

Covenant Part 4 – Living Covenant Out

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 In the second session, we looked at the obligation which results from the making of covenant, contained in the Hebrew word *chesed*.

5 We looked at the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Sam.9, and that he was restored to his father's lost lands and adopted as David's son, all because of David's intent to do *chesed*, to do right by Jonathan's descendants, because of the covenant made with him in 1 Sam.18.

6 We saw that *chesed* is an essential part of God's make-up and character, and when in Ex.34.6, God reveals Himself to Moses in all His full glory or weight, He reveals Himself as *rich in chesed, self-sacrificial covenant obligation* and truth. **7** And the constant refrain of Israel throughout her journey is that the *chesed* of the Lord goes on forever, He is always faithful to His covenant.

8 And we saw last night that in Jesus Christ the covenant with Abraham is upgraded, not annulled. We saw that the promise is to Abraham leads to the new covenant in Christ, and that through the renewal of the significance of Passover, the sacrifice of Himself on the cross, the promise to be faithful to us always and the sign of the covenant wounds in his risen body, Jesus is now irrevocably given to us. We say that the sign for our part was baptism in water and to receive the Holy Spirit.

9 We also saw the wonderful fact that when the Hebrew translators of the New Testament from the Greek into modern Hebrew came to the word 'grace', they translated it with the word 'chesed', for this is the most obvious term to use, given its self-sacrificial and unconditional obligation and commitment.

So What?

But that has a knock-on effect, an important one in this generation we live in. **10** Because of Christ's covenant with us, we are in covenant with those he is covenanted to also.

And this is the sharp end of covenant, because God calls us to live in relationship with those with whom He has gathered us in His body.

I talked on Sunday afternoon about the nature of covenant being self-sacrificial. We talked about circumcision as the sign of the Old Covenant, which is a literal self-sacrifice of a piece of the man's flesh to mark in His body the taking on of the obligation.

I also said that covenant is part of the maturing of humanity; we are made for relationship, we are not made to be alone. **11** In our culture there is a fight against covenant, a struggle for egocentric independence, when, all the time, we are built for commitment and covenant behaviour. The sign of full humanity is the coming to a place of self-surrender to another, whether to a spouse, to one's children, to a community or to the Lord.

Today we are seeing the fruits of an immature humanity which resists and resents covenant, resents having its independence curtailed. We are taught that self-expression, self-fulfilment, self-reliance, self-development are all our right. But is that what Jesus, our covenanted Saviour says to us as His people?

12 Jesus says, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Into self-surrender, into self-sacrifice, into self-crucifixion (though actually you can't crucify yourself.)

We see this as death, we see this as an affront to our liberty, our right to choose. And of course, it is. But that's because we are stuck in an

adolescent spirituality which personalizes the covenant – my personal Lord, my salvation, my walk with God, my blessing, my fulfillment.

13 It's significant that there is a circumcision for followers of Jesus – not a circumcision of the flesh, but a circumcision of the heart. And just like in the physical, when a piece of flesh is sacrificed, never to be restored, so in the circumcision of the heart, the me-protective covering is removed, and we are forever joined to Christ and one another.

When we look at the first believers and followers in Jesus, we see a community, a *koinonia*, with an emphasis on togetherness. Jesus teaches them 'Our Father', a 'we' prayer, an 'us' prayer, not a me prayer.

We need to see here the significant change in mindset we need to have if we are really to practice covenant as God calls us to.

14 Paul writes to the Corinthians – 'though we are many, we are one bread and one body, because we all share in the same bread.' (1 Cor 10.17) That means, in gathering together with God, in one place, we share together in that covenant relationship.

There is a growing tendency in the body of Christ to be very non-committal about church. I can take it, I can leave, after all, I'm part of the body of Christ universal. One group is just a branch of the big thing. But in the covenanted action of breaking bread, we actually do normally with one group of people. And I don't think Paul is trying to make it mystical for the Corinthians, saying that when we share bread, we are somehow part of that great body in the sky. No, Paul says we who are many are one body, one covenanted people when we share together in the one bread. I don't know about you, but I tend to break bread with the same people on an ongoing basis. Occasionally I am elsewhere, but bread and wine in our own community is generally something we do with the people we are gathered with in Christ.

So, on the basis of this covenant meal, Paul says, you are part of one another. And that means we need to reflect the heart of God in the way we deal with one another. Being committed, being given, being

there, being present. All the things we expect from God in his covenant nature, and depend on, He calls us to also be to one another. We'll look at that more in a moment.

We need the Holy Spirit for this, which is why He comes and lives in our lives as the law-keeper and the covenant-maker. He enables to live for one another.

