

Covenant Established & Enjoyed

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[0 : 00] If you find the heat unbearable, downstairs is actually quite cool, and there is a speaker down there. So if you need to go down, there is no, as Greg said earlier, there's no coffee service, there's no hospitality, but there are chairs and cool air.

So if you need to go down, please, and again, there's water in the back as well. If you need to do that, please take advantage of that because the purpose of our time together this morning for the next few minutes is to hear God's word.

And if you find the environment distracting beyond your listening, go ahead and do what it takes to be able to continue to listen. I had the privilege two weeks ago to perform a wedding.

Anthony and Noel got married, and it was a great joy to be with them. And I was reminded as I did this service of just how wonderful marriage is.

It is a beautiful, a blessing. It's a sobering and weighty service because it's a covenant relationship. It's a commitment to one another till death do us part.

[1 : 12] It's a commitment to intimacy that's bounded by loyalty. It's a lifetime commitment, and it's a life-giving commitment. And as I sat there and I saw the bright-eyed joy of a bride and the loving gaze of wonder of the groom, this picture of a beautiful covenant relationship was brought to mind.

And, you know, God intended it to remind us of our relationship with Him. I don't know if you know this, but throughout Scripture, there are these places, most clearly in Ephesians 5, but also in Isaiah 61 and other places where we're reminded that marriage is not the ultimate end in itself, but marriage is actually a picture that God has given us so that we might know more about how He intends to have a covenant relationship with His people, in which we as His people would feel secure and loving, that we would be loyal and faithful because He is a loyal and faithful God, that we would be blessed and that we would be a blessing because we are God's people.

But, you know, it doesn't always feel like that, does it? Being a follower of Jesus, being a Christian doesn't always feel like something that's awesome and wonderful.

It doesn't always feel secure. We don't always know His love for certain. We waver in our commitment and our faithfulness and we doubt His faithfulness and His commitment all the time. We don't always trust God to take care of us. We feel insecure because of our own failures. We feel that God is far off, not near, and we find it difficult to draw near to Him.

[3 : 16] Sometimes we think we've chosen God. And because of that, we consider Him to be a nice optional add-on to our already full life.

And in doing so, we treat Him with a carelessness that belies the weight of being God's people.

Take this thought experiment.

How often do you wake up in the morning with this thought in your heart? I am one of God's people. He has chosen me. He has set His love on me.

He has called me before the foundations of the earth to be His. And He has done everything necessary so that I can come to Him and by faith be His people.

And now I can live my life today and every day knowing that this is the most important thing about me. And I can be God's woman, God's man in this world.

[4 : 22] I wonder how often we wake up and think of the privilege and the responsibility it is to be God's people. I think often, if I'm honest about my own heart, when I woke up in the morning, I am distracted from the reality of being God's people.

I am distrustful that that's the most important thing about me. I feel insecure about God's love for me. I feel insecure about God's love for me.

Exodus, if you want to turn there in the Pew Bibles, it's page 64 in your Pew Bibles. Exodus 24 is where we are. And just to remind you where we are in Exodus, the first 19 chapters is God's great

deliverance of his people from slavery through great signs and powerful acts to free them from slavery in Egypt and to call them out and to protect them and to provide for them. And then we've seen as we come to chapter 19, chapters 19 through 24 are this section where God now comes and having delivered his people, he now declares who he is and calls them to be his people.

The opening part of this section, if you remember in chapter 19, the key verses in chapter 19 verses 4 through 6, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

[6 : 17] Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. And this is what this section, chapters 19 through 24 is about. God calling his people to be this special people for himself. And we saw in chapter 20, the giving of the 10 commandments, the 10 words. This is the big picture principle of what it means. And then the book of the covenant, which is chapters 21 through 23, is more instructions about what does it mean to be God's people.

How are we, how ought we to live in light of being God's people in the world? Now we come to 24 and there is a ratification. God having declared this is what it means, now brings, it's kind of like in a marriage ceremony when you declare this is what marriage is and then you bring it to the point of, will you say I do or not?

Right? And this is where we're at in chapter 24. This is the vows part, where the relationship between God and his people is ratified and established.

[7 : 34] So let's go ahead and read together. And as we read this, let's ask ourselves a question. How does this text tell us? What does it mean to be God's covenant people? Let's read together Exodus 24.

