

You're in the Story of God Making a Covenant with His People

Message 2 of 5 in the series "You're in the Story"

1. God's desire has always been to create a people of His own who would love Him and serve Him.

"...Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you." Jeremiah 7:23 (ESV)

2. God made a covenant with His people when He met with them at Mount Sinai.

"Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me... Then God gave the people all these instructions: 'I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods... You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God... Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... Honor your father and mother... You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely against your neighbor. You must not covet...' Exodus 19:5, 20:1-17(NLT)

"Look, today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse! You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. But you will be cursed if you reject the commands of the Lord your God and turn away from him and worship gods you have not known before."

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (NLT)

- a. God gave His people a hard copy of the terms of the covenant so they would never forget it. "Have the people make an Ark of acacia wood—a sacred chest 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. Overlay it inside and outside with pure gold... Place inside the Ark the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you. Then put the atonement cover on top of the Ark. I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant." Exodus 25:10-11a, 21-22a (NLT)
- b. The people of Israel gladly accepted God's conditions. "...Moses went down to the people and repeated all the instructions and regulations the Lord had given him. All the people answered with one voice, 'We will do everything the Lord has commanded.'" Exodus 24:3 (NLT)
- c. Despite their promises, God's people couldn't keep their part of the agreement for even six weeks. "When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. 'Come on,' they said, 'make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt.' ... Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf... The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry. The Lord told Moses, 'Quick! Go down the mountain! Your people whom you brought from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. How quickly they have turned away from the way I commanded them to live!'" Exodus 32:1-8a (NLT)

3. Jesus came to mediate a new and better covenant.

"(Jesus) is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises. If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it. But when God found fault with the people, he said: 'The day is coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to my covenant, so I turned my back on them, says the Lord. But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives saying, "You should know the Lord." For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already. And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.'" Hebrews 8:6b-12 (NLT) (see also Jeremiah 31:31-34)

- a. The new covenant deals with sin permanently. "The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide

perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God, 'You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. Then I said, "Look, I have come to do your will, O God—as is written about me in the Scriptures.'"

Hebrews 10:1-7 (NLT) (See also Psalm 40:6-8)

- b. The new covenant is unconditional because it is a covenant of grace. "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." Ephesians 2:8-9
- c. The new covenant is internal, not external. "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death." Romans 8:1-2 (NLT)

"Clearly, you are a letter from Christ showing the result of our ministry among you. This 'letter' is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts." 2 Corinthians 3:3 (NLT)
- d. The new covenant is available now to anyone who surrenders his/her life to Jesus. "But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God's children"
John 1:12 (NET)

Note: Cutting a covenant with God requires a blood sacrifice. "...This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you." Luke 22:20 (NLT) (See also Genesis 15:9-10)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. How do you feel about signing contracts? How do you feel about "making a covenant" with God?
2. Read Exodus 24:3 & 32:1-8. Why were the people camped at Mt. Sinai willing to break a covenant they had made with God only 40 days earlier? Share a time when someone broke a contract they had made with you. How did you respond?
3. Read Hebrews 8:6-12. Why did Jesus come to mediate a new covenant between us and God? What was wrong with the old one?
4. Discuss the following four advantages of the new covenant available through Jesus:
 - The new covenant deals with sin permanently. (Hebrews 10:1-7, 1 Peter 3:18)
 - The new covenant is unconditional because it is a covenant of grace. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
 - The new covenant is internal, not external. (Romans 8:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:3)
 - The new covenant is available now to anyone who surrenders his/her life to Jesus. (John 1:12, 3:16)
5. What excuses do people give for not accepting the terms of the new covenant with God available through Jesus? What excuses do we give for not telling as many people as we can about this amazing opportunity?
6. Spend a few minutes as a group praying for spiritual renewal in our church, in our city, in our state, and in our country. What would this look like?