



The Salvation Army

Worship Workout

17 January 2021

**God's promise
and choice**

**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

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Theme for the week

Today we continue to look at 'Covenant' and focus in on its origins and how covenantal love for everyone came to fruition through God's ultimate covenant with Israel.

We gather today as people called by God to be holy people – throughout January as we consider Vision and Commitment on the theme of Covenant we consider how we are to react to this boundless commitment from God to love us come what may.

'Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine.'
(Exodus 19:5)

Call to worship

Leader: We are met in the presence of God **All: And we do not meet alone.**

Leader: With the angels in the highest heaven **All: We gather to worship the Lord.**

Leader: With Abraham and Sarah **All: We gather to worship the Lord.**

Leader: With the saints of every age **All: We gather to worship the Lord.**

Leader: We embark on our own journey of faith **All: God's holy name be praised.**

Leader: God makes of us a great people **All: God's holy name be praised.**

Leader: In the desert and in the den, in barrio and basilica **All: God's holy name be praised.**

Leader: We journey in the presence of God **All: And we do not journey alone.**

Opening song: Good, good Father

Oh, I've heard a thousand stories of what they think You're like; But I've heard the tender whisper of love in the dead of night; And You tell me that You're pleased and that I'm never alone.

You're a good, good Father; It's who You are, it's who You are, it's who You are; And I'm loved by You; It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am

Opening song: Good, good Father (cont)

Oh, and I've seen many searching for answers far and wide; But I know we're all searching for answers only You provide; 'Cause You know just what we need before we say a word

Because You are perfect in all of Your ways; You are perfect in all of Your ways; You are perfect in all of Your ways to us; (Ohh) You are perfect in all of Your ways (all of Your ways); Oh, You're perfect in all of Your ways (Your ways); You are perfect in all of Your ways to us

Oh, it's love so undeniable I; I can hardly speak; Peace so unexplainable I, I can hardly think; As You call me deeper still, As You call me deeper still, As You call me deeper still into love, love, love.

(Chris Tomlin)

Let's pray...Song: As water to the thirsty (352)

As water to the thirsty, as beauty to the eyes;
as strength that follows weakness, as truth instead of lies;
as songtime and springtime, and summertime to be;
so is my Lord, my living Lord, so is my Lord to me.

Like calm in place of clamour, like peace that follows pain;
like meeting after parting, like sunshine after rain;
like moonlight and starlight, and sunlight on the sea;
so is my Lord, my living Lord, so is my Lord to me.

As sleep that follows fever, as gold instead of grey;
as freedom after bondage, as sunrise to the day;
as home to the traveller, and all we long to see;
so is my Lord, my living Lord, so is my Lord to me.

(Timothy Dudley Smith)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I read through your word and see the wonderful plan of salvation which you purposed to carry out through your chosen people, Israel, I thank you that despite their disobeying the conditions of your covenant, you never gave up on your people, and used them to be your witnesses – through whom was born the Messiah, who became the sin-offering for the world.

Thank you that today you are carrying out your plans and purposes through the Body of Christ, which is the Church, and thank you that by faith in him I am also your precious possession – through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that the day

Prayer (cont)

is coming when you will ratify your New Covenant with the house of Judah and the house of Israel and that Christ will return to set up his Kingdom on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. We praise your holy name, for Jesus' name's sake.

Amen.

Activity: Holy, holy, holy...

It is a core belief of The Salvation Army that God's full salvation involves our becoming holy in covenant relationship with himself and through the working of the Holy Spirit within and through us.

If holiness involves us reflecting something of God in his everlasting covenant love and faithfulness, take some time to reflect on what this practically looks like. You could write a list of, or maybe draw, what this looks like. Also consider those desires and temptations that seek to keep you from God – give them to God and renew your resolve to resist and defeat them this year.

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Scripture Reading: Exodus 19:1-8

On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

Song 3: Your grace is enough

Great is Your faithfulness, oh God; You wrestle with the sinner's heart;
You lead us by still waters and to mercy, And nothing can keep us apart.

