

Sunday 10 December 2006 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

COVENANT SERIES – Week 8, Living It Out

Nick Allan

Intro

Final sermon today in our series on Covenant. But Covenant is such a central theme of the whole bible, and of our relationship with God, that you will see it come back again and again in the future too! Today we're looking at how to live it out. How to take hold of it, and make the most of it.

Last week, you'll remember that I spoke about the boundaries of blessing – I recognise that was quite a hard topic for some people – but I'm not sorry for sharing that message. We need to understand the realities of what the walk of discipleship is all about. I can tell you what you want to hear, or I can tell you the truth....

But do remember – its boundaries of **BLESSING. Think of the Covenant as a baby harness, not a straight-jacket**

- Ex 34:6 “...the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

Like I said at the start of this series, the theme of covenant, like the theme of kingdom, needs to be central to our understanding of our Christian faith, how we live everyday life as disciples of Jesus, and of how we read & understand the bible. So keep mulling it over, keep digesting it, and keep close to your mind the wonderful realities that we operate under as we live within the boundaries of blessing, as we share in a relationship with our almighty God who pays the price for our failings and sin, and more than that, exchanges his own holy identity with our own. An I believe that through living everyday life in the light of God's kingdom and covenant, we can start to touch our own communities and friends around us with the blueprint of heaven, and we ourselves really can start to experience the promise of 'life in all its fullness'

Ratify the covenant

Let's look firstly at how **we need to stand on the promises of God**, and how God will ratify his promises with us, when push comes to shove.

BANK NOTE EXAMPLE – a bank note is a contract – like a covenant. That piece of paper isn't worth a penny if the Bank of England won't cash it in on demand. They've got to deliver on their promise.

That's how the covenant works – then and now. We've followed the story - Way back in Genesis 12 **God makes a promise** to Abram - that he would make out of him a great nation, and bless all peoples on earth. Then a while **later he ratified that promise** – through the ceremony of covenant, the corridor of blood and so on. Hundreds of years after that, **God ratified again his promise to his people** – by bringing the Hebrews out of Egypt, and giving them the promised land.

Still today, God not only brings us into his promises through faith in Jesus, but **he continually offers to ratify that promise – to come good, to come through, to deliver on it.** Just like the Bank of England have to with our notes.

So it is with our covenant relationship with God. As our stronger covenant partner – who offers us all the resources of heaven, because what's his is now ours too – there are times in our lives when we need to call those favours in.

Because there are times when we need to stand on the promises of God.

NEPAL STORY – Angels came to help people in King's Centre/St Toms when one of their party was unconscious with cerebral malaria.

So there are normal times and there are particular times in life when we need to learn to stand on God's promises, and call out to Him to prove again – to ratify – his covenant with us.

They might be trials in life, times of need, suffering, or persecution. Or they might be **really positive occasions** – like deliverance. We pray in the name of Jesus (using our covenant identity in Christ) and Jesus delivers – he rids people of spirits and spiritual oppression which has kept them in bondage. He sets the prisoners free – and that's exactly what the bible teaches us.

Even when they are trials, I would encourage you to **see them in a positive light – as an opportunity to ratify our covenant relationship**, to see it at work. And **when you don't see an instant breakthrough** – that's when we **learn to stand on the promises** and the hope that Christ puts in our hearts.

Trials

Many of the trials we suffer in life, are driving us back under the umbrella, the covenant.

They aren't always sent by God, but he does use circumstances to drive us back to the good shepherd, in the flock, under his protection. Even through tests and trials which come from the work of the enemy, . God can work and God can victoriously prove his covenant to be true.

We have trials in life that are a test to ourselves.

- Sickness, pain, oppression, failure, relationship breakdown, disappointments, etc

What is the test to ourselves? That we discover the promises of the covenant.

- You suddenly need to rely on God, as other things around you start to fail
- You have to surrender yourself to God, to make sure your heart is right before him
- And then rely on him, to ask for protection, to ask for provision, to ask for forgiveness, to be free, to be joyful and peaceful.

God tests in you what he has put into you

As a church, we are facing a testing time now, as our leader has been hospitalized with a serious illness for several weeks. It's a trial that needs to be ridden out. It's a time to get on our knees and call out to God to ratify His promise to us that he heals and delivers us. It's a time to learn about perseverance.

Part of the reason these kind of situations can be testing is that they often don't resolve instantly. There are people in this church and St Toms with long term illnesses. But it was great to be at the whole-church prayer meeting last Tuesday night when the body got together corporately to stand in God's covenant and pray for his kingdom to come in those situations. **That's persevering under pressure.**

Like the man in Jesus' teaching about prayer in Luke 11 – the persistence of the man knocking on the friend's door.

- Luke 11:9-10 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Some Christians have no confidence – so God has to test you to give you confidence (just like concrete etc is put under stress-tests, to be sure it can withstand the pressures of high buildings) At times, God will 'stress-test' us.

