supposed to be a good time. You know, we're in Bolivia. We're serving the Lord together. We're serving friends. Like, this is supposed to be where we click, right?

But we weren't, and it was just a really frustrating time. It was confusing and frustrating. But in God's grace, he taught us a very powerful lesson that week. We're both different, right?

So, Jess, she's my wife now, at the end of the story. I jumped ahead, right? But she's a little bit more, like, she likes quality time, and I just love lots of people, right?

And so I went on this trip with this perspective that we're just going to be serving 100% of the time. You know? And she's just following me to Bolivia. She knows nobody there. She knows nothing about Bolivia.

She doesn't really know what we're doing. And I think, at the very least, she thought she'd get some good quality time with me. So, this whole time, we're kind of at different perspectives, right? And in God's grace, he showed us that.

[4 : 59] He showed us that we were being selfish, you know? We were expecting the other person to meet our needs rather than committing to love and serve them in a way that they can flourish. So, that was just a really powerful step in our relationship.

And the reason why I bring it up is because it was that change of mindset from Jess being there to serve me and help me in my ministry to me committing to helping her flourish in whatever that looked like.

And so that meant maybe giving up a little bit less time with my friends, you know? And that meant me sacrificing these things that I felt so entitled to in order to love her and help her flourish.

And so then our relationship continued. And this idea of committing to one another and laying our wants down actually built that intimacy and that joy that we had been looking for all along.

And so it was kind of counterintuitive, right? I think that's freedom, you know? Like, we should have freedom and she should meet the things that I want and I need. But we found the very opposite, right?

[6 : 03] We found that by committing to one another, we actually had so much more joy in our relationship. So that's just a little teaser. So let's open God's Word.

Let's go to Jeremiah chapter 31. We're going to be reading Jeremiah 31 verses 31 to 34.

It's about the new covenant. I'll give everybody a second to get there. All right.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant that they broke. Though I was their husband, declares the Lord, for this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them.

[7 : 03] I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother say, and know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity and I remember their sin no more. So one thing we're going to be discussing today is that our God is a covenant-making God. Right?

This seems kind of abstract. Right? We don't really talk much about covenants these days. And when we do talk about it, we probably don't understand it that much. But I'll read a little Tim Keller. He was very helpful in this thinking. So I'll just read it. He can say it a lot better than I can. So he's just talking about what is a covenant. And he says, a covenant, a bond.

It's a bond that creates a particular type of relationship. On one hand, it creates a relationship more intimate and more personal than one based solely on the law.

[8 : 02] On the other hand, it creates a relationship that is far more durable, binding and unconditional than one based solely in affection and feeling. It is a beautiful blend of law and love. A personal relationship made more intimate and more personal because it is legally binding.

Because in a covenant relationship, you can trust the person because each side has made a vow and each side has lost their independence. Each side has made a promise to be faithful and to be thoughtful and to be kind and to be loving in spite of the circumstances and in spite of their feelings. So we see God, right, in the garden. God created this world good, right? He created Adam and Eve good.

He created them in a perfect place where they had fellowship and unity with him, right? They walked with him. They enjoyed his presence. But what does man do? Man chooses to sin. Instead of being a part of God's partnership to make this world flourish, they decide to do life their own way. They decide they know better than God and they break that relationship. And really, ever since then, men have been doing the same thing, right? We've been rebelling against God's good rule. We have not partnered well with him.

[9 : 13] But we see a God who then comes back to people and he creates covenants. He's a covenant-making God and he reaches back to people to try to restore that relationship. So we see that in Abraham, right?

God calls Abraham. He tells him that in his seed, through Abraham's seed, all the nations of the world is going to be blessed, right? So Abraham's family becomes Israel. They go down to Egypt. They're in slavery. God rescues them out of slavery. He brings them across the Red Sea and then he makes another covenant with his people. And this is kind of the covenant we're going to be focusing on today.

I'll get to more specifics while we're focused on that one. I think it's pretty relevant to our world today, but we'll get to that later. So God makes his covenant with the children of Israel.

We can see this in Exodus chapter 19. I can just read it. Exodus 19 verse 5.

[10 : 13] So God is telling people Israel, Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all people, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

So that's just a little bit of background. So one thing we see about this covenant is God is calling them, Hey, you're going to be my treasured people. Like, that's pretty powerful. You know, God is calling out these people and saying, You're going to be my prized possession.

But he's also calling them to obey his word, to obey his law. And then following Exodus 19, God gives lots of details about this law. I'll try to simplify it real quick.

We see the Ten Commandments, right? The first four of the Ten Commandments are about man's relationship to God. And the next six of the Ten Commandments are about man's relationship with one another.

So, for simplicity's sake, God is calling them to love God and to love others. We also see this whole other aspect of this whole, the tabernacle and sacrifices and all those kind of things.

