**The God of Covenant, Part Two**  March 13, 2016

Genesis 9

**Coffee / Question**

What do you think is the difference between a contract and a covenant?

**Feedback:**

In a perfect world, a person’s word would be enough. But we don’t live in a perfect world. Each of us has enough personal experience that we know that people don’t always tell the truth and even if and when they do, not all people keep their word.

It is very important that you and I know the difference between a contract and a covenant. Look at the bulletin insert.

**“How to Understand Covenant**

The difference between covenant and contract, in the Old Testament and throughout scripture, is so profound [that] the difference could almost be highlighted by saying it’s the difference between [1] prostitution; contract, and [2] marriage; covenant. Or between [1] slavery; having a slave, and [2] having a son.

*“Based on the scholarship of countless scholars over the decades, covenant can be properly understood . . . to be a sacred family bond.”*

Contractual relations usually exchange property, exchange goods and services, whereas covenants exchange persons. So when people enter into a covenant, they say, ‘I am yours and you are mine.’ God uses the covenant to enter into a relationship with those whom he created in his own image: humanity.

God first established humanity in a marital covenant. The second covenant is with Noah who is married, who also has three sons who are married. Together they form in Hebrew what would be known as a household or a family. The third covenant with Abraham is made with the chieftain who leads and rules over what you would call in Hebrew a tribe.

Then, when the twelve tribes of Israel are covenanted to God at Mt. Sinai under Moses, there you have one national family of God, made up of twelve tribes, hundreds of households, and presumably thousands of marriages.

*“ God, through these covenants, is doing his best to take that one human family which has been broken apart by sin, which has been torn apart by violence and injustice; he is trying to reunify this fractured human family we know as the human race.”*

<http://www.worldviewpublications.org/outlook/archive/main.php?EDITION=043>

Let’s now read together **Genesis 9:1-17** and take careful note of the key emphases made in this covenant.

1. It was initiated by God – v.9, 11

Noah didn’t approach God and ask if he would be willing to not flood the earth again. It was God who came to Noah.

This reveals a characteristic of God that is seen over and over in the story of the Bible. God always makes the first move. Always!

The salvation of humanity... was his idea.

The means by which salvation is accomplished... was his idea.

Jesus who made known the invisible God, revealed himself as a shepherd... who searches after lost sheep.

The reason anyone begins to search after God when they do, is because Jesus is already searching after them.

The reason those of us who follow him, love him, is because he first loved us.

2) This covenant restated the original command to be fruitful and increase in number – v.1, 7.

The fall into sin by Adam and Eve did not cancel mankind’s privilege and responsibility of procreating life, even though, this is how the sin nature is passed on.

Sex, which is a physical pleasure given by God to be enjoyed in the context of marriage between a man and a woman, is also a spiritual act by which life is created, and in which God is involved (Psalm 139) as he wonderfully weaves a human’s physical frame together in the womb of their mother.

The Noahic covenant commands humans to be fruitful and increase in number.

3) This covenant redefined mankind’s relationship with animals – v.2a.

The fact that God chose to include this provision in his covenant with Noah, tells us that in some way before the flood, animals had not had a healthy fear of humans.

In some way the relationship between animals and humans had been corrupted.

After the flood, God addressed this corruption, and instilled into animals a healthy and necessary fear of humans.

We all know the importance of this Example of living in Revelstoke in bear country. They ran from us. But occasionally when a bear lost its fear of humans, there was trouble.

4) The covenant allowed for a change in diet – v.2b-3.

When God first created mankind look at what he told them, **Genesis 1:29.**

Regarding what animals were to eat, look at what God said – **v.30**.

When Adam was judged by God for his disobedience, look at what God said to him, **Genesis 3:17b-18**.

When God instructed Noah about building the ark, and the animals that would come to him, look at what he said, **Genesis 6:21.**

After Adam and Eve’s fall, humans continued to eat a vegetarian diet.

But after the flood God permitted the eating of meat.

This covenant didn’t say that a vegetarian diet couldn’t be followed.

What God did was expand man’s diet to now include meat.

What does this tell us about God?

Some think of God as only being interested in the philosophical or deeply theological. But we see here that God is interested in the daily things of life – like the food we eat. This is consistent with who Jesus revealed God to be.

**Matthew 6:25** – *don’t worry about what you will eat or drink. Your heavenly Father feeds the birds. You are much more valuable than they are.*

**Matthew 6:28** – *don’t worry about clothes. If your heavenly Father clothes the grass of the field, will he not much more clothe you?*

5) The covenant stressed the sacredness of blood in two ways. (a) The blood of animals was not to be eaten – v.4; and

(b) the blood of a human was not to be shed – v.5-6a.

What is it about blood that is sacred?

Life is in the blood.

