

Covenant Breakers... and Keepers

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning everybody. Good morning. Good morning, thanks. If you are new to Watermark, you don't know me, my name is Kevin, one of the leaders here. It's great to be with you this morning.

I saw a couple of familiar faces, some faces we haven't seen for a while. It's great to see friends, old and new. We are a couple of weeks out from Easter.

And so for the next few weeks we are going to be looking at various portions of scripture that help us think about Easter. If you are new to church or Christianity, you may think Easter, that's about Easter eggs and chocolate things.

And that's like a western holiday, I get some public holidays. But actually Easter is all about Jesus of Nazareth. And about his death on the cross. What we are going to do over the next few weeks is we are going to work through some passages of scripture in the Old Testament that show us or that shed light on what Easter is all about.

That help us understand the meaning of Easter. I don't know if you have ever played this game, maybe when you were a kid. You shine a spotlight and you make shapes out of your hands, right? So you are like, oh, it's an elephant and it's a dog and you make these shapes, a shining spotlight and the people behind you have to see the shadow and guess what animal it is.

[1 : 21] Do you know what I'm talking about? Okay. In some ways, much of the Old Testament is like that. There are these stories and these narratives that shine a light and they kind of give the outline of who Jesus is and what the gospel is all about and Christianity and Easter.

But they don't fill it in detail or in color. We are going to look at some of these passages of the next few weeks that give a bit of an outline, a shadow of what Easter is all about in the Old Testament and how the Old Testament foreshadows Jesus on the cross.

So today we are looking at this very famous passage in the Old Testament, Exodus 32 to 34. It's a long reading, so thank you Raymond and Soda. Now the context is this.

Just a few weeks before this event that's taken place, God has just rescued his people out of Egypt. This amazing, great deliverance. By the blood of the Lamb, Passover has happened.

They've been saved and rescued. And now they are traveling between Egypt and Canaan. Canaan is this land, this area of land that God promised to Abraham. He would give his descendants.

[2 : 30] And they're traveling in the wilderness that disappeared between Egypt and Canaan. And on this way, God has provided everything for them. He's given them food, he's given them water, he's given them clothing.

Everything they've needed, God has provided. And they come to a place called Mount Sinai, about halfway on the journey. There's some hills. And at this place, God tells Moses, the leader, the representative, to go up on the hill.

And God establishes a covenant, which is like a special relationship with his people, via Moses. So Moses is on top of Mount Sinai, and God establishes this covenant relationship.

And he gives Moses the terms and the conditions of the covenant, which are largely the Ten Commandments, plus some other instructions. And God's people, remember, the Israelites are not just religious people or spiritual people, they are God's covenant people.

It means they belong to him. They've entered into a special dynamic relationship with God. It's kind of like marriage, right? Marriage is a form of covenant. And when you get married, you say to your spouse, all that I am, with all that I have, I give myself to you.

[3 : 44] I now forsake all others, and I belong to you. You enter into this very special relationship. It's like, when I was married to Claire, my job is to love all people, to love all male and female, but I have a special love for Claire, that is reserved for her, right?

That's a covenant relationship. And so God's people are his covenant people. So Moses goes up to Mount Sinai, receives the Ten Commandments, the covenant terms and conditions. But while Moses is up there, things down below are falling apart.

Because the people of Israel don't know what's happened to Moses. He's up on the mountain, and they start to wonder, what's happened to the guy? He's taking a long time. Maybe he's died.

Maybe something's happened to him. If something's happened to Moses, how are we going to follow God? How are we going to know God's will for us? And so they start to scheme in the plan. They come up with a plan.

They go to Aaron, who's the second in charge, and they say, Aaron, make a golden idol for us. It's something that we can bow down and worship. It's not so much that they want to replace God, they just want a representative of God.

[4 : 51] They want something they can touch, something they can feel. It's a bit hard following God that you don't know where he is or what he's like. And so they want something tangible to feel and touch and look to and say, God is in our midst.

