

Sunday, June 19, 2022 -Camping Sunday!

Memory Verse: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” -Leviticus 26:12

Text: “45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. 46 When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.” -Matthew 13:45-46

Message: Swan Song #3: “The Covenant”

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-22 (*Listen for the conditions, results and the sign of the covenant*)

Blurb: Pastor David continues his final series he believes are key biblical messages. This Sunday he takes us on a whirlwind journey through the entire Bible to see it’s core theme of Covenant. We are invited into a loving-relationship with God, and this is our most treasured possession!

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” -Leviticus 26:12

WORSHIP SONG -Prerecording

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Let Your Kingdom Come* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” -Leviticus 26:12

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly

This Is My Father’s World

Questions

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

READING OF SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:28-34

One time some Jewish experts asked Jesus what the most important commands that God had ever given. Jesus answered by giving what we all the Greatest Commandments. These two are what the relationship between God and people is built on. Mark 12:28-34,

28 One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, ‘Which commandment is the most important of all?’

29 Jesus replied, ‘The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, 30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. 31 The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.’

32 The legal expert said to him, ‘Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides Him. 33 And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.’”

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, He said to him, ‘You aren’t far from God’s kingdom.’” After that, no one dared to ask Him any more questions.”

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: “Root Beer Float” -Pastor Andrew

PRAYERS: Honoring Our Fathers/Dad’s Root Beer -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: Swan Song #3: “The Covenant”

PP#1: Swan Song #3: “The Covenant”

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.” -Matthew 13:45-46

So, I’m in my final message series here at Forest Hills, and for this series I’m going back and reinforcing some of what I think are the key biblical teachings that I have tried to bring to this church and that are close to my heart and my pastoral leadership. The last two Sundays I’ve talked about how as Pentecost people, the Holy Spirit lives in us, transforms us from the inside out, and makes us holy lights shining into our dark world.

Today I want to share with you the biblical theme that has not only shaped me the most, but perhaps has been most influential in shaping my Christian understanding.

So, Swan Song #3: The Covenant. The relationship God makes with people is based on covenant. That covenant forms our very self identity and our relationship with God. Matthew 13:45-46 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.”

PP#2: *Image of a little girl wearing pearls.*

I want to share with you a story some of you have heard before. I used it in my second message I preached here 13 years ago!

Once there was a king who presented his daughter, the princess, a beautiful pearl necklace. The necklace went missing and his people in the kingdom searched everywhere but could not find it. Some said a bird may have taken it away. The king then offered a huge reward to anyone who found it.

One day a clerk was walking home along a polluted river that was very filthy and smelly. As he was walking, a sparkle from the river caught his eye, and when he looked, he saw the pearl necklace! The excitement of the reward led the clerk to disregard the murky, foul water. He put his hand into the water and grabbed at the necklace, but somehow he didn't catch it. But when he looked again, the necklace was still there! So he tried again, this time walking into the river, dirtying his pants, and putting his whole arm in to grasp the necklace. But strangely, he still missed the necklace!

Yet when the water settled, he could clearly see it, right there, in the water. With all his determination, he plunged into the polluted river, frantically grabbing everywhere for the necklace, but to no avail. He finally crawled onto shore, covered in grime and filth, exhausted and bewildered. He was overcome with despair and disappointment, and he lost all hope of ever getting the necklace.

PP#3: *Image of a person resigned and hopeless, despairing, perhaps dirty and exhausted*

Let me pause here a minute and ask you, do you know how the clerk feels? I mean, in your life? Can you resonate with this story? Do you know what it's like to try so hard to get a hold of that prize which you want so badly? In your life, have you been trying to grab that something that will turn your life around...frantically searching for that which will bring you lasting happiness, bring meaning to your life and answer your deepest longings?

But then, like that clerk, you find yourself just frantically grabbing after something that seems always to elude your grasp? And have you gone deeper and deeper into the murky and polluted world, putting your whole self into it, but coming up empty handed, with the only thing to show for it is how you've been muddied, compromised, dirtied and degraded?

Do you know what it's like to be all "washed up" on shore, exhausted, spent—chasing that lifelong, inner dream that never materialized, and in the end, you find yourself disgusting and revolting? Have you finally concluded that it is all just an illusion and there is no real prize? It's one grand exhausting trick? Have you finally succumbed to the philosophy that life's tough and then you die, it's all a joke and there is no answer to that inner pain and longing?