Look at what God said through Moses in **Leviticus 17:11**.

In order to teach and prepare people for what God’s Rescuer would ultimately do,

as his blood (his life) was given in sacrifice for humanity, God here in this covenant begins to build the awareness of and respect for blood.

Though the meat of an animal could be eaten, its blood was not to be eaten.

In this way God intended for the life of a creature to be respected.

And regarding human blood, it was never to be shed – by animal or another human.

6) God established capital punishment for the killing of a human being – whether done by an animal or another human – v.5-6.

What was the reason for capital punishment?

Why would God mandate the use of such a violent act to restrain violence?

Look again at God’s reason – **v.6b** - *…for in the image of God has God made mankind.*

The creatures of the earth were made by God.

But the creatures do not bear God’s image. Only human beings do.

It is being an image bearer of God that infuses human life with value and dignity.

A primary reason why Western culture does not value human life is because of the absence of God and the insistence that humans are but the product of time plus chance.

The God who made us in his image says human life is precious and that no one has the right to take another’s life.

1. The covenant included all of Noah’s descendants – v.9b, and all living creatures on the earth – v.10.
2. It was an unconditional covenant
3. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow- v.12-16.

Who was the rainbow a sign for?

It was a sign for Noah and his descendants (which includes us) that never again, will all life on earth by destroyed by a global flood.

But the rainbow was also to remind God of what he had promised.

Twice God stated this – v.15, 16.

Does God in some way need reminding?

What this emphasizes to us is that God keeps his word.

Even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood, there will never come a future moment when God changes his mind and says “enough.”

Even if life of earth again becomes like it was in the days of Noah, God will honor his promise to never send another global flood.

The rainbow is the constant reminder to humanity and to God himself, of his mercy.

As we’ve considered the details of this covenant, what do we learn about God through it? John Piper has said that the Biblical covenants tell us that God is directing history, and that his purposes are being realized – both in a global scale and in our individual lives. This reality is to influence our responses and choices when it comes to our day to day life.

History is going somewhere.

The circumstances of your life are not random.

All events serve the purpose which God is working to accomplish.

Do you know what that purpose is?

We spoke of it in the article we read at the beginning.

Look at **Galatians 4:4-7:** *But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. 5God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. 6And because weare his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” 7Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.*

When did God send his Son? *At the right time.*

The right time according to who? *According to God.*

How would God know that it was the right time?

*Because he controls and directs time.*

Why did the Son come? *To buy freedom for those who were slaves.*

Slaves to what? *Slaves to the law.*

For what purpose did Jesus buy our freedom?

Was it so that we might be forgiven? *Yes. But there was much more.*

*It was so that God could adopt us as his own children.*

Do you see it?

The intent of God has always been to recreate the family that had been broken.

What did God do for his children after adopting them?

*He sent the Spirit of Jesus into our hearts.*

For what reason?

What does the Spirit of Jesus prompt us to do when he comes into our lives?

*To call God “abba.”*

Do you see it again? This emphasis on... family!

What else does God do on behalf of those he adopts and makes his children?

*He makes us his heirs.*

The Father, Son and Spirit are at work in history to build the church of Jesus,

which is a family, in order that those he rescues, redeems, and adopts might be for all ages, the defining testimony of his grace and mercy.

Who else but our God would take rebels and make them his children?

But why? Why would God not start fresh?

Why did he choose the incredibly messy and dysfunctional path he has?

Dallas Willard explains in his book, ‘The Allure of Gentleness:’

*God… is creating a community of love that freely responds to him, that chooses to be his, that diligently seeks until it finds him, and that finds in him the fullness of life.* p.97.

Some would say history is humanity’s story.

But the Bible reminds us that ultimately history is God’s story.

If you and I want to understand history, we can’t just look to the past; we must look to God and what he has said he will do. Do you realize that God directs history from the future.\* \*John Piper, ‘God’s Covenant with Noah’ Series: The Biblical Covenants

That’s why as we study these covenants we will always look ahead to Jesus.

For the covenants pointed to his coming and the salvation God would achieve through him.

THE GRACE OF GOD

We love and follow the God who made the first move.

God is not laid back when it comes to his interactions with humanity.

He is passionate in his pursuit of us and in his expressions of love for us.

The God we love and follow is active not only to rescue and forgive, but to adopt as his own, all who would believe in and receive him.

The God we love and follow can be counted on.

He is the God of covenant, who is truth and who loves the truth.

It is impossible for him to lie.

The God we love and follow directs not only world events; but the circumstances of our lives. Our faith in him is not a step into the dark, but a reasonable act of trust in the One who is completely and absolutely faithful.

**The Blessing**

May you experience the blessing of this singular passion expressed by Paul in Philippians 3:10:

I want to know Christ….