

The Covenant of Creation
Gen 1:26-31, 2:15-25

Brothers and sisters, back in 1997 I saw a movie called "Seven Years in Tibet." It's the story of Heinrich Harrer, an Austrian mountain climber who was detained by the British at the start of World War Two when he was in India.

Heinrich manages to escape and flees to Tibet, where in a surprising turn of events he ends up befriending the young Dali Lama and becomes a mentor and father figure to him.

Yet - at one point in the movie the young Dali Lama says to Heinrich *"You are far too informal with me to be my father."*

And that particular line struck me... and it has stuck with me because it was so different from my understanding and experience of what a father-son relationship was like.

I'm used to a very informal relationship with my father, where we related freely back and forth with no protocol, restrictions

or conditions, where emotion and feelings could be expressed... If we wanted to, we're still both guys after all.

So to hear a young boy express the awareness and expectation that a father-son relationship would be more formal really struck me, and it highlighted that the significant differences in the relationship between Heinrich and the Dali Lama were not just those of age and world experience, but they were also cultural.

And maybe you've experienced or observed how different cultures regard certain relationships or social positions with various levels of formalities or informalities.

And if you are new to a particular culture it can be a bit confusing to figure out who you are supposed to relate to formally and when, and who and when you are able to be more casual and informal.

In another culture, for example, if you address a school principle or a teacher by their first name they might be

offended or upset, whereas in Canada a school principle or teacher would probably say “please call me John.”

And if you have come to Canada and learned English as a second language, you know the challenge in learning which terms are appropriate for addressing people formally versus addressing them informally.

For example, you don’t want to call your boss “*dude*” but neither is it appropriate to address him as “*your honor*.”

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with calling someone “dude” or “boss” or “your honor” or “Mr. Principle” or “John” – but the point is that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of addressing people and that appropriateness depends on **the kind** of relationship we have with them.

Because the relationship is the context which determines what is right or wrong. So if we want to interact appropriately with others, we need to know what type of relationship we have with them.

Now I’ve mention there are formal and informal relationships, but there are many other types as well; there are friendships – close friends, casual friends, bff’s... And there are professional relationships, working relationships, dating relationships, marriage relationships, parent-child relationships and so on.

And each relationship is a context that defines appropriate interaction; the kinds of things that are right or wrong in how we relate to the other person.

So with all this in mind friends, let me ask you – “*what kind or type of relationship do we have with God?*”

Now maybe your first inclination is the say “*does that really matter? Isn’t the most important thing that I know that have a relationship with God, does it really matter what kind of relationship it is?*”

Yes it does friends – because if we don’t know the kind of relationship we have with God, then we don’t understand the context in which we are relating to Him.

And that means we won't understand the ways in which He is relating and communicating to us and we won't know what the appropriate or correct response is - if we respond back at all – and thus we risk offending Him.

Now it's one thing to offend your boss – it's a whole other level of “uh-oh” to offend God – right?

Now you might think *“I didn't know God could get offended, I've just thought God was always Loving, after all God is Love.”*

But that right there friends illustrates a particular kind of relationship that we think we have with God. Maybe we'll call it the *“Star Wars relationship”* because we relate to God like He is an impersonal power, like the force in Star Wars, except He's all good because He's Love, and Love never gets offended or angry or causes hurt and so on...

Or maybe you're thinking *“yes! I'm so worried about offending God and having him punish me.”*

And that also illustrates another kind of relationship that we think we have with God, which we could call the *“Angry God relationship”* because we're always afraid that God will send some bad luck or trouble our way because He's angry at us.

So, the next question is “are these correct understanding of the kind of relationship we have with God?”

No – they are not! The good news is that God has made the effort to reveal and describe to us the kind of relationship that we do have with him in the scriptures.

Because in relationships, nothing is worse than not knowing **what kind** of relationship you have with someone, right?

Especially if you are a teenaged guy who likes a girl... and you don't know if she likes you back in the same way or if she just likes you as a “friend.” That's the worst! You don't know what to do or how to act towards this girl. You need to know what kind of relationship you have with her or you risk embarrassing yourself and messing things up.

And without knowing what kind of relationship we have with God, we're just guessing and we don't really know how to act appropriately, or to respond to what He may expect of us.

So, what kind of relationship do we have with God? Brothers and sisters, we have a Covenant relationship with God.

Now you might be thinking *"But I thought we had a personal relationship with Jesus? And what exactly is a Covenant relationship anyways... and why is that important?"*

Well I'm glad you asked because over the next three Sundays we are going to look at what the scripture says about Covenant so that we begin to understand it as the reason for the Easter Season.

