

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

### COVENANT SERIES – Week 2, The Covenant Exchange

Nick Allan

#### Introduction

Started series on Covenant – encourage you to get the CD of last week if you missed it, and future weeks, to get the fullest picture of this deep and foundational teaching. We're learning together as a church to walk to the meter and rhythm of God's scriptures. Kingdom & Covenant. The theme of covenant runs throughout the Old and New Testaments, we see it today in our worship songs and liturgies, in our marriages, in the way we do (and perhaps don't) related to others. Its all around us as Christians, if we open our hearts and minds to understand it better.

Today we're going to look at the covenant exchange, whereby we change our identity.

#### Reminder – what is Covenant?

- Definition
  - Covenant is an agreement between 2 parties To become one. To enter into 'one-ness'
  - To have unity by having relationship
- We looked at the covenant God made with Abram in Genesis 12-17
  - God made a promise to Abram in Gen 12 that from him would come a great nation, famous, and a blessing to the whole world
  - A little time later God *ratified the covenant* following the custom of the age
    - Called Abram to bring several prize animals representing his wealth and possessions, cut them in half and walk down the middle
    - That night, the presence of God himself – represented by darkness and a flaming torch – moved between the pieces, through the corridor of blood.
  - Later in Gen 17 God establishes a sign of the covenant – a covenant scar as was common in that age.
    - In this case, circumcision of every male – a physical sign, reminder of the promise and boundaries of the covenant made to the new nation – the new people of God - for all time to come
- We found that bc you believe in Jesus, you are a recipient of the covenant that God made with Abram
  - That means that all the resources of heaven are at your disposal (Eph 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.)
    - Because the covenant exchange means that what once was God's is now shared equally with you
    - And what once was yours, you now share with God
    - Who gets the better deal out of that?!

Today – unpacking the **new identity** that is bestowed on the parties in a covenant.

#### Identity and name

Under ancient covenants, and under our covenant with God as his people, there is a exchange of identities. That was part of the 'deal'. Just like Marjorie and I exchanged identities when we married. She became Marjorie Allan, I entered her family, I consider myself part of her family.

### Example of Abraham

- Genesis Ch 17 – Abram 99 yrs old. God says ‘ I will **confirm** my covenant between me and you’ (ratify, prove his promise) Read Gen 17:1-8

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

- Change of name

- Abram was given a new name by God as part of the Covenant transaction. It was one of the symbols that a covenant had taken place
- Abram means ‘exalted father’ – which was probably rather difficult for him to bear – given that up until that time, he had not borne any children with his wife Sarai. In Ch 16 13 years ago he deliberately sleeps with his wife’s servant in order to try and *make God’s promise happen*.
- Abraham means ‘father of nations’ or ‘father of many’
  - That’s a big name! God gives him this name so that every day he uses his name, he’ll remember my promise. He’ll reiterate the promise (father of nations) every time he tells someone his name. It will remind him forever of this promise.
- In Hebrew language - God takes one of the pieces of his name YHWH from his name – and includes it into Abraham’s name.
  - Takes a piece of himself and plants it into Abram forever.
  - Turns Abram from an old man thinking he was useless to the world, into the father of many nations, through whom the world will be blessed and impacted

- **In covenant with God, there is a Change of identity – conferred upon you by God**

- Happened to Abram
- Happened to Israel when the covenant is reaffirmed under Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:3-6) – God promises again that He will make this nation *HIS PEOPLE* – an identity change from simply being a harassed tribe, a people-group in slavery and without their own land or secure identity
  - Into the people of God
- Happens to us, through our faith in Jesus Christ and the new covenant he established. Lets look at that more.....

### Exchange of identities

NT tells us a lot that we have a new identity.

Example – Spanish (India, Sri Lanka etc) people change their name when they become Christians

The key to grasp is that the reason we have a new identity in God’s eyes, is because we have a covenant partner who has ‘done the deal’ with us. **Swapped sides with us**

- Jesus came to establish the new covenant
  - It’s the blood of Jesus, and the body of Jesus which form the corridor of blood, the acceptable symbol and sacrifice of the covenant ceremony
  - When we choose to become followers of Jesus, we choose to enter into that covenant *exchange and agreement* (whether you realised that at the time or not!)

