

**Sermon Notes of
Elder Jim Roberts' Sermon on June 20, 2021:**

**"A Tale of Three Fathers
(Hebrews 13:20-21)"**

[In today's sermon, Elder Jim Roberts on Zoom shows us that we are included in God's eternal covenant, which is a God initiated free gift showing His mercy, love, and grace.]

Introduction:

- This is Father's Day. Happy Father's Day! Fathers are so important to families.
- Why is it that you can have such supreme confidence in the promises of Scripture?
- How can you know you can place full trust in your heavenly Father?
- The assurance is because He is a God of Covenant.
- How often do you include the word "covenant" in your conversations about God or in your prayers?
- You can look at your concordance and discover that the Bible is laced throughout with the word and with the concept of covenant.
- The 7 major covenants of Scripture will tell you infinitely more about the plan of salvation than ever could the 7 annual festivals of the Hebrew calendar.
- Today will be just a summary outline of a huge subject which Jim gave 24 sermons on this subject between 2012 & 2014.
- Where we are headed is captured by this passage from Hebrews, in its summary chapter and our main text.
- The book of Hebrews compares the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.
- Now the Old Covenant was good, the New Covenant is much better and the best is yet to come.

Hebrews 13:20 (NIV), May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21) may he equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

- Note please how the words "blood" and "covenant" are associated, which is important.
- But this is Father's Day and my title is "A Tale of Three Fathers."
- You might surmise that Jim will pick out 3 Scriptural fathers and draw lessons from them.
- But he will actually talk about the 2 fathers in his life and end with our heavenly Father.

Father #1:

- Father #1 was actually Jim's maternal grandfather.
- For economic reasons, Jim's parents sent this true 1946 post-war boomer to live with his grandparents on their Arno, Missouri farm during Jim's preschool years.

- The short version of this story is that his Gramps became Jim's hero and idol.
- Jim followed his Gramps everywhere and who gave him early impressions of how a man should live his life.
- Gramps was very exemplary of how to live a true Christian life.
- Jim watched his work ethic and neighborliness.
- Jim saw him every Sat. preparing his Sunday school lesson and it was his voice teaching the class at church from the Scriptures.
- Jim can sum up his Gramps impact on him with a song from Celtic Thunder entitled "The Old Man."
- The main lesson is that we had a covenant-like relationship in that we were absolutely bonded to each other as heart friends to care for one another.
- And Jim got his turn to care for Gramps when Granny died when Jim was 15.
- His Gramps became helpless and lost domestically.
- So Jim moved down there for five months and cooked his meals and ran the house when he wasn't going to school during his sophomore year.
- Then Gramps moved to his home town of Springfield where our friendship covenant continued until his death.
- It was like the kind of covenant God has initiated with believers.
- We would never leave nor forsake one another.
- That's the theme of God's covenant with us.
- Now when Jim did move back with his parents, his Mom continued with many of the traits that Gramps passed on to her.
- Jim's mom is another hero Jim always remembers with a song as well: ("Did you ever know that you are my hero.")

Father #2:

- Now Jim's 2nd father, his biological Dad, could not have been a sharper contrast to his first father.
- Jim's father became a hopeless addict and the vodka turned him into a mean and hateful person.
- So, Jim had no relationship with his father.
- My hatred increased toward him was complete the day he stole my coin collection and my car keys and drove my first car to get more booze and then sideswiped something and left a depression on one side of my car from front to back.
- Now, you may think Jim is dishonoring his Dad in telling us about this.
- It would be that if there had not been a Paul Harvey "rest of the story."
- After Jim left for college, married and we had his daughter, God prompted Jim to let go of the past and reconcile with his dad.
- Fortunately, his dad He did reform for the most part, becoming a Bible student and a mostly pleasant person.
- We visited him in the veteran's hospital where he worked.

- We introduced his granddaughter to him, embraced him, and reconciled with him.
- Those last several years were positive years and left good impressions on our daughter.
- The lesson here is that it is never too late to try and initiate reconciliation with an estranged relative, or even a former friend.
- Jim was determined to start up a new covenant bond with his dad, and God gave them success.
- It's interesting that Paul wrote that we all participate in a ministry of reconciliation.
- As much as lies within us, we should try to live at peace with all people (Romans 12:18).
- Jim was so grateful that he could now be a part of his dad's life in a very positive way.

Father #3 – our heavenly Father:

- And now we move on to Jim's 3rd Father and our real topic of the day which is impossible to fully address.
- So the attempt is to help us better understand the doctrine of covenant and how it can draw us closer to a fully trustful relationship with our covenant God is where we are headed.
- Let's begin with **Psalm 25:14 (NIV)**:

The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.