And so they say, Aaron, make us this calf. And Aaron does that. He produces this golden calf-like structure, and they bow down, they worship, and they celebrate, and they make a feast.

And what they think is a brilliant idea soon ends catastrophically. Look at chapter 32, verse 7. I'm going to have most of the scripture on the screen, but you can look at your bulletin.

God says to Moses, Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They've turned aside quickly, out of the way I commanded them. They've made themselves a golden calf.

They've worshipped it. They're sacrificing to it. They've said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. Now therefore, leave me alone. Let my wrath burn hot against them, that I may consume them.

[5 : 53] So it's hardly been one month since they've left Egypt. They're in the wilderness, and already things are falling apart. Their covenant relationship is in deep jeopardy.

It's been threatened. Because they haven't even, you know, Passover, and the Exodus, is fresh in their minds. It's only a few weeks from there.

And already, this special relationship that they've got with God, is under threat. It's falling apart.

Their covenant vows, they've broken them. And so now the relationship is under threat.

And it's kind of like, imagine, imagine, you're going to get married, right? So you go to Hong Kong Park, you go to the marriage center there, and you get dressed up, and you're in your very best, and you go in, you make your appointment, you go in, and you're so excited, and you've got a photographer there, and the marriage officer comes, and he leads you in saying your vows, and you say your vows, and your spouse says their vows, and he says, right, I now legally pronounce you before the government of Hong Kong, you are married, husband and wife.

And you put your hands over each other, and you take photos of the rings, and it's also nice, and you go outside, and you say to your wife, I'm just going to go get the marriage certificate, just wait here. And you go inside, you get the marriage certificate, and you come out, and your wife is behind the trees, with the photographer, kissing and cuddling, and the ink hasn't even dried on the paper, and already the vows are broken.

[7 : 29] Or imagine even worse. I mean, it sounds funny, but it's not funny, right? You go on honeymoon, and you say to your husband, I'll meet you downstairs now, and you go downstairs, you're in the Maldives, you're on honeymoon, and you see your husband slipping his phone number to somebody across the bar, saying, call me later.

It's like, you've just made the covenant. It's only just begun, and already you're breaking it. And that's what's happening with Israel here. They've only just left Egypt.

Moses is up the mountain, busy getting the terms and conditions, and Israel already worshipping other gods. They're going after other lovers. And friends, the Bible says that actually, in some ways, this is a picture of what all sin is like.

Sin at a fundamental level, at a deep heart level, it's actually a form of idolatry. It's a form of saying, there's something else that's going to become, that's become more important to me than you, God. I'm going to, I'm going to say no to you, and I'm going to give myself to something else. Something other than the God who's created us to know him, and love him, and be in a relationship with him.

[8 : 41] You know, Martin Luther, a famous pastor, 500 years ago, said, nobody breaks any of the 10 commandments, especially the latter half, like, do not steal, do not lie, do not commit adultery,

do not commit murder.

Nobody breaks any of those, unless you first break the very first commandment. And the first commandment is, don't have any other gods before me. And he's right, right? When you, when I, when I do something, let's say I lie to a colleague, to protect my reputation, my reputation.

What am I actually doing? Something's become more important to me than God in that moment. What people think of me, my reputation before others, is more important to me than God. So, so I do that, because actually, God is not that important.

Or let's say I, lie in my tax return, right? I tell the government, this is what I earned this year, but actually there's a whole lot of other stuff on the side, I don't really want to tell them. What's happened? Something else has become more important to me than Jesus Christ, than God. That's actually become my God. I say, Lord, I'm going to look to you, I'm going to trust in this, this thing will make me happy. And so Martin Luther was right, when he said, whenever we, whenever we sin, when we do these things, we always try to look to some other God, whether our reputation, whether our face, our financial security, our pleasure, our comfort, something else has taken the place of God.

[10:01] And we're loving, and worshipping, and looking to that thing, to give us security, and meaning, and peace, and hope. And that means, in a way, all sin is a kind of covenant unfaithfulness.