Then he said to Moses, come up to the, come up to the Lord, you and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu. And 70 of the elders of Israel and worship from afar.

Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near and the people shall not come up with him. Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do. And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and 12 pillars according to the 12 tribes of Israel.

And he sent young men to the people of Israel, young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord.

[8 : 41] And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do and we will be obedient.

And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, behold, the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the 70 of the elders of Israel went up and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.

And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God and ate and drank. The Lord said to Moses, come up to me on the mountain and wait there that I may give you the tablets of stone with the law and the commandments, which I have written for their instruction. So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua and Moses went up into the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you.

[9 : 56] Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them. Then Moses went up on the mountain and the cloud covered the mountain and the glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days.

And on the seventh day, he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

And Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and for 40 nights. Let's pray together. Lord, thank you for this word.

Thank you for your word that speaks to us in every part of it about what kind of God you are. Lord, what you have done for us in the gospel and Lord, what it means to be your people.

Lord, we pray this morning that you would instruct us and teach us in Jesus' name. Amen. Having been presented with all the words and the laws, God then comes and he says, now it's time.

[11:12] He tells Moses to go back down the mountain. Verses one and two are the instructions that he gives him saying, this is what you're supposed to say to the people when you go down to the bottom of the mountain. And then Moses goes down in verse three and he says all those things to the people.

Not only those instructions in verse one and two, but also all of the Ten Commandments and the laws that God has told him. And the people respond. And what we see in this section is there are two things that go on.

In the first few verses, particularly in verses three through eight, what we see is that the covenant is finally established. And then what we see in verses nine and following is that the covenant is then enjoyed and entered into.

And we'll look at that in those two parts. So the first part is the covenant enacted. As God brings his people, it brings them to the point of, I do in this ceremony.

There are five elements that God weaves into the story so that we can know a little bit about what it means to be his people. There are five elements.

[12:17] So I'm going to go through these pretty quickly. But if you're taking notes, you can just keep track. There should be five. If they're not clear, then it's my fault at the end. So five elements of establishing a covenant relationship with God.

The first one is that God reads again, or Moses reads again, or tells again, the instructions and the word of God.

You see it in verse three. You see it again in verse four that he writes it down. You see it again in verse, which is it, seven or eight, where he reads it again. Verse seven, he reads it again.

Three times in these five verses, you see the repetition or the recording or the speaking of God's word. And friends, we need to recognize that this is how God establishes his relationship with us, by his word.

He speaks to us, and that's how we know what kind of God he is and what it means to be his people. That's why this is such a precious book, because God has given us his word.

[13:26] So, and not just verbally, so that it might be corrupted over time by oral transmission, but he's actually given it to us in a written form, so that we can always go back and say, what has God said?

Here it is. So that's the first thing, is simply the establishing of God's word. And if you notice in verse three, it says that Moses said both the words and the commandments.

There's a recognition there of the distinction between chapter 20, where the words are the ten commandments, and the commandments or the rules are the book of the covenant, chapters 20 through 23.

And so we see that God gives us big principles, and then he gives us all sorts of little instructions so that we know both on the broad scope and on the day-to-day how we ought to live.

So reading of the law is the first one. The second one is that God calls people in a community, and as he calls them, this community bears witness to the covenant relationship reality that they're supposed to be in.

[14:35] So when you look again in verses four, right, he gathers this morning, he builds an altar, and then around the altar, he puts 12 pillars.

Those 12 pillars represent the 12 tribes of Israel. And what it represents is that God is saying, by instructing Moses to do this, all of you must come, and all of you who claim to be God's people must come and together bear witness to this action.

Friends, we live in an age where it's very easy for our Christianity to be individual. Well, I'm a Christian because I believe in God.

Part of what we see here is that when God calls us to him, he doesn't simply call us as individuals, though he does that, he calls us as individuals into a community.

And one of the purposes of this community is to bear witness together of who God is and what he has done. And so the 12 pillars is this picture as they're arrayed around the altar for worship.

[15 : 39] It's this picture of God calling his community people to gather together and to bear witness to who God is. And friends, this is what you're doing here this morning. On this incredibly hot day, you have chosen to come and sit in uncomfortable pews in order to hear God's word and bear testimony to who God is.

