

THE BLOOD COVENANT

Airlines Christian Fellowship - The Covenant heart of God [1]

The covenant that God has made with His people, has its origins in something that God did with Abraham, and the benefits of that we still reap today in a marvellous way.

Gen. 15

This is a blood covenant. If two Israelites were to enter such a covenant with each other they would do 4 things.

1. They would lay at each other's feet their shield and sword. That was a symbol that they would be one another's protector.

2. They would lay their belts and their coats at each other's feet. That was a symbol that everything they owned belonged also to them.

3. The covenant would be sealed in blood in two ways. They would sacrifice an animal, cutting the carcass in two and placing the two sides a little distance apart so that they could walk between these two walls of blood.

They would walk together in the figure of an 8 [symbol of eternity] and then they would make an incision in their wrists so that they drew blood. They would allow the blood to trickle down into the palms of their hands and they would then shake hands. [origin of handshake].

4. They would swop names.

And they finally swopped names. The name of God in Hebrew is an unpronounceable YHWH - the sound of breath.

Now when God changed Abram's name to Abraham He was doing much more than changing the meaning from "Father is lofty" to "Father of multitudes / nations"

God added His name to Abram - Abraham - This is even clearer with his wife as there is no significant difference in meaning from Sarai to Sarah - but in adding God's name the earlier Hebrew rendering of "Princess", Sarai, is now known as Sarah, meaning the same. And God from this moment onwards is known as the 'God of Abraham' and later 'Isaac and Jacob' are added also. The marriage covenant of many nations follows this covenant.

Now when God entered into covenant with Abram they followed this procedure - except Abram had nothing to offer God, he couldn't protect Him, all that he had was given by God anyway. So

God did His part. The statement "I am your shield, your very great reward" is God saying that He is Abram's protector and provider.

The animal is sacrificed as we mentioned - but since Abram could not meet with God, God caused him to sleep while He passed through the carcass. Indeed, Abram could not participate in any of this, all that he was was given by God anyway, so Abram's great contribution was to snore in a corner while God did His part!

Relevance for us

Now what does this have to do with our Christian lives today? The answer lies in the events of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, which culminated in the cross. For here, He entered into a NEW covenant with His people.

And He, the firstborn of all creation, was to make us joint heirs with Him - joint heirs of all that He inherited from the Father as the only begotten Son. Heirs of the promises of God, heirs of the wealth and riches of God, and heirs of the authority of God.

SHIELD AND SWORD

In N.T. terms that shield, sword, belt and coat is part of the spiritual armour that Paul teaches us in Ephesians 6. In the making of the blood covenant the shield and sword stood for protection over one another. We learn from the N.T. that the shield is the shield of faith and the sword is the Word of God. Apart from the personal application, there is a corporate / fellowship application as we pray down God's protection over one another by using the shield of faith and the Word of God.

BELT AND COAT

Likewise the belt and coat have their N.T. counterparts. We are told that the belt is the belt of truth. The covenant that God has made with us in Christ is one of truth. Jesus often prefaced what He said with the emphatic "truly truly". When we believe in Him we "*know the truth, and the truth sets us free.*"

The coat is the robe of righteousness. A coat that speaks of the fact that we are in a right relationship with God.

NAME SWOPPING

For us He took upon Himself the name we bear because of our character - sinners. And we, in turn, take on His name as we are known as CHRISTians.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Airlines Christian Fellowship - God's covenant heart [2]

Jn.13:1-17

To ask any of the disciples which act of Jesus impressed them most, would, I'm sure, have prompted a variety of responses. For Peter, I'm sure this incident would have left a lasting impression on his mind. In a later letter, remembering how Jesus got up and tied a towel around His waist, Peter calls his readers to "clothe yourselves with humility" - [lit., "tie around yourselves the apron of humility"]. John records it with vividness too. This event brought from Jesus "The full extent of His love".

