

## Sunday 4 December 2006 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

### COVENANT SERIES – Week 7, Boundaries of Blessing

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#### Introduction

In the final 2 weeks of our series on Covenant, we are looking at the boundaries of blessing within our covenant with God, then next week explain Old/New Cov differences, and look forward to Advent.

#### STORY

- Christian leaders in curry house in Birmingham, end of night, Holy spirit laughter. End up listening to how the Muslim faith works
- Restaurant owner introduces 5 pillars or rules. Christian leader asks if they do it – “No sir” and are sad. If you obey rules you go to heaven, if you don’t... you don’t.
- Leader’s reaction “I guess none of us going to heaven then?” – stunned, sad reaction, realisation.
- Introduces Jesus – “Whoever believes in me shall not perish but have eternal life”. They share love of God with them.
- The Gospel of Jesus is “the power of God for our salvation” (Rom 1:16) – not law but relationship with our loving God .

#### This week

So far, we’ve been painting a picture of the wonderful benefits of covenant life with God. I’, speaking today about how to stay firmly under the blessings, the ‘life to the full’, that our life of faith offers. Because while our God is committed to our welfare and is hugely full of mercy towards us, He sets some boundaries to our relationship with Him, which are meant for our good. And on the occasions when we overstep these boundaries, there can be unfortunate consequences for us.

#### STORY

- How Nick’s daughter Yasmin has recently learn (the painful way) to obey her Daddy when he says “no”, not to put her hand into a candle flame.
- Parent’s first reaction, apart from feeling very sorry for her pain, was to say to each other ‘oh well, she won’t do that again in a hurry’ – She had learnt a lesson, and it had consequences
  - Because Daddy was able to see beyond what Yasmin could understand – to see that the action that looked so inviting for her, was actually going to be very detrimental in the longer term

#### Sin has consequences

So it is with God and us sometimes. The covenant is a covenant of promise, but it comes with some conditions attached. They are basic boundaries, within which we can enjoy the blessing and fruitfulness of being in God’s will. Outside of them, we walk into enemy territory.

**In our lives sin has consequences.** That’s not to say that God cannot redeem situations, turn things around and continue to bless our lives if we turn back to his covenant ways.... Of course that is always his heart, and that’s what Jesus died to achieve for us. Nevertheless, Sin is sin. And sin can have consequences in life for all of us, which sometimes we have to live with and endure, even after we know God has forgiven us. This applies whether its old sin, buried away in your past or new sin

– something that happened just yesterday afternoon. So, **the answer** of course is to **be alert** and **try to avoid stepping into sin** and out of our covenant protection and provision wherever possible, by **being aware of God’s boundaries of blessing.**

### Boundaries of blessing

Let’s use an Old Testament passage about covenant to illustrate the way God operates in covenant with his people – which include you and me now living under the New Covenant of Jesus.

- These passages are an example of the boundaries of blessing
- I’m starting with the 10 Commandments – because this is the part of the ‘law’ which was not done away with when Jesus established the New Covenant – these 10 still stand in Jesus’ eyes as part of our covenant of blessing with God
- **Read 10 Commandments Deuteronomy 5:6-21**

God then speaks to Moses more, as he passed him in a cloud of glory, making it clear that he is offering blessing and protection, but that he is not to be trifled with either and that there will be consequences for breaking this covenant:

- **Exodus 34:5-10**

Then Moses goes on to explain to the new people of Israel just what the benefits of sticking within these boundaries of blessing will include:

- **Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

### Boundaries

With the giving of the first law – the 10 commandments – the Lord is setting out the boundaries of his blessing. **And its all about relationship.** He’s offering intimacy and family. God says: “Now you know me, you need to obey me” Because **all relationships have ground rules**, boundaries, frameworks that define the freedom that the relationship has. For example, the boundary of the marriage relationship is monogamy. You break that boundary if you commit adultery. You stretch it if you start even entertaining those kind of thoughts or relationships in your heart (Matt 5:27-30)

In a similar fashion, our God invites us into glorious relationship with Him, where we can prosper and know the hope and peace He brings, but within certain boundaries of behaviour. The boundaries are there so that we can avoid the consequences of sin as much as possible – and instead live within the **boundaries of blessing**

What does God mean when he says to his people - ‘obey me, keep my covenant’ ? He’s saying “**I have chosen to take the initiative towards you, simply out of love for you.** The only response I require from you is **faithful love**”

- **In other words, God is into monogamy**
- Not going after other Gods - Deut 5:9 – “I am a jealous God..”

