

## Covenant Part 2; Chesed 2 Samuel 9.1-13

### Introduction

**1** First session I opened up the whole theme of covenant, *berith*. We defined covenant as

- **An irrevocable, self-sacrificial commitment between two parties to mutual terms of agreement , sealed by a vow or oath.**

**2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,2.5** We saw that there were many examples of covenant in the Scriptures, between men and men, but notably between man and God. These covenants are made on behalf of man by God, who promises, who vows to bless all the nations, especially through His covenant with Abraham.

**3** We saw also that there are four elements to the rite of covenant – **3.1**sacrifice, **3.2**vow, **3.3**sign and **3.4**meal.

### **4 Chesed**

But there is another facet to covenant which is easily missed. I mentioned this morning my concern with the inadequacy of our English translation. I have a great worry about the English language generally, because English speakers have this aversion to believing that English is anything other than the true vessel of God's revelation – rather like the lady who said *,if the authorized version was good enough for Paul, it's good enough for me.*

So I make no apology for taking you beyond the English language, back to the original language, to Hebrew, the language of David and Moses, and spoken by Jesus in a related dialect, Aramaic.

There is a word which is notoriously poorly translated. And it's poorly translated because we don't have the cultural background to do it justice.

The word is translated in English Bibles, kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, pity, favour, love... all these are woefully inadequate. The word in Hebrew is chesed – and it is a covenantal word, and it is an action, not a feeling.

**5** To unpack this, and its relationship to covenant, we need to look at this story of Mephibosheth. (try the Hebrew version of his name mephi-voshet) – it means, dispeller of shame.

**6** The story is linked to an earlier covenant; when David overcame Goliath, Jonathan, Saul's son, became his closest friend, a brother to him. In 1 Sam 18, we read that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. In this day and age when relationships between men are being sexualized and degraded so much, it's great to know that there is a friendship, a deep bond between men which is often lifelong, unpressurised about time spent together, vulnerable and strengthening to womenfolk in its nature. It's the place where men can share their deepest fears, their temptations and their dreams and be understood in a way women cannot understand them.

This was the kind of bond between David and Jonathan – and it caused David to say of him at his death, his love was better to me than that of women. It also led them to make a covenant together, a very strong covenant, because it bound them to the offspring of the other, to protect and bless them.

**7** When David was driven from Saul's house because of Saul's madness, Jonathan helped David escape. But before he parted from David, Jonathan made David promise to be true to his covenant, for Jonathan knew that David would be king in his father's place. Let's go to 1 Sam 20.12

*And Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you?"*

*1Sa 20:13 But should it please my father to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father.*

*1Sa 20:14 If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die;*

*1Sa 20:15 and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."*

*1Sa 20:16 And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies."*

*1Sa 20:17 And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.*

I want us to notice here something very key. This translation, the English Standard version gets very close to the meaning of hesed. Jonathan knows that kings have a habit of bumping off their rivals, and so Jonathan makes David vow that he will not destroy his family, and does it with a covenant.

David is then bound by vow to protect Jonathan's offspring as long as he lives.

**8** The words in the Hebrew are clear – 'do hesed' to me, says Jonathan, and to my family, for the sake of our love and our covenant. It's not a feeling, it's an action. In Hebrew, you almost always do hesed.

**9** Hesed is, put simply, covenant obligation, a bounden duty, which must be done to keep the covenant vows. So, in 2 Sam 9, David looks to fulfil his vow to Jonathan, who is now dead. And Mephibosheth becomes the amazed recipient of David's hesed for the sake of Jonathan. He is saved, restored, made a king's son, adopted into David's family. He comes from nothing (literally) to the highest table in the kingdom – and not only that, but the table of the one who, were it not for hesed, would be his enemy and greatest threat!

Can you see the picture? Having understood hesed a little more, we can now look wider.

### **Rich in Hesed (Ex 34.6)**

**10** When Moses wants to see God, God won't let him see his face, but passes by and declares His name. That declaration is so important to our understanding of God's nature and character, not least, because it's what he wants to reproduce in our lives by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor 3.17,18)

God declares Himself like this – the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and favourable God, slow to anger, and rich in hesed and dependability.

**11** In fact, the only two places in the Bible where there a capital letters are once at the beginning, with a capital B, then in Ex.34.6, when God refers to Himself as ‘Maintaining Chesed’ – the word maintaining has a capital N!

So, God declares that in the depths of his nature, he is hesed, He is covenant obligation epitomized. **12** And that is why the constant song of Israel, through the millennia of their walk, even in their unfaithfulness, is ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his hesed goes on for ever.’ They had got hold of this depth of commitment of God to them. The God of hesed.

I haven’t time to tell you tonight about how many times hesed appears in the Scriptures. David appeals to God’s hesed in Psalm 51.1 ‘Be favourable to me O God because of your hesed’ – when he was guilty of a capital offence before God.

Jonah (4.2) appeals to that great hesed of God from the belly of the fish, and Nehemiah, after the return from exile, reminds God of his hesed.

There’s also a very significant little story hidden away in 1 Kings 20.31, where Ahab has beaten down the King of Syria, Ben-Hadad, but Ben Hadad’s officials say something very key to him – ‘we have heard that the kings of Israel are kings of hesed’ and as a result, and not in accordance with God’s will, Ahab, evil Ahab, makes a berith and shows hesed to his enemy.

We are going on next time to look at how this whole theme is taken into the New Testament. But one thing to know tonight out of this is that behind our shame and our failure, to live in the King’s family, his sacrifice has provided an inheritance for us, and He will be true to His covenant.

If tonight you are a believer, but you are living under shame and despair, come to Christ, who is full of hesed, full of loyal, self-sacrificial love for you. © Colin Symes Edinburgh 2010