

## Before You Say 'Yes' to Jesus

*The Price of 'Yes': What it Means to Follow*

August 9-10

### Introduction

Hey everyone! I'm Mark and I want to welcome you to service. This week we are continuing our brand new series called, *Before you say 'Yes' to Jesus*. By a show of hands, how many of you would say you have said 'Yes' to Jesus? What does it mean to say 'Yes' to Jesus?

Last week Pastor Earl kicked off our series by helping us understand what exactly we are saying 'Yes' to when we say 'Yes' to Jesus. He shared that, coming from an unchurched background, his greatest fear was not knowing what would happen to him after he died. He said that even at a very young age he would lie awake at night wondering what would happen to him after death. So when someone told him that Jesus offers eternal life he said, "Yes! I want that!" Later he confessed that he wasn't really saying 'Yes' to Jesus but 'Yes' to the promise of eternal life.

It reminded me of my own story in that when I was growing up my parents took me to a Christian stage production called, *Heaven's gates, Hell's flames*. Anyone remember it? If you're not familiar, it was a series of short stories that depicted people's final moments of life followed immediately by their eternal destination — heaven or hell.

I'll never forget, one of the scenes showed a bunch of teenagers driving recklessly and they get into a fatal car accident. The next moment they're all waking up at the pearly gates and the angel is looking up their names in the book of life. Only one the group was a believer so when the rest of their names aren't found they start yelling at their friend saying, "You knew about this? Why didn't you tell us?" And the friend is crying saying, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I thought I had more time." Then, to really drive the point home, the lights turn red and Satan and his demons come out and drag the friends away as they're screaming in terror.

And this happens over and over again with different people. I think one was a kid who received Jesus at a VBS with his unbelieving Mother. Let me tell you, when they gave that altar call at the end, every hand went up! Including mine. But were we really saying 'Yes' to Jesus? I think most of us were saying, "Hell, no! We won't go! Sign me up for some fire insurance!"

So whether we're saying 'Yes' to the promise of eternal life, or 'Yes' to heaven's gates not hell's flames, it raises a deeper question, "Have I truly said 'Yes' to Jesus?" Last week Pastor Earl shared powerful words of Jesus reminding us what it's really about,

*"And this is the way to have eternal life—to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the One You sent to earth," (John 17:3).*

Christianity is not our "Get-out-of-Hell" free card, it's not a subscription to a religious institution, and it isn't our lucky rabbit's foot in times of need. It is to ultimately know God and know Jesus whom He sent.

Tim and Kathy Keller famously said,

*"To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything."*

In most of our relationships, people say they love us but they really only love the version of us we allow them to see. And our greatest fear is that if people truly knew us there's no way they would love us. But God doesn't love a version of you. He loves you. He sees all of you, knows everything about you, and still chooses you, still loves you.

So last week Pastor Earl taught us that to say 'Yes' to Jesus is to say 'Yes' to a deeply personal and life-changing relationship with Him where we both know and are known, love and are loved.

### **Covenant Relationship**

And if you've been in Christian circles you've probably heard the language of having a "personal relationship with God". But what kind of relationship are we talking about here? What is the nature of this relationship? Is it a parent-child relationship? Teacher-student? Boss-employee? Some people treat it like a dating relationship where I check in when I feel like it and check out when things stop working. But while the Bible uses many different images for our relationship with God, the primary way that the Bible talks about this relationship is as a **Partnership**.

Let that sink in: God, the God of the Universe, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, who is all-knowing and all-powerful, He is a partner-seeking God. From the very beginning God has sought to partner with humanity. Turn to the person next to you and tell them, "God wants to partner with you."

The word the Bible uses to describe this partnership is not one you hear very often. In fact, the only context in which you might hear it used is in a traditional Christian wedding and that word is **Covenant**. According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*,

*"The image of covenant or agreement is the primary way in which the Bible portrays the relationship between God and His people and (to a lesser extent) to the human race in general."* (Pg. 176)

And while a Covenant is binding, it is so much richer and deeper than a mere contract between two parties.

In scripture, **"A covenant is a sacred, binding relationship established by God, marked by mutual commitment and faithfulness, for a shared purpose."**

### **The Edenic Covenant**

With this framework in mind, let's take a look at the very first Covenant found in the book of Genesis. After creating mankind it says,

"Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground,"  
(Genesis 1:28).

**"A covenant is a sacred, binding relationship established by God, marked by mutual commitment and faithfulness, for a shared purpose."**

So God establishes a partnership with His newly created image-bearers, marked by mutual commitment and faithfulness, for the shared purpose of cultivating the earth.

You see, this wasn't just God delegating a task and then peacing out. God walked alongside them. This was a partnership. It was marked by mutual commitment and faithfulness. God provided everything (life, provision, purpose, His Presence) and humanity's role was to trust, to obey, and to steward creation. Part of that Covenant-trust was mapped out in the clear expectation that they could eat from any tree except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But then we read in Genesis 3:6,

*"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it," (Genesis 3:6).*

Can you see how this goes so much deeper than just eating a fruit? By eating the fruit Adam and Eve were breaking covenant with God. They were choosing independence over trust. They were choosing to reject God's partnership and to shape the world in their own image. And how has that been going for us? The Bible says that everything that is wrong with the world today — poverty, sickness, war, etc. is the result of a broken partnership with God and choosing to shape the world in our own image. God wants to partner with humanity to bless creation but we chose to shape it into our own image. How is that going?

