

GOING
FORWARD
together
LIVING IN GOD'S
Covenant



VISION & COMMITMENT 2021

The Salvation Army

Worship Workout

10 January 2021

**God's
invitation**

**Welcome to our 2021 Vision and Commitment Series
looking at God's Covenant.**

***“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I
will make a new covenant with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.”***

(Jeremiah 31:31)

***For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new
covenant, that those who are called may receive the
promised eternal inheritance.***

(Hebrews 9:15)

Ian B

Theme for the week

Believe it or not we are still in advent. This week marks the Feast of Epiphany, the celebration of the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, as represented through the visit of the wise men to Jesus. A line from *In the bleak midwinter* came to mind: *If I were a wise man, I would do my part, Yet what I can I give Him, Give my heart.*

And this seems important as we also begin our Vision and Commitment series on Covenant. As we consider God's invitation to join him in the redemption of the world, we also consider the miracle of grace in that Jesus wishes nothing more than our heart, love and devotion in return for this wonderful eternal life and salvation. What a wonderful truth and promise to start the New Year – hallelujah!

***For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.
(Hebrews 9:15)***

Call to worship: Based on Psalm 25, Genesis 9, Mark 1

Leader: God said, "I will be your God."

All: God has promised. God remembers. God is faithful.

Leader: God said, "I will lead you in the paths of truth."

All: God has promised. God remembers. God is faithful.

Leader: God said, "I will forgive you."

All: God has promised. God remembers. God is faithful.

Leader: God said, "My kingdom is near."

All: God has promised. God remembers. God is faithful.

Carol 1: As with gladness men of old

As with gladness men of old, did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore your splendour see.

As with joyful steps they sped, to that lowly manger bed,
there to bend the knee before, Christ, whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet ever seek your mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare, at that manger plain and bare,
so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to you, our heavenly King.

In that glorious city bright, none shall need created light;
you its light, its joy, its crown, you its sun which goes not down;
there forever may we sing, alleluias to our King!

(William C. Dix)

Prayer: We enter in...

Dear Lord, we stand this morning in anticipation of being in your glorious presence.

And we are aware that we can stand before you, only through belief in your Son, Jesus Christ. Through him we can step forward and we can accept the invitation to a life lived with you that is only available through him – the new covenant.

And in return this morning, we bring ourselves to you. All that we have been, all that we are, and all that we will be is yours today – for that is our costliest treasure, ourselves and all that we are. We know we often fall short and that we cannot earn your grace or love, but through your Son we are still allowed into relationship with you, to be part of your family, to be able to share in this indescribable promise of something well beyond our ability or capacity to understand. But day by day as we present ourselves to you in Covenant, you help us to understand, you lend us your understanding, your love, your grace, and in that we become truly yours, and you remain truly ours. There are no words to describe the joy of this promise, just a feeling of thankfulness, of relief, and of excitement for what the future may bring.

Amen.

Old year out...new year in

Much has been rightly said about being 'glad to see the back' of 2020, I think it is fair to say that no one would opt to repeat this year if such a facility were available. It is easy for us to want to put the whole year into its own quarantine in our brain, never to be seen again, but...

This morning I want us to consider the biblical truth that the God of the Covenant never changes, and his promises remain the same. This means that God has been with us all through 2020, he has continued to be visible in the world and in our lives; albeit we have sometimes not been looking in the right direction.

Isaiah 54:10 reminds us of God's promise that: ***Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.***

And so, as we stand on the cusp of the rest of 2021, and on the start of our new series about Covenant, I want you to consider: **How have you experienced God in new and different ways this year? How has God been present and working in your life?**

As you think about that we will sing: **When I was lost** by Kate Simmonds.