On the surface, this should have been an ordinary scene. It was the duty of the host to arrange for someone to wash the guests feet. Among a group of men such as the disciples it would probably have been the youngest - but none of the disciples volunteered. Jesus was obviously waiting to see which disciple was prepared to serve the others.

Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave. For most of us when it gets near the time to leave a job the tendency is to slacken off. But for Jesus it meant showing a greater, more intense love. But as far as the 12 were concerned they weren't in the mood for niceties and courtesies - indeed they'd spent much of the day debating amongst themselves - who was the greatest. Lk.22:14,24f

It was a silent / searching rebuke. It is an action that draws out their pride: "You shall never wash my feet". It must have hurt their pride to take in what Jesus was doing. He taught them to receive His ministry - or else they had no part with Him. They needed to be cleansed of their pride, their self-sufficiency, their pre-occupation with themselves.

It is not easy to receive love if there has been a history of hurt / rejection / confidence-destroying in your family life.

From teaching them about their relationship with Him - He teaches them about their relationship with each other. He'd washed their feet - they were to wash one another's feet.

God's love is revealed by Servanthood.

Servanthood is the giving of oneself - "God so loved that world that He gave..." The great theme that is picked out here is the "servant theme" He is teacher / Lord - but amongst them as "one who serves". Lk 22:27 (one who serves) O.T. Isa 52:13 - 53-12 Mt. 12:17ff - Acts 3:25f/ 4:27,30

But perhaps the greatest analogy of all is to link this passage with Phil 2:5f.

Jn 13:4f

Phil 2:7f

<i>Laid aside His outer clothing</i>	- made Himself nothing
<i>Took a towel</i>	- took the nature of a servant - humbled himself
<i>Poured water into a bowl</i>	- Poured out His life unto death.

And the washing of the physical dirty feet becomes the cleansing of spiritually dirty lives.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.... The covenant love of God is shown in the immense ability of Christ to lay down His reputation by becoming a servant - which led eventually to Him being willing to lay down His very life.

"God so loved the world that He gave..." [Jn.3:16]

Later in one of his letters John says:

"Dear friends, since God first loved us, we ought to love one another..."

The willingness to learn these things is our willingness to become a servant like Him. Phil 2:5ff

"Tie around yourself an apron of humility" - serve one another. That is the heart of God.

FINDING GOD'S COVENANT HEART - 1

Habakkuk

QUESTION: How do you know that God loves you?

Habakkuk is all about a prophet wrestling with the tension of thinking that he knows God's heart - but finding that God doesn't appear to be acting according to his understanding. [1:2f] In the same way, one of the reasons why it is important that we find God's heart is surely that God's plan for all of our lives is to be a 'prophetic people'. I mean that in the broadest possible sense - to be God's 'mouthpiece'.

FRAMEWORK

Habakkuk was a man with a burden, [1:1], a Vision, [2:1], a prayer [3:1] and a Song, [3:17-19]. This pattern is not unique:

- 1 Moses Burden - The Lord gave Moses a burden to carry at the burning bush (Ex 3:7ff10) vision - Moses eventually caught the vision and wanted to return to Egypt (Ex 4:18) During the fulfilment there was a great deal of prayer (Ex 5:22f) But when all war accomplished there was song (1st in O.T. - Ex 15)
- 2 Hannah - burden - she was barren (1 Sam 1:4-6) vision (1 Sam 1:11) Prayer - (1Sam 1:12) - finally when all war accomplished she burst into song - the magnificat of the O.T. (1 Sam 2)
- 3 Paul - burden (Rom.9:2-4a) vision (Rom 11.26f) Prayer (Rom 10:1) Song (Rom.11:33)
- 4 Jesus - Burden (Lk.12:50), vision (Jn.12:32), prayer (Lk.22:44), song (Mt.26:30)

The pattern of Gods purpose in all these is to bring people **out of bondage into** life and liberty out of darkness into light - from just being God's creation to God's beloved children. From experiencing the things that God **DOES** to experiencing who God **IS**.