[11 : 22] And that's really drawing us a picture of, like, God is a holy God who can't dwell with sin. And breaking the covenant requires penalty, right? It requires the shedding of innocent blood.

So, in this law that God gets to his people after he's rescued them out of Egypt are these kind of two precepts. Like, I'm a good God. I want you to love me.

I want you to love others. And when you don't, innocent blood has to be shed. So, this is the old covenant that God made with the people of Israel.

And so, if we're back in Jeremiah 31, we see... So, basically, God's promising a new covenant. But first, we've got to understand this old covenant.

He says, So, what's primarily wrong with this first covenant?

[12 : 33] It's pretty much the fact that the people kept breaking it, right? Isn't this basically Israel's history? over and over again. Israel is breaking this covenant. God wants them to love him.

What do they do? They go and love other gods. They make idols. He wants them to love one another. Injustice is kind of rampant throughout the history of Israel. And so, the biggest problem with this covenant is that the people don't actually live it, right?

They keep breaking it. But God continues to be faithful and continues to pursue Israel. And so, we see this kind of... this history of Israel. God's kind of faithful.

They keep breaking the covenant. Like, he gives them the covenant at Sinai, right? So, he gives them the covenant and he comes down on the mountain and shows his power, right? And the people are like, we will do anything you say.

We will obey you. Thank you for your covenant. All these kind of things. Moses goes back up to get more information from God. He's gone eight days and when he comes back down, they've already created a golden calf because they thought Moses died up there and now they have to have another guy to serve.

[13 : 44] And so, this is just kind of the fickleness of the people of Israel. But when we look at that, I don't know.

We've got to think of the fickleness of our own hearts. Because what are these basic commandments? that we love God and that we love others. Maybe you're here today and you believe that there is a God but you don't really feel much of a need to please him.

You don't feel much of a draw or a pull towards a relationship with him. I think the God of the Bible is pretty clear. I am to be your first priority.

I am to be your God. I have done all these things for you. I have made this covenant. And so, we as people are called to love him.

How about, how are you with loving others? Do we first think of other people or do we first think of ourselves? ourselves? So, we look at the Israelites and we say, what's up with these Israelites?

[14:56] They can't follow God's covenant. But when we look at our own hearts, I think we also recognize that we're pretty unable to fully love God like we should and fully love others.

And so, but the Bible is also clear. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and what happened? They were separated from God.

They were separated from the joy of God. Death happened, right? What happens when the Israelites sin? They know that animals must pay the penalty. Right?

So, we see the problem with this old covenant here in Jeremiah. We see basically that the Israelites couldn't keep it and now that we look at ourselves we're like, we probably can't keep it either, right?

But, the Bible is also pretty clear that we're kind of required, right? To know God, God is holy, God is just. To know him requires us to be righteous and good. All things that we're not really.

[15:58] So, we see the problem but I hope we also see the tension, right? So, this tension of this old covenant that we are called to be righteous to a righteous God and we just simply are not.

let's go on, let's hear a little bit about the new covenant. So, as we read on, it says, for 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 and no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, know the Lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more. So, let's think a little bit about the history of Israel, right? So, we're talking about Israel at the Exodus, right?

Where God gives them this first covenant. So, basically, he rescues them from Egypt, he shows us power, it's like, wow, our God's awesome. And so, he gives them this covenant to live by, to live in this good relationship with him.

[17:04] But they continue to break that covenant. God's faithful to them, he takes them to the promised land, he raises up David, a king, who loves the Lord, and he blesses the nation through King David and through Solomon.

But then we kind of just see this downhill slide, right? So, these nations seek to have good, they don't have good kings anymore, the people continue to serve other gods, to not love the Lord, to not love one another, right?

And so, we just kind of see this downhill slide. So, when we get to Jeremiah, what's happened now is the kingdom of Israel has broken into two countries, Judah and Israel.

They don't get along anymore, they fight each other. Israel has actually been taken captive by Assyria, so Israel's no longer. Now we just have Judah left, right? And Judah is kind of its last little bit.

And so, Jeremiah is really writing to people, he's writing to exiles who have already been conquered by another nation, another country, Babylon, right? And so, when we get to this stage in Jeremiah, he's promising this new covenant to a nation that's pretty much broken down, right?

[18:28] Everybody is often separated and in exile. There's still a little bit of people still in Jerusalem, but Jeremiah is prophesying and saying, hey, Jerusalem's going to fall here soon, and those of you who are in exile, you're going to be there for a while.

So this is kind of a weird message, right? So he's given this kind of message of hope to people who have already kind of reaped the consequences of their disregarding God.

So imagine that you were in Babylon, your family had been taken, everything you knew was about to fall, and you're going to be stuck in a foreign nation for a while, and you get these words.

And you know that really the root of all of this is your people's inability to follow God's covenant, to love God, to love one another. And so the promise is, So we see a few aspects, right?