*So remember Your people, Remember Your children, Remember Your promise, oh
God.*

Your grace is enough, Your grace is enough, Your grace is enough for me.

Great is Your love and justice, God, You use the weak to lead the strong;
You lead us in the song of Your salvation, And all Your people sing along.

*Yeah, Your grace is enough, Heaven reaching down to us, Your grace is enough for
me;*

*God, I see Your grace is enough, I'm covered in Your love, Your grace is enough for
me, for me.*

(Chris Tomlin)

Workout Wondering

There are many examples of God's covenant in the Old Testament. Noah in Genesis 9:8-17: ***Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you."*** – in this we have the first mention of covenant and what it looks like.

In Joshua 24:1-17 we have an explanation of how the covenant worked through from God's love: ***"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the Lord."*** – because God has done all of this for His people.

We have the covenant with King David in 2 Samuel 7:11-16; 23:5: ***"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you"***, and then David replies, ***"If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant."*** – a covenant that has brought much anguish and doubt upon whether David was ever good enough to serve God in the way he did.

And then we have the many re-affirmations of original covenants such as in 2 Kings 11:17: ***He 'then made a covenant between the Lord and the king.'*** Next is 2 Kings 23:3: ***'The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord.'*** And finally, we have the scripture passage we looked at last week, Jeremiah 31:31-34: ***"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."***

But, the thing about the examples above is that they are just an appetiser of what is to come from our amazing God – because the definitive covenant is yet to come.

The definitive covenant is with Israel, and it comes through Moses.

In Exodus 19:1-8 Moses is told by God what was expected of him and his people, ***‘Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine.’***

Then we have giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17, and the setting up of the Ark of the Covenant with its Tabernacle in Exodus 25:1 through to 26:37.

God’s covenant through Moses reflects both his promise to humankind and his commitment to us. This new law is different – it could be called the ‘ultimate covenant’ that serves as a continuation on God’s promise to those he called previously. It is different in that this covenant is decisively important, not only in the history of Israel, but also for the whole of humanity.

The Covenant with Israel through Moses has three key ideas that emerge:

The first is God’s reassuring Initiative.

God asks Moses to remind the people who have been rescued from Egypt, ***‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’ (Exodus 19:4)***. This image of being carried to God on eagles’ wings is both compelling and reassuring, as Isaiah rightly reminds us – ***‘...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint’ (Isaiah 40:31)***.

The metaphor of the wings of an eagle was really significant to the audience, it depicted God’s attributes the same as a bird that was seen as rather majestic – loving compassion, protection, strength, and watchfulness – just as the young eagle is carried on the adult wings and taught how to flee the nest and fly, God has lovingly carried Israel and safely delivered her from bondage.

It underlines the initiative that God takes in choosing us first. He initiates this everlasting covenant that He will never break: God’s covenant commitment is everlasting, and he cannot forsake his faithfulness as 2 Timothy 2:13 reminds us: ***‘if we are faithless, he remains faithful’***.

It’s not a just a contract or an agreement. There is a significant difference between the idea of a ‘contract’ and a ‘covenant’. A contract may be broken and dissolved, and of course humankind proves unfaithful in its covenant with God – Scripture is rife with examples of the Exodus tradition, that of God’s chosen people breaking the covenant followed by a reminder by the Prophets of a need to get back on the covenant track.

But what is covenant love? It comes from the Hebrew word *hesed* – or as variously translated, loving-kindness, steadfast love, loyal love, unflinching love – it repeatedly sums up this covenant commitment of God’s love and is the closest thing in the OT to the NT understanding of grace. We can fail and fail and fail again, but God will never fail us.