Burden

In order to understand what a burden is - Nu.4:21-27 - originated in the special responsibilities that the Gershonites carried. The Tabernacle was the visible presence of God wherever it was - amongst believers or unbelievers. The whole body of believers constitute the New Covenant understanding of the Temple - 1Cor 3:16 [plural] / (1Cor 6:19) [singular] / 1Pet 2:5.

Let us define our terms: It is not the burden of life. It is not "This is the cross I have to bear" syndrome. It is a burden concerning some aspect of God's presence amongst us - it is something that God has given.

Vision

2:1 "I will look to see what He will say..."

Prophets were known as "SEERS". The scripture tells us that without vision the people perish - (Prov 29:18), and therefore it is crucial that we become people who seek the Lord to see what He is saying about the particular thing that you are carrying.

Habakkuk, is conversational with God as he tries to grasp the vision. [1:2,17 3:8] There is no short cut to receiving a vision for the things that the Lord has laid on your heart. Habakkuk knew that, and he placed himself on that watchtower [symbolic of what he was doing] and said, in effect, "Lord I'm not moving until you have shown me what you are saying."

LOGOS - General word, everlasting, timeless. Jn 1:1ff

RHEMA - Specific word, in time and space. Mt.4:4; Jn.5:19 / 8:28 / 10:27; Acts 16:6-10.

A second important principle for listening is OBEDIENCE. God wants men and women today who will be obedient and have listening ears. [Solomon - 1Kg.3:9 - 'hearing heart']

FINDING GOD'S HEART - 2

Prayer

One of the things Hab. noticed regarding prayer was the more he prayed the worse it seemed to get. It draws out questions (from trust) - Jesus - why have you forsaken me? The reason that God does that is that it draws out of us our real commitment to the burden - at this point we will either give up or cry.

(Ex 5:22) Moses cried (1 Sam 1:11) Hannah cried (Rom 7:24) Paul cried (Mk 25:39) Jesus cried. Those are cries of the Spirit to bring release from the burden we are carrying so that the glory of God may be revealed. The prophetic ministry is a struggling ministry. I have no doubt that the usual pattern is "Ask and you shall receive".

There is in this prayer of chapt.3 a progression in Habakkuk's relationship with the Lord as he struggles with these

things: 3b-7 is IMPERSONAL, 8-15 is PERSONAL, and 16-18 is an INTIMATE INVOLVEMENT with what God is about.

In Habakkuk - the silences are as revealing as the revelation itself. Let us look at some reasons why God remains silent.

1. The silence of judgement (1Sam 2:12, 17, 3:1)
2. The silence of Mercy (Hab.1:2,5; Isa 53:7; Matt.26:53)
3. The silence of Testing (Job - all of it!; 2Chron 32:31)
4. The silence of waiting (Isa 30: 15,18)
5. The silence of love (Ps.131; Zeph 3:17 [RSV footnote])

Song .

Whatever the nature of the burden, the deliverance always leads to song.

Paul, in 1Cor.14 talks about preparation for coming together. Each one has something when they come together:

"A hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to:

"continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."

The sacrifice of praise is a considered response to all that He has done.

We have followed Habakkuk's experience in these studies and it is a surprise to find out what the outcome of his burden was: 3:16.

But, nevertheless it warranted a song of praise. It is a song that expresses the uniqueness of God, that Habakkuk should desire to praise Him despite the gloomy circumstances ahead, because His worthiness to be praised does not rest on whether or not He does nice or comfortable things.

So we must not feel that the song of triumph is to be triumphalism. Triumph, victory, deliverance is the coming forth of God's plan - not ours. It may not be comfortable for us.

The amazing truth of the scriptures is that if God is in it, however devastating it is, there will always be hope, and salvation, and deliverance at the end of the day. And that gives Habakkuk the freedom to jump for joy despite the immediate circumstances.