

“Covenant of Peace”

Isaiah 54:1-17

Sunday, March 24th, 2024

God is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. Those who know Jesus Christ savingly - who trust that He is the Messiah and the Holy One of Israel - are God's covenant people. The Church is a covenant family. It is the best family of all!

In the third century, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to his friend Donatus: "It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which are a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians... and I am one of them."

Maybe you're wondering, just what is a covenant anyway? The *First Catechism* defines a covenant as "A relationship that God establishes with us and guarantees by His Word." (Q. 24) Presbyterian Church in America pastor and author O. Palmer Robertson in his book, *Covenants: God's Way with His People*, defines a covenant as "a bond in blood sovereignly administered." (p. 11)

At creation, God made a covenant with the first man, Adam. That covenant is the **covenant of life** (also known as the **covenant of works**). In this covenant of life (or works), God required Adam to obey God perfectly. If Adam obeyed God, then God would reward Adam with life. If Adam didn't obey God, then he (Adam) would die.

Genesis Chapter 3 reveals what happened. God had forbidden our first parents from eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But, tempted by the serpent (Satan), Eve ate of the fruit, and she gave it to Adam, who also ate. They fell in their disobedience to God. He then cast them out of paradise (the Garden of Eden).

What Adam failed to achieve in the covenant of works, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, achieved through the covenant of grace. In that covenant, Jesus represented His elect people and He obeyed the whole law for His people, and then suffered the punishment due for our sins.

The covenant of grace has several manifestations. Here they are in order of their administration:

- the covenant of preservation with Noah (Genesis Chapters 6-9),
- the covenant of promise with Abraham (Genesis Chapters 12, 15 & 17),
- the covenant of the law with Moses (Exodus, Chapter 20),
- the covenant of the kingdom with David (2 Samuel 7), and
- the covenant of consummation (new covenant) with Jesus (Jeremiah 31).

We come this morning to **Isaiah Chapter 54** in our continuing sermon study of the Old Testament book named Isaiah. And we see in this chapter Isaiah referring to a “covenant of peace.” God has entered into a bond in blood covenant with His people; and it is Jesus’ blood that cleanses us from all our sins.

Isaiah 54:1-17:1 - “Sing, O barren, You *who* have not borne!
Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,
You *who* have not labored with child!
For more *are* the children of the desolate
Than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD.

2 - “Enlarge the place of your tent,
and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings;
do not spare;
lengthen your cords,
and strengthen your stakes.

3 - For you shall expand to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will inherit the nations,
and make the desolate cities inhabited.

4 - “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.

5 - For your Maker *is* your husband,
the LORD of hosts *is* His name;
and your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel;
He is called the God of the whole earth.

6 - For the LORD has called you
like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a youthful wife when you were refused,”
says your God.

7 - “For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
but with great mercies I will gather you.

8 - With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,”
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

9 - “For this *is* like the waters of Noah to Me;
for as I have sworn

that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth,
so have I sworn
that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.

10 - For the mountains shall depart
and the hills be removed,
but My kindness shall not depart from you,
nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,”
says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

11 - “O you afflicted one,
tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted,
behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.

12 - I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
Your gates of crystal,
and all your walls of precious stones.

13 - All your children *shall be* taught by the LORD,
and great *shall be* the peace of your children.

14 - In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.

15 - Indeed they shall surely assemble, *but* not because of Me.
Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake.

16 - “Behold, I have created the blacksmith
who blows the coals in the fire,
who brings forth an instrument (weapon) for his work;
and I have created the spoiler (destroyer) to destroy.

17 - No weapon formed against you shall prosper,
and every tongue *which* rises against you in judgment
you shall condemn.
This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
and their righteousness *is* from Me,”
says the LORD.”

In this chapter, Isaiah uses three images to portray the miracle of God’s grace. The servant of the Lord has changed everything by His sufferings, death, and resurrection from the dead. Isaiah helps us grasp what the servant’s victory is worth to us. Then in the next chapter (55) the prophet coaxes us in how to enjoy this amazing grace.

There was the covenant with Abraham (then known as Abram) in verses 1-3).
This covenant is pictured in today’s text as a barren woman rejoicing over her growing family. The barren woman of verse 1, the tent in verse 2, and the mention of

descendants in verse 3 make us recall Abraham's circumstances and the promises God made to him.

Those promises are **Genesis Chapter 12:1-3:**

1 - Now the LORD had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,
from your family
and from your father's house,
to a land that I will show you.

2 - I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
and make your name great;
and you shall be a blessing.

