**God Made a Covenant**

**The Word**

Read together Deuteronomy 4:44-5:7

**The Big Idea**

The story of Scripture is the story of God graciously initiating with human beings, entering into a covenant with them, and setting their lives on an adventure of faith with him. We are called out of a merely cultural Christianity into a deep covenant relationship with God.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. As you heard the story of God initiating covenant relationships with people throughout Scripture, what was something that was new or impactful for you in that?

2. On Sunday, Cultural Christianity was contrasted with covenant Christianity. What else do you think should be added to that discussion to distinguish between those two forms of Christianity?

3. On Sunday, it was said that our own spiritual growth is primarily up to God not us. If that’s true, how significant are our own actions, decisions, and disciplines in our spiritual growth? What role do they play?

4. What do you think about this idea of experiencing your faith in terms of God’s pursuit of you? Have you experienced your own relationship with God in those terms, and how would it change how you approach your life with God if you did?

**Digging Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. Deuteronomy rehearses God’s covenant with Israel on the plains of Moab just before they enter the promise land.

1. To a new generation of Israelites leaving behind the wilderness and moving into a new cultural context in the promise land, Moses reminds them of their identity as God’s people.

2. As we step out into the culture of our day, Deuteronomy grounds us in our identity as God’s covenant people

B. Deuteronomy 4-11 depicts the core postures, dynamics, and commands of the covenant

 1. These chapters were central to Jesus’ own sense of identity and mission

 2. These chapters are still relevant to God’s people today

II. The history of covenant

 A. Abraham

 1. God’s gracious initiative and choice of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3)

 a. A radical call to leave his old life behind

 b. A radical blessing of descendants, land, and blessing to all nations

 2. God’s covenant with Abraham and covenantal ceremony (Gen 15)

 a. God passes through the two halves of the sacrificed animals

 b. God unilaterally guarantees fulfillment of his covenant with Abraham

 3. Abraham’s adventure with God

 a. A journey of faith and patience

 B. The Israelites first generation

 1. God’s gracious initiative in rescuing them from slavery (Ex 6:5-7)

 2. God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai and covenantal ceremony

a. Covenant: you are my treasured possession, a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:4-6)

b. Covenant ceremony: the blood of the covenant sprinkled on the altar and on the people (Ex 24:5-8)

 3. Israel’s adventure with God through the wilderness

 C. The Israelites second generation (and beyond)

 1. God’s gracious initiative and calling of them

 2. God’s covenant with them

a. Covenant: you are my treasured possession (Dt 7:6-9)

b. Covenant ceremony: blessings and curses pronounced from Mt. Nebal and Mt. Gerazim (Dt 30:19-20)

 3. Israel’s adventure with God in the Promise Land

 D. Jesus and the disciples

 1. Jesus’ gracious initiative and call: “come follow me” (Mt 4:18-22)

 2. Covenant

 a. Upper Room: “you are my friends, I confer on you a kingdom”

b. Covenant ceremony: “this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you” (Lk 22:20)

3. The disciples’ adventure with Jesus for 3 years and then with the Holy Spirit in Acts

 E. The early Christian churches

 1. God’s gracious initiative: “To God’s elect, chosen by God” (1 Pt 1:1-2)

2. Covenant: “you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Pt 2:9-10)

 3. The adventure continues today . . .

III. The difference between living in covenant with God and cultural Christianity

 A. Cultural Christianity

1. You identify as Christian because your parents were Christian or you decided that Christianity made the most sense

2. You engage in certain cultural practices (church attendance, Bible reading, etc)

 3. But you experience yourself as being in the driver’s seat of your own life

God may be part of your life in as much as he adds value, but you are in control

B. Covenant Relationship

1. You experience God’s pursuit of you

a. You experience yourself as having been acted on, drawn, and pursued by a Person. The experience may be dramatic or subtle, it may be beautiful or unsettling. But what is clear is you are no longer in the driver’s seat.

 b. You look back on your life with gratitude

1). Your life is not so much about the series of good choices you’ve made

2). Rather you see the hand of God on your life in spite of yourself at times

 c. You look ahead at your life with assurance

1). Since your relationship with God is up to him and his faithfulness, not you and your strength, you can be assured he’ll be a faithful covenant partner

2). Analogy: a parent holding their child’s hand through rocky terrain: the safety isn’t dependent on the child’s grip but the parent’s grip.

 2. You lose control over your life

a. You’re bound by a covenant relationship, so you no longer get to choose to do whatever you want

b. You begin to realize you’re not the ultimate one in control of your own spiritual growth

1) Our most significant spiritual growth doesn’t tend to happen by our plans and resolutions (though we can grow a bit that way)

2) Our spiritual growth tends to happen when God does a fresh work or drops an experience in our path we weren’t expecting that leaves us forever changed.