PP#4: *Image of a hand holding a pear necklace*

Let me continue the story.

As the clerk lay on the shore, filthy and despairing, a holy man walked by. He asked the clerk what was the matter. The clerk explained that he could see the princess' necklace in the river, but no matter what he did he just couldn't get it. Then the wise old saint suggested that instead of looking down into the dirty river, he try looking up. And sure enough, when he did, he saw the string of pearls hanging on the branch of a tree above the water. All along the clerk had been trying to capture merely a *reflection* of the real necklace!

I want you to know that there is a real, true necklace. In life. There is a real, true answer for you in your life. What you have been longing for, striving for, spending yourself for...really does exist, and you *can* have it. The problem may be that you are spending yourself grasping at a mere reflection of the true answer, the real prize. To find it, you may just need to look up.

PP#5: *Quote, with fitting image:* “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” -St. Augustine, *Confessions*

The true answer is that your heart and soul long for a right relationship with God. You see, God created all things, but He had a special plan for people. He created people to be with Him: to talk with Him, to fellowship with Him, to spend time with Him, to hang out with Him...to be with Him. God has created us for Himself, and only when we are right with Him will we have our heart's desire; only with Him will our lives be right.

I've heard it described that God created all of us with a God-shaped hole down in the very core of our beings. St. Augustine put it this way 1,600 years ago, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, [O God]” (*Confessions*). About 500 years ago the Presbyterians put it in question and answer form: “Q: What is the chief end of man? A: To love God and enjoy Him forever.” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*)

PP#6: *Image of hugging God/Jesus and feeling whole, with a heart watermark in the background*

So the true answer for our lives is not something *to have*, to *work for*, to *achieve*. Rather it is a true relationship. It is to be restored to a right and true relationship with God. God created you, loves you, and wants to be with you. And only when you love Him and are with Him will you find that your whole life finally makes sense—comes together—and you have that inner peace and joy. What you are longing for is to be in a love-relationship with God. Notice I said *love-relationship*. The right relationship with God is a *love-relationship*.

This true, love-relationship with God is the main story of the whole Bible. It is THE theme, THE plot, THE story, from the beginning of the book of Genesis to the end of the book of Revelation. God has created us, loves us, wants to be with us, and has done all that is necessary for us to be with Him now and for all eternity. This is the story of the Bible. This is the story of salvation. This is the story of your life.

PP#7: The Biblical Covenant: The binding agreement of love-relationship between God and people, enacted, offered, and sealed by God. It is the dominant theme of the Bible.

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” -Leviticus 26:12

In the Bible, this love relationship between God and His people is described as *the covenant*. The covenant is how God relates to us. And although it can be found all over the Bible, it is concisely said in Leviticus 26:12, where God declares, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”

Now, true to my nature, I have provided for you a summary outline of the biblical covenant as a handout this morning. Pull it out. Today we're going to take a whirlwind tour of the covenant through Scripture. Ready to cover the whole Bible in about 10 minutes?

PP#8: *Images of the Garden of Eden, Noah's Flood w/rainbow, and Abraham*

In the Old Testament—or the *first* section of the Bible, the covenant begins right away with Adam and Eve. We find in the creation account that people are made to commune with God and be stewards of creation. This covenant is sealed through God's gift of creation. It is found again with

the Noah and the flood account, in which God pledges never again to destroy the entire world. This time the seal is the rainbow.

The covenant is more clearly defined with Abram. Let's take a closer look at that.

PP#9-10: Genesis 17:1- (CEB)

1 When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai ["God Almighty"]. Walk with me and be trustworthy. 2 I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants." 3 Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 "But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. 5 And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham. 6 I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you. 8 I will give you and your descendants the land in which you are immigrants, the whole land of Canaan, as an enduring possession. And I will be their God."

Turn to Genesis 17. This chapter describes the covenant that God solidified with Abraham. As we read this, listen for the main components that make up the covenant. Verse 1, "When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am El Shaddai ['God Almighty']'. Walk with me and be trustworthy. 2 I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants.' 3 Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 'But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. 5 And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham. 6 I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you. 8 I will give you and your descendants the land in which you are immigrants, the whole land of Canaan, as an enduring possession. And I will be their God.'"