Again, it is Isaiah who clearly captures the reality: **“*Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unflinching love (hesed) for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,*” says the Lord, who has compassion on you’ (Isaiah 54:10).**

Next, we have God’s Commandments, and our obedience

While God’s covenant is everlasting and faithful, it is designed to be a relationship in which we as God’s people declare our love and humble obedience to our King, and in him find our life and fullness. God says to Moses, **‘*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession’ (Exodus 19:5)*** – this comes from the Hebrew *‘salāku’* which means to set aside your most valuable possession that will go everywhere with you. One God, our King, He sees us as his most treasured possession that will be with him forever.

God’s covenant with Israel through Moses is accompanied by the giving of the Ten Commandments which are to define the character and the conduct of God’s people, enabling them to be different from all other peoples and nations of the world. Historical study shows just how radically different these expectations were from any other known religion or belief in the surrounding nations, in worshipping one living God with no other idols or gods.

Finally, we consider the idea of God’s Holy Covenant of Love

Ultimately the people of God in covenant with him were being called to grow into the very character of the God who chose and called them, set apart for him, and set apart to be holy. God said to Moses, **‘*Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exodus:5-6)***. Can you believe that today, right now, that is what God wants us to be? Holy?

The covenant people of God, that is you and that is me, are called to bear witness to their King, in word and deed – as part of a ‘Kingdom of Priests’. Translated back into Hebrew this means to be stood on ‘my holy hill’. Not ‘a holy hill’. But a ‘holy hill’ that belongs to God. A hill that is truly holy.

We are called to be a ‘holy nation’, a people set apart, who as such give clear testimony to the nature and character of God. He designates Israel as a separate and very distinct nation because He is separate and distinct, as are his plans.

When we consider holiness, it’s easy to get stuck on what we don’t do (the negative aspect of holiness) rather than what we actually do (the positive aspect of holiness)!

If God's covenant love, *hesed*, speaks of constant, unfailing love and forgiveness, then the character of our holiness, as we stand together on God's holy hill, should be generous, sacrificial, merciful and outward unfailing love, as the people of this holy King.

That is who we are called to be.

While the Israelites' journey as a covenanted people reveals disobedience and seasons of questioning their destiny, God keeps his covenant. He is faithful, just and merciful, no matter how the people behave. God is unchanging, and our responsibility to obey him does not change despite our failures.

When Abraham faithfully and courageously set out on his journey with God, and believed the promises of God for his life, his family, his descendants and his future - this is what God said, ***“Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you.”*** – yet it was with a very dim and rather smoky view of what this meant that Abraham showed obedience – because at that point the full glory of the covenant was yet to be unveiled.

In contrast, in God's covenant with Israel through Moses we see a much fuller flowering of God's character and intent, to be ultimately superseded and fulfilled hundreds of years later in the hopes of the prophets and the reality of Jesus. There is no real challenge for us today from this message – rather, there is something to really think about and try and grasp.

The fact is this, that God has called us to be holy people, despite all our failings, in loving and faithful covenant with him. Abraham, Joshua, King David, Moses, both Jew and Gentile, you, and I. Just let that sink in...that through Jesus the covenant between God and us is there and it is very real.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian B' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Closing Prayer

Generous God, you gave us our voices, no two the same. As you did with Abraham and Sarah, you take and touch our lives and they can become extraordinary. And in your Church you have gathered us, in your community of common folk and complainers, prophets and puzzled people, you have called us and made a place for us.

So let what we say and do here, what we ponder and decide here, be real for us and honest to you, as you prepare us for the life of the world in which you are praised.

Amen.

Response song: Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour

Beautiful Lord, wonderful Saviour, I know for sure all of my days are held in Your hand, And crafted into Your perfect plan.

*You gently called me into Your presence
Guiding me by Your Holy Spirit
Teach me dear Lord, to live all of my life
Through Your eyes*

And I'm captured by Your Holy calling, Set me apart, I know You're drawing me to Yourself, Lead me Lord, I pray.

*Take me, mould me, use me, fill me
I give my life to the Potter's Hand
Call me, You guide me, lead me, walk beside me
I give my life to the Potter's Hand*

(Darlene Zschech)

Benediction

For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:
"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

(2 Corinthians 5:16)

