

## *SIGNING THE CONTRACT*

In the late fifties or early sixties, there was a group of men who began to meet for fellowship and many were of note, at that time. I wasn't familiar with many of the names; I think there were two women present as well. One name that I was familiar with: Leonard Ravenhill. Another name that I was familiar with was T. Austin-Sparks. At any rate, they had been meeting together for some time, and I read a transcription of one of the meetings that they had. Through a discussion process, the question was asked by one of them of the group as a whole, "What do you think is the next thing that God is going to bring out of the scriptures to the body of Christ? What is the next thing on the horizon for God's church?" There wasn't a lot of context in the article for that comment, so I don't know if they were rehearsing things that had come to the church as we've done in the past concerning the restoring of truths out of the dark ages to the church – not that those truths had ever died, but that they weren't plainly visible. At the beginning of this in the nineteen hundreds, speaking in tongues existed but it wasn't prominent. Through Azusa Street, it became notable, and in the late seventies, early eighties, it was the butt of jokes by late night talk show hosts. It wasn't that it did not exist; it was that it came to the front; it became known. I think this was the context of the question, "What is going to come to the church? What is the Holy Spirit going to bring for this phase of history in his fulfilment of his purpose in Christ?" They concluded (I don't remember which of them as I looked for what I read some time ago but couldn't find it again.) out of Revelation 12, that the next thing that God was going to bring forth out of the fulfilment of scriptures was that there was going to be a man-child born. A man-child would be born and that the expression of that which had been conceived and been in the womb and being formed was going to be birthed into the beginning of a manifestation in the earth of a different life that was not of the earth.

Not long after that, by some accounts, in 1964, there was a man who had been broken by failure, got off his knees in a small two-bedroom, one bath, terrazzo floored, concrete block house, and began to speak into a reel-to-reel tape recorder the truths that God had birthed in him. God took that message and that man and in fifteen years blew around the world a move of the Spirit that was as unique and as real a move of the Spirit that ever has been on the planet. The baseline of that move was a gospel that had been birthed through the brokenness of failure, and the message was distilled to one central theme. There were many aspects that fit into it, but that theme was "death to self," that there is no way to become the habitation

of God, that God would come and dwell in that which was not clean. There had to be a sanctification that took place that would allow God to come and dwell among men and that that life then be manifested. The life that was God dwelling in a man would then be made manifest. One of the consequences to that, we have heard many times in revelation by the Spirit probably best identified in Romans 8, was that the manifestation of the sons of God was going to deliver the creation out of its bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

There was a time, similar to the time when God took Moses, after not only preserving his life, but then took him 40 years early, so to speak – on time for Moses and on time for God but early for Israel – and he prepared a man to lead Israel out of captivity. And so, God started a number of years ago, birthing through a message of “death to self,” the preparation of those who would be those who would lead this creation out of the bondage that they are in into a liberty that God has always designed for them to experience.

The process I want to speak about a little bit tonight because, although we have heard the message, although we have all witnessed by the Spirit to the message, the imbedding of the fulfilment of what that message speaks to is life, and that life is the fullness of Christ. The responsibility that we have is to embrace the process, the power of the cross, which is the instrument of death to self. To those who die foolishness; to us who live and trust, it is the power of God unto salvation. To come to full stature, not having just begun, not having just enjoyed a lot of the aspects of the outpouring of the Spirit, but to actually finish the course and come to a perfect man, to the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is all that's left.

Everything that has ever been done has been fulfilled other than that. Jesus said to his disciples, “The same that I have done and greater will you do.” It isn't going to be greater because we are going to come to a better life than he lived. It's going to be greater because the manifestation of that is going to bring an impact to the world that is greater than what he did. The same life in an ongoing expression of the fulfillment of the purpose of God from the foundation of the world is going to bring an ongoing expression of the purpose of God into an obvious expression to this world. Just as much as tongues was in darkness – there were people who lost their jobs, run out of town, called deceivers and deceived – and now it has become almost “ho-hum” because it came to the surface, it became certified as being of God, and then became common. God is going to bring something that is uncommon and unnatural forth in the earth that is going to be a testimony of the fulfillment of his purpose when he began.

I want to read a little bit in Romans the fourth chapter. When we look across history, we don't see a lot of data, we don't hear a lot of testimony, we don't see a lot of evidence that supports what we have been talking about so far this evening. We see a church languishing in mediocrity, divided, schismed, testifying against themselves, putting Satan on vacation because they accuse one another so he doesn't have to do it. Paul anchored his expression of this in the testimony of what Genesis referred to as the beginning of the establishment of a nation. In establishing a nation, he took a man, and Paul said in Romans 4:1, "What should we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, is found?"