Sin goes so much deeper than just "breaking the rules". It fractures our relationship with God, it violates our partnership with Him, and it hinders our joint mission to bless the earth. And the worst part is that the Bible says every single one of us has broken covenant with God. All of us have rejected God's invitation to partner.

*"The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant," (Isaiah 24:5).*

*"As at Adam, they have broken the covenant; they were unfaithful to Me there," (Hosea 6:7).*

All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Every one of us has rejected partnership with God. But what you see over and over in scripture is that God continues to choose for Himself a person or a people with whom He will partner for the purpose of blessing the earth. From Noah to Abraham, David to the people of Israel, God continues to seek partners.

### **Abrahamic Covenant**

I want to jump ahead to unpack one more covenant that is significant to our story. Once again humanity is living in rejection of God's partnership and once again God chooses someone and initiates a covenant partnership, this time with a man named Abram.

<sup>1</sup> *"The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

<sup>2</sup> *I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

<sup>3</sup> *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,**" (Genesis 12:1-3).*

What I want you to see is that every time God establishes a covenant with someone it is for the benefit of the whole earth! God wants to partner with you, not just for your benefit, but for the benefit of the whole earth!

But then a significant amount of time passes and Abram has yet to experience the fulfillment of God's promise. God promised that He would make Abram into a great nation, one that would bless the earth. But now Abram and his wife are geriatric, well past child-bearing age.

<sup>1</sup> "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

"Do not be afraid, Abram.  
I am your shield,  
your very great reward."

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

<sup>4</sup> Then the Word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." <sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness," (Genesis 15:1-6).

We need to pause right here because this is a massive verse. God is inviting Abram into a covenant partnership and Abram's response is not to perform, it is not to be perfect, it is not to disqualify himself, it is to believe the Lord. When God initiates our response is to believe. When God speaks, we believe. When God promises, we trust. When God moves, we respond. Our entry into covenant relationship with God doesn't hinge on our religious performance or our moral perfection but on our faith to believe God. Don't disqualify yourself from partnership with God. It doesn't hinge on your goodness but God's goodness.

<sup>8</sup> "But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

"I believe Lord, but what assurance can you give me?" Warning: This next part of the story is going to sound pretty bizarre to our modern western ears.

<sup>9</sup> "So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

<sup>10</sup> Abram brought all these to Him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. <sup>11</sup> Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

What is happening? This is a P.E.T.A. nightmare! This was an ancient near eastern practice called, "Cutting a Covenant". Have you ever heard anyone say, "Let's cut a deal?" After laying out the terms of the partnership, both parties would walk between these bloody halved animals as if to say, "*May it be done to me as to these animals if I break this covenant.*" So God is not inventing a new format, He is meeting Abram in his time, culture, and understanding. And Abram would have understood the weight and significance of this covenant.

<sup>12</sup> “As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. <sup>14</sup> But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure,” (Genesis 15:12-16).

What is God referring to? Israel’s enslavement in Egypt?

<sup>17</sup> “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup> Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites,” (Genesis 15:17-21).

God’s glory is made manifest in the form of a smoking fire-pot with a blazing torch and then it passes between the pieces. But did you notice who didn’t pass through the pieces? Abram. Abram is still in a deep sleep. God walks through the bloody animals alone! By doing so it is as if He is declaring, *“I am taking full responsibility for this covenant — for My part, and for yours. If either of us breaks it, I will bear the consequences.”*

You see God knew something about humanity that Abram didn’t fully understand — we would fail. From Eden to Noah, Abraham to Israel, we are incapable of upholding our end of the bargain. With every covenant we see the same pattern:

God Initiates -> Man Violates -> God Restores

God’s Covenants aren’t dependent on our flawless obedience but on His unfailing love.

## **Conclusion**

Fast forward the tape again some 2,000 years. Jesus and His disciples are in the upper room.

*“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is My body,” (Matthew 26:26).*

What did Jesus do with the bread that represented His body? He tore it in half. Like the bloody animals halves Jesus bore the consequences of the Covenant upon Himself.

<sup>27</sup> *“Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup> This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,” (Matthew 26:27-29).*

For thousands of years the pattern repeated: God Initiates, Man Violates, God Restores. No one was able to fulfill the Covenant. Then Jesus stepped into human history to pay our end of the covenant and to enact a new partnership — one that doesn’t depend on our perfection but on His. When you say, ‘Yes’ to Jesus, you’re not signing up for a new religion, you are entering into the most sacred, loving, life-giving partnership in the universe.

Christ's sacrifice empowers us to live in humility knowing that we didn't earn it, and confidence knowing it can never be lost if we are in Him. We simply need to believe as Abram believed. Do you believe that God wants to be in covenant relationship with you? Will you step into this sacred partnership where your life becomes part of God's mission to bless the earth?

God has already said 'Yes' to you through Jesus. The only question left is, what will your answer be?

### **Group Discussion Questions**

1. What does it mean to you that God wants to exist in a Covenant Relationship with you? How do you think a Covenant Relationship differs from other relationships?
2. Abram's entry into Covenant with God was belief. Is there anything in your life that you're having a difficult time believing God for? Are there any areas where you're still operating out of a sense of performance or perfection?
3. What are some ways in which your Covenant Relationship with God blessed the world around you?