

“Introduction to Covenant Theology”
Psalm 89
(Preached at Trinity, December 4, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Human beings are generally unfaithful. We think little of covenant vows. Because of our sinful nature and the resulting self-centeredness human beings make every promise, every vow, and every covenant contingent upon how it affects our pleasure.
For example marriage vows include a covenant pledge of faithfulness until the end of life. 41 % of married couples admit to infidelity at some point in their marriage. 50 % of first marriages end in divorce, 67 % second marriage, 74 % third marriage
2. We live in a world of unfaithfulness. We make promises and break them often. We become indignant when people are unfaithful to us but easily excuse our own lack of loyalty.
3. In this world so void of faithfulness there is One who is always faithful. God’s faithfulness is absolute, infallible, unchanging.
Numbers 23:19 KJV - "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"
4. God’s very nature is covenantal. His triune being is a declaration of relationship as God’s eternal existence has been marked by perfect devotion within this divine personhood. We have been created in His likeness and image. The fact that we are relational creatures interdependent upon each other reflects God’s nature.
It is what makes us able to have a relationship with God and what makes God’s covenants of infinite value to us, particularly as we consider our fall into sin.
5. **Psalm 89** is a psalm about God’s covenant faithfulness. It tells us that He will never fail to keep His covenant promises – **Verses 1-4**
Psalm 89:34 KJV - "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."
6. But there are times when God doesn’t seem to be keeping His promises. **Psalm 89** also speaks to this.
Psalm 89:39 KJV - "Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown *by casting it* to the ground."
7. This psalm records the words of a believer in the context of a great national disaster. He sets his plea before God on the basis of His covenant faithfulness.
 - A. It designates Ethan as the author—Ethan was one of the gifted musicians set apart to lead the Levitical music. As we’ve seen, these men were wise theologians and great men of God.
 - B. Ethan was compared with the wisest men upon the face of the earth.
1 Kings 4:30-31 KJV - "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about."

- C. Ethan knew God. He knew the promises of God. He is a man we can learn from. **Psalm 89** is set before us as a Maschil – a psalm of instruction and contemplation. May God grant it to be a psalm of instruction and contemplation for us as we consider the great covenant faithfulness of God.
- 8 Before we can consider God’s covenant faithfulness we must consider the importance of covenant. All of the Bible pivots on the concept of Covenant.
- A. The concept of Covenant is an expression of God’s condescension to man.
LBC – Chapter 7, Paragraph 1 –
“The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”
- B. All of God’s dealings with man are by way of covenant
9. The first thing I want to do in **Psalm 89** is to review the concept of covenant – kind of an introduction to Covenant Theology.
This is of infinite importance. Covenant theology provides the backbone to understanding the Bible. It provides the framework for understanding the Gospel. Without a proper understanding of the Law and Gospel we’ll fail to comprehend the heart of God’s redemptive purpose.
10. This subject is woefully misunderstood today. Dispensationalism has gutted a right understanding of Covenant theology.
11. Tonight I want to give you a quick, brief primer on Covenant Theology
- I. There are three important covenants as we consider God’s condescension with man
- A. First, we have the Adamic Covenant also called the Covenant of Works
1. God created Adam and placed him in the garden – a morally perfect man dwelling in a perfect environment in a relationship with God untainted by sin. In a sense Adam was God’s own son created to reflect the glory of his father. God wrote His law upon Adam’s heart that he might imitate God in holiness.
 2. God, in this loving relationship made a covenant with Adam and required obedience from him. It was a probationary period
Genesis 2:16-17 KJV - "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ¹⁷ But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."
 3. In this covenant Adam represented all of his posterity.
The promise was permanent life upon obedience and the penalty of death upon its breach.
 4. This was not a covenant of merit. All of God’s dealings with man are by way of condescension and thus by grace.
In other words, by obedience Adam was only doing that which was required of him. So at best he could only declare himself to be an unprofitable servant.
 5. Rather than a covenant of merit it was a simply God setting forth His provision for Adam’s remaining in this state of grace—probationary

6. Of course, we know Adam did not remain in this state of grace – he fell and all of humanity fell with him
Romans 5:12 KJV - " Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"
 7. **Romans 5** describes the relationship between Adam and Christ. Adam and Christ both stand as representative heads with humanity. Adam represents all of humanity, Christ represents the elect. In Adam all sinned and suffer the penalty of death. All who are in Christ are made alive celebrating His resurrection life.
- B. Second, we have God's eternal Covenant of Redemption –
1. I speak of this covenant second because it presupposes the fall of man
 The Covenant of Redemption preceded the Covenant of Works in time but not in decree
 The Covenant of Redemption sees God looking upon the fallen race of humanity. All have sinned, none righteous
 2. The Covenant of Redemption is the foundation of God's purpose in history
 An understanding of this covenant is essential.
 - a. You cannot understand or interpret the Word of God properly unless you approach it within this covenantal framework
 - b. An understanding of this covenant is essential for a proper understanding of God. This covenant represents the unity of purpose between the three persons of the Godhead
 3. Covenant theology is distinctly Trinitarian flowing from the shared eternal fellowship of the persons of the Godhead.
 The Covenant of Redemption is the unified plan between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to redeem God's elect people from their sins.
 4. This Covenant was not with us but between the Father and His Son with the Holy Spirit
 - a. In this eternal transaction or covenant God the Father chose a people with the purpose of giving them to His Son as an inheritance and bride.
 - b. The Son agreed to die for those whom the Father gave Him
 Jesus died to accomplish the eternal covenant. This was His purpose in coming.
Mat 1:21 – "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."
 - c. The Holy Spirit agreed to regenerate God's elect people in time and give them faith in Christ and repentance from sin
- C. Third, there's the Covenant of Grace
1. This covenant is made against the backdrop of sin. Mankind is under the wrath and curse of God and slated for destruction.
 2. This covenant is God's purpose to save His people through the Gospel.
 The Covenant of Redemption was God's eternal covenant; the Covenant of Grace was the historical promise

