

DEUTERONOMY 8 COVENANT LIVING (1)

Listen to this. (PIANO NOTES) Some musical chords are “dissonant.” When they are played together, they make an awful noise.

Now listen to this. (MORE PIANO NOTES) Some musical chords are “consonant.” When they are played together, they make a beautiful sound.

Which would you rather play? Which would you rather hear? Which would you rather have settle into your soul?

The Bible is about dissonance and consonance. It is the story of the relationship between God and people. The story begins beautifully, but it becomes awful. Yet God is in the business of making it beautiful again.

God is all about covenants. Covenants are relationships. God is about turning our dissonant relationship with him, into a new “consonant covenant” relationship with him. Dissonant to consonant. Awful to beautiful.

But what does this look like? What does it mean for people like you and me to live in covenant relationship with God?

This week and next week, we will discover this in the book of Deuteronomy, as we settle in chapter 8, which captures themes we find all through the book.

We learn about covenant today, from this book of yesterday, because we believe God does not change, and we believe his ways of dealing with people do not change. Yes, there are differences in details between that day and this day, but this is the same: God is seeking and gaining a new consonant covenant relationship with the people he loves.

This is all through Jesus. Moses looked forward to Jesus. We look back on Jesus. The consonant covenant is ours, through Jesus. He has secured a new relationship with God for us, by suffering for all of the sins that brought such awful dissonance to our original relationship with God.

So what is covenant living like? I offer you two thoughts today, and two more next week.

* Today: He promises, and we trust. He provides, and we depend.

* Next week: He prospers, and we praise. He pushes, and we obey.

These truths shape every moment of our lives, as we live in covenant.

Here is the first: HE PROMISES, AND WE TRUST.

HE PROMISES.

Think of the ring on my finger. It is a promise from my wife to me, that she will keep her promise and be faithful to me. Hold this image of promise in your heart and mind, as we ponder this.

Verse 1: “Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers.”

Where are we as we read the Old Testament?

Remember that the great turning point in the whole Bible is Genesis 3:15. Our relationship with God has become dissonant, because Adam and Eve have rebelled against God. We are no longer good enough to relate to God on our own. We will only relate to him, if he is better to us than we deserve. We can only move from dissonance to consonance, if he offers mercy and grace.

He does this in Genesis 3:15, as he promises a day when Satan will be crushed. We believe Jesus eventually fulfills this promise.

In the Old Testament, God will prepare us for Jesus, by relating to us with different covenants, all because of his grace to us.

* There is the covenant with Noah: the promise of life, after the flood.

* There is the covenant with Abraham: the promise of blessing, even all the nations, through this one man.

* There is the covenant with Moses: the promise of land, for God’s own people.

* Still to come: the covenant with David, and the new covenant described by Jeremiah. Then Jesus himself, who secures an eternal consonant covenant relationship.

As we read Deuteronomy, we are reading of God’s final words through Moses to his people, as they prepare to see God fulfill his promise of land. God is saying, “I have promised. Will you trust me?”

God promises. WE TRUST. That’s the idea, anyway.

Here is my morning routine. I stumble to a window to check outside to see what the weather is like, to see if I will be able to exercise. Then I stumble around, find my Bible and prayer list, and have a time of worship and prayer.

Aren’t I holy? Not really. I am just like you. Often my heart is as dull as my mind and body.

But sometimes, God bursts through. Last Monday, I did what I often do: I turned to a Psalm to guide my prayer. I read these words in Psalm 33: "In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name."

Wow! That rocked my soul! With all the joys and sorrows and even soul-splitting struggles that I have had and I have described to you, I saw those words and I said, "That's my problem. I don't trust him."

Do I trust him to keep his promises? Do I trust him when he promises he is directing all things in my life and his world, for my good? Do I trust him as he promises to always care for me? Do I trust him to forgive me again, when I sin again? I believe in him, but do I believe him?

The start of a new, consonant relationship with God, and the heart of an ongoing, consonant relationship with God, is that I trust him.