A kind of covenant breaking. A way of saying, God, I know I should love you, but I'm going to love something else. more than you. This thing has become more important to me than God.

And so, look what happens in our passage, chapter 33, verse 1. The Lord says to Moses, okay, go, depart from here, you and the people, that you brought out of the land of Egypt, go to the land that I saw to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob.

In other words, go to the promised land. I will send my angel before you, I will drive out your enemies, Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, et cetera. But I, I'm not going to go with you, lest I consume you along the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.

In other words, you are a stubborn people. So God says, Moses, the marriage is over. The covenant is over. He says, you can still go, and actually, I will send my angel, I will help you, I will send my blessing ahead of you, I'll clear out the way, you can go and live in the promised land, but I'm not going to be with you.

[11:12] This relationship, I'm no longer going to be your people, you're not going to, you're not going to be my people, I'm not going to be your God. This relationship is over. It's kind of like, in a marriage, right? Someone says, this marriage is over.

You can keep the house, the furniture we bought, you can keep that, the engagement ring, you can have that, but I'm not moving in with you. Our relationship is, is over. And the reason is, he says, if we go on this journey together, and you Israelites, keep on behaving like that, my justice, my integrity, my commitment to my holiness, is going to destroy you.

Because the consequences for sin, is always death and destruction. Always. You know, friends, when we sin, when I sin, let me use myself as an example, somewhere deep in my heart, I'm always doing a cost-benefit analysis.

Okay, this is the cost, this is the benefit, okay, it's worth it, I'm going to go for it, right? Now that happens at a deep subconscious level. Friends, sin always, always, costs us more than we expect. Always costs more than you bargained for. And the consequences are always, death and destruction. And so God says, this is not going to work. This relationship needs to come to an end.

[12:26] Now here's a quick question, on the side note, question for us. I wonder how we would feel, if God said this to us. If God said to us, this morning, you can go, and have all of my blessings, I will send my angel before you, I will clear the path to you, I will open up the way, I will, you can have all my blessings, you can have heaven, and everything you want, but I'm not going to be there.

How would we feel? I think if we're honest, we'd be tempted to say, that sounds like a great deal. I mean, I can get all the good life, all the blessings of God's favor, and I don't even need to keep this relationship with God.

That sounds like a good deal. But actually friends, it's a terrible deal. And look what happens here, verse 4. When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, they grieved.

Because this is terrible, terrible news. It's traumatic. God says, I am no longer going to be your people. You are no longer going to be my God. Sorry.

I think I've got that wrong the whole morning, right? You are not going to be my people. I'm not going to be your God. Now they are without God.

[13:44] They are without hope. They are without purpose. They are without meaning. They are without identity. They are without security. They are without peace. In a world, bobbing along on their own.

Without God. Friends, if you're not a Christian this morning, this may sound really strange to you. But I want you to see that the divine being, who created everything that exists, that we call God, He created you to know Him, and love Him, and be in relationship with Him, and to experience peace, and security, and identity, and meaning, and wholeness, in relationship with Him.

And just because you don't believe in Him, doesn't mean that He doesn't believe in you. And that He doesn't have a purpose for you. This is what it means to be a human being. To be in relationship with the God who made you to know Him.

And yet the problem is, things always get in the way. Things always get in the way. And so, look what Israel do. They grieve, and they mourn. It's like somebody has died.

Because actually, the most important thing about them has died. Their relationship with God has died. And so, Moses, in the rest of the chapter, Moses begins to intercede. Look at verse 12.

[15:01] He goes, and he says, Lord, we need you. He says, God, us going into the promised land, enjoying all of the good life, without you being there, is meaningless.

There's no point. We are your people. That's our identity. That's who we are. If we go in, and you're not with us, there's no point in us even going in. God, this is who we are.

This is what it means to be your people. And so, eventually, God says, okay, fine. I will make it work. Look at verse 17. The Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken, or that you have asked for, I will do for you.

For you have found favor in my sight. God says, okay, Moses, I will find a way to still keep my covenant relationship with my covenant people. Now, the question is this.

