

It's Our Turn

Introduction:

- A word about covenants – what they are. Our rights and our duties.
- Name and describe the several covenants between God and man
 - Be God's partner in creation and tend to the garden. Eat of all the trees except one.
 - The rainbow – a sign of a covenant between God and humans that God would never again flood the earth completely
 - The covenant between God and Abraham/Sarah – you will be my people and I will be your God.
 - The covenant of the law proclaimed in the 10 commandments. Follow these and live.
- They all have two things in common. One – God reached out to humans Two- we broke the covenant while god remained faithful

P1 Isaiah 49:8-16 ()

- V-8 (*This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances.*)
 - I just love passages that start this way. "Thus says the Lord". Reminds me of Carleton Heston as Moses speaking to Pharaoh.
 - There is a lot of power when God speaks – Mountains tremble and the earth shakes. Jesus calmed the sea with just a word and demons obey him.
 - Then there was the time when the angry men brought a woman accused of adultery to him, hoping that he would sanction their violence and intolerance. Instead he told them to go ahead – as long as the one with no sin among them through the first stone. When God speaks mighty things occur and we have the chance to be taught by God if we will just listen,
 - This is what the Lord God says:
 - *In the time of my favor I will answer you In the day of salvation I will help you*
 - *I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land*
 - I don't know about you, but that sounds somewhat familiar to me. I distinctly remember speaking, and then hearing words spoken to me that mean the same thing.
 - For better or worse. In sickness and in health. In good times and in bad times. It does not come as a surprise that the words we speak, the vows we make when we marry carry the same intent and level of commitment as the words God spoke to us, creating a covenant between us.
 - When a man and a woman stand in front of family, friends, a congregation, a preacher and God to exchange their wedding vows they are truly committing all that they have and all they are to the other person – and God has done the same thing.
- V-9 (*say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.*)
 - We are the prisoners. Locked away in a prison of separation and isolation of our own making.
 - God did not put us in this jail- prison, we did that all on our own – but God did, does, and will forever encourage us to leave that place behind and to rejoin the holy family.
 - But things are not that simple. To one degree or another we do not want to leave our comfortable prisons behind. They are familiar and to a degree they are even comfortable. To paraphrase an old saying, better the prison you know than the one you don't know.
 - When Moses led the people of God out into the desert, out into freedom there were several times when the people wanted to surrender and return to Egyptian Bondage.
 - Tell the story about Narnia, the end of time, and the dwarves stuck in the hut. They were so afraid of being taken in, that no one – not even Aslan could bring them out.
 - Those dwarves and we have a lot in common. God has set a table before us – and all we can taste is the disappointment.

- God opened the door and said we are free – we are skeptical, thinking there is a catch, and we are unwilling to trust.
- God said you are forgiven – come home. We refuse claiming we want to pay our own debts.
- V-10 (*They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.*)
 - God has bid us come out of our prisons. But at the same time God has given us an idea or picture of what it is we go to. V-10 is meant to give us a glimpse of heaven – just a tiny peak. No hunger. No thirst. We are not just talking about food and water here – we are speaking also of spiritual peace. When at last the day comes when we join our heavenly father our spirits will know a peace and contentment only dreamed of here on earth.
- V-11 (*I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up (KJ = Exulted)*)
 - Mountain roads are generally narrow, winding, and difficult to travel. Yet that is where God meets people. In this verse God is telling the people – and us that God intends to flatten the mountains, turn them into roads, remove all the barriers, and make it as easy as possible for us to go to God.
 - Some of the mountains are real mountains. And yet, some of them are of our own making and more figurative in nature.
 - One of those mountain roads we seem to have so much trouble with is living according to God's plan for us (the 10 commandments) No matter how little or how hard we try we just can't seem to get through the week without breaking some of those commandments. God bids us do our best but also says that through Christ's blood our failures and sins are forgiven, and washed away completely
- V-14 (*But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me."*)
 - It never ceases to make me smile when I read passages like this. When we humans find ourselves in a jam and then accuse the Lord of having abandoned us.
 - Remember with me the story of the man and his dream of walking along the beach. Two sets of footsteps, his and Jesus'. Yet at the darkest of times there was only one set of footprints and the man assumed they were his and that Jesus had abandoned him.
 - Then there was the time that the people of God complained, thinking that God/Moses had brought them out into the desert to die.
 - Don't forget what Lazarus' sister said when Jesus finally arrived – If you had BEEN here – Read between the lines, she was accusing him of abandoning them.
 - And yet in every one of those cases and all the others that we might think of God did not abandon us – we turned our backs on God.
 - There certainly have been many times when we deserved to be abandoned and forgotten. There has only been one case of God turning his back on someone and that was God's own son Jesus. Remember Jesus' words on the cross; tucked in there between Father forgive them and it is finished Jesus cries out – Father why have you abandoned me. The answer is simple and compelling – Christ was paying for our sins – he was suffering the separation from God that we deserved and he was doing it so we would never have to know what that is like.
- V-15/16 (*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me*)
 - And then there is God's assurance to us. A rock solid – God proclaimed guarantee – I will never forget you.
 - God goes on to say that God has our names engraved on his hands so there is no way we can be forgotten. Our names were engraved there one dark Friday afternoon by some Roman soldiers using a hammer and some nails.

Conclusion (A call to action)

- And then there was the last covenant – the one sealed in Christ's blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus invited us to take, eat, and drink. I can almost hear him say, "I've done my part – now it's your turn. Live like the child of God, love like I have loved you.