We do a great job at explaining how the birth of Jesus is the reason for the Christmas Season – but what's the reason for the Easter Season?

Why was the crucifixion and death of Jesus necessary?

What does the His Resurrection back to life mean? How do we explain this to other people who ask us about it?

Because we often end up explaining Easter in a rather simplistic way; *"well Jesus died for sin – that was really sad... but then He came back to life! That's awesome!"*

But brothers and sisters when we fully understand our covenant relationship with God and what it means to be in this type of relationship with Him then the Holy Spirit works through that to deepen and strengthen our faith in Jesus...

And we are better equipped to offer a basic explanation instead of a simplistic summary of the Easter story so that we are actually communicating spiritual truth to the people God is bringing into our lives, in a way that challenges and corrects how they think we relate to God. (gently of course)

So let's start unpacking what a covenant is by looking at the scriptures passages we read from this morning which were Genesis 1 and 2.

Obviously this is where the relationship between God and humanity begins as God creates mankind – male and female in his own image and so we call this relationship between God and humanity the Covenant of Creation.

Now there is not much specifically said about the Covenant of Creation in the scriptures – apart from its inference in the first two chapters of Genesis – and so it is often overlooked and neglected. But, make no mistake friends it is very important.

In framing the context in which we can understand our relationship with God, the Covenant of Creation is very much like a simple yet elegant frame for a piece of art.

It's not the center of attention - but it lies behind the artwork, and holds it in place, and the subtle details in that frame that shows around the edges can draw out and highlight particular features of the picture.

If you remove the framework, then those details and highlights are lost – do you know what I mean?

So the Covenant of Creation functions as a frame for our relationship with God, with others, and with the rest of the Creation – it frames everything.

And Genesis 1 and 2 give us the details about this initial covenant, and also defines a covenant relationship.

Now I need to make a quick side note on the connection between these two chapters in Genesis. Genesis 1 functions like a trailer for a movie, where you are get snapshots of the action taking place in a way that summarizes what is going on.

Then when you watch the movie, you get the actual story which gives you the all details that fill out what you saw hinted at in the trailer.

So in Genesis 1:26-31 we get the “trailer” version of the creation of humanity and then Genesis chapter 2:4 comes along and the “movie” version starts – so it's not a second account of the creation of humanity but a fuller more detailed version. Does that make sense?

So the first thing I want to draw your attention to is how often God is speaking in these passages... 1:26 *"then God said"*; 1:28 *"God blessed them and said to them"*; 1:29 *"then God said"*; 2:15 *"the Lord God commanded the man"*; 2:18 *"the Lord God said"*

Friends God's words are never empty – they are not just powerful... they are power! And when God speaks His Word not only creates humanity but it outlines and determines the kind of relationship He will have with us. So what does God's Word say? God declares *"Let us make mankind in our image"* (1:26)

Friends, this simple statement reveals to us that a Covenant is a Bond that connects two parties – in this case between God and humanity.

God had determined to create us – which already establishes a bond, a connection between God and us as Creator and created, but He goes further and determines to create us in His image – a specific bond which gives distinction to what the

Covenant of Creation is about - *and we'll look at what that means later on* - and God speaks this bond in existence, He declares it and thus it is so.

So a Covenant is a Bond and in order to exist, that Bond must be declared – but there's more.

Look at 1:29 where God says *"I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."*

And in greater detail in chapter 2:16-17 *"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."*

Here God is speaking to those He has a Bond with about what will give life, and what will bring death. The creator, the one in whose image we have been made, whom we are bonded to, decrees what will give life to humanity, and what will bring about death.

So a Covenant is a bond, of life and death - but wait... there's still more.

Listen as I read these the remaining verses where God is speaking to humanity in these chapters and tell me if you can detect any negotiation, bargaining on the details of what God is declaring are worked out.

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (1:28)
“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (2:15-18)

So friends, did you catch any negotiation going on in these passages? No there is none. God decides everything. He doesn't consult with anyone on the creation of humanity, He doesn't ask Adam if he likes being alone...

He does not entertain suggestions from Adam on what the consequence will be if Adam eats from the forbidden tree – God decides and decrees it and that's the way it is. And it's good.

So a Covenant is a Bond, of life and death, which is sovereignly administered.

Friends, God and God alone sets the terms and conditions for the bond of life and death that He has with us – with every one of us, with every human that has come from God's command to multiply, increase in number and fill the earth.