Let's start this story with Abraham, and let's track Abraham's progress because God made a promise to Abraham that was outrageous, and he promised it to Abraham when Abraham had no basis to understand the promise itself. He said to Abraham, "I am your shield and I am your exceedingly great reward." Abraham thought about it for a minute and he said, "Yeah, but, although I appreciate the fact that you are going to give yourself to me, when I die, who am I going to give what you gave to me to; I don't have a son." He talked to God about the continuity of his life when God was talking about giving him eternal life, that he would not see death and that he would be one with God forever, and he wanted an inheritor. That's how much he understood about what God was saying.

God has spoken things to us as well: that there is a glorified body waiting for those who finish this course, that there is a manifestation of the sons of God. That is the only thing that is going to be that manifestation. It cannot be a message that's preached; it cannot be a gospel that's spread across the earth; it cannot be an understanding of a revelation of God's purpose. It has to be some who have presented themselves to God in a way that the work of the Spirit can progress in them to bring them to a life that is the fulfillment of what all the prophecies spoke about. This thing is by life. It is not by revelation. It is not by anointing. It is not by gifting. These things come and they go, but the life is the only thing that is going to bear testimony that has an enduring quality and is of significance to this world. Jesus has been gone for 2000 years, and basically, the church's relationship with Jesus Christ is an idolatrous one because they want to worship him as the savior outside, bringing salvation to them, but they don't want to acknowledge the responsibility to live by the Spirit that he said he was going to send.

There are two things that Abraham found, and Paul recounting this brings David into the mix as well in the sixth verse, he said, "And this is even as David also described the blessedness of man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works." This is unnatural. It is radical. This is contrary to everything the earth is

built on and contrary to everything that comes out of the earth. “Saying, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” Now, Paul talked in another passage about a foundation upon which the church is built and he said, “Other foundation can no man lay than that which God has laid in Jesus Christ.” See, if you’re going to build, you are going to build on that foundation. The foundation has two ingredients, these are the two ingredients, and this is what God has done on our behalf.

This is Paul saying, “What did Abraham, according to the flesh, find?” What is the history of what Abraham encountered? And God extended a contract (or covenant) to Abraham, and the anchor tenet of this contract was based on what God imputed to Abraham. There were two ingredients to it: (1) He would not impute their sin; and, (2) He did impute righteousness. It had nothing to do with Abraham. This was a signed covenant that God gave to Abraham, and it was on the basis of what God did. The very implication of the word “impute” is “if you had it, I wouldn’t have to impute it. It is given to you on account of the fact that you don’t have it and I have to provide it for you because you cannot get started out of what is in the earth.”

Abraham couldn’t follow God out of himself. If God was inclined to do so and he told Abraham where he was going to go, Abraham didn’t have wherewith in him to follow because this wasn’t truly about geography. This wasn’t about Ur to some area around Jerusalem. Abraham testified to that. It is written in Hebrews 11, and it says that when he got there, he said, “This can’t be the final portion of the journey, so I’m going to stay in a tent because my testimony of not building a house on a foundation is that this can’t be the place. There’s got to be more.” It was the impression of his relationship with God, following God and being dependent upon God on a daily basis for where he was setting his tent up that night. It’s through that necessity for those instructions that there began to be imprinted upon him through his communion with the Spirit of God – a likeness that was less of the earth and had an affinity and perception of things in the Spirit. God was actually changing Abraham and the destination God had for Abraham was to change Abraham, not just to change Abraham’s geography. He had to deal with Abraham concerning something that Abraham could hold on to, something that Abraham had tension with, that he could actually be involved with God concerning. So God said, “I’m going lead you to a place a day at a time, and I am not going to tell you where you are going.”

How did Abraham get this that was imputed? It says by faith. What he had was not that he had righteousness. What he didn't have was a free pass from his sin. What he did have was a capacity to bear witness to the influence of the Holy Spirit and to trust the one who spoke. Because he trusted God, his sins were not accounted to him but forgiven; actually, expunged is a better word. He had a righteousness imputed to him, and it was not on the basis of anything he had done or that he could do. This is a fully provisioned, fully paid for, fully functional document that God handed to Abraham. God had signed it because he had provided an atonement for man before he made man. We heard prophetically tonight that the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world, and that certainly is true. But it is also equally true and fundamental that the Lamb slain is the enduring quality that gives purpose to this world. In reality, it isn't just that it was done before, but it was done before so that it could serve as the foundation of this world. The world, when it was created by God, was set in the very shed blood of the provision of God to redeem what he was going to make inadequate. So, it was not only from the foundation of the world but also as the foundation of the world.