Song 2: When I was lost

When I was lost you came and rescued me, Reached down into the pit and lifted me
O Lord, such love: I was as far from you as I could be,
You know all the things I've ever done, But Jesus' blood has cancelled every one, O
Lord, such grace, to qualify me as your own

*There is a new song in my mouth
There is a deep cry in my heart
A hymn of praise to Almighty God - hallelujah!
And now I stand firm on this Rock
My life is hidden now with Christ in God
The old has gone and the new has come - hallelujah!
Your love has lifted me*

Now I have come into your family, For the Son of God has died for me
O Lord, such peace: I am as loved by you as I could be
In the full assurance of your love, Now with every confidence we come
O Lord, such joy to know that you delight in us

Many are the wonders you have done, Many are the things that you have planned
How beautiful the grace that gives to us all that we don't deserve, All that we cannot
earn but is a gift of love

(Kate Simmonds)

Vision and Commitment series 2021: Covenant

Hopefully you have picked up by now that we are starting a new worship and preaching series based on Covenant as part of The Salvation Army's Vision and Commitment series, which is our traditional way of heralding in the New Year.

The series was launched by our Territorial Leaders last week as they led us all in worship – this can be still be accessed on You Tube at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDM_lhHcLRQ

For the next four weeks we will be looking at the following themes about Covenant:

1. God's invitation (Jeremiah 31:31-34)
2. God's Promise and Choice (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:1-8)
3. God's Gift of Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:14-20)
4. Our Response to God's Grace (Hebrews 9:11-15)

There will be an opportunity at Week 4 for you to make your commitment to God, accepting or renewing his Covenant invitation for yourself and seeing what he has in store in 2021 – for you as an individual and for us as his Salvation Army churches in Kilburn and Notting Hill. Let's get going...

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-33

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

What is Covenant?

In order to get our heads around this topic, it is firstly important that we understand what a Covenant is. The Bible Project have put together a helpful and concise definition and overview of Covenant in the Bible. See more at:

<https://bibleproject.com/learn/covenants/>

Our relationship with God

We might think of God as our friend, our teacher, and our master. And this is all true, but there is another facet of our relationship with God that doesn't get quite as much attention, and that is God as our partner. In the very beginning of the Bible, this is the relationship we see. God creates man as a partner to help him spread more goodness throughout the world. Unfortunately, we, as human beings, didn't live up to our end of the deal. It is this broken partnership with God that is the reason we are stuck with the fallen and corrupted world in which we live. Thankfully, the rest of the Bible describes God's efforts to repair this broken partnership.

God's unyielding Covenant love

The first step God takes in repairing this partnership is to select a small group of people and make a new partnership with them called a "covenant." In this covenant, God makes promises to these people and asks them to fulfil certain commitments.

In total, there are four Old Testament covenants—one with Noah, one with Abraham, one with the Israelites, and one with King David. All these covenants serve the purpose of creating a new partnership into which God can eventually invite all humankind. Unfortunately, Israel eventually breaks these covenants with God.

Nevertheless, throughout the Old Testament, prophets talked about a day when God would once again create a new covenant, one that would completely restore all the broken covenants that came before it. This new covenant was fulfilled by God's Son, Jesus Christ.

We're told in the Bible Christ is a descendant of Abraham, allowing him to fulfil the covenant God had with Abraham and his family. We're also told Christ is the faithful

Israelite who is able to truly obey the law, and Christ is the king from the line of David. This allows Christ to fulfil God's covenant with these people as well, thus restoring all the covenants in the Bible.

Christ himself is the New Testament covenant—a covenant that cannot fail and cannot be broken.

Christ invited people to follow Him and join Him in a new partnership with God. Despite our failures, we are able to enter into this new covenant thanks to the fact Christ Himself was able to perfectly fulfil His commitment to God. Through His perfect keeping of the new covenant, we too are now able to enjoy a renewed partnership with God.

At the end of the Bible, we see John describing a new and perfect partnership with God where all the saved work with Him to once again spread goodness and perfection throughout the world. Thanks to the fulfilment of the new covenant through Jesus Christ, God's initial plan for mankind is made complete again.

He came to give us life in all its fulness

*He came to give us life in all its fullness, He came to make the blind to see,
He came to banish death and doubt and darkness, He came to set His people free.
He liberating love imparted, He taught men once again to smile;
He came to bind the brokenhearted, And God and man to reconcile.
He came to give us life in all its fullness, He came to make the blind to see,
He came to banish death and doubt and darkness, He came to set His people free.
(After last chorus) He came to set us free!*

We wonder why Christ came into the world, A helpless, homeless Child;
We wonder why He tolerated men, The tainted and defiled.
We wonder why! We wonder why!
The Son of God as man came down, What does this signify?