He promised a Savior, and he has sent a Savior named Jesus, to make our dissonant relationship, a consonant, covenant relationship. I trust him.

But that is not all. Now that I trust what he has done, I can trust in what he is doing. His promises are true. His love is great. I live with this trust in my heart and my life, in all the moments of my day.

* Like in this moment: I am a young person, and I cannot stand that teacher.

When I live in covenant, when I know that he promises and I can trust, I trust that God has placed this difficult person in my life. I may not know why God has done this, but I trust he has done this.

I trust that he wants me to somehow be a better person because of this relationship.

I trust that he will give me the opportunity to honor him in this situation.

I trust that when I am finished with this relationship, I will be better prepared for whatever and whoever else may come my way.

He promises. I trust him.

* Like in this moment: My day is just one frustration after another.

When I live in covenant, I trust that God sees that frustration, and that he has even allowed that frustration.

I trust that he is working inside me, to build something better in me - probably more kindness or patience!

I trust him to keep me from being overwhelmed by those frustrations.

I trust that when this set of frustrations is past, I will be more prepared to face the next set, which I know will come in a broken world.

He promises. I trust him.

* Like in this moment: "How can I go on without him? Without her?"

When I live in covenant, I trust in his promise that no matter who leaves me or forsakes me, he will never do that.

I trust him to give and take away in ways that are best, even if they seem severe.

I trust him to fill the big hole in my heart, with himself and others.

I trust that when I think I can't go on, I will go on, because he is faithful to his promises to me.

He promises. I trust him.

Do I trust him? Do you trust him? If you know Jesus, how can you not trust him? I know! I know Jesus, and I still do not trust him as I should.

Do this with me. You entered this room today, with something or many somethings, weighing upon your heart.

Maybe it is the unsettled soul of your child. Maybe it is the uncertainty of a relationship you really desire. Maybe it is the aggravation of living with parents who are sinners, too.

Maybe it is a feeling that you want to make a difference in your world, but the world seems no different. Maybe it is the husband, wife or friend whom you must forgive, again. Maybe it is concern about the future of this part of Jesus' church.

Will you say to the Lord, "Help me to trust you"? Will you take the words of Psalm 33, and pray them to the Lord who sent his Son to live, die and rise for you? "In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name."

Covenant living. Remember the ring. He promises, and we trust.

((BEGONE UNBELIEF))

He promises, and we trust. HE PROVIDES, AND WE DEPEND.

I show you the ring to remind you of his promise, and I show you my whole hand to remind you of his provision.

HE PROVIDES.

Verses 2 to 4: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

“Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.”

What is God doing? He is reminding them of what they should know! It has been 40 years since Israel left Egypt. He has taken them out of their bondage in Egypt, and he has provided for them every step of the way, for these 40 years.

They were hungry. He provided. They were thirsty. He provided.

They had old clothes. He provided. Their feet hurt. He provided.

They grumbled. He provided. He provided and provided and provided.

He provides. WE DEPEND.

It is said that Martin Luther said on his deathbed, “We are beggars.”

How does that strike you? That may have made sense to a German peasant 450 years ago, but that strikes us as odd.

We are not beggars. We have everything we need. We have much of what we want. I don't need to sit on the street and ask people to place a dollar in my hat.

Well, you think, maybe Martin Luther was talking spiritually. Maybe he was describing how we are beggars because we need God to forgive our sins.

We do not like that either. We think we live in Lake Wobegon, where everyone is above average. There may be some spiritual beggars around - maybe the people live down around 11th Street. But not me.

But if I live in the covenant, I see exactly what Martin Luther meant. We are beggars. We depend on God for everything for body and soul.

Think again of the words here, which Jesus later used as he fought off the temptations of Satan: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

What is he saying? We need physical bread, and God provides! But we also need spiritual bread, and God provides that, too. We do not need just one or the other. We need both. And God provides both. We depend upon him for everything for body and soul.