Chasidic Conduct

I want just to bring one other Hebrew word into the scene here. It is a word which is difficult to translate, but it conveys a lot of what I am trying to convey to us as believers, as covenanters with Christ and therefore with one another tonight.

15We looked at and marveled at the word Chesed, but there an adjective from that word, in Hebrew, the word is Chasid, in English we could use the word Chasidic.

16 Chasidic Jews are the Jews who seek to live out what the Scriptures teach; they seek to live self-sacrificially obligated to the Lord, under the Mosaic Law. They are the ones who have the wide-brimmed hats and curls, and do the fantastic dancing because for them, the Law is a joy.

17We find the word chasid in a number of places in the Old Testament, once again, you would never guess at its origins from the English.

But in 2 Sam 22.26, in the midst of one of David's songs, he says

'To the chasidic one you will cause yourself to do chesed' – the same thing is found in Psalm 18.25, and in a lot of the Psalms where it occurs, it is translated 'saints' although it is not talking about holiness. So in Psa.30.4 and Psalm 31.23, it appears as saints.

In Psalm 12.1, the Psalmist complains, 'Help Lord, for the *chasid* fails, for the man of integrity fails among the children of men.' That could be a cry for today.

Interestingly enough, the word does turn up in the Hebrew New Testament once or twice – it is used of Cornelius in Acts 10.2, who is described as 'chasid' and in 2 Tim 3.2 and 5, to describe those are not 'chasid'. But it is significant that in Hebs. 7.26, the Hebrew translators describe Jesus our High Priest as 'chasid' where Greek has osios, pure, undefiled.

What I want to say tonight, really, is that as those who have received chesed and chesed upon chesed, we should be living Chasidic lives, lives which take on board the irrevocable obligation of the covenant of God with Abraham, renewed to us in Jesus Christ, living self-sacrificially and in unconditional yieldedness to Him and His community.

That has some very practical outcomes for us. It means not treating my brothers and sisters as optional extras to my own spiritual life, but seeing them as the means through which God intends to form and develop me into the character of Jesus.

It means letting my yes be yes and my no be no, and honouring the commitments I make to others. It means moving from the 'I' story to the 'we' story, and into the 'His' story. It means putting up 'No exit' signs around the covenants I am in, however painful and difficult they are, finding ways to work through the conflicts, believing that in Christ, there is a resolution.

It means questioning the unchasidic behaviour of so much of the world today – rejecting marriage, abusing intimacy as something shallow and casual, promoting self and ego.

18 It comes back down again to Paul's words in Romans 12.1 – which I want to close with, and adapt to what I have been sharing over these last sessions; Paul has been painting this picture of the depth of the chesed-grace of God and all the covenant provides for us in Christ, and he then says

Therefore, I beseech you brothers, in view of the *chesed* of God to offer your bodies as a self-sacrifice, fully yielded and acceptable to God which is your logical response of worship.

Can we live as Chasidic Christians, in that bonded, willful intention of self-sacrificial commitment to the Lord and to His people, which will enable Him to bless the nations as He first promised to Abraham?

Winding Up

What I want to do is to take a few moments applying this to our own situations.

- First, are you in that covenant with God because of Jesus Christ this evening? There is an action we must take. To join us to the sacrifice of Jesus' death and the sign of His resurrection, to bring us into that covenant relationship with God where we can know the God of Abraham's blessing, we need to step out of living without Him, and into loving Him. And the action we are called to take is water baptism, the milestone, the altar, the place we stand between the pieces of the sacrifice of Jesus, and get wet like He did. Just as a couple whose love is sealed in the covenant of marriage, water baptism seals us into covenant relationship with God through Christ.
- Secondly, there are some of us this morning who have not realised we are in covenant with Jesus Christ; we are living as though we are slaves, not sons and daughters. The covenant of God in Jesus Christ makes you and me children of the King. God is calling you out of poverty, and into His love. Maybe you need to take hold of that promise this morning, that the blood of the new covenant is really for you, and you are in an unbreakable relationship with Him, not because you are good enough, but because Jesus Christ has done it all for you, just as God did it all for Abraham.
- And thirdly, we need to look at our relationships to each other. Are we acting chasidically in the body of Christ; are we treating one another as sharers in the bread of Christ. Or do we see ourselves just as attenders at a social function, shoppers at a retail outlet where salvation is the commodity, and we are the

consumers. How are we working out committed covenant with one another, through thick and thin? How is that reflected in our giving, of time and money to this gathering of God's people? Or are we so busy giving to our own favourite causes that we like and that pull at our heart-strings, we are ignoring God's call to share in the ministry of the place where He has joined us?

19 I want to pray the blessing from Hebrews over us again.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

Heb 13:21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

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