We wonder why Christ came into the world, And let men hurt Him so;
We wonder why the Christ should have to die, Does anybody know?
We wonder why! We wonder why!
The Son of God as man came down,
What does this signify?

(John Gowans)

Wintry Workout Wondering

Good news! The New Covenant being extended to all through Jesus, and life in all its fulness being a reality for all through Jesus, is the best news we have ever, and will ever have – it is a great start to the New Year – hallelujah! And the appearance of this New Covenant with God, wrapped up in humanity and with us here on earth, was recognised two thousand years ago by the wise men – the first gentiles to worship Jesus. Matthew records the words of the wise men on reaching Herod's palace: ***“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:2)***

They saw the star, it was their invitation. And so, they left their home land and travelled bearing gifts for the new King. I wonder what they expected to see – not a baby I would wager. But what they did see changed them forever, and changed what was in their hearts, they didn't go back the way they had come.

And the invitation into God's new Covenant through Jesus is life-changing. It might take you far from home, it will undoubtedly be full of the unexpected, and it will change what is in your heart: transforming into His image with ever-increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18)– and will continue to do that for all of your life, your earthly one and the one after that.

Jesus died so that all could come into a partnership with God, so that each of us could be restored, and with us the whole world be restored, back to God. It is through Jesus that God's rescue plan for all that is in heaven and earth, will be brought to its fulfilment. Ephesians 1 is the most amazing piece of galactic back drop ever written: ***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.***

And in Ephesians 2 this whole concept is put into context in terms of us as individuals: ***But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.***

I mean, is that not incredible news? And he did this not because we earned it, or will ever earn it, no...he did it just because he loves us...with a lavish, reckless love that underpins this Covenant relationship which we can each have with him if we believe in Jesus Christ and make his mission our mission. We give up our life to him, and he gives his life to us – it's an exchange that has such far reaching consequences for each of us individually.

And, of course, it has a knock on effect for us as a church and fellowship of believers. Ephesians 2 again: ***Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and***

strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Notice it says ***being built together*** and ***becoming a dwelling***. This is not a static relationship, this is real and alive and happening within each of us right now; if we want it to be. Because you see you have to want to be part of it, you have to be committed to it – a covenant requires two parties.

This morning, I want you to marvel at the riches and abundance of love and grace of God's Covenant, and I want you to feel the leap of joy that comes with knowing that you belong to God and what that might mean for the rest of your life. But I also want you to know that this Covenant life takes commitment, sacrifice, and obedience – and none of that is easy. I often reflect that people think the most difficult part of being a Salvation Army soldier is the not drinking alcohol bit, but let me assure you, the daily requirements of Covenant living are actually the hardest part: being obedient when it means that you can't do what you want to do, putting others before yourself when all you want to do is sleep or eat chocolate in front of the telly, sit with people whilst they grieve and mourn knowing that it is costing you emotionally.

But you see this is bigger than you, and there is much more at stake than your comfort and happiness – at stake are the lives of those in the dark, those in chains both physical and metaphorical. And you have God as your Covenant partner: what is his is yours and what is yours is his. And you may be thinking 'well I'm not sure how much use what I have will be to him', but you'd be hugely mistaken – he makes us magnificent for him.

God has extended his invitation to you through the blood of his son Jesus Christ - will you accept? Like the wise men, will you come and see and kneel before Jesus and offer him your heart today?

For those of you who have already accepted, renew that acceptance today as you reflect on the meaning of Covenant at the start of this new year.

It is my witness this morning that I have no right answers to this Covenant life, I am travelling through it doing my best, and trying to do my best for others. Sometimes I get it wrong, sometimes I get it right, but there is one thing that is true at the start of each day, and it is this: all I have is my calling and my Covenant with a faithful and unrelenting God on whose unwavering power and lavish grace I must rely to get me through – and that is all I have needed, and will ever need. It is always enough. And it will be enough for you.



Response Song: O love that wilt not let me go

O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

(George Matheson)

Benediction

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

(Isaiah 54:10)