So, the main elements of the covenant with Abraham are that 1. God promised him a land, 2. a people as his descendants, and 3. changed his name and identity. Now if you look ahead a bit, you will see that with Abraham God is actually laying all the foundations for the coming of Jesus and human salvation: 1. *A place* where Jesus will come—the Promised Land; 2. *A people* to whom He will be born—the Israelites, the chosen people of God; and 3. *The identity change*—that Christ will bring to those who believe in God.

PP#11-12: Genesis 17:1-22 (CEB)

9 God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants in every generation. 10 This is my covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Circumcise every male. 11 You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it will be a symbol of the covenant between us. ... Your flesh will embody my covenant as an enduring covenant. ... 19 But God said, "No, your wife Sarah will give birth to a son for you, and you will name him Isaac. I will set up my covenant with him and with his descendants after him as an enduring covenant."

So, how will this happen? What is required of Abraham and God's people? Let's keep reading. Verse 9, "God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants in every generation. 10 This is my covenant that you and your descendants must keep:

Circumcise every male. 11 You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it will be a symbol of the covenant between us. ... Your flesh will embody my covenant as an enduring covenant.” Verse 19, “But God said, ‘No, your wife Sarah will give birth to a son for you, and you will name him Isaac. I will set up my covenant with him and with his descendants after him as an enduring covenant.’”

So, the covenant was a relationship between God and God’s people, based on trusting each other by faith. Abraham had to believe in God and trust Him to fulfill this covenant, and believe and trust in such a way that he acted upon it, acting like it was already fulfilled. It was symbolized in circumcision: you see *where* the mark was connected it with all the future generations even yet unborn. It passed down from generation to generation.

PP#13: *Images of Moses 1. And the 10 Commandments, 2. Passover, and 3. Leading the Israelites through the Red Sea*

With Moses the people of Israel agree to follow and obey only the Lord their God all the days of their lives. This covenant of sacrifice is sealed with sacrificial blood splattered on the altar and the people. The covenant continues to be prevalent throughout the judges, all through the monarchies and throughout the prophets.

PP#14: The Covenant

Old: God chooses to redeem people (through the Law and sacrifices)

New: Jesus redeems people fully and eternally (through His death and resurrection)

So the covenant, as depicted in the Old Testament, is a bond of relationship between God and the people He created. It is a bond in which God pledges His love and mercy to people. People, however, struggle to keep their part of the covenant, to stay faithful God through devotion and obedience to Him. Ever since Adam and Eve, people have consistently chosen against God. We falter and fail and fall short of the *hesed*, the incredible loving-kindness of God. Thus we are stuck! In the Old Testament, breaches in the covenant are temporarily repaired through blood sacrifices. Yet this only covered for the sin; it did not solve the problem sinfulness—selfishness—itsself.

But...but...in the New Testament: God has provided the solution for our problem! For those who believe, the covenant is ultimately fulfilled *in, with and through* Jesus Christ.

PP#15: The New Covenant:

“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” -Hebrews 9:15

Hebrews 9:15 says, “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”

PP#16: *Image from Easter of the view from inside Jesus’ tomb of the empty cross*

God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die and rise again. Through God’s grace and love He covers our sins, and we receive the righteousness of Christ as our own. It is because of this

righteousness—given to us as a gift in the Holy Spirit—that we can fulfill our end of the covenant with God. So now our covenant with God is made possible. You see, it is through Christ whereby we, instead of trying to offer our own imperfect selves in exchange for the mercies of God, now receive the mysterious gift of God’s divine grace. And this covenant is sealed by the death of Christ on the cross for our sins and His victorious rising to new life.

So, when we choose Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, to become His disciple, then He gives us the Holy Spirit as God who lives right inside of us! Talk about an intimate relationship, right? God not just near us, God not just next to us, but God right inside of us!

PP#17: *Same image as PP#6*

Church, do you see it? *It’s all about our relationship with God!* God loves us, wants to be with us, wants us to be with Him, but we cannot because He is Holy and we are sinful. Yet God perfectly keeps His side of the covenant, faithfully even in the midst of a relationship we have broken, and then works to make it possible for our relationship to be restored with Him.

The story of the Bible is God working so that we can be restored to a right relationship with Him. This is what we are longing for. This is what we yearn for deep down inside.