Now, we have come to a place, everybody sitting here has been to a place, (and I would suggest maybe more than once) where we have said, "There's no further purpose in this life. There must be more. There's got to be more." I said that after I was born again, not too long before I got the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I did not know what was "more;" I just knew there had to be more. I was asked by an older brother of mine, he said, "I think you're ready." I said, "I think so. For what?" He said, "For the baptism of the Holy Spirit." I said, "What's that?" It was what I was yearning for but I didn't know. It was as if it was manna, something to partake of, but it wasn't partaken of by knowledge. The word 'manna' means "and they knew not," but it still fed them. That's because God made a provision, and he has fully funded this provision, and it is not on the basis of what we've done or on the basis of what we are able to do. It is on his great name, and the expression of that name is a provision to redeem that which he made inadequate. That's why it is the foundation, and the foundation is laid based on the forgiveness of sins and based on the fact we couldn't do it. What are you ever going to do, when you are on that foundation that would dent, crack or destabilize the foundation? What can you do to shake the foundation of God? Nothing. There wasn't anything you did before that that de-stabilized it; it just appeared because God funded it. It's an expression of what God is.

The end of the twelfth verse in the first chapter of the gospel of John, it says, “To as many as believe on his name....” those who trust what he is are given the power to actually be changed into the likeness of his purpose he had before he made anything. He is the anchor of this covenant, and the evidence of this covenant being anchored in God’s provision is that my sins are forgiven, and I still have things working in here that are less than righteous. Jesus ramped it up when he said, “It isn’t just that you shouldn’t murder, but you shouldn’t hate.” He went from what was outside to what was inside. Then, the Apostle John took it to the non-negative when he said, “It’s not just enough to not hate; you have to love.”

Last April, the convention was over and we were waiting on the ministry meeting on Monday morning. It doesn’t start until ten, so, I was over sitting with Andrew Giles and Bill Grier, and Andrew said, “What have you been doing?” I said, “This morning?” He said, “Sure.” I said, “Well, I was practicing being God.” (I’m not sure he’ll ever ask me that question again.) He looked at me like, “Okay...” And I said, “I was imputing righteousness to people...” That’s part of what God does, right? It’s an anchor provision of this covenant. “... and I got to the fourth person on my list and I was struggling. So, I’m evidently not good at this.” He justifieth the ungodly.... (Whew!) while they are still ungodly. This is unnatural. This is something that stretches our faith to stay on the foundation, not to build based on what we do. If you build on what you do, you build on your ministry, you build on your understanding, you build on your gifting, you are off the foundation, or you are building with hay, wood and stubble. Guess what? There’s a fire coming.

This foundation speaks of what God provided in the covenant with Abraham, but there was more to it and so, continuing to see what Abraham found. Romans 4:9, “Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.” Not because he had it. “How then was it reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision that he might be...” See, he was beginning to join God when he signed the covenant. As long as the covenant was unsigned by Abraham, it had force, but it could only impute to him what he didn’t have, and in that sense, Abraham was relying on the provision of God for Abraham.

We have come to a place in our walk in the Spirit – because we have offered a substitutionary sacrifice that God provided on our behalf, and our sins are forgiven, and we have imputed to us a righteousness – that isn’t based on what we have done or haven’t done. Neither is it going to be finished on the basis of what we can do. This is the reason that Paul was bringing this to the church. It wasn’t just to give

them a history lesson concerning Abraham. It was to match Abraham's experience up as a known historic fact with what God had brought them to in a covenant relationship with himself, but what the church has not done is they have not signed the covenant. What the church wants to do is to partake of the provision of God on their behalf based on another man's sacrifice because it is something that enhances their lives. You are better for it. You are better to be forgiven than to walk under condemnation and guilt. You are better to have a imputed righteousness than a conscience sullied by your own works, those that are historic and what's working in you currently. You are better for it. It's a better society to have a people living together that have benefited by the provision of God on their behalf. It's better, and it's necessary, but it isn't completed.

