

“Covenant Faithfulness”
1 Samuel 20
(Preached at Trinity, September 17, 2017)

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. Saul had a single-minded goal—kill David. He was using every resource at his disposal to carry out this plan. Why would David turn to Saul’s son with any hope of help? It was because they had made a covenant.
1 Samuel 20:8 NAU - "Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you."
2. There is hope and certainty in covenant.
Dale Ralph Davis writes, “The covenant involves firm promises and solemn commitments. That is why in his uncertainty and in his pillar-to-post flight David turned to Jonathan. There was a covenant, a bastion of certainty, a safe haven, in both a dangerous and a helter-skelter time.”¹
3. The word translated “kindly” in the NASB is the word we know very well - חַסְדִּים
It is translated in various ways. The KJV often translates it “mercy” – “Thy mercy endureth forever.”
The NASB most often translates it “lovingkindness.”
The word carries the connotation of loyal, steadfast, faithful love.
My favorite way of translating it is “covenant love.”
The same word is used in **Verses 14-15** – still in the context of covenant
1 Samuel 20:14-15 NAU - "If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? ¹⁵ "You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."
4. Our attention is continually drawn to Jonathan’s love.
1 Samuel 18:1-3 NAU - "Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. ² Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. ³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself."
1 Samuel 20:17 NAU - "Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life."
 - A. As we’ve seen, the covenant was initiated by Jonathan. He was the superior, twice David’s age, the son of the king, and yet he made covenant with David.
 - B. This covenant love between David and Jonathan is important as we consider the nature of covenant.

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 206.

5. David was being pursued by Saul but as he remembered Jonathan's covenant love he held out hope that Jonathan would work on his behalf. It was based upon Jonathan's covenant faithfulness.
6. The concept of covenant is the overarching principle of Scripture. God's revelation unfolds within the framework of covenant. God's purpose in the redemption of His people unfolds by way of covenant.
What is the basis of God's unchanging love for us? And what is the basis of our eternal security – how do we know that our salvation will not ultimately be lost and snatched away due to some failure on our part?
The answer can be found in one word – Covenant.
Nehemiah 1:5 CSB17 - "I said, Lord, the God of the heavens, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant with those who love him and keep his commands"
7. God is a covenant keeping God. He is a God of covenant faithfulness; He will never forsake His promises. God is a sure refuge to those who will trust in Him.
Deuteronomy 7:9 NAU - "Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments;"
8. Tonight I want us to meditate for a few minutes on this most important principle in Scripture – the principle of Covenant Faithfulness.

I. What is a covenant?

- A. In the most basic sense, a covenant is a promise
 1. The Children's Catechism
 - Q. What is a covenant?
 - A. An agreement between two or more persons.
 2. The covenants in the Bible of which we have greatest interest are all unilaterally initiated by God. There is no negotiation, no compromising of terms. God sets the terms. It originates with Him alone.
We see this as God spoke to Abraham –
Genesis 17:7 NAU - "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."
 3. The world does not like the fact that God is Sovereign. They try to negotiate with God. They want to set the terms.
- B. In **Genesis 6:18** we find the word *covenant* used for the first time in the Bible.
Genesis 6:18 NAU - "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark-- you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you."
 1. This is not the first covenant.
The first covenant in the Bible was made with Adam – we refer to it as the covenant of works. Adam entered into the covenant as our head or representative.
1689 LBC 6:1 – “Although God created man upright and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatened death upon the breach thereof, yet he did not long abide in this honor . . .”

LBC 6:2 – “Our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them, whereby death came upon all. . .”

2. In reality, this also was not the first covenant. The first covenant that would be applied to humanity was made before the world began. In eternity, there was a covenant made in the counsel of the Godhead. Man had no part in this covenant
 - a. God the Father chose or elected a people – a people terribly plagued, corrupted, and defiled by sin. It was a people upon which He would shower unspeakable blessings.
 - b. In this Covenant, the Eternal Son agreed with the Father upon condition of perfect obedience to redeem the elect from their sin. He would begin by becoming a man; He would live a perfect life in obedience to the Law, and then He would suffer under the wrath of God as a substitute for the elect.
 - c. The Holy Spirit would deliver these people from the power of sin through regeneration and enable them to embrace this salvation of Christ by faith.
3. The Christian life is a covenant relationship. It rests upon this eternal covenant.

** You cannot properly understand the Christian Gospel apart from this concept of Covenant.

Jesus Christ is the Mediator and Guarantor of a Covenant relationship
Hebrews 7:22 NAU - "so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."

Hebrews 8:6 NAU - "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises."

II. The Gospel comes by way of covenant – a covenant of grace offered to all men but effectually applied to the elect.

- A. God’s eternal covenant is entirely by grace, unmerited and undeserved.
 1. It is out of this eternal covenant of redemption that God enters into the covenant of grace expressed in the Gospel
 1689 LBC 7:2 – “Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained to eternal life, His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.”
 2. The Christian life is a covenant relationship. It rests upon this eternal covenant. Love, hope, worship, and service are all motivated by a gratitude for this grace.

- B The Gospel that offers Jesus Christ to sinners is an invitation to enter into a covenant relationship with God.
1. This offer of grace is freely offered to all men
Isaiah 55:1 NAU - "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost."
 2. The New Covenant demands a new heart – The Holy Spirit creates within us new hearts to become partakers of that covenant
 3. Through this new birth the Holy Spirit works in us faith and repentance – trusting in the sufficiency of Christ alone and turning from our sins. It is a gift of God’s sovereign grace but it is demanded of all men.
 4. While the New Covenant demands a new heart, God commands all men to repent and trust Christ.
 5. The question before you is have you received His grace? Have you received His covenant of love? Have you trusted the gift of His Son? Are you resting upon the merits of the Savior alone?

III. The end of God’s covenant is to bring us to peace and reconciliation with Him

- A. Left to ourselves we could have never entered this peace
1. 1689 LBC 7:1 – “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to 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.”
 2. The Gospel is a gospel of peace
We find a beautiful peace displayed in this passage
1 Samuel 20:42 NAU - "Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'"
 - a. The word for “safety” is שָׁלוֹם – Jonathan literally tells David, “Go in peace.”
 - b. Jonathan is not saying that David was now delivered from Saul’s relentless attacks or that his life would now be easy. Jonathan is declaring peace between the two of them. This is because he had sworn covenant with David.
- B. What a beautiful picture of God’s peace with His elect. God has brought us to peace with Himself by way of His covenant.
1. We have not yet been brought into the fullness of God’s promise. There are many battles yet to be fought, but we are assured of God’s promise.
 2. This assurance is based upon the faithfulness of God who cannot lie. He will fulfill His covenant.

Conclusion:

1. So here we have the essence of our hope. It rests firmly upon the eternal covenant of the Godhead. This is the Divine aspect of the covenant.
2. What we witness with David and Jonathan was covenant faithfulness on display. Such faithfulness brought hope and rest.
3. This is the hope of the Gospel. God pledges covenant faithfulness. But the human aspect is founded upon the Gospel's demand for faith and repentance.
Those who come to Christ SHALL NOT be cast aside.
John 6:37 describes both the Divine and the human aspects of the Covenant
John 6:37 NAU - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
4. Our salvation from start to finish is carried out according to God's eternal sovereign plan and accomplished by His mighty power. Our salvation was planned and accomplished for God's sake alone – for His glory. But it is founded upon God's eternal covenant.
For Christ's sake we will never be forsaken.
Psalm 40:16 – "Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified."