



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“CREATED FOR COVENANT

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:14-20

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 25, 2019
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The new covenant about which Jeremiah prophesied has been realized in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So it stands to reason that no survey of the covenants of God would be complete without words such as these which come to us from Luke 22, beginning with verse 14.

Luke 22:14-20

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It doesn’t take very long in life to recognize the patterns of promise making and promise keeping. Whether be it a verbal commitment, a firm handshake, a formal contract...that holy bond of marriage; a great deal of our life is lived within a kind of covenantal framework, and this is no less true in our spiritual lives.

Looking back at the dawn of time, we can already observe something of God’s covenantal faithfulness. Having created Adam and Eve to live together in love, theirs was the responsibility not only to be stewards of all that God had made, but they were also called upon to obey God. And theirs was an amazing life; but, as we all know, Adam and Eve did what they ought not to have done -- they ate of a tree from which God had clearly directed them not to eat, and as a result, their lives were changed forever...our lives are changed forever! From having to deal with the pangs of birth to tilling the soil, to having to grapple with this inherited and corrupted condition of sinfulness in a great many ways, our relationship with God and with one another and with God’s created world, it has changed.

Which brings to mind something very important that we need to remember when we are talking about Biblical covenants. Such blessed covenants that are initiated by God, they are, in

a word, “serious!” For not only do they reflect a bond, but they reflect, within the Biblical scheme of things, they reflect a blood bond. In other words, God’s covenants have life and death consequences.

Consider some of God’s other covenants...like the time when virtually the whole of the earth had turned away from God, save one man and his family. The way God dealt with our sin on that occasion was to open the heavens, but as a flood came to the earth, so did another covenant!

In Genesis 6:18, God says: “But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.” Oh, but how this must have broken God’s heart. I mean, this was, after all, God’s creation, which, at the very beginning, God had declared “good.” So God gave us a sign of his love – a sign that would serve to remind us that never again would God flood the world...the rainbow; but, lest we forget, the rainbow also served to remind God. In Genesis chapter 9 the Lord declares: “When I bring the clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen. 9:14-15).

What I find amazing in this episode, this chapter of God’s redeeming love – is that, even though the world presents God with one problem after another, through a covenant with Noah and even a covenant with the expanse of creation, God has set forth an example of how he will never ever forget.

But God’s covenants are not only about remembering, they are also about the future, and, testifying to this reality, soon comes yet another of God’s covenants - this one with Abraham. Now Abraham and Sarah may have been without child, but they were not without the favor of God. “Look toward the heaven, God said to Abraham, “and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be” (Gen. 15:5).

But God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah were not just people, but also a promised land. “To your descendants I give this land,” God says, “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates....” (Gen 15:18).

Ah, but it is not just a people and a land...it is also a promise: “By your offspring,” God goes on to say, “shall the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves....” (Gen. 22:17). And so it was that Abraham’s offspring did grow numerous, so numerous, in fact, that one day in the future, they would pose a problem for a Pharaoh in Egypt who would say to his subjects: “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them....” (cf. Ex. 1:10). And they did! Pharaoh set taskmasters over the Israelites, and they were horribly oppressed. The Bible tells us that they cried out to God and that God heard their prayers!

Through a series of plagues, God’s appeal to Pharaoh, first uttered through Moses, to “Let my people go!” -- it is finally granted, and we know from the Scriptures that this would be for God’s people, a 40 year journey, but we also know that it would be vouched safe, once again, by

God's covenantal faithfulness. God gave unto His children tablets of stone upon which were written God's commandments, and, by way of those commandments, God gave his children the incredible opportunity to know and love both God and neighbor, and God further let it be known that if those things were done, if the people would, indeed, follow God's commandments, then things would go well with them.

But, here again, we proved altogether human, forever prone to evil and slow to do good are we, but God doesn't give up on us! After a period of history when the judges ruled, there came a time when God's people wanted a king, and God gave them a king, and, unto Israel's second king, God gives yet another covenant. Listen to what David said about God's promise to him that there would always be someone from David's line and lineage on the throne. "Is not my house like this with God?" says David, "For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure" (2 Sam. 23:5).

That word, "everlasting," is an important word, because God's covenants, they reflect an ongoing and continual story of salvation and new life, one in which every previous covenant remains an integral part of the overall story. It remained that way for God as we hear in Exodus 2:24: "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And it remains that way for God's own people when they talk about God's commandments which had been received by a previous generation: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the Lord make his covenant, but with us, who are all here alive today" (Deut. 5:2-3).

So what do God's covenants mean to us, who are alive here this day? We, who call ourselves a covenant people, what are we to glean from all of this covenantal theology? Well, to begin, we must first understand that all of the covenants that we have considered thus far find their partial fulfillment in their own unique set of circumstances, but they find their fulfillment in God's greatest covenant, a covenant about which we have not yet spoken, but one which this morning's Old Testament Lesson anticipates.

The prophet Jeremiah lets it be known that this new covenant was needed, because we had broken the old covenant – the law! God's commandments had made us acutely aware of our sins, to the point that one sacrifice after another was needed to atone for our sins; still, we could never fully atone for our sins – for they were too great!

But, praise be to God, all of this would change through what the prophet Jeremiah declares as a "new covenant," which we know, by grace through faith, was accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ who said: "This cup [this cup] that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Ah, if we ever needed a sense of the true nature of a blood bond – those life and death consequences associated with the covenants of God – we have it right here at this table!

Yes, covenants had been broken...and there was a price to be paid...and it was! It was paid once and for all! That's why, when we come to this table, we don't talk about it in terms of it being an altar, as if a sacrifice needs to be made. No! The sacrifice was made, and when we

put our trust in Jesus Christ, that very atoning sacrifice, it continues to endure as a once-and-for-all eternal sacrifice...not only for us but for all of those whom the Lord our God would call.

Friends, that is what God's covenants have always been about – they have been about calling people, restoring people, redeeming people. And while the covenants of God have come at different times and through different people, and while Jesus himself helped us to understand them differently, they nevertheless remain God's covenants and God's commandments both now and in the future.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish that law or the prophets;” Jesus said. “I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.” In this way, God's moral law and God's eternal decrees, they are still with us today; it is just that now, by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, they are written not upon stone, but are written upon our hearts.

But also know this, our righteousness or lack thereof is never determined by the extent to which we follow the letter of God's law. On the contrary, our righteousness is based solely upon what Jesus has done and the righteousness of Christ. Oh, if there is a continual sacrifice to be made, it is the very ongoing denial of ourselves; it is in the keeping of God's covenants and our obedience to God's commandments, which, in the end, is really not that great of a sacrifice to make, especially when we realize what God, in Jesus Christ our Lord, has done to make it possible...that we as frail and as human as we all are would be reconciled with the very living God!

Let us pray...

Gracious and Loving God, we give you thanks and praise for having revealed to us a law that is now sealed upon our hearts as well as a desire to worship you in spirit and in truth. Grant us this day a heart inclined to find its rest in you...a heart that loves you...a heart that lives in covenant with you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*