There were two ingredients of the seventh day when God didn't rest. He rested from creating, but he didn't do nothing. It says, "He blessed and sanctified the seventh day." The blessing is accounted right here in the fourth chapter. It's identified by Paul referring to David's description of Abraham's experience. It has quite a history, quite a witness through time, by the Spirit. How in the world did David pick this stuff up? By the Spirit. Jesus asked the Pharisees and said, "Whose son is Christ?" And they said, "Well, he's David's." He said, "Well, then how then did David say, by the Holy Spirit" – [So, if anybody thinks the Holy Spirit wasn't here until Jesus left, get over it.] – "How then did David, speaking by the Spirit say, 'the LORD said unto my lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool?'" Who was being talked to here? Obviously, David was talking about Christ being his lord, but then he acknowledged that Christ had a lord. It's recounted, of course, in Hebrews, when it says, "Unto which of the angels did God say at any time, 'Sit, thou at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

There is more than just having things imputed to us. There has to be a process engaged by the same faith that the imputation came, experiencing the on-going provision of the contract, but God cannot bring it to force until we sign. The signing for Abraham was that he was circumcised. It was the seal of the righteousness that was imputed, not because it wasn't of faith, but it was built on what was imputed, so it sealed up what had been imputed to him and it sealed it up in him. And God began to inscribe in this man a righteousness that was of the same faith, but it wasn't imputed righteousness, it was inscribed righteousness. It was working in Abraham to re-create him according to the likeness of the one who saved him.

We can travel as long as we want on what's imputed. It can't be shaken; it can't be cracked; it can't be dented; it can't be defeated. It will always be there. It is the foundation, and God laid it, and it's laid in Jesus Christ. It's done. It's for us, and I am forgiven because of that; however, the question isn't, "Am I going to trade on what I've been forgiven of or whom I've been forgiven by?" But the question is "Am I willing to be given for?" Am I willing to (pardon the pun) put skin in the game? Am I willing for the circumcision of my heart by trusting the same Spirit that imputed to me a righteousness that had tremendous benefit for me when I had no strength, and am I willing to take the little bit of strength that I now have and invest it in the kingdom of God? Because while we were without strength, Christ died.... But in Revelation, a letter that Jesus dictated to an angel to send to the church, said, "For thou hast a little strength," what are you going to do with that? Are you going to take it unto yourself? Are you going to become a great man on the earth or in the church? Or are you going to humble yourself? Are you going to take the strength that is on you, Samson, and instead of raising yourself to secure your safety, are you going to take that strength to humble yourself and fulfill God's call on your life? Are you willing to die? Do we always look for the upside of the work of the Spirit, or are we willing to wait and prove to God that we really want to be joined to him? Phase one of this covenant benefits us; phase two of this covenant is going to cost us. First blessed, then sanctified.

In the seven feasts of Israel's agricultural year, it came to the fifth feast and it's called the Feast of Trumpets. Fifty years ago, the trumpets began to be augmented by a trumpet which was blown and, by the anointing and support of God, became a significant message to some. It was sown as a seed into their lives to be harvested at a later time. One of the things about the great parable, which is the sower and the seed and the six kinds of earth (ranging from hard-packed soil where the seed wouldn't germinate to the hundred-fold soil), is an evident truth that the sower is the same, the seed is the same, and so the outcome of the seed being sown is what is the earth going to bring to the table? Is it so hard-packed that the seed can't germinate? Is it so shallow that it can't take enough root to survive persecution? Is it so thistled that it can't bring life to fruitfulness? And once transiting into fruitfulness, what measure of fruit is it going to bear? The fruit of God's purpose is to finish.

The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Micah says, "Long have I waited to partake of the first ripe fruit." This was part of the stress that Jesus was going through in the Garden of Gethsemane when he knew that when he took sin upon himself willingly and hung on a tree, it was going to break the Father's heart because the funding of

this is God's blood. The funding of this is God's provision. This wasn't Jesus doing daddy a favor. This was God in Christ reconciling. If the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, who do you think it was who pulled the knife across its throat.

The Feast of Trumpets, to a large extent, was closed out by a message, referenced, "Death to Self." It's the fuel that finishes the contract. It is the seal of the righteousness that is imputed, to actually be formed and fashioned into his likeness by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, not just getting a thrill and a chill, not just moving in the gifts of the Spirit, not just having significance among our brethren but actually laying our life down. Jesus spoke to this, obviously and very clearly, when he said, "If you are going to seek to save your life, you're going to lose it." Except a seed of corn fall in the ground and die, it abides alone. If any man will lose his life in this world for my sake and the gospel's, he shall find it unto eternal life. He preached it, he taught it, he testified to it, and he lived it.