And if you're a visitor here and you're checking it out, this is why we gather. This is what we are doing. We are gathering together as a community because we haven't simply been called as individuals.

But we've been called together not only to bear witness but to worship. And you see this in the erection of the altar and the sacrifices that were made.

Now, sacrifices feel very odd to us. This is not common. We obviously don't sacrifice things today. In the Old Testament, it would have been a very common thing. And what you'll see is that in the law, sacrifices are a regular part because sacrifices communicate the life and death reality of what it means to have a relationship with God.

There's lots more nuance to that. I'm not going to unpack that. We'll get to it as we keep going and teaching through the tabernacle. But right now, I want you to see that the fact that there are sacrifices, that as animals are killed, is an acknowledgement of the life and death weightiness of being in relationship with God.

[17 : 06] And here we see there are two offerings that are given. One is a burnt offering. And the burnt offering signifies devotion. And when a burnt offering is sacrificed, the animal is killed and then it is put on the altar and it's completely burned up, communicating a wholehearted devotion.

There is nothing left. There's nothing held back from this complete sacrifice, this complete offering. But then with that, then there's also a second offering that the ESV calls a peace offering.

If you read an NIV translation, it will call it a fellowship offering where the animal is sacrificed and a part of it is burned on the altar. But it is actually then kept and used as a feast where the people come together in this peace offering and they fellowship with God and one another.

And in these sacrifices, we see God calling, giving pictures of different aspects of what it means to be his people. And in this worship, it's meant to be wholehearted and it's meant to be fellowship that is a calling to intimacy with one another.

The third thing that sacrifices do, which is less explicit in this passage but is more explicit in the broader, is that it establishes a covenant. You go back to Genesis 15 when God inaugurates this covenant with Abraham.

[18 : 32] There are animals that are sacrificed and then, if you remember, there's this weird vision of a pot of flame sort of walking between them. But the idea would have been very well known to an ancient Near East person that you cut the animals apart, you walk through it together, the two covenant partners, and the idea is, may God do to us, or may you do to me this, that is, cut me in half and kill me, if I break the vows of the covenant.

Right? And so this is the third meaning. It's a recognition that a covenant vow is a weighty one. It is a life or death one. And to break it is to bring the curse of death upon you.

And friends, this is where we see the thread beginning to be pulled. If you listen to the reading from Hebrews earlier, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

When a covenant is broken, something, there must be a payment of a life for that breaking. And the whole sacrificial system that we'll learn about in the tabernacle is meant to picture this and remind us that our obedience to God and our keeping His covenant commandments is so important that if we violate it, we are worthy of death.

It is a very weighty thing to be in relationship with the God of life and the creator of the universe. And so, the three things we've talked about so far in terms of ratifying this covenant, the reading of God's word, the gathering, the community coming together to bear witness, and now this act of worship that has at its core this recognition of sacrifice and the need of sacrifice.

[20 : 23] Then the fourth part is that there's a response. And isn't it funny? We see this response from God's people actually three times. It's all the way back in chapter 19 where without having any idea except having seen them deliver Him, the people say, all that you say, we will do.

I don't know if you've ever made promises like that. Hey, whatever you want, I'll do it. Without having any idea what you're promising, right? So, God says, well, I'll tell you what. Thank you for that.

But let's instruct you a little bit before I tell you. So, then He gives the Ten Commandments in the book of the covenant. And then He brings it back down and Moses reads these things or He speaks these things to them.

And then they say, okay, everything you do, we will do. And then they do the worship and then they do the sacrifices and they're reminded again of the weightiness of this covenant. And then Moses reads the law and the covenant stipulations for a third time and says, okay, do you really mean it? And they respond. They say, everything that you have said, we will do. And they go further. They say, and we will be obedient. Now, I'm a parent.

[21 : 33] I know what it's like to have children who say, yes, Daddy, we will do everything that you tell us to. And we know from the story of Exodus that as Moses goes up on the mountain again, the people are about to do a terrible disobedience in the episode with the golden calf.

We know that that's on the horizon. And yet, right here, this is an appropriate response. If we, as we enter into a relationship with God saying, yes, this is what we're called to do.