How can this work? God says, I can't go into the promised land with you because of your sin. Okay? You are stubborn people. I can't go in.

[16:01] The relationship is broken. As a commitment to my own holiness, I will consume you. Listen, your sin and your rejection of me, your rejection of your covenant unfaithfulness, means that I can't go in with you.

But then he says, but I will go in with you. So, how do these two things come together? The other way of saying it is, how can God both take our sin and covenant breaking seriously, and yet overlook it at the same time?

There seems to be this paradox involved somehow. And friends, this is still a question for us today. Because, this isn't just theoretical or philosophical. This is deeply practical.

Because this week, friends, you and I are going to sin. This week, you and I are going to do things. Other things are going to become more important to us than Jesus Christ.

Friends, friends, this week, we are going to sacrifice our relationship with God on the altar of comfort, or financial security, or pleasure, or people pleasing. You and I are going to break relationship with God and worship other gods.

[17:07] And so, how do we maintain a relationship with God? Why doesn't God just say, okay, fine, go your own way, do your own thing? How is this, how is this going to work? And it seems to me like Moses himself is grappling with this question.

Because, in verse 17, God says, fine, I will go with you. I will still maintain relationship. And the next verse, verse 18, Moses says, God, show me your glory.

Show me your glory. Now, the word glory, sorry if I'm in the way, the word glory literally means weight. Weightiness. But the idea is substance. Okay?

If something has a lot of glory, it has substance to it, weight to it. What Moses is saying is, he's saying, God, I want to see the substance of who you are. I don't want to just see your, I don't want to know you superficially.

I don't want to just see the facade, the outside. I want to know the substance of who you are. God, I don't see how these things can come together. You are holy and righteous and perfect, and yet you are forgiving of your people.

[18:08] Show me who you are. Show me how these things work. And so God says, I will show you my glory. Verse 19, I will make all my goodness pass before you.

I will proclaim to you my name. Chapter 34, Verse 5. So the Lord descended in the cloud and stood before him there and proclaimed his name. The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations. Forgiving, iniquity, and transgressions, and sin. But who will by no means clear the guilty. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and the children's children, the third and fourth generation.

So Moses says, God, I want to know you for who you really are. Show me. And he says, this is who I am. And he doesn't show Moses a picture. He doesn't say, okay, you'll see me. He describes his truest attributes.

And how does he describe himself? Merciful and gracious. Abounding in steadfast love and forgiveness. To a thousand generations forgiving, transgression, iniquity, and sin.

[19:19] And yet, who by no means will clear the guilty. Now in a sense, that doesn't really answer our question, does it? The problem still persists. How is it that God is gracious and merciful and yet doesn't clear the guilty?

How is it that he forgives sin but he doesn't clear the sin? How does that work together? Next week, Niels is going to answer the question. Kind of.

I'm not going to give us the full answer today. Next week, we're going to look at half of it and then the following week, Oscar is going to tell us the full answer, okay? But, I want us to feel the tension. But, in this passage, there are two things that I think to look at that give us a clue. Two shadows that are going to paint the outline of the picture. What happens between chapter 32 when God's judgment comes and chapter 34 where God renews the covenant.

Because in chapter 34, God reinstates the Ten Commandments. Something, two dynamic things happen in between these two chapters. The first one is the people do something. The people do something.

[20:26] The first thing is the people repent. Look at chapter 33, verse 3 to 5 with me. God says, Go to the land for the land of milk and honey, but I will not go with you lest I consume you along the way for you are a stubborn people.

Verse 4, When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, Say to the people of Israel, you are a stubborn people. If for a single moment I will go with you, I will consume you. Verse 6, Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. They did that.

Now, the ornaments here, it's kind of jewelry, it's also maybe special clothing, it's special garments that they're wearing. Most commentators think what this has to do with is some kind of idol worship. There are things that are like maybe bracelets or bangles or rings or earrings. There are things that they are keeping with them that help them worship the various gods and the idols around them.

