We are in a sermon series on *A Word A Week*. Today’s word is *covenant*. This is the covenant God made with Abram and Sari.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

*Years ago, I took Bethel Bible training in Madison, Wisconsin. It’s a 2-year study of the Old and New Testaments. Each unit has a drawing that encompasses the teachings of that unit. It’s not good art, but it sticks in your head! The drawing for the unit on *covenant* is a large arm stretched out from heaven that is chained to the earth. The point being, **God chooses to be chained to us in covenant.** What does that mean?*

*We have given God every reason under heaven to get out of the *covenant*, or to be unchained from us.

- When Israel wandered in the **wilderness**, complaining and refusing to trust God, that would have been a good time for God to walk away from the *covenant*.

- When they got to the **Promised Land** and were continually forsaking God and worshiping pagan gods, that would have been a good time to drop the *covenant*.

- The prophets warned them, but they wouldn’t turn back, so **they got booted** from the Promised Land. Good time to abandon the *covenant.*
And it doesn’t stop there. **We crucified the Son of God.** Could you think of a better time for God to walk away from the covenant? And yet, on the third day God raised him from the dead, forgiving the sins of all humanity.

Add to that all the splits and divisions in the Church over the years, the misuse of power, the neglect of the poor, superficial/thin-based religion, and a host of other sins, and you have a sound case for God to terminate the covenant.

**But God chooses to be chained to us in covenant.** What does that mean in the modern world?

*Several years ago, I met with a man who had multiple affairs over many years. He had children. He had a family. This time he got caught, and I almost think he was glad he did. He told the whole dark story and confessed it all to his wife. There was no question in my mind that she was going to leave him, but she didn’t. Honestly, my first thought was that there was something wrong with her. Was she co-dependent, had a weak ego, or was she a masochist? We’re talking an enormous amount of betrayal and the details had to break her heart a hundred times over. But she saw something in him. True remorse, brokenness, shame, a desire to make amends. Whatever it was, she forgave him. Not in one moment, but over and over again. She had to work at it. God had to help her. That’s covenant.**

It made me think of the story of Peter asking Jesus how many times we should forgive someone. “Maybe as much as 7 times?” he said. And Jesus replied, “How about 77 times?” (Matt. 18:21). Or another Gospel has it 70 times 7 times! (That’s 490 times!!)

I got to thinking about that. I know it’s a play on numbers. It’s hyperbole, exaggeration to make a point, put sometimes it takes 490 times to forgive just the one thing. It’s hard work. It’s covenant. You choose to stay chained to that person.

Yet, we are but humans, not God, and there are situations in which it is not safe for us to stay chained to that person. There are times when the right thing to do is to unchain ourselves from that person so that both of us can get well. But even then, **God remains chained to us.** All of us.

*We have a lot of families dealing with addiction in this country. The American Psychiatric Association claims,
An estimated 2 million people in the United States have a substance use disorder related to prescription opioid pain medication and the number of overdose deaths from prescription and illicit opioids doubled from just over 21,000 in 2010 to more than 42,000 in 2016.
(psychiatry.org May 7, 2018).

That’s like a demon coming into your home and taking over someone you love. Talk about feeling helpless? You have to know this word covenant. **God is chained to us.** I know some days, or months, or even years, don’t not feel like it, but truth is not based on feelings, is it? What we feel is a reaction. Truth is a reality.

Read the Scriptures. It is full of human depravity; brokenness, unfaithfulness, sickness, immorality, sin and death. And yet, **God is chained to us?** Through all of it, God does not abandon us. That’s not a feeling. That’s a fact. It’s a historical fact.

*There is no human condition that lies outside the boundaries of the **covenant** God has made with us. The psalmist said it this way;*

7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night;”
12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

(Psalm 139:7-12)

That’s **covenant!** As dark as it might get, there is no darkness beyond the reach of the **covenant.** If God is chained to us, **God is chained to us.** It either is or it isn’t.

The Apostle Paul said it this way;

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35, 37-39)

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That’s covenant! Covenant is the serious business of the Church. We can clean up the building, pay the bills, get a new Livestream, improve the website, put a new sign out front, and even find a new Sr. Pastor, but at the center of it all is the covenant God has made with the world. That is the business of the Church. That is the good news we have to share with the world. **God chooses to be chained to us in covenant.**

Tell that to a young woman whose husband has been unfaithful.

Tell it to a family dealing with addiction, or to a couple whose child is gravely ill, or has died.

Tell it to an elderly person who is tired and worn out.

Tell it to a room full of prisoners, **“God is chained to us…”** (They’ll understand the chains!)

Or tell it to room full of politicians.

Tell it to anyone who is broken or hopeless, afraid or overwhelmed, even to people who are arrogant and think they are self-sufficient.

This “covenant love” is not meant to give us license, but to motivate us to love God in return. Why would you not love someone who has forgiven you all your sin, refused to abandon you in your darkest hour, and will not unchain themselves from you?

Oh, you gotta know the word, COVENANT. It drives the whole thing!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: **Amen**

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **35No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** **36For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 8:35, 37-39)