So it's not like the first covenant that was broken, right? So that's got to be intriguing to them, right? Because all they've seen throughout their history is their inability to actually live out this covenant, right?

[19:57] We see that it'll be written on their hearts, and that all of them will know this covenant. And then finally that their sin and their iniquity will be taken away, it'll be forgotten.

So this is a pretty revolutionary concept to these Israelites. But then what I think is interesting is that they have this promise, and then the nation still kind of sits in this land, this limbo for 600 years. And so we have these Israelites who have been sent off to other nations, they've rejected their Lord, and they've lost their land, they lost a lot of these things.

But they have this promise, they have this hope. So let's get to the end of the story. And this is what Joshua's talking about. I kind of wanted to linger there for a second because this is this whole idea of Advent.

We're waiting for the Messiah to come. We have all these promises, the people of Israel had all these promises, and they were just kind of waiting for their fulfillment. covenant. And so this promise of a new covenant is kind of crazy to them.

[21 : 11] They don't really know how this is all going to work out. They had this promise, but now they're just kind of waiting. So feel that tension. Now let's fast forward. We'll go to Galatians chapter 4.

So a couple of things we wanted to bring apart in this series is that the birth of Christ was timely and it was necessary. So if we look at Galatians 4 verses 4 and it says, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

So part of the joy of Christ's coming is that he came in a time where people were under the law. They were under this requirement to meet God's righteous standards and failing.

And he came to redeem those people, to redeem us, to redeem Israel, to redeem all the people who can't live perfectly. And so that's a pretty awesome thing.

So let's further understand how this works. Let's go to, we're going to spend a little time in Galatians. So Galatians 3, verses 10. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, cursed is everyone who does not abide in all the things written in the book of the law and do them.

[22 : 38] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law. The righteous shall live by faith, but the law is not of faith. Rather, the one who does them shall live by them.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree, so that Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham tension we talked about, right, we're called to be righteous, we're called to be holy, we're called to love one another, but we can't, right?

And so what does this verse say? This verse says, we actually are required, God made a covenant with us that we would meet, that we would live for him, that we would live according to his rules, but we didn't do it.

So what does Christ, what does Christ come and do? Christ comes and lives those rules for us. He fulfills those covenants, and he takes our penalty, he takes our pain, he takes the just penalty that we deserve, right?

So the whole Old Testament sacrificial system, it taught us that there had to be penalty paid for our sin, and so Christ pays that penalty by receiving our curse.

[23 : 59] And remember how back in Exodus God said that we would be a prized possession. Here in Galatians we learn that through Christ, through his faith, we become sons, we become heirs.

These are all pretty powerful realizations. So then now we're in Galatians 4, it says, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of this world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

So this principle that Christ has made us free, we could spend our whole lives trying to obtain righteousness, right?

[25 : 17] There is many well-intentioned Jews, Pharisees, whoever, that tried to meet every requirement of the law, but we find out that we're not able to meet that, and that life was never given through the law, but it was given through faith, because Christ is that perfect Israelite, he is the one

that lives for us.

And I really wanted to touch on this topic, because I think it's something that we struggle with in our culture today, right? this idea of works that we have to earn our worth, we have to earn what we want, what we deserve, is just very pervasive in our thinking, in our life.

And what the Bible says, what Christ's birth says, is that he came to fulfill all requirements, so that we may receive his blessing, right?

He took, on one hand, he took all of our punishment, on the other hand, we receive all of his blessing. And so as we go through this church plant, there's going to be lots of requirements that are placed on us.

It's very easy for us to fall back into the worthless principles of this world, to think that what we do defines us, what we do gives us worth, but what we have to remember is that Christ came, he lived, he died for us, and secured our worth.

[26 : 47] If we're not careful in this world, we'll be beat down by all the things that we need to accomplish, all the things that we need to do, but what Christmas tells us, what Christ coming tells us, is that he has accomplished all of these things for us, and we've been given his spirit to then give us the ability to live according to his will.

So that was the message I wanted to leave everybody with today, just that message of freedom, that message of Christ's efficiency, that message of, I don't know, just confidence that our debt has been paid, and he has given us his righteousness and his inheritance and his spirit so we can live a free and good and powerful life.

Let's pray. dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for your word. Lord, we just recognize how in need of you we are all the time.

Lord, we want to live rightly, we want to honor you, but Lord, so often we struggle to do that, Lord, we just find ourselves so incapable, Lord, but I pray that you would remind us of the worth of your son, of the power of his resurrection, of the gift of his life, so that we may live in truth and in power and in freedom to reach this world, to live for you, to make your name known in this area and in this world.

Lord, thank you for your word, thank you for your son, thank you for all you've done. In your name I pray, amen. The new covenant gives us those who are Christians, those who are our students, accept the Christ.