[21:27] In Genesis earlier on, Jacob, who is the grandson of Abraham, at one point he encounters God and he renews the covenant with God. And he says to all his family, his wives and his children and his servants, take off your ornaments.

And they dig a big hole, they bury them in the ground and they move on. It's kind of their way of recommitting themselves to God. The same thing is happening here. God says, I'm not going to be with you and the people mourn, they grieve.

And so they take off their rings to this God and that God, they throw them down and God says, remove them and says they strip themselves of them. It's kind of like they can't get rid of them quick enough.

I don't know if you've ever walked in on somebody who's doing something wrong, right? And they can't get away from the situation quick enough, right? They're on their computer looking at something they shouldn't be and they quickly close the computer or you tell your kid, don't eat the cookie and you walk in they're eating the cookie, you know, and it's like, they couldn't, they can't get rid of it quick enough.

That's what they're doing here. They're stripping themselves, they're taking off their chains, they're getting rid of the ornaments. They're grieving, they're mourning, they're repenting. It says, verse 6, they stripped themselves from Mount Horeb onwards.

[22 : 38] In other words, they left them behind and they moved on. And in the Old Testament, this, this passage here where God says He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love, this verse is kind of like a creed.

It becomes a statement that in the Old Testament they say again and again and again. But often, it's used to call people to repentance. So for instance, in Joel chapter 2, Joel is calling God's people back to himself.

And he quotes this passage, look at what he says here. He says, Yet even now declares the Lord, return to me with your heart, come back to me. Why? Return to the Lord. Why? For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And that's the point here. Who are those that God forgives? It's those who come to Him in faith and repentance. It's those who turn to Him. Friends, it's not the perfect because none of us are perfect. It's not those who only commit small sins that God forgives because all sin is deadly serious.

Friends, who does God forgive and is gracious towards? It's not those who can pay God back somehow because, friends, none of us can pay God back.

[23 : 53] So who is it that God forgives and is gracious and merciful to? It's those who see Him as a gracious and merciful God. It's those who turn to Him in faith and repentance.

It's those who see themselves as sinners in need of grace and say, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Friends, none of us are perfect. None of us only commit small sins.

None of us can pay God back. But all of us, all of us can get on our knees and say, God, I need you. Friends, have you done that?

Why don't you do that today? Don't leave this place. Why don't you draw near to the living God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and sin to a thousand generations.

This God is so good. So the first thing is the people repent. But there's a second thing that's going on here. And that is, let me not give it away. What is the determining factor between chapter 32 and chapter 34?

[25 : 02] There's one determining factor. There's something that's going on here. It's a man, right? There's one person that's involved. Who is it?

It's Moses. And what does Moses do? He mediates for the people. Moses stands in the gap and mediates on behalf of the people before God.

The big difference here is that there is a mediator who is righteous and God-fearing, who is full of God's favor, who can intercede for them and plead on their behalf.

Listen to Psalm 106. It describes this passage and it describes it so well. It says this, The people of Israel made a calf at Horeb. They worshipped the metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for an image of an ox that eats grass.

I mean, that's meant to be humorous, right? They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things for them in Egypt. Therefore, He said, He would destroy them had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach, that means stood in the gap before Him to turn away God's wrath from destroying them.

[26 : 14] God's wrath would have destroyed them, but there was a man who stood in the gap who said, God, please, please God, be merciful and gracious. He stood on their behalf and interceded and prayed for them and pleaded and petitioned God on their behalf.

They had a mediator. And you notice how many times the passage spoke about Moses has found favor with God. Let me just read a few of them to you.

33 verse 12, Lord, you have said to me, you have found favor in my sight. Now therefore, since I have found favor in your sight, God, please show me your ways. Verse 17, the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you ask, I will do for you.

Why? For you have found favor in my sight. 34 verse 9, the Lord, then Moses said, God, since I have found favor in your sight, please, go in the midst of us.

the passage again and again and again says this, the people are stubborn and stiff-necked, but there is one person who has found favor in God's sight. There is one man who is God-fearing and honorable and righteous and wants to do the right thing.