- Does this not suggest that God wants us to know and understand His covenant nature?
- He wants to confide otherwise secret things to His people.
- Intimacy and companionship with and confidence in God is related to a covenant understanding, which is both eternal and unconditional with us.
- We are today walking in the results of the New Covenant.
- But a huge percentage of believers don't understand much about a covenant relationship.
- Our intimacy with God is related to covenant understanding.
- We have the benefits of our covenant relationship without much understanding as to why.
- We need to understand what's the foundation for the fact that the Father accepts you as Jesus Himself?
- How can we be absolutely sure about that?
- Why does God act like this toward His children?
- From the Bible, you will discover that it is a covenant book with a covenant purpose.
- It is unique to this book that God enters into covenant with humans.
- Covenant is the foundation upon which God's interactions with us are built.
- It's the act and expression of his love nature.
- It's the key that ties the 2 testaments together into one book. There is one covenant thread that runs through the scriptures.

So what is a covenant?

- With its Mid-Eastern origins, it's hard for us Westerners to understand.
- Jim has done a lot of research concerning the detailed information about Mid-Eastern covenants, that he is going to share with us.
- A covenant is fundamentally a blood-bond for life or death between two parties.
- It's always made with the shedding of blood and the making of an oath.
- When partaking of a covenant, one is now bonded to another person in a life and death relationship.
- It's always a serious matter.
- In a Biblical sense, God is the initiator of covenants between himself and selected humans.
- Among Mid-Eastern peoples it was an unbreakable agreement and binding contract.
- It was never a causal relationship.
- It's a committed covenant unto death.
- In establishing a covenant with someone, you are saying, "If I do not keep this covenant, I am ready to forfeit my life."
- So how did you make a covenant in the cultures of OT biblical ages?
- Though there were various ways, they all have basic ideas in common.
- First, there is no exit. If you tried to leave or break this covenant, you're dead!
- So you make sure this person is worth entering into covenant with.
- We need to understand that this blood-bond covenant is stronger than family ties.
- Now Paul wrote at least twice that people today are covenant-breakers.
- Treaties between nations, broken promises, and marriage and divorce rates are typical examples.
- Or politics – do you really believe campaign promises?
- How about commercials? Do we believe in the claims they make about their product?
- One reason why true covenant is not an easy concept for us is because we live in a treacherous truce-breaking age.
- Yet absolute faithfulness to His word is the way God is.
- A broken covenant is the very opposite of the heart of God.

Joshua and the Gibeonites:

- Remember the story in Joshua and the Gibeonites?
- Israel was advancing into Canaan and displacing its inhabitants.
- So Gibeon come to Joshua pretending to be of a far distant country and talks him into making covenant with them.
- So, Joshua entered this covenant with them.
- But later, Gibeonites are discovered to be local folks just down the road.

- And when they became under attack from other tribes, they come and tell Joshua, you agreed to come and defend us!
- Interestingly, God says, “They are right. You made covenant with them and you are bound to act accordingly.”
- That’s the day when the sun stood still for the battle when Joshua defended the Gibeonites.
- God did this because that’s how serious God is about keeping a promise.
- God hates covenant-breaking because a covenant touches his very heart.

The details of a covenant:

- So let’s see what happens when two tribes in the Mid-east cultures made a covenant.
- Consider tribe A and tribe B. They want to join for mutual benefit.
- So each tribe chose a representative, who would embody all of tribe A and one who would embody all of tribe B.
- What happens to that representative happens to the entire tribe.
- The reps (representatives) come together in the sight of the elders of each tribe.
- The first act is an exchange of weapons, which means they are exchanging their strength.
- They also would often exchange their outer garments that identified outwardly who they were.
- Then there is the sacrifice of an animal, often a young bull, because a covenant was a blood covenant agreement.
- It is slaughtered between them and split down the middle with blood pooling, and the two reps would walk through the blood in a long figure 8 pattern.
- Then they face each other in the blood, saying that this is deadly serious, loyal commitment, not a passing, casual relationship.
- They tell each other, “If I break this agreement, I will die even as this animal has died.”
- In Hebrew, the very word “covenant” means “to cut.”
- So, any time you cut something you remember the concept of a covenant and that it does not happen without the shredding of blood.
- If one breaks this covenant, he forfeits his life.
- Remember the Bible says, “The blood thereof is the life thereof?”
- Next there was always written terms of the covenant listing what the two tribes would do for each other.
- Their weaponry was included that would pledge what strength they each had.
- It was signed by the reps and sealed before witnesses.
- Then there was the cutting of the representatives.
- One way was to cut across their palm. More commonly was cutting of the wrist of each other.

- They would bring these wounds together and intermingle their blood.
- Blood would run down the right arm, the symbol of strength.
- And then you vow before God that you are giving your strength to one another.

- Thus, the two reps become literal blood brothers as the two tribes would be.
- In various places of the Middle East and Africa, this blood exchange is still practiced today to signify committed agreements.

- Now they exchange names to make their covenant public.
- They are no longer separate tribes A & B. They are now together tribe AB and/or BA.
- They are now known as blood brothers.
- They are now known as friends as well.
- The new relationship begins based on two words: the first is “lovingkindness.”
- This means, “I’m going to love you.”
- The second word is “remember.” It means they hold you in the forefront of their mind.