So there's a response. Yes, Lord. You are the Lord. We are your people. We will do everything you tell us. And then finally, in verse 8, there's a ratification.

In some ways, this is the height of the passage. This is when, this is when the, you know, in a marriage ceremony, I now pronounce you man and wife. If Moses is now saying, I now say this covenant, behold, the blood of the covenant that God has made with you to make you his people. And they're sprinkled with the blood to cover them and to show them, yes, you have now been brought into this covenant relationship with me.

[22 : 46] God says, I will be your God and you will be my people. What a great privilege it is. What are we to learn from this?

Quickly. One, we're to listen to God's word. He speaks to us. We ought to treat that with great weightiness. We have even more of God's word than the people of Israel had back then.

May we be diligent in knowing it and in obeying it. Secondly, God calls us not just as individuals, as communities. Please, I'm going to preach to the choir.

Make gathering together with other Christians a commitment in your life. Be a part of the community. And third, God calls us to respond with wholehearted faith.

Not anything held back. No, God, I will believe in you as long as you do these things. Or I will believe in you unless you do these things. Or I will believe in you. But Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross, and to follow him.

[23 : 52] And so we are called to wholehearted commitment in faith. But friends, if we had left, if I had left you here with the application, then what I've told you is to try harder, to be better, to be a more devoted Christian.

And you know what? I want you to try hard. And I want you to seek to be a better and more devoted Christian. That's a good thing. But friends, the wonderful thing about the New Testament and the Gospel is that that's not the foundation of how we actually be God's people in Jesus.

The Old Testament in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 predict that a day is coming when a new covenant will come. When God's laws aren't simply written out there, but they will be written in our hearts.

And our hearts are transformed so that as we become God's people, we are able to love him in a way that we never were before. And we are actually able to be obedient to the covenant, not in order to earn our status with God, but out of the status of God.

How could this be? Well, because of what the book of Hebrews has written about and what we read about earlier. Jesus has come. And in the new covenant that he establishes for us, here's the wonderful thing.

[25 : 05] God says, obey the law. And Jesus says, I will stand in for them and I will do that. Jesus brings his perfect obedience to the whole Mosaic law and says, I will stand in their place to do that.

And not only will I stand in their place by taking their obedience and providing their obedience, but then I will also then offer myself as the sacrifice, the death that needs to be paid for the disobedience that's true for all of us.

Because none of us love God the way we ought to. None of us obey him perfectly. None of us honor him as we ought to. And Jesus says, I will die in their place for that.

And so Jesus, by offering his life and his death for us in our place, establishes a covenant with God where all the stipulations are met, where all the laws have been kept, where all the requirements

have been found fully, completely fulfilled.

And friends, when we come to God in the new covenant, we come only to confess our need and to throw ourselves on God's mercy and grace that he's shown us in Jesus.

[26 : 23] With great joy we recognize he has done what we in Israel could never do in keeping this law. And we enter into a relationship with God by faith, through grace.

And from that then we live a life of obedience. And we live a life of seeking to honor and please God in all that we do.

Not to keep the covenant, but out of the covenant. Because he has written his law on our hearts.

And he has given us a heart that says, I delight to do your will, O God.

What a great privilege it is to be God's people. To see that God has done for us what we could not do to establish this new covenant.

Whereby we come and enjoy being his people on the basis of what Christ has done for us. This is what 1 Peter talks about in that great passage that I love.

[27 : 28] For you are now God's chosen people, his royal priesthood. And at the end he says, Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Friends, this is the joy that we ought to know.

Like a bride, knowing on her wedding day that this groom has looked at her and said, Of all the peoples of the earth, I have chosen you for the rest of my life. God has done this for us in Christ. And he looks at us and he says, I have chosen you. You now come and be my people. And then there's a celebration.

So having now enacted and ratified this covenant, having now walked through these five things, he then in the rest of this book, or the rest of this chapter, talks a little bit about the covenant being experienced.

I promise you, we're going to go faster through the second half than the first half. If you're waning, hold on. After descending and after the people respond and all this, then God says, Come back up.

[28 : 34] Some of you, come back up. You leaders, come back up the mountain and have fellowship with me. In verses 9 through 11, you see this incredible picture of God's people coming up and meeting with God.