We depend. If I live in the covenant, I realize that I live with an utter, complete, even desperate dependence upon God for anything good.

I am very much a beggar. All that I have, all that I am, and all that I hope for, will come from the hand of the Lord who provides, on whom I depend.

Now I can say that to you, and that can go right over your head, for it is easy to say those words, but it is still easier to go off and forget them in the daily joys and struggles of life.

So let's again bring these words back to our lives, as we enter some of the moments of our lives.

* Like this moment: today is here, and today will be hard. It will be long, and you will have to deal with tough people and rough situations. You stand in the shower, and you don't want to ever get out.

When I live in covenant, I believe God will provide, and I depend on him for everything.

I pray for help to get out of the shower!

I cry to him for strength, to do what I must do.

I check my heart before his throne, as I enter the room to see that person I do not want to see.

I ask him to still both my soul and my stomach, as stress and hunger churn away at me.

He provides. I depend.

* Like this moment: a word from another, explodes into your soul, as you realize your words have again exploded, and destroyed, another person.

When I live in covenant, I believe that God will provide the grace I need, and I will depend on him.

He will provide the help I need, to go to the one I have hurt, with words of remorse.

He will provide the Spirit-filled control I will need, as I seek to change my habit of speaking.

I will cry to him with a desperate desire to stop shaming his name and savaging the people around me.

I will be confident that in my weakness, he will provide strength even to bridle this tongue.

He provides. I depend.

* Like this moment: when you realize that the situation is impossible, and you can do nothing to make it better.

The co-worker whose heart is stone cold. The aging relative, who will not get better, but who may linger for what seems like forever. The child, whose heart is full of rebellion.

The husband, who will not change or even talk about change. The one you love, who hates Jesus Christ. The words of the doctor that offer little hope. The soul-splitting loneliness of the one who does not want to be alone.

When I live in covenant, I say, "I cannot do this. I cannot change this. I cannot make this be, as I want it to be. Oh, Lord, it can only be you. I need you to do what only you can do, and to do in me what I cannot do in me, so that I will somehow honor you, my covenant God, through this.

Isn't that sometimes the way of the God of the covenant? Isn't it his way, to drive us into the desert, so that we will depend on him?

A pastor records the email of one woman to another, as both women saw their loved ones confront impossible health situations.

"Dear Susan,

"My husband just had his second malignant brain tumor removed last month...We are truly in God's hands now.

"With our earthly minds, it is difficult to understand the need and place for the type of suffering that goes with this illness...

"Our Creator has opened a rare window of opportunity for your family to live in total and complete submission to God's will.

"Most of us take life for granted, encumbered by the trappings and distractions of this planet, and never fully enjoy the presence of the Living Savior in our lives.

"This is about to change for you. A window has been opened for you all to look into heaven, and see God in His Glory and Majesty...

"God is hearing your prayers as I write this. He tells us, 'I will change your darkness into light and make the rough places smooth; I will not forsake you.' Claim these truths as your combat gear to fight this illness.

"Through love, prayer and submission to our Lord, you and your family will find the grace, peace and strength to carry you through each day. Easy for humans? Of course not. But easy for God? Yes, yes, yes.

"Give all of your worries and fears to God because He is holding on to all of you right now with all of his might."

That is a woman who is living in covenant. She is trusting in the promises of God, and she is depending on him to provide, in an impossible situation.

What "impossibilities" do you face today?

Maybe it is a life-threatening or life-changing impossibility, like a terrible illness or wrenching crisis.

Or maybe it is a spiritual impossibility, like the realization that you are much more of a sinner, in so many more ways, than you ever thought before.

Maybe you have no idea how you can change and grow.

We are beggars. We are needy. We are dependent. Sometimes God must rock our worlds to help us see it, but we are wise to see this, even if everything is well.

Dissonance to consonance. Awful to beautiful.

The God in whom we trust, for he keeps his promises in Jesus, and through Jesus.

The God on whom we depend, for he provides in Jesus, and through Jesus.

We live in covenant.