- **What you are saying is.....** ‘I take you, Jesus, into my life and heart and I give you access and full reign over my life and heart.’ – That’s your part of the exchange
  - And in return, the almighty divine Trinity, the **God of the universe, says** the same! ‘I take you into my heart, I choose to share what I have with you’
- That’s what the **phrase ‘in Christ’** means
  - Its used a lot in the NT, particularly by Paul (88 times!) eg. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ** Jesus” (Rom 8:1)
  - It means that we have passed along the corridor of blood. Our covenant partner Christ has taken our place. We stand in his place, he stands in our place
- The covenant exchange is this
  - Christ takes our identity
    - Our rebellion, our fears, our alienation from God, our sin [a falling short, falling away from], our broken lives, our missed opportunities, our wounded hearts, our human frailty
  - He takes on our identity, and we take His identity!
- **This is the covenant exchange**
  - We get his righteousness (who had none)
  - He gets our sin (who had none)
- **Christ becomes sin, we become sons (and daughters too)**

#### Why its so important to hold the Covenant idea in mind

- This is why I want people to have the picture in your mind of the covenant exchange, the symbolic stuff – because it knocks onto so much else.
- Eg. SONG - ‘I’m trading my sorrows, I’m trading my shame, I’m laying the down for the joy of the Lord’ ..... **That is covenant picture & language!**

#### The Covenant Scar in us as Christians

- Reminder that a permanent scar/mark was cut as part of the ancient covenants (on the chief’s hand)
- In the covenant with Abram every male to be circumcised – **the scar/sign** (Gen 17)
  - A private, personal scar to each man/family – remind them of the private & personal relationship which now existed between them and the living God
- **The scar on us as Christians**
  - Rom 2:28 – “...circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.”
    - Paul is saying here that for the people of God, the new covenant which offers right relationship with God is marked not by physical, outward signs (in this case circumcision ) but by **a change within.**
      - Not bc your parents are Christians, not because your family are Catholic, not because you go to church, not even because you take communion
      - The sign of the covenant is the Holy Spirit living an active **within us**
  - **The inner person has made the commitment to God – circumcision of the heart**
    - Eph 1:13 – the HSpirit *marks* out hearts, marked with a seal
      - And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.....
      - **That’s the scar – the Holy spirit.** It outworks into every day life – but it starts within

## The scar on God the Trinity

- **What about God – can he be scarred? Does he bear the marks also?**
  - Luke 24:40
    - The glorified, resurrected body of Jesus **bears the scars** of the cross (despite being *perfect now*). His hands and feet.
  - Jesus shows it to his disciples - It's a covenant (“...remember the ‘New Covenant’ thing I was talking about”), not only ratified in blood, but an everlasting covenant (like Abraham) because Jesus bears the scars in his glorified body for all eternity. Even on my human body, I bear the scars for all time of the covenant I've made with humankind
  - Isaiah 49:16 – “I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”
- In Jesus, God looks at the scars daily, and says:
  - I remember who my covenant partners are, who my brothers and sisters are. And I choose to stand with them, and to make all of my resources available to them, and to ensure that their inheritance is protected for all time

## What this means in relation to Jesus, and Communion

So in the Covenant relationship there is an exchange of identities

Jesus is saying:

- I stand as the representative of heaven. I've been sent from my father to you
- I fully identify with you
  - Even though flesh isn't part of my nature, I've taken it on because that's part of your identify
  - Even though sin is abhorrent to me, I'm taking the full extent of sin on to myself, because that's part of your identity
    - I'll bear the penalty of that, because I've come to identify with you
- All that you know about covenant is now represented in me (not torn flesh of simple creatures – we're talking about *my flesh*). You'll understand it and live it if you will embrace my flesh & blood (John 6:25-59) , **if you will take on my identity** (which is what believing means)
- .
- Remember me
  - That's why Jesus instructs us to 'remember me' at the Last Supper
    - Not trying to conjure up a picture of his face (in a beer glass)
    - Remember who you are in Christ. The covenant you are part of
    - Re-new it today – confirm it – celebrate it afresh
    - Remember who your covenant partner is
- **What are the blessings of this covenant?**
  - John 6:35 – never go hungry or thirsty
    - All of the resources of heaven are yours
    - Seek first the kingdom and all these things will be added to you
      - You will not be in *need* if God is your covenant king
- **The exchange**
  - We give up our life to him (ends in death)
  - He gives up His life to us (ends in eternity)
  - Bc Jesus died our death, we know we get his life! It's a covenant
    - **THAT IS AN AMAZING OFFER OF COVENANT !**

*Service continued with a time of shared communion together.*