This is the Covenant of Creation friends – a bond between humanity and God with life and death implications which was brought into existence by God's decision and Word.

So however else you might want to categorize the relationship that we have with God... call it a personal relationship with Jesus, a saving relationship, a loving relationship, calling God

our Heavenly Father, even seeing God as angry, or vengeful, distant or remote...

If we are to be true to the revelation of scripture – we have to set what/how we think about our relationship with God within this starting framework of the Covenant of Creation.

This is the starting point for correctly understanding our relationship with God and who He is revealing Himself to be.

And this Covenant relationship we have with God also effects our relationships with others and with the creation – so the practical implications of the Covenant of Creation for our day to day life are huge!

If your relationships with others are messed up, if your relationship with work and with the world is messed up – there's a good chance it's because your original covenant relationship with God is messed up and you don't understand it correctly.

This connection to our other relationship comes from the uniqueness of the Covenant Bond in being made – male and female – in the image of God, which means that we reflect who God is to the rest of the creation on a smaller scale.

The image of God is not some quality we that have, e.g. reason, or creativity. It is our position within the creation as God's representatives who rule on His behalf in our work.

That's what is reflected in 2:19 – 20 where God brings all the animals before Adam and whatever he called them – that was their name. There was no negotiation if the giraffe didn't like its name and preferred to be called a Longneckker instead...

Adam's relationship in working with the animals reflects the sovereign administration of God's covenant bond with us – that's the image of God. That's why our work is Holy!

Similarly in 1:26 when God – as Creator, Spirit and Word – determined to make humanity, God says *“let US make*

mankind in OUR image” and then 1:27 says “in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”

After which comes the command to multiply and increase.

So there is a plurality, a community aspect, in how humans reflect the image of God which comes from male and female being together and multiplying.

Now move ahead from the “trailer” version of chapter one to get more of the details in chapter two and we see this fleshed out when God decides it is not good for man to be alone.

So God provides a suitable, appropriate helper in order that humanity can correctly reflect the communal nature of God to the rest of the creation.

And so the scripture then declares that it is upon the basis of this task of reflecting the communal image of God that we have the basis for why a man and a woman are intended to enter into a marriage relationship –which by the way we also call a covenant.

So, our work reflects the Covenant of Creation, and the institution of marriage reflects the Covenant of Creation, and there’s a third part to this practical aspect as well.

It’s from 2:1-3 where it says *“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”*

God takes a Sabbath rest... and friends the significance of a Deity being able to rest is lost on us.

Ancient creation myths often attributed the existence of our world to the efforts of some god who was locked in an eternal struggle to subdue the equally powerful force of chaos that always threatened to undo what the god had created.

But the creation account in Genesis reveals the truth to us. Yes in the beginning the *“earth was formless and empty,*

darkness was over the surface of the deep” (1:2) but God’s creating Word conquered this chaos, subdued it, gave it shape and form and purpose and brought forth life out of it and it is sustained without the need for God to eternally battle chaos.

There is no greater power than God, there is no equal opposite power to God. God finished creating, and He rested and He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a day of rest.

So – as we are made in the image of God, to reflect God correctly to the creation we also must rest, we must observe Sabbath to reflect God’s sustaining and preserving power in His Word which created all things and sustains them as we trust that it sustains us.

And so chapter two ends with what I think is a wonderful description of the first human observance of the Sabbath.

As Adam and Eve have imaged God together in marriage and community and have seen the necessity of that partnership in

work – they now reflect God in Sabbath together, and the scripture says *“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” (2:25)*

That is kind of relationship they had, because of their covenant relationship with God. They could “rest” with each other – and if you’ve been in a relationship for long enough you’ll know how amazing that is.

And that’s the whole point of having the Covenant of Creation revealed to us as the backdrop for understanding our relationship with God.

To cause us to marvel and wonder at what it was like at the start of this relationship between God and humanity, and the world, and each other – before things changed to the way we know them to be now...

To cause us to wonder if things might be able to be as they once were – to hope it would be possible for it to be like that again?

And this gives us something to strive for, for as bad and things might be as we know them now... it can help to make some sense and bring some meaning and purpose to life to know that marriage, family, community, work and rest and recreation are part of who we are and how we are connected to God...

But it's just the start of the story of our Covenant relationship with God friends – it has only just begun, and so we'll leave things where they stand in the Covenant of Creation this morning...

With Adam and Eve naked and feeling no shame – wouldn't that have been incredible.

Let's pray.