- At the end of all ceremony, they sit down to eat.
- In the West, we eat because we are hungry.
- In the Eastern hemisphere, they eat to celebrate covenant.
- For anyone to be asked to eat there and to say “no, I’m not hungry’ is an absolute insult.
- To have their hand on my table means they are bonded to you.
- This is the final seal of the deal when the two rep’s hands are on the table to begin the meal.

- Usually a part of the meal and sometimes the only part of the meal is a cup of wine and a piece of bread.
- They feed each other the bread and drink the common cup of wine.
- The bread says, “Take me completely, for I am now yours.” So, they internalize one another.
- The wine is my blood which I am ready to shed for you.

God's covenant with mankind:

- Now, from the first page of the Bible, God enters into such a binding covenant with mankind – Adam and Eve, which is a story all in itself.
- It would be enough if God just gave us His word.
- But just to complete our understanding about the nature of what He is doing, God enters into a blood covenant with us.
- He says that He would rather cease to exist than to break His covenant with us.
- God says that He stands behind His word and will never leave or forsake us.
- All God’s words in Scripture are spoken against a covenant background.

- God comes down to our level and takes something that everyone at least at one time understood.
- God, like Eastern people, binds Himself with a life and death bond.

David and Jonathan:

- Let us illustrate this with a story from first Samuel about David and Jonathan.
- Because of King Saul's breaking of covenant with God, he jealously sees David as a threat to his and Prince Jonathan's kingship.
- So, Saul tries to kill David and tells Jonathan so.
- But the two friends made a blood covenant together.
- Because of their covenant, Jonathan forfeits his right to inherit the throne and defends David.
- You can read where Jonathan gives David his weapons and robe as tokens of his commitment.
- But Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle on the same day.
- David laments his loss of his covenant friend with "The Song of the bow."
- Later, he asks his court if there are any remaining relatives of Jonathan that he may honor their covenant commitment.
- Yes, David learns there is the crippled Mephibosheth hiding out in the wilderness in Lo Debar where he expects to be hunted down and killed as the survivor of the house of Saul.
- David has Mephibosheth brought before him and he is shocked to find that David makes him equal with the princes and he's invited to eat from David's family table.
- This man who deserves nothing from David yet receives full pardon because of David's blood covenant with father Jonathan.

Our spiritual message:

- The family of mankind is reflected in the family of Saul with its hatred of God and very suspicious when God says He loves us.
- But there was born into humanity a Jonathan (Jesus), one who was absolutely separate from us yet one of us.
- This person is the perfect covenant representative.
- He's not God in disguise. He took to Himself our humanity.
- At the same time, He is fully God, and worth the entire creation.
- Jesus can stand for us. What happens to Him happens to us. He stands for us.
- That's what Gethsemane is all about, where Jesus finally chose to be our covenant representative for humankind.
- Is there any other way that the covenant can be made without the shedding of the blood of the Lamb?
- John the Baptist, in seeing Jesus, said, "Behold the Lamb of God comes to take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- Jesus chose the Father's way of covenant blood.
- And as He advances toward the cross, we are there, because those of us not yet born were included in the covenant.

- He's our representative. We are in Christ and Christ is in us (Galatians 2:20). We are one with Him in covenant.
- Jesus enters into covenant with the Father as us and for us.
- He walked, not through the blood of an animal, but through His own shed blood to become our eternal representative.
- God said through the centuries that He would keep His word even if it killed Him. And it did.
- That's how serious a covenant can be.
- God will always honor His promise.
- Jesus' resurrection guaranteed that the covenant is sealed and the final deal is done.
- It's interesting that Jesus was healed of every wound in His body except the scars on his wrists and the one on His side.
- So Jesus retained the scars of His covenant with all of us.
- First thing Jesus did when He walked into the upper room was to show the disciples His scars, which means a lot to Middle Easterners.
- That's when they believed and rejoiced – even doubting Thomas.
- The covenant has been made.
- Check what Jeremiah said as repeated in Hebrews: "Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more, and I will write the love-fulfilled law on your hearts, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Hebrews 10:16-17).
- We are now one with the eternal God and no one can snatch us from His hand, because ours is an eternal promise.
- Jesus is the living guarantee that God comes to live with us and in us in an eternal promised covenant.
- We are in a family bond with God, never to be forsaken.
- Jesus is our blood brother, and every time we take communion, we rehearse that.
- And all that happened before we were ever born, just as Mephibosheth was covered before he was born by Jonathan's covenant with David.
- One more thought – the eternal covenant in Jesus' blood was made before we were born and covers us completely.
- All we have to do is to receive it, and when we do, we are Mephibosheth.
- We are no more deserving of the special grace that than the crippled Mephibosheth was given.
- So, you could say that we are all spiritual cripples, because we all fall short of the glory of God.
- We have been given a tremendous gift as we are brought into covenant with the Holy Triune God, in spite of ourselves.
- Please remember the eternal nature of God's promise which cannot and will not fail.
- Also please remember that your inclusion in the eternal covenant as stated in Hebrews 13 is a God initiated free gift of His mercy, His love, and His forever grace. Amen!