[27 : 24] And God looks upon that man and says, on the basis of your goodness, I will treat them well. Do you see that? Friends, do you see what God is wanting us to see here?

What you're not meant to see is this, if only we have a good and righteous pastor, our church will go well. Friends, that's not what you're meant to see here. What you're meant to see here is this, that we, just like Israel, are stiff-necked and stubborn, prone to sin, covenant-breaking idolatry, and yet we have a mediator.

And his name is not Kevin. His name is Jesus. There is a mediator, one who is righteous and finds favor in God's sight and is always God-fearing and always does the right thing and is just and holy and he could stand in the gap, in the bridge between a holy and righteous God and a stubborn and sinful people.

He could stand in the gap and say, God, because I have found favor in your sight, treat my people well. You could take Psalm 106 and substitute Jesus' name in for Moses.

Look at how it reads. The people, they exchanged the glory of God for false gods and idols. They forgot their God, their Savior, He who had done great things for them. Therefore, God would have destroyed them had not Jesus, His chosen one, stood in the gap before Him and turned God's wrath away.

[28 : 55] Friends, this is Jesus, our mediator, our advocate, who petitions God on our behalf. And if you know the book of Romans in the New Testament, Romans is all about the good news of the gospel of Jesus.

Romans chapter 1 does that. Paul quotes Psalm 106 except he substitutes Jesus' name in for Moses. Listen to how he writes it. He says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of mankind.

For though they should have known God, they did not honor Him as God who gave thanks to Him. They exchanged the glory of the immortal, eternal God for images and other gods.

For there is no distinction for all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And yet, all people are able to be justified, that means forgiven, declared not guilty through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, the eternal sacrifice for our sins.

Friends, do you see what's happening here? In Exodus 32 and 34, we have a picture, a shadow of the gospel. This is Christianity. This is our hope this week.

[30 : 09] That in Jesus Christ, we have a mediator, an advocate, one who stood in the gap for us, one who didn't just go into the tent of meeting and petition God, one who went into the very throne room of God, Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself, who could intercede and plead for us.

Friends, Jesus went to the cross, He died, He shed His blood, He paid the price, so that now God's wrath was poured out on Him and not on us. Friends, no one can be saved or forgiven based on what they do.

We are all too sinful. Maybe it's your first time you've ever stepped in a church. Maybe you've been here a thousand times with you either passed in the front or you're hung over at the back.

Friends, none of us can save ourselves. But we have a Savior, a mediator, an advocate, Jesus, the Son of God, who goes before us.

And so here's the question, is He your mediator? Is He your Savior? Have you come to Him in faith and repentance or are you still trying to save yourself? Friends, where are you looking for hope, for redemption, for meaning, for purpose, for joy, for peace, for security this week?

[31 : 32] The things of this world will fail you. They will let you down and they will cut you off from the living God, the God who made you to know Him and find those things in Him.

Friends, turn to Jesus. He is the one that we need. He is the one that I need. He is the one that we all need. In a few minutes time, we're going to sing this song and I want to leave you with these words.

Jeremy, you want to come on up. Listen to these words as we close. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, I put out look and see Him there who made an end to all my sin.

Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God, the just, the holy, the righteous, the pure, is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.

Let's pray together. Oh Lord Jesus, the gospel, the Bible is so full of the good news, of the wonder of what you did on the cross. Jesus, thank you so much that you are our perfect mediator, our perfect interceder, the one who stood in the gap on our behalf.

[32 : 41] Jesus, thank you for coming and not only coming, for dying and in our place that we can know you, that we can be reconciled, that our current relationship can be restored. God, I pray for each one of us to pray that we will go from this place this week deeply secure, satisfied, full of you,

our eyes fixed on you.

And God, for those of us who don't know you, oh Spirit of God, won't you draw us near to you, give us faith in our hearts that we can come to you. I pray these things in your good and your gracious name.

Amen. Amen.