



## A COVENANT OF THE HEART

**OPENING PRAYER:** Open with prayer for any personal needs of your group.

**NOTE:** Our insights are important so remember to respect each other's thoughts/reflections.

**DISCUSSION:** Spiritual circumcision of the heart (Romans 2.25-29) is to allow the revelation of God's love through the Holy Spirit, to cut through our pride, expectations, intellectual and emotional barriers. It is to submit ourselves to God. We were dead to God due to our sins, yet God's grace allowed us to understand the richness of his love through faith in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2.1-10). This is our spiritual covenant – we invest in our love for God, through faith, because we are his children and he is our heavenly Father.

- Share with each other what entering a spiritual covenant means to you as a follower of Jesus.
- What area of your spiritual walk do you need to invest in with God?

**READ:** John 12.1-8 ([Discuss as many - or as few - of the following questions as you like](#))

This story of Jesus interaction with a woman anointing him, religious leaders and negative attitudes towards his anointing are seen in all gospels.

- Have others read Matt 26.6-13, Mark 14.3-9, Luke 7.36-50 – compare and share which version impacts you the most and why.
- Jesus said not to worry about the money that could have gone to “the poor”. Why do you think Jesus, who said not to worry about possessions and that you can't serve money and God, suddenly says it's ok to have this lavished on himself?
- When have you spent money lavishly for others? Would you spend as lavishly for the poor?

### GOING DEEPER:

- Who do you identify as the poor in your local community and how could you do something that shows Jesus love to them as individuals or as a group?

### CLOSING PRAYERS:

- **CHURCH:** Pray for our Easter services that we might be prepared to engage every part of the Easter experience to draw closer to God and for those who will visit our church during Easter.
- **VISION 2021:** That the leaders time **this Sunday after church** will encourage everyone in the goals we're seeing achieved and the way people are growing in their faith lives.
- **OTHER:** Pray for other churches in our local area that they might share the love of Jesus and continue to grow in favour with the wider community

Covenant with God • Joshua 5.2-12 • Luke 15:11-32

What interesting readings we had today. We jumped from circumcision to obstinate child.

Who feels like trying to draw the theme between these readings?

I didn't choose these – they are our actually the readings set for this Lenten season

As Dylan pointed out, it is easy to get stuck in reading the word of God yet - as Nathan pointed out, the power of the word is active in our world and can be active in us

If we truly wish to be transformed by it then we can expect God to do amazing things

Kerry loves doing puzzles - she has one she's working on at the moment

Reading the bible is like putting pieces of a puzzle together – which can be tedious

It can seem overwhelming with so many pieces - However, it can also be exciting when we find those pieces that match, and we start to see the bigger picture come into view

God sees and loves the bigger picture - and he wants us to see and invest in it also

So, let me put a couple of the pieces together for what is happening first with Israel then with Jesus parable so you might see what might seem like a strange link

Joshua picks up the story of the wilderness wandering. However, the 40 years of wandering has now ended. They are about to begin a new life, a new season. This is a big deal.

They have crossed over the Jordan and are finally in the Promised Land.

The reason this has happened though is the generation of those born in the desert have chosen to be obedient and do something their parents would not.

They will *trust* that God will give them the land regardless of the challenges before them.

To show their commitment, Joshua is called upon by God to oversee a mass circumcision.

An emperor needed a body guard, so he called a Japanese, Chinese and Jewish swordsmen

He needed to test their skills so the Japanese guard showed how he could cut a bee in two.

The Chinese guard showed how he could cut a fly in four. The emperor was very impressed.

The Jewish guard sliced at a gnat, but it remained alive. Disappointed, the emperor asked why it remained alive. The Jewish guard replied, circumcision isn't meant to kill.

This painful gesture was first given to Abraham in Genesis 17 to remind Israel of their distinctiveness as a *covenant people* – it is now reinstated for a new generation

They were to offer their own flesh and blood in covenant with God – God's response was to deliver on his promise and enable them to enter the Promised Land.

No longer would they be reliant on the literal gift of daily bread (manna), just like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, they will grow crops and have to partner with God in creation

They've learnt to engage with God - yet will they see relationship or just rules?