- James 1:2-4
Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Testing gives you confidence in the covenant

- Trials help you to develop perseverance, otherwise known as spiritual stamina
- As you persevere in the faith you grow in maturity
- You grow in spiritual security and confidence

As we learn to stand on God's promises, it shouldn't just be in the hard times, in the problems in life either. We need to **stand on the truth of our identity in God**. That we are royal children of the almighty God. That we are heirs to the kingdom of God on earth. That our spiritual identity is hidden in Jesus Christ, the one who conquered death and sin and the devil.

We need to stand on this stuff! **We need "to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us"** (Phil 3)

As we press on with faith, even in the midst of trials and positive opportunities, we are saying to God – 'ratify your covenant with us' – deliver on your promises

- **And He will, and He does**
- Because that's his nature! Our God is called 'I AM', not 'I once was...'
- God is faithful, God is a healer, God is hope, God is Love, God is gracious and compassionate, God is slow to anger and swift to bless, God saves us, God is our deliverer, God is our fortress, God is like a strong tower, God is our refuge, God is our strength, God is an ever present help in times of trouble, God is God.

Possessing the Land

We need to possess the promised land that is ours.

Let's learn a lesson and not act like the Israelites did. For 500 years they have been in the land, and not taken possession of it. (See 1 Sam 13:19-22 – the Philistines were extorting the Israelites, they couldn't even sharpen their own axes and sickles, let alone make their own weapons). They lived in the land, but they didn't dominate it. So the Israelites had the land physically, but not in reality.

Why then, have they been living in the land and not taken possession of it?

- Probably because they hadn't really believed their promise from God, and they had strayed from his covenant at various times.

Why do some Christians live in the relationship of covenant with God, and not know by experience, the power of the covenant that he has made?

The danger for us today is that we may now know in our heads that we have this covenant partner, but we don't put it to the test – give our partner the opportunities to ratify, to prove His covenant.

The way to drive our enemy from the territory of our life is to believe in our covenant and kingdom relationship with almighty God our dad, and live like we believe it!

We also have to remember that we are in a battle. God never intended us to stand back and accept it (eg. just say 'I'm sick'). We might not all go to heaven well. Some people with long-term illnesses may die of them. But we are soldiers. We are fighting against an enemy whose weapons are sin, sickness, sadness, suffering. As soldiers we've been given God's armour for the battle!

So we may have to fight for the territory – even though we are in the strong covenant. We may have to fight to take and possess the land – to see the things of God's kingdom break out in our midst.

Paul Maconochie has taught us as a church that satan will try to dominate us in 2 ways:

- 1) **control** – when we are controlled by sinful ways, attitudes, or we allow things other than God to control our daily decisions – like money
- 2) If we break that control, then he is likely to
 - a. **Persecute us**

So what must our response be?

- **To surrender ourselves to God again** – to hand control over to him. And make sure we are right before him

That's what we're doing corporately as a church at the moment in response to Paul Mac's illness. We are in a season of prayer and fasting. We are corporately surrendering – getting under God's almighty hand, and praying that he will lift us up again.

If you persevere in the covenant and the battle, then I believe:

- **we will force the enemy from the territory that has been promised to us by God**
- **we will prove the covenant true**, our heavenly covenant partner will ratify again and again his covenant promises to us.

How to live it out practically?

Live in the spirit (the power)

- The only way to prosper as a Christian, to persevere, to enjoy kingdom life to the full is to make sure we make space for the empowering work of God's own spirit in us
- (Gal 5v16) So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
- Put yourself in the way of Holy Spirit
 - Time
 - Prayer
 - Conferences etc
 - Get others who are full of God to pray with & for you
 - Ministry on Sundays & Small Groups
 - Soaking etc

Live by faith (the promises & identity)

- hold firm to the promises of God [all of which are "Yes" in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20)]

- hold firm to the identity we now have in Christ – who has swapped his royal inheritance with us. Who became sin, that we might become sons and daughters of our God

Live like an Ox! (the yolk)

- The answer to trials and tests in life is to ensure that you are not trying to hold onto them, or sort them out yourself.
- If you've got a problem – make it God's problem. If its your problem, then its always going to be a problem. If its God's problem, its in good hands.

Matt 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- Jesus explained it: "Here's how the covenant works.....You've got a yolk and so have I. Give me your yolk and I'll give you mine.
 - Mine is really light, well made, will fit you well
 - Yours at times can be downright uncomfortable and painful
- That's the covenant transaction – you get his, he gets yours

Live humbly (the attitude)

- Don't rely on yourself – you're not strong enough to carry the burden
- 1 Peter 5:5-11

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."
- The attitude is this:
 - Humble yourself under God's mighty hand.
 - Surrender yourself to God
 - Live a life of repentance (saying sorry) and faith (trying to live God's way)
 - Give your anxieties to God
 - Resist the devil by staying humble, staying alert, staying self-controlled and staying under the umbrella
 - And the devil will flee from you (James 4:7)
 - And your covenant partner will lift you up again in due time

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