3. The Covenant of Grace was first announced after the fall of Adam in what is known as the Proto Euangelion – or Proto Gospel or First-Gospel
Genesis 3:14-15 KJV - "And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."
 1. The Covenant of Grace was made with the elect—the seed of Eve.
 2. Who are the seed of Eve? There is a clear distinction between the seed of Eve and the seed of Satan. Abel and Seth were of the seed of Eve. Cain was of the seed of the devil. The covenant puts the seed of Eve and the seed of Satan at enmity with each other. Thus we see Cain at enmity with Abel.
 3. God pledges that Eve’s seed would destroy Satan’s seed. It is a pledge to accomplish redemption for all of God’s elect through Jesus Christ.
4. Although the Covenant of Grace was made with God’s elect people particularly there is a general offer of grace to all mankind. In other words there is a general gospel call and an effectual call.
 - a. God calls all men to repent and believe. In this sense faith and repentance are the conditions of the Covenant of Grace.
 - b. Of course, the essence of the Covenant of Grace is unconditional; the effectual call is necessary wherein God regenerates and creates faith in them.

II. The covenant of grace is administered under several other covenants

- A. This covenant is the overarching support for all of God's dealings with humanity
 1. The Covenant of Grace is revealed progressively and administered through several other covenants.
 2. When Adam broke the Covenant of Works God responded by revealing His redemptive purpose in the Covenant of grace – He provided a covering and promised the ultimate victory of Christ
 3. We find it in the Noaic Covenant when God promises to preserve the earth, never again to destroy it by flood. The ark itself foreshadowed God’s redemption of His people in Christ
 4. We find it in the Abrahamic Covenant
 - A Theocratic Society – “I will be their God”
 - A land – Canaan – It would be their possession as long as they remained a theocratic nation
 - A numerous seed – like the stars of heaven & the dust of the earth
 - A promise of victory and peace in Canaan – “your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies” (Gen. 22:17)
 5. We find it in the Mosaic Covenant
 - a. In one sense the Mosaic Covenant points to the covenant of works – God’s demand for perfect obedience to His Law, not as a means of salvation but in order to point us to the grace of Christ who fulfilled all of the demands of the Law.

- b. The Mosaic Covenant was full of types and foreshadows, of worship and sacrifices all designed to be figures of Christ
WCF – Chapter 7:5 – “Under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types of ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come . . .”
6. We find it in the Davidic Covenant
Psalm 89:3-4 KJV - "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, ⁴ Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. "
God promised to David that his would be a throne that would never end.
2 Samuel 7:12-16 KJV - "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: ¹⁵ But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee. ¹⁶ And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."

III. The Covenant of Grace finds its ultimate fulfillment in the final New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

- A. Jesus Christ was the promise of the Old Covenant promises
1. He is the fulfillment of the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace as He came to deliver His people from their sin and has delivered the final blow to Satan, crushing him effectively beneath the cross.
 2. He is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham of a seed through whom all of the nations would be blessed
 3. He is the fulfillment of the Sinai Covenant as all of the temporal blessings promised to Israel of a land are fulfilled in the Christ’s provision of a city whose builder and maker is God.
 4. He is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant as He sits upon an eternal throne ruling over a Kingdom that will never end.
- B. In the New Covenant our relationship to the Law has changed
1. The demands of the Law haven’t changed
 2. But under the Old Covenant the Law made demands but offered no power to comply. It stood over us under the condemnation of the wrath of God.
 3. Under the New Covenant Christ met the demands of the Law delivering us from the condemning penalty of sin.
 4. At the same time, the Holy Spirit through changing our hearts and applying His sanctifying grace delivers us from the power of sin.

- IV. God's Covenant promises are absolute and irrevocable.
- A. God's covenant rests upon the infallible eternal transaction of the Covenant of Redemption.
1. It is not founded upon the weakness of man but the almighty power of God
 2. The Covenant of Redemption was promised and sealed in the eternal decrees of God – absolute, unchanging, infallible
- B. From this eternal Covenant God made His Covenant of Grace which was then administered through the other covenants
1. Again, it is absolute and unchanging
 2. It finds its final fulfillment in Christ
- 2 Corinthians 1:19** – “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”

Conclusion:

1. What is the basis of God's unchanging love for us? What is the basis of our eternal security – how do we know that our salvation will not ultimately be lost due to some failure on our part?
The answer can be found in one word – Covenant.
- A. We have to remember that the New Covenant is an unconditional covenant. It cannot be broken. It is built upon grace and the merits of Christ.
- B. It is a covenant entered by faith and the promise of continuing in the covenant is based upon the preserving work of the Holy Spirit.
Jeremiah 31:33-34 KJV - "But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."
- C. This is why there are curses for covenant breaking in the Old Covenant but none in the New Covenant. The New Covenant is entered by God's elect people who will be preserved until the end.
Ephesians 1:13-14 KJV - "ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."
2 Timothy 1:9 KJV - "Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began"
2. Where do we find comfort in times of affliction? How do we know that God is for us and that He will never abandon us.
The answer can be found in one word – Covenant.
3. Next week we'll begin to unfold the text of **Psalm 89**
It is my prayer that it will give us comfort and peace as we consider God's infallible promises that are ours by way of covenant.