Then we have our parable – some call it the “Forgiving Father” – many resonate with this - such a complete image of God's abundant compassion, forgiveness, grace, love and mercy.

If all Christians reminded themselves of this each day and chose to live this out in the same way through the Holy Spirit, our world would be transformed in a matter of months.

There's some cultural points here for those new to this parable and its context.

Firstly, Jesus has just finished speaking to religious leaders – those so focused on the rules they forget to live and love God as children who have everything - like the older brother

Secondly, their attitude also keeps them from loving their brother. The religious leaders issue with Jesus is he spends time with sinners – they are quick to judge rather than love.

Thirdly, Jesus often gives exaggerated stories to highlight the severity of our sin or the wonder of God's love.

Culturally, the young man should have been stoned to death for what he asked. In addition, we know he hit rock bottom as he worked with pigs and even contemplated eating their food – a very big cultural no, no for Jews – Jesus floored them with how sinful this guy was

Yet he also floored them with the level of God's abundant love.

- The father saw his son from a way off – he was looking for him.
- The father ran to meet him – he wasn't concerned about cultural etiquette.
- The father was filled with compassion which overflowed physically
- The father restored another 3<sup>rd</sup> of his inheritance (symbols of ring, robe and sandals)
- The father celebrated this return with *everyone* in his household community

What I love here is Jesus shows just how aware of his sin the son actually is – he says:

*I have sinned against heaven (God's ways) and before you (cultural and relational ways).*

It's like the guy was walking all the way home rehearsing his lines - when he finally speaks, his father barely lets him finish before showing all is forgiven – this is what God does for us!

This is the message Jesus is emphasizing – God looks out, waiting for his children to return - he runs to those aware and sorry for their sins - full reconciliation is theirs

Yet God's resources are at the disposal of the dutiful children, even those who are focused more on judging others than on reflecting the same abundant love of their father.

Which child do you feel you are? Or perhaps you are yet to know the love of this father!

Let's look at Romans 2 - Paul is discussing the role of OT Law for Christians.

The *laws of Moses* were written in the desert – Paul discusses how circumcision applies to a Christian in the same way it applies in relation to a covenant with God for Joshua

Paul would agree it is an outward sign of the covenant revealing the distinct calling of a Jew

However, he also points out that, if the heart is sinful, then physical circumcision is actually of no value - it sabotages and diminishes the point of the physical act.

So, rather than focus on the *external*, Paul says to focus on the condition of the heart.

Using circumcision as a metaphor, because it is such a strong and well-known image of covenant with God, he says *only the Holy Spirit can purify a heart and set us apart to God.*

Adhering to the act itself isn't enough. A person's heart must change – this is circumcision of the heart. This goes for us today – being moral isn't enough if it doesn't draw us to Jesus

Who has read, or know of *the 5 love language* books? It's also an online app

These are great for those who wish to take the time to understand how to speak into the lives of their loved ones – spouses, children, family, etc.

It's also a great book to understand yourself and what fills your heart.

It's also a great book to understand others in your church, work place, community.

A covenant is a powerful symbol of relationship - something we all desire (I pray no one has asked you to commit to a covenant in the OT way) *simply because of what it offers*

A covenant (like in marriage) touches on ALL our love languages in that it says someone cares enough for me to say – *I understand you & I'm not going anywhere*

- Even when that person is quick to judge you or others - than show abundant love.
- Even when that person says - I wish you were dead - being selfish and hurtful.

A covenant responds with the love of the father which restores our identity to us.

The reality is we desire the benefits of a covenant – yet our humanity won't allow us to remain 100% faithful to a covenant – thankfully we know the One who is faithful

And the One who is faithful helps do in us what we can't do in ourselves – love others

Everyone is called to a covenant with the One who runs to embrace us if we wish – to do so requires a spiritual transformation that cuts to our heart.

Ephesians 4.1-6 reminds us that for those who have made a covenant with God to love Jesus for what he's done for us, we are to *do our best* to remain faithful to our covenant.

God has more for you than you can possibly imagine and invites you to understand the bigger picture of his puzzle through a covenant with him

If you have made a covenant with Jesus – lets give thanks for it and pray it grows strong.

If you haven't yet, I invite you to do so today.

Let's pray...