### Love not law

**Its about faithful love, not law.** The first covenant was written on stone tablets. The New Covenant is written instead in our hearts and can be called ‘the law of love’. The covenant is framed in simple terms of love. So simple that the teachers summarised the 10 commandments in 2 statements:

- Love God, love neighbour
- **About loving relationships!**

Don’t see it like a list of ‘do not’s’. They are boundaries for our own good, so that we prosper – that’s why we’re calling them the Boundaries of Blessing.

What happened with the 10 Commandments was tragic. **By the time of Jesus, the people of God had turned the baby harness, into a straightjacket.** Turned the 10 commandments into at least 613 by the time of Jesus.

And God doesn't enjoy the consequences of Sin in our lives. His heart is broken by it. He isn't trying to inflict punishment. He is sad, because His people are moving away from the boundaries of protection and provision, and into the hands of your enemies.

- You get God's enemies as part of the covenant. And they will want to get revenge on God, by attacking us – if we move out of his protective covering

### Deal quickly with your sin

Deal with your sin swiftly – keep short accounts with God.

Sin that we don't address quickly in our lives can lead to all sorts of problems. I said it a few weeks ago when I spoke on the armour of God – the methods of warfare of our enemy include:

- **sinfulness, sadness, sickness, suffering, satanic oppression**

And the bible makes it clear – we need to address issues in our lives and our choices, and avoid behaviour which is ungodly:

As an example, let's **read Ephesians 5:3-7**

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”

If we get into lots of ungodly actions in our lives – sin – then we open a door into our lives to the enemy of our souls. “Do not give the devil a foothold” (Eph 4:27)

- Eg. if I am being sexually immoral... I shouldn't be surprised if I find I can no longer hear God very well, or feel at peace inside, or see many answers to my prayers.
- If I love to gossip, slag people off, be rather vicious towards my work colleagues....I shouldn't be surprised when I find my heart is angry all the time, and I can't seem to find a way to calm it down
- If I link myself in heavily with people who don't love God – hang around with them, do the same habits, think the same way, watch the same horror movies etc, I agree with their attitudes and their cynicism..... I shouldn't be surprised when I find my faith is very low, I can't believe any longer that God can come through in a situation, I find it hard to find God's perspective on things

**Sin has consequences.** Those consequences **may not be sent directly from God** .

- **I don't believe God sends sickness** – the bible, the NT, Revelation – all point to our future as fully healed people etc)
- **I don't believe God sends broken relationships, inner pain,** etc etc

**But they can be the consequences of our earlier actions.** Stepping out from under the **umbrella** of God's provision, protection and promise. **God wants us whole** – He can restore any situation and hurt in our lives – **but how much better** to avoid it in the first place!

Nick example: South East Asia story.