And it's remarkable because we're about to see, if you read ahead a few chapters to Exodus 33, Moses says, God, I have to see you. And God says, Nobody can see my face and live.

And yet here in verses 9 through 11, these people go up and they eat with God. And they see God. And that's what the text says. In fact, it even recognizes how incredibly unique this was in verse 11, where it says, He did not treat them, right?

Let me look with you because I've got to put my glasses on. So here we go. Verse 11, He did not lay His hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. That is, He knew that they deserve death to actually come into that intimacy because of their sinfulness.

But because of the covenant that was established, God gives this taste of what He has called them into. Intimacy with God. Fellowship with Him.

[29 : 44] They come up and they eat together. And in the ancient Near East, to eat together wasn't simply grabbing a burger as you're running through the drive-thru at McDonald's. It was a time of relationship and of connection.

To invite someone to eat with you was a weighty thing. It was an act of hospitality, but it was also an act of blessing. And God says, Come, sit with me, eat with me.

And the thing that they see is remarkable. Suddenly Moses sort of takes his left turn into apocalyptic vision, right? Talking about sapphires and things that are clear as heaven.

And you just think, Where did this come from? Well, if you read through the whole rest of the Old Testament, you see that there are pictures like this in Ezekiel. That these are common symbols about, that reflect the throne of God in visions.

And it seems that these people didn't see the fullness of God, but they saw a taste, the toes maybe, of God. And so they got a taste of what it meant to be intimate with God in that way.

[30 : 51] So not only do they, as they enjoy the covenant, enjoy this intimacy with God, but they're also brought into His glory.

And you see this in the following verses in 12 through the end of the chapter. Moses is invited up, and you see that the mountain is this picture. The closer you get to the top of the mountain, the closer you get to the glory, the closer you get to the consuming fire of God's holy presence, the

fewer people who are able to go.

Right? The people are at the bottom. They can't even get on the mountain. The leaders are up a little bit more. Joshua gets to get up a little bit closer. But Moses alone is able to be the one who goes into this glory.

And God is reminding the people again that the intimacy that they have is with a holy God, and a God who is holy other than them.

God who is so big that they can't even imagine what He's like. Nor are they worthy to approach Him. And Moses goes in as a mediator.

[32 : 03] There are all sorts of beautiful themes here that we will unpack in the next 15 chapters. of Exodus. Right? This mountain is the thing that the tabernacle pictures, where you have courtyards, and you have layers of approaching to the glory of God.

And fewer and fewer people can go in with greater and greater covering of sacrifices to recognize the holiness of God. The tabernacle and later the temple will picture this mountain, where people can approach God's glory.

And it prefigures that we as a sinful people will need mediators to go and open up a way. And it leaves us with a cliffhanger.

Moses, think about it if you're an Israelite sitting at the bottom of the mountain. What happened to Moses? He went up. He disappeared into a cloud that looks like a consuming fire. And he disappeared for 40 or 47 days, depending on how you're counting it.

Right? What's going to happen down below? Well, we'll wait until chapter 32. Right? We'll get there. 31. Which one is it? 32.

[33 : 12] Chapter 32. There's this whole section of law that's going to come before we get to what happens down below. And so the narrative of this next section is just beginning. But as we have these teasers of what's to come, as we finish this, looking at this, I actually want to go back and read the passage that Pastor Greg read at the beginning of our service.

Because having talked about all these elements of what it means to be God's people, having talked about the incredible joy of God's people being able to approach a holy God with intimacy and fellowship, I want you to listen again and hear the reverberation of all of these themes in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19 and following.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh. And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

[34 : 58] Friends, let's pray together. Lord, what a privilege it is to be called your people.

Lord, what an amazing mystery it is that you have done all that is necessary for us in Christ to draw near to you, that we don't have to be afraid of the fire and the glory and the holiness of your presence, because Christ has gone before us.

Lord, thank you that we can know intimacy and fellowship with you. Lord, that we can know your word, that we can worship you, that we can live lives of commitment and obedience to you, because we have been covered by the blood of Jesus, by his life and death and resurrection for us. Oh, Lord, we praise you for this great privilege. Lord, may we live as if this is the great prize and treasure of our lives.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.