It was interesting and notable to me some time ago when the Holy Spirit asked me, "What was Jesus' commandment?" I think we would all recognize that this commandment, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another," as the disciples' commandment from Jesus. What was his commandment? What did the Father speak to him? What was the covering that he led his life under? What caused him to go into 18 years of obscurity and be harvested unto the will and the purpose of God? He said, "This is the commandment I received of my Father, I lay my life down." The testimony coming out of this was that he said, "Of myself, I do nothing." Testifying concerning what was considered to be miracles, he said, "The works you see me do are not my works; it's the Father that worketh. I'm joining him in his great work, and his great work, right now, is in me because I'm the light of the world." He said, "How am I straitened until this be finished." He said, "I sanctify myself that they might be sanctified." He said, "Go tell that fox, Herod, this day and tomorrow, I do miracles; the third day I will be perfected." He testified to an ongoing work of salvation that was taking place in his life by the work of the Holy Spirit. He was born Christ; he had to learn Christ, and he had to come to full stature as Christ. We should expect no less.

If there's a message that needs to be heard, if there's a resonance coming out of the Feast of Trumpets into the Feast of Atonement, it is "Lay down your life. Do not live out of your own resources." If this covenant is going to be fulfilled in some, it is going to be out of what is not in them. They are not going to live life out of themselves. They are going to live life out of their Father. Jesus said, "I live by the Father." Going into the sixth feast, prepared by successfully submitting and

allowing the messages of the Feast of Trumpets to produce a confidence toward God that will allow the Holy Spirit to bring us to the place where we are laying our life down because the only feast that had penalty was the feast of Atonement. It said – under the letter of the word and the law that any man who did not afflict his soul was “cut off” from the people. I have no idea what that looked like. I do know what it means to us. It does not mean that you are going to lose the foundation. It does not mean that all of a sudden your sins are going to start being imputed to you. It does not mean that you lose a right standing before God on a sacrifice of another. What it means is you are not going to finish because the sixth feast isn’t the last feast. The last feast is Booths or Succoth.

The last feast is an enablement built on the back of afflicting your soul unto the shedding of blood that allows you to get out of your sealed, self-induced, self-sourced, self-centered life and live with God in common with those who have also joined through the atonement – the atonement not of another’s sacrifice for us (that is an atonement) but the atonement of sealing the deal and experiencing the full provision of the covenant that God has extended to us.

On occasion, my father would let me know I was walking on thin ice, and I know this next statement is an example of doing just that. However, there is a very real sense that as much as Jesus is my atonement, there is a creation out there that needs a sacrifice that is offered for its release. It is certain that this is not possible apart from the sacrifice that Jesus made. There is no starting without that provision, but there is no release for the creation until there are those who give evidence to having laid their life down that they become an atonement for the creation, that they open the door in an obvious way. Is the door open now? Yes. Oh, yes. The door is open. It’s a veil. It functions as a semi-permeable membrane that will let some things through, but it will withhold other things.

We recognize the accountability to lose our life for his sake. We sing a song, “He paid a debt he didn’t owe; I owe a debt that I can’t pay,” but we have an obligation. We need to lose our life for his sake; that is beyond question. But he didn’t leave it there. He said, “...and the gospel’s.” There is a gospel that must be preached, and it can’t be with words. There is a gospel that needs to be preached and distributed through the whole earth, and it’s not a gospel of words, it’s not a gospel of light. It is a gospel of life. When God said, Jesus testifying, actually Jesus said it, “No man lights a candle and puts it under a bushel but in a prominent place, and it gives light to the whole house.” You don’t light a candle with light. You have to light a candle with fire. The evidence of the burning gives light. You can hold a candle under that light and it is not going to ignite. The candle is actually lit by God with

life. The light that is testified to in the earth that is going to bring a close to this age and initiate an age in which righteousness is the governing force, not unrighteousness, is going to be lit by life.

We have that open door. We've had that seed sown. We have to join him in his purpose. We have to be willing to be cut; we have to be willing to be separated. If there is that in us that still wants to be something, do something, have something, we've got to be separated from that before we are going to be able to express the purpose of God. He cannot move in, he cannot dwell in me as his temple when there are still cobwebs in the corners. We have a relationship through Christ, but when Christ comes to full stature, he stands on a platform where one step is now into God himself from that which is limited, that which is dependent, that which is temporal to that which is a source.

This earth has to be plugged into God as the source. God always does what he is doing through man, not independent of man. Sovereignty is not the expression of God independent of man; sovereignty is something that God has reserved to express perfectly through man. God is withheld until he has a man. That's our call. We have to finish. That is all that's left.

John Cheever  
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