3 - I will bless those who bless you,
and I will curse him who curses you;
and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

"As Abraham received the promises as a tent-dweller in a foreign land, so his descendant are to remember them who dwelt in exile. God stands by His promises! God's people will spread out to the right and to the left in the land promised to their father Abraham long ago." (Webb, 215)

Then, there was the covenant of the law (often referred to as the covenant at Mt. Sinai where God gave His law to Moses) beginning with the reference to the Lord as Israel's Maker, husband, and Redeemer (vs. 5). This covenant is pictured as a lonely wife comforted by her loving husband (verses 4-10). "In her youth Israel, as verse 4 indicates, had suffered the shame of slavery in Egypt; in her maturity she was to suffer the disgrace of widowhood in Babylon. But as the Lord then took her to be His bride, entering into a covenant with her at Mt Sinai, so he would take her again and renew His relationship with her.

A recent study by Rutgers University found that fewer Americans are getting married these days, and that of those who do, fewer than ever say they are "very happy." The national marriage rate has dropped 43% over the last 4 decades, with many couples opting to live together outside marriage.

One of the study's authors believes that popular culture reinforces this trend: "With the breakdown of the family, peer culture, including pop culture, has gotten stronger. Nothing could be more anti-marriage than much of popular culture."

In such times, it's more important than ever that believers have a biblical understanding of marriage. Along these lines, it's instructive to consider the biblical metaphor of God as Husband.

In the Old Testament, prophets frequently spoke of God as a husband and Israel as a faithless wife, whoring after idols. But, even though He had every right to divorce her, God pursued and loved Israel nonetheless.

So, God is Israel's husband (verse 5). His key attributes in this regard are His "everlasting kindness" and "unfailing love" (verses 8 & 10). Both qualities translate the important Hebrew word *hesed*, often used of God's covenant faithfulness. For a moment, God sent Israel away, but the Lord "has call [her] back as if [she] were a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit" (v. 6). He is her Redeemer (verses 5 & 8).

The context for this passage is God's promise that Israel will return from exile and prosper. God exiled the nation as discipline for her sins. However, "His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime" (**Psalms 30:5**). As in the days of Noah, sin had to be punished, but mercy will ultimately win (verse 9).

The covenant with Noah next comes into view in verses 9-17. It is pictured as a poor city beautified with costly jewels. The covenant with Noah was a covenant with the entire human race. After the flood, Noah's family spread out and brought new life and blessing to the whole earth.

Verse 10 is very important - it is where I received the inspiration for the title to this message. I like what Ray Ortlund has to say about it:

"The gospel is not "He loves me, He loves me not," depending on our own loveliness. The grace of God is a "covenant of peace", a permanent arrangement bring us a wholeness we don't deserve. Therefore, we can enjoy God's grace without fearing that He'll retract it. We didn't cause His grace to begin with, so we can't reverse it now. God's anger is real, but passing. His love is also real, and lasting - forever. For all spiritual whores who will receive it, this is God's Word! Break forth into singing and cry aloud as verse 1 teaches!

The history-spanning movement of God's covenantal work is compacted in **Ezekiel 37:24-28**. Speaking of His people, God says:

"David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.

Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."

In that happy day, God will have brought His covenantal purposes to their final perfection, just as He guaranteed with Noah. The land that He had promised to Abraham will be filled with the seed that He likewise had promised (**Ezekiel 37:25**). That

people will radiate the holiness to which God had directed them in the Mosaic covenant (**Ezekiel 37:24**), even as they are ruled by the King promised to David (**Ezekiel 37:24**) and enjoy the nearness foretold in the new covenant prophesied (**Ezekiel: 37:27**).

All the old sorrows will be gone, the old divisions healed. Throughout the unfolding covenant of grace, God gradually had sketched out the particulars of His eternal redemptive purpose. Piece by piece, He had shown His people more about what He had purposed to do. And from the golden streets of the new Jerusalem, all the saints clothed in white will see that this, finally, is that to which God had been drawing their hearts all along, even as He had been shaping them as a people distinctively His own.”

Let's apply this text under the auspices of hope.

God's promise, the thing meant to bring comfort to the people in the middle of the storms, was to point them toward the heavenly things.

Don't keep waiting for this life to be better. It may never be better.

For us, some may have financial difficulties, others may have very difficult health problems, others have difficulties at home or in relationships. We can tend to put our hope into these things getting better, which they may. *Are we putting our hope on the wrong things?*

What about Christians in China, pastors who have been sitting in prison for preaching the gospel? Do they put their hope in being released?

What about Christians in Northern India who are being persecuted and killed by zealous Hindus? Do they put their hope in being released?

Don't put your hope in the wrong thing. Hope is a Person; He is our Blessed Hope! Put your hope in Him!

An enthusiastic believer in Christ, Dan Richardson, lost his battle with cancer. But his life demonstrated that even though the physical body may be destroyed by disease, the spirit can remain triumphant. This poem was distributed at his memorial service:

Cancer is so limited...

*It cannot cripple love,
It cannot shatter hope,
It cannot corrode faith,
It cannot eat away peace,
It cannot destroy confidence,
It cannot kill friendship,
It cannot shut out memories,
It cannot silence courage,
It cannot invade the soul,
It cannot reduce eternal life,
It cannot quench the Spirit,
It cannot lessen the power of the resurrection.*

Don't give up the fight.