There is always grace and hope in God

IDEA of TARGET, CIRCLES BOUNDARIES

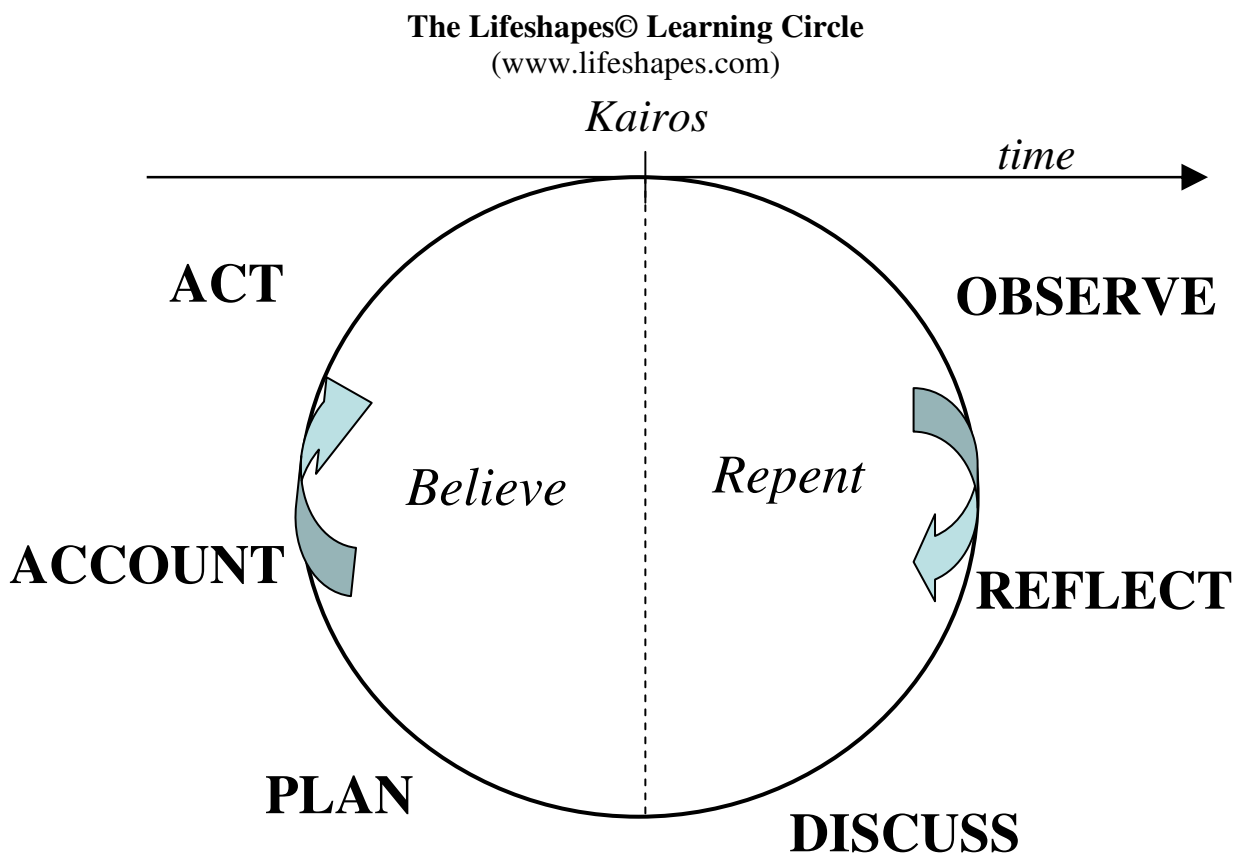
- Question is – which direction do you choose to travel in, once you’ve hit the wall/kairos

The important thing is that God does definitely offers healing, forgiveness, restoration and a brighter future to those who enter into, and try to stay in relationship with him.

Application – how to stay under the covenant?

Let’s remember, that being a Christian is definitely NOT about keeping to a set of rules, praying 5 times a day or facing the wrath of a fierce God. Quite the opposite. We are in relationship with a God who is a “compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, (Ex 34:6). For all of us, Jesus died on the cross and inaugurated this new covenant of love, so that we don’t have to remain condemned by the sin and failures in our lives, but that we can live in continual relationship with the almighty and know a life of forgiveness and restoration.

So how can we live in this ? I suggest you **look out for key ‘kairos’ events in life. Use the learning circle. Come back and live a life of regular repentance & faith** (Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. **Repent and believe the good news!**")



Accountability is key – 2/3s, with your partners, or at a push in small groups

**Closing encouragement: (Hebrews 4:14-16)**

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”