PP#18: Mark 12:28-30

“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

An expert in the Scriptures came to Jesus and asked Him to summarize the whole teaching of the Scriptures. He asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” (Mark 12:28). Did you take note of Jesus’ answer? He said it is to be in a right, *love*-relationship with God. “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” (29-30).

PP#19: Mark 12:31

“‘The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.’”

But this covenant with God also affects all of our relationships. Not only are we to love God, but Jesus said “‘The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.’” (30-31) This comes from the Holy Spirit living in us making us holy and then living out through us when we shine like flashlights.

PP#20: *Image of a hand trying to grasp at pearls hanging out of reach*

The key to life is to love God completely and totally, radically...with everything you’ve got. It is not to *do* anything or *acquire* anything or to *achieve* anything or to *accomplish* anything. All these things are mere reflections, and become pointless grasping that merely exhaust us, discourage us and dirty our lives.

If you are exhausted from trying to find the treasure of life, if you have tried all you know to grasp it; if you are tired, worn out, discouraged, dirty and hopeless, then take the advise of the old saint in the story. Look up. It is real.

PP#21: The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

“45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. 46 When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it. -Matthew 13:45-46

Jesus said, “45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. 46 When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.” [Matt. 13:45-46 (CEB)]

God invites you into the covenant. The Lord offers you the pearl of great value. You just need to stop grasping at mere reflections. You need to give up everything else you *think* brings you joy—all your strivings after the illusion—in order to receive the real deal.

PP#22: *Same image as PP#6*

All it takes is a simple prayer. A prayer of turning to God, giving Him your hand, giving Him your life. He will keep His part of the covenant and He will give you *abundant* life!

Take a moment, and look up!

Amen.

[Live Worship Only] CLOSING SONG: *Days of Elijah* -Sanctify

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” -Leviticus 26:12

BENEDICTION -Pastor David

POSTLUDE -Sanctify (live)

COVENANT: THE WAY GOD RELATES TO PEOPLE

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” -Leviticus 26:12

<u>With Whom:</u>	<u>Conditions:</u>	<u>Sign:</u>	<u>Biblical References:</u>
1. Adam & Eve	Commune directly with God	Gift of Creation	Genesis 1:28-30 The Lord gives all creation to Adam and Eve Genesis 3:8 The Lord walked in Garden of Eden during the cool of the day
2. Noah	Following Flood	Rainbow	Genesis 9:8-17 God promises never to destroy the earth with a flood again
3. Abraham	a. Land: Promised Land b. Son: Decedents (Israelites) c. Name: “Abram” to “Abraham”	Circumcision	Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-22 Genesis 17:7 “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”
4. Isaac	Re-established covenant made with Abraham	Circumcision	Genesis 26:24 “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you . . .”
5. Jacob	Re-established covenant made with forefathers	Circumcision	Genesis 28:13-15 “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. . .I will give your descendants this land. . .all the people of the earth will be blessed through your offspring.”
6. Enslaved Israelites	God has heard their cry	Exodus (Freedom)	Exodus 3:7-10 “The Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt...I have come down to rescue them.’”
7. Moses & Israelites	Mount Sinai	The Law	Exodus 24:1-8 “. . .When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the Lord has said we will do.’” Leviticus 26:12 “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”
8. Phinehas	Covenant of peace	Lasting priesthood	Numbers 25:10-13 “. . .a covenant of lasting priesthood. . .”
9. Joshua	Serve only God	The Promised Land	Joshua 24:1-27 “...and the people said to Joshua, ‘We will serve the Lord our God and obey Him. . .’”
10. Kings	Serve only God	Everlasting kingdom	II Samuel 7:5-16 “. . . Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” I Kings 6:13 “I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel.” Ezekiel 37:24-28 “. . .I will be their God, and they will be my people. . .”
11. Prophets	Turn back to God	Covenant written on the heart Many included Promise to restore	Jeremiah 31:31-34 “. . .This is the covenant I will make. . .I will put my law in their minds and write in on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. . .” Zech. 2:10-13 “. . . many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day & will become my people. I will live among you...” Zechariah 8:7-8 “. . .they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”
12. Jesus	“Cup of the New Covenant”	Cross	Matthew 26:27-29 “. . .This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. . .” Hebrews 8:6 “But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.”
13. Church	Baptism	Water & Holy Spirit	John 3:5 “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’”
14. Saints of Heaven	Overcoming/faithfulness	New Jerusalem	Revelation 21:7 “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be His God and he will be my son.”