

Sermon – 06/08/2006 am

Covenant Renewal – Commitment

Study Text: Deuteronomy 29:10-15

Commitment is not popular these days. People want to live together without making any commitment to one another. Even with easy divorce, the thought of making a public commitment to another person in marriage is too binding for many. People do not want to be committed to raising children. If they have children they want someone else to be responsible for caring for them. In the workplace commitment between employer and employee is hard to find. Workers come and go at will.

Even in the church commitment to a fellowship has largely disappeared. Many Christians are like kangaroos, hopping from one place to another. If they do not get what they want in one place or they disagree with someone they pack up and go to another. Those who do not want to be committed are usually those who are selfish and end up being unfaithful. The Bible has a lot to say about such unfaithfulness.

What then about commitment to Jesus? Those who are afraid to make any commitment to a fellowship will waver in their commitment to the Lord. You will find they fail to attend any fellowship for extended periods of time. For some making a commitment to Jesus is just too costly. They want Jesus to be around when they need him, but at other times they get by without him.

Mention of turning away from sin, from the pleasures and treasures of this world, is often met with shock. 'Give up my old friends, give up my pleasures in life, and give up authority over my own life'! 'No one told me about this when I became a Christian'! Tragically the gospel is often presented in such a way these days. People are told 'you can have Jesus without giving up the 'good life', without any serious commitment'. Moses warns against saying *I shall have peace even though I follow the dictates of my own heart, as though a drunkard could be included with the sober* (29:19).

Stand before the Lord

All of you stand today before the Lord your God (29:10). Moses reminded them of the solemnity of this occasion of covenant renewal. They had not gathered to listen to a political leader or a religious leader. They were standing before the Lord to hear his words and to make a commitment to the Lord their God. They stood before the throne of the almighty and eternal God. When the Lord made a covenant with them at Horeb they stood before the burning and thundering mountain in great fear. Once again they stood before the Lord God to renew the covenant.

What about today? Do we not stand before the Lord as we come to renew our commitment the covenant of grace? As you come to the Lord's Table what are you thinking? Are you worried at what people are wearing? Are you thinking about their sins? Are you lamenting the old days when things were done differently? Are you like those who rebelled against Moses, the servant of the Lord? Moses reminded them that they were not standing before him but *before the Lord your God*.

You stand today before the Lord your God. Think about the Lord and your relationship to him. Think about the covenant he made with you in the blood of Jesus Christ. Think about that precious blood that cleanses you from your sin. If the blood of Jesus means nothing to you then you have no place at his Table. Come before the Lord humbly confessing your sin and believing that Jesus went to the Cross for you.

You come to this table to receive the bread and the wine. It was Jesus who first gave these elements to his disciples in the upper room. It is Jesus who continues to give these to us today. This is the Lord's Table. We take the simple elements of bread and wine that were bought down at the shop. They are not changed by any prayers that we make. It is you who will be changed, not the bread. But we take them as from the Lord. *Take, eat, this is my body broken for you; this do in remembrance of me.* These are the words Jesus spoke.

Today we stand not before a burning, thundering mountain; *but you have come to Mt Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... to God the judge of all...to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling* (Hebrews 12:22-24). You come before the judge of all, the God before whom all will one day have to give account for their deeds. There is no escaping this judgment. You will not be able to blame someone else for your sin. You will not be able to change the law, bribe the judge, or flee to some hiding place.

Only Jesus will be able to defend you on that day (I John 2:1). He will point to the Cross, to his blood shed for you who believe. *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh/sinful nature but according to the Spirit* (Romans 8:1). Do you hear those words today? Do you love the sound of those words? Let us rejoice in the great salvation that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Covenant Established

The apostle Paul often spoke of being 'in Christ'. What did he mean by this? Jesus spoke about coming and making his home with anyone *who loves me and keeps my word* (John 14:23). He promised to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in his disciples (John 14:17). But Paul spoke about believers being 'in Christ'. How are we 'in Christ'? The teaching of the covenant may well be behind this expression used by Paul, for believers enter into a covenant with Jesus Christ when they believe. 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood' said Jesus – and they all drank from it.

As the people stood before the Lord on the plains of Moab, Moses called upon them to *enter into covenant with the Lord your God...which the Lord your God makes with you today* (29:12). There are two aspects of the covenant here. Firstly the Lord makes the covenant, and secondly the people were to enter into that covenant.

The Hebrew words translated as 'make' and 'enter' are rather interesting. 'Make' is literally 'cut'. A covenant was cut. This refers to the animal that was cut in half in the covenant making ceremony (Genesis 15, Jeremiah 34). 'Enter in' is literally 'pass through', a reference to the same ceremony in which the recipients, the people, passed between the two halves of the animal. This was a solemn ceremony and a very meaningful one. It was during such a ceremony that the Lord told Abraham his descendants would return to Canaan after 400 years to inherit the land.

Christians today do not follow such a covenant making ceremony. But we do enter into covenant with the Lord when we are baptised. *As many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death* (Romans 6:3). As the body of Christ was torn upon the Cross the curtain in the temple was torn in two, and the new and living way was opened into God's holy presence.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is like covenant renewal. We entered into this covenant by baptism. We remember Jesus and the covenant God has made with us in Jesus Christ. This new covenant is better than the old because there is forgiveness of sin in the blood of Jesus. Moreover, we are given a new heart on which the laws of God are written (Hebrews 8:10).

God made the covenant with all the people gathered before him there by the Jordan. Included were all the men of Israel, their wives, their children and even their servants and strangers (29:11). God had delivered them all out of Egypt and brought them all through the wilderness – except for those who rebelled. They would all enter Canaan. Moses in fact goes on to say that God was making the covenant not only with them but with those not present on that day (29:15). Future generations would be brought into this covenant. It is a covenant of grace and the Lord includes whomever he chooses. The elect from all nations and from all generations will be included.

Are you included in this covenant? You can be sure because it is all by grace. If you are doubtful it is because you still think it is by some merit of your own that you enter. Remember Romans 8:1. In this covenant, in Christ Jesus, we enjoy great blessings from the hand of the Lord – if we remain faithful.

Covenant Oath

You enter in covenant with the Lord your God and into his oath (29:12). We skipped over this little word 'oath' before but we must come back and consider it. Literally it means 'curse'. The one who enters into a covenant will incur a curse if they violate the covenant obligations.

Any agreement comes with its sanctions or penalties. Breaking a marriage agreement may mean losing a house, losing access to children and more. Despite all the desires and wisdom of men there always are, and always will be, penalties for breaking marriage covenants.

Cutting a covenant was a solemn ceremony involving death, as we have seen. Passing between the dissected calf symbolised not only entering into covenant, but also into the covenant curse. Like the dead calf *their dead bodies will be meat for the birds of heaven* says the Lord, if they break the covenant (Jeremiah 34:20).

One does not enter into covenant lightly and one does not enter into it a second time. If you turn away from the Lord he will give you over to the destruction of the flesh (I Corinthians 5:5). You will suffer at the hands of Satan who shows no mercy.

As you come to the Lord's Table remember the covenant you have entered into, and walk in obedience to the commands of Christ. If you stumble he will lift you up for God is merciful. But if you turn away and ignore the Lord and his word he will hold you guilty of the blood of the Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon