

There's an academic discipline known as "The Science of Evacuation." It studies the dynamics of removing people from crisis situations. How do you direct the herd? How do you safely evacuate a crowd? Cities in hurricane zones have evacuation routes. Evacuation orders are posted on subways and airplanes. Public buildings have evacuation plans.

After September 11<sup>th</sup> the NY Times ran an article, "How to Get Out Alive." The article talked about the actions of those who survived the attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

One survivor was on the 73<sup>rd</sup> floor when she heard the explosion, and felt the building shift to the south. You might assume her first instinct was to flee – get out of Dodge. But her immediate reaction was the opposite... *She froze...* Later she confessed, "I really wanted to hear someone shout, 'Everything is okay! Don't worry. It's in your head.'" Thankfully, a coworker screamed instead... *'Get out of the building!'* Today, the woman still ponders her reaction. In the article she asked, "What would I have done if that person had said nothing?"

This morning I want to scream to you, "Get out!" *Get out while you can!* We live in a fallen world that's been poisoned by sin. It's headed to hell in a hand basket. And I need to warn you, "Everything is not okay." All the wishful thinking in the world will not make our situation any better. As we learned last week, the world has fallen and it can't get up. You need an evacuation plan... and here's the good news - there is one!

This week I want to talk to you about *God's evacuation plan*. Our **Essentials** series tackles the subject of **God's covenants** to man. Though we've sinned against God, and have betrayed Him in the worst way, God still loves us and pursues us... We're trapped in a building that's collapsing all around - but God has an evacuation plan He calls *covenant*.

Here's this morning's statement of faith... "We believe that in pursuit of sinful man, God makes and keeps covenants. God made a covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the Church. Each covenant is based on faith, and fulfills a role in God's restoration of a fallen world."

I want to start by taking you back to a time when you were betrayed by someone you trusted... *a parent, a friend, a spouse, a partner...* You loved this person and you believed they loved you. Even today the pain is still so sharp... When you recall this person's voice, or touch, or face, or hands it sends shivers down your spine.

You were honest, and humble, and giving, and reliant towards them. In return, they were deceptive, and abusive, and selfish, and manipulative towards you. For a moment, recall the pain you felt – *or you're feeling...* And how did you react? At first there's shock and shame – then confusion, *how could they?* – That's followed by disappointment, anger, loneliness...

*Here's why I'm putting us through this ordeal...* This is the same pain we've caused God. We limp through life nursing our bruises and wounds – and we're oblivious to the hurt we've inflicted on Him. How many times have you betrayed or disobeyed God?

Sadly, God gets double-crossed every day a thousand times over. People all around the world make promises to God daily... "God, just get me out of this trouble, and I'll never again \_\_\_ (fill in the blank)." "God, please provide for me just this once, and I'll always \_\_\_ (fill in the blank)." People pledge their love and loyalty to God – then throw it away the first time it becomes *inconvenient* or *sacrificial*. And every time it happens it inflicts God with a fresh wound. It breaks God's heart in another place.

One day, while standing on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem, Jesus took a trip down memory lane – to the days before His ministry, and childhood, and even His

birth – to His pre-incarnate days as Co-Creator, as rightful occupant in God’s place on God’s throne... In Matthew 23:37 Jesus reveals the heart of God over ages past, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” The picture is of a loving God relentlessly pursuing a stubborn people.

Incredibly, when God is betrayed He doesn’t stop loving, caring, giving, and reaching... God is determined that our sin will not derail His purpose. Grace is a burning bush. It burns but it’s never extinguished.

Because of the way we’ve betrayed God, it would be justifiable for Him to give up on mankind. Why bother? Just start over with another brand of humanoid? Throw away the first design and make another attempt. *My dad always says this is why he and mom had a second son. After living with me for a couple of years they figured they could do better...*

Yet when man sinned God didn’t abort. Instead He went to work loving, and wooing, and pursuing sinful people. He works tirelessly to restore us.

The Bible begins with mankind in a garden paradise living in harmony with God. It ends the way it starts... man in a garden called heaven. But in between, man sins and gets booted from the garden. Paradise is lost. And God works to redeem a fallen race and restore a fallen world.

Theologians sometimes call it *The Drama of Redemption*.

In fact, it’s a drama in six acts. Each act is in the form of a covenant. A good way to understand the Bible is through the six major covenants God strikes - with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the Church.

A covenant is an agreement that sets out the terms of a relationship. From the beginning God created man for fellowship. God wants to know and enjoy man. God wants men and women to know and enjoy Him. Yet real fellowship doesn’t just happen - and can’t be sustained without a covenant. Terms are needed to govern, guide, and glue it together.

Take two single people, they forego marriage and shack up – they like each other, it’s convenient, they just want sex... but there’s no respect – no commitment – no promises - no shared and met expectations... *Who buys the groceries? What if the guy brings another girl home? So she gets tired of him and wants a break? Say his buddies move in?*

Without a covenant, a relationship has no definition. It lacks substance, and meaning, and backbone... Today, millions of single folks float in and out of these kinds of relationships and earn a new set of scars each time. Covenant defines a relationship. It adds value and stability.

And the same is true in a relationship with God. Have you heard a friend say, “I’ve got my own relationship with God.” or “Me and The Man upstairs, we’re tight.” or “Yea, I’m cool with God - we’ve got our own understanding.” You can say you love God - worship God - pray to God... but here’s the test of a real relationship with God... are you in covenant with Him?

*Have you agreed to the terms and expectations God defines in His covenant?*

I have a relationship with Barack Obama. He’s my president, but that doesn’t mean I can call him, and he’ll invite me over to play basketball. There’s no promise or expectation between us. We’re not in covenant. In the same sense, all people have a relationship with God – He is our Creator and we’re His creation - but what gains God’s favor, acceptance, and forgiveness is the covenant relationship that occurs through Jesus.

This morning I want to move quickly through all six covenants. In a sense we’re going to cover the entire Bible in one morning... Each covenant builds on its predecessor. All six climax in the New Covenant which Jesus offered us on the night before His crucifixion. The one true God reveals His evacuation plan through covenant.

First is the **Adamic Covenant** – this is the covenant God made with Adam and Eve. God created male and female to be His image-bearers. He wants us to be like Him – not as *rivals to His glory*, but as *reflections of His glory*. We're to be like God - in *submission*, not in *competition*.

To prove their dependence on God, Adam and Eve could eat of any tree in Eden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was the one fence in the midst of endless pasture you couldn't jump over.

It's been said, "There are two ways to get a thing done... Do it yourself, or tell your teenager *NOT to do it.*" That proved true with Adam and Eve. "O, I think there's one tree from which we shouldn't eat... wonder which tree? Got to see that tree! Doesn't look so evil to me? How's it taste..." All of a sudden, Adam and Eve are nibbling on forbidden fruit.

Sadly, rather than faith, Adam and Eve chose independence from God. And God honors their choice in all areas of life. They're on their own in childbirth, work, gathering food, raising kids, conflicts in their marriage...

God still offers His help, but it has to be sought. Sin has to be covered. And the first step God takes to resolve their sin is to sacrifice an animal. From the beginning, *the wages of sin was death*. A sacrifice was required. When God used the skin of a sacrifice to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve a precedent was established. From this point onward, sin would be forgiven, and the sinner's shame was covered, only by a sacrifice.

Fig leaves, or the sewing together of human ingenuity and effort, never satisfies God or covers sin. Author Harry Blamires puts it, "In the Christian life, nothing, nothing at all, can be purchased at the do-it-yourself shop." Our part in God's covenants is faith – we need to trust in the sacrifice.

But does the first family learn the covenantal lesson? No! Cain kills his brother Abel out of jealousy. Abel approached God with a lamb. Cain the farmer - brings a fruit basket. God rejected the work of Cain's hands and accepted the sacrifice of Abel... *and now the backsliding starts...*

Two weeks ago we read Psalm 8:5, God made man "a little lower than the angels." Will Rogers added "and he's been getting a little lower ever since." That's what happened after Adam's eviction from the garden.

God gave man dominion over all creation - now man has a tough time ruling over his own appetites. Today, we can harness the power of the atom, but we can't control a remote control or the click of a mouse. In Eden, Adam and Eve bombed. It was the original *Adam bomb*, and the fallout was immediate. Violence and vice became commonplace.

Genesis 6 describes how grim life got – and how quickly we got there... "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence..." Mankind becomes so wicked the human race will be lost forever unless God takes radical and merciful action.

The Adam's Family didn't embrace the covenant, so God chose another family. God chose Noah, and not because he was better than other men. Noah was a sinner like Adam. After Noah exits the Ark he gets so drunk he falls asleep naked. Noah acts like a redneck on vacation. Genesis 6:8 tells us why God chose him... "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

Noah gets picked not because of *his goodness*, but *God's grace*. God's evacuation plan – salvation - is always received by grace through faith.

God uses Noah to build a boat, and gather up representatives of the animal kingdom. God sends a global flood to destroy the wicked. From God's perspective the earth is cleansed. God

starts anew with Noah. And God's first step in His new program is to make a covenant.

As soon as Noah leaves the Ark, he builds an altar, and sacrifices an animal. And remember, at the time animals were in short supply. *Why waste one unless it's absolutely necessary?* God requires a sacrifice. All God's covenants are signed with blood.

God blesses Noah and tells his sons to fill the earth and multiply. Prior to the flood everyone was a vegetarian. Noah didn't eat meat. If he had I'm sure none of the animals would've joined him on the Ark. But after the flood, God adds meat to man's diet. For the first time Noah and his sons enjoy a good steak... which means animals are now prey.

And to provide the game a fighting chance, God instills a fear of man in the animals. When little Bambi sees a man dressed in orange, he runs for his life. This fear protects animals from man, and man from animals.

I have a healthy fear of the dog up the street that attacks me when I go for a run. But since I went to Pets Mart and got the stuff you can squirt in his face, he now has a healthy fear of me... There's a mutual respect.

Another part of the **Noahic Covenant** is God's establishment of capital punishment. The sons of Noah are about to become founders of nations. Human government is on the horizon, and here's a guiding principle... Genesis 9:6, "**Whoever shed man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed...**" Notice the reason... "**For in the image of God He made man.**"

Though marred, man is still an image-bearer of God. And to kill an innocent man is to defile and deface the image of God within him. As we mentioned in weeks past - our calling as humans is to **reflect** God's image in our own lives and to **recognize** God's image in others.

Finally, in the Noahic Covenant God makes peace with man. He hangs up his bow of war – and does so for all to see. God puts a rainbow in the clouds as a sign of His promise to never again flood the earth with water. But does man accept God's offer of peace and enter into His covenant?

The sad answer is "*No.*" An enemy of God, a man named Nimrod – who was said to be skilled with bow and arrow amasses a worldwide revolt. God hangs up his bow. Nimrod takes his bow and wars with God.

God had told the flood's survivors to spread out and reproduce. Nimrod gathers the tribes together in the plains of Shinar, near the city of Babel. Genesis 11:3 tells us Nimrod builds a tower to the sky that he coats with pitch – **a waterproofing material**. *What is Nimrod doing constructing a waterproof tower in the desert?* Iraq is not exactly a floodplain.

Nimrod convinced mankind that God is a liar. He can't be trusted. God is the bad guy, and he's the good guy. Man needs to look to himself – be your own god. This is the same deception Eve fell for in the garden.

After the flood God hung up his bow, but man failed to embrace the covenant God offered. And did God give up His pursuit? Not hardly.

Satan chose **a man, Nimrod** – **a place, Babel** – and **a means, fear**. In turn, God in His ceaseless pursuit of sinful man counters Satan's plan with evacuation plans of His own. He chooses **a man, Abraham** - **a place, Canaan** – and **a means, faith** – to provide salvation to all generations.

In Genesis 12 God calls Abram from a pagan city known as "**Ur.**" It was the first place bathtubs were known to exist. It was a luxurious place.

But God calls Abram and his wife, Sarai, to move. He brings them to an undeveloped land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Today, we call it the land of Israel. *And God establishes a covenant.*

The **Abrahamic Covenant** consists of a three-fold promise that shapes the rest of history and the Bible. God promises **land, nation, and blessing**. God gives Abraham a chunk of land – not just Israel, but most of the Middle East... vast descendants that will form the Hebrew nation... and through Abraham's distant heir, Jesus, all the nations will be blessed.

Here's a shorthand version of God promise - *sod, seed, salvation*.

Abraham is 100 years old and his wife is 90, but God promises them a son. *Sarah laughs at the promise...* when the boy is finally born they name him "Isaac," or "Laughter." *God always gets the last laugh.*

From Isaac comes the nation Israel. Abraham has many descendants. And through one of those descendants salvation comes to all men. All the nations – Jew and Gentile – are blessed through Jesus. This is why the New Testament starts with genealogies in Luke and Matthew. They trace His lineage back to Abraham. Jesus is the fulfillment of this covenant.

An episode from Abraham's life is prophetic of the work of Jesus. God calls Abraham to take his only son, Isaac, to Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham didn't hesitate because he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice up the mountain – the same mountain where Jesus would carry the cross. On the mountain top Abraham strapped his son to the wood and raised his knife.

At that moment, God spoke and told him to stop. He'd passed the test. Abraham looked up and a ram was caught in the thicket. God provided a sacrifice. That ram was symbolic of Jesus – God's ultimate sacrifice.

There's a legend that after the ordeal Abraham wanted a new computer. Sarah suggested he just upgrade his old machine. But Abe needed a faster computer. Finally, Isaac settled the argument. He encouraged his father to have a little faith. "Come on dad. God will provide the RAM."

The rest of the Bible springs out of God's covenant with Abraham. The OT tells us what happens to the **land**, and charts the history of the seed, or the **nation** Israel. Both OT and NT articulate the prophecies leading to Jesus – the life He lived – and the **blessing** He brings. And how does Abraham enter the covenant? He does so by faith.

The faith that enters God's covenant is illustrated in Genesis 15. Abraham signs His covenant with God in the style of his times. Two parties slaughtered a row of animals – cut them in cross-sections from head to toe - then arrange the halves of beef to form a corridor.

The parties of the covenant would then walk side-by-side between the animal parts as a commitment to their part in the covenant. *You think a house-closing is a hassle. Imagine signing this type of an agreement!*

When Abram finished slicing the beef he sat down to wait on God. He expected God to literally walk with him through the animal halves. He waited all day, and into the evening... shooing away the vultures. Finally, as he nodded off, God appeared in the form of a burning torch and smoking incense - and instead of walking with Abraham down the corridor – God walked it by Himself. He took unilateral responsibility. All Abraham did was wake up, and believe.

Here's the lesson. A relationship with God is not a tag-team effort. It's not up to us to meet God half-way. God's favor isn't received by God doing 50% of the work, and me doing 50%. *God does all the work!* He takes sole responsibility. All you and I do is wake up and believe.

The Abrahamic Covenant was passed on to Abraham's family - his son, Isaac – grandson, Jacob – and Jacob's 12 sons, or the tribes of Israel... And to the tribe of Levi another child was born – a boy named Moses. At first, Moses was a failure. He tried to deliver the Israel from Egypt on his own – and ended up on the back side of the wilderness for 40 years. While herding

sheep he learned to be humble and follow the Shepherd.

Through Moses God brought plagues on Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and led the new nation to Mt. Sinai where they received God's Law - not just the Ten Commandments, but 613 dos and don'ts.

And again the **Mosaic Covenant** was based on faith. All the commands were impossible to keep. Some were inevitably broken. And when one was violated the covenant called for a sacrifice to be offered – a lamb or bull. Once again, only the blood of the sacrifice could cover sin.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, God elaborated on the place where the sacrifice was offered. No longer would just any altar be sufficient. Moses received blueprints for the building of the Tabernacle.

And God gave to Moses the **Passover**. On the night the Jews left Egypt death passed through every Egyptian family and killed the firstborn. But God commanded the Hebrews to slaughter a lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts of the house. When the death plague saw the blood it *passed over* the house. The people inside were saved, not because of their own individual merit, but because of the blood. Salvation has always been by **our faith** in God's sacrifice.

The next of God's covenants was the **Davidic Covenant**. Ironically, the *Lamb* of God would also be a *lion*. God promises a dynasty to David. And again, as with other covenants God chooses *a nobody* to transform into *a somebody*. David goes from *shepherd boy* to *King of Israel*.

After numerous military successes, David was enjoying the spoils of battle when he noticed the Ark of God sitting in a nondescript tent. David was in a palace and God's presence dwelt in a tent. David wanted to build a Temple for God. But God told him, "No." His son, Solomon would build it, but God would build a house for David.

God makes a provocative promise to David - an **everlasting throne**, and **everlasting kingdom**, and an **everlasting king to sit on that throne, and rule over that kingdom**. Who qualifies as an "everlasting king?" It can be none other than Jesus. He's *the sacrifice* and *the Sovereign*... He was born a son of Abraham as our sacrifice like Isaac, and to David as our king.

Here's why Jesus' Kingship is so strategic... God gave dominion over creation to mankind. When man sinned he forfeited that dominion to Satan. In the NT Jesus refers to Satan as "**the ruler of this world**." But the devil is a usurper. Jesus is the true king over creation.

On the cross Jesus won back ownership of this fallen world. When He returns He'll take possession. As King of kings, He'll take what belongs to Him. He'll right all wrongs, purge the planet, and reign in righteousness.

Which brings us to the sixth and final covenant – all the other covenants culminate in the **New Covenant**. This covenant was promised to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Later, Jesus offered it to the Church at the Passover.

Listen to the amazing promise in Jeremiah 31. "**The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest... says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.**"

The Old Covenant or Mosaic Covenant was written on stone tablets. In contrast God promised to write the New Covenant on men's hearts. Here's the ultimate covenant... Rather than provide us some external standard, that can be lost, or neglected, or misinterpreted – God embeds or implants godly desires within our nature. He "**writes it on our hearts**." The NC turns

*loving God and loving others* into instinctive reactions.

It's amazing how all the ancient covenants came together in the upper room – with the disciples - on the night before Jesus was crucified. The man the Bible calls “the last Adam” sat down with His men to take of Moses' Passover. David's everlasting king is about to become Isaac's substitutionary lamb. The next day Jesus will carry the wood to the exact same spot where God tested Abraham. All the covenants culminated.

God's evacuation orders were about to lead to freedom. That's when Jesus picked up the cup and said, “**This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.**” Like all the covenants the New Covenant is paid for with blood. But Jesus made the final payment with the blood He shed on the cross.

If you want *love* written on your loveless heart... If you want your sins to be remembered no more... If you want to truly know God... trust Jesus.

If you're relationship with God is this vague, weird-o, homespun, self-concocted kind relationship with God it's not going to stand on the Day of Judgment. You need the covenant relationship that comes through Jesus. Trust Him. Come to Him on His terms – repent and believe.

Let's recite today's doctrinal statement. “**We believe that in pursuit of sinful man, God makes and keeps covenants. God made a covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the Church. Each covenant is based on faith, and fulfills a role in God's restoration of a fallen world.**”

## BONUS MATERIAL:

Tragically, sin has permeated and poisoned everything God made. Nothing is untouched by sin. Its effects are felt in all corners of creation.

Take **man** for example. The theologians refer to our **total depravity**. This means evil has tainted all aspects of our nature. *It's weakens our body, clouds our mind, infects our motives, discredits our good works, impairs our judgment – it even stains our soul and our spirit.*

Man is **totally depraved**, but he is not **utterly depraved**. Certain aspects of our make-up remain good and noble... *Men and women are capable of faith. We have a free will. We can take dominion. We can know God.*

Mankind is not **utterly depraved** – we still bear the image of God. But we are **totally depraved** – that image has been marred in ever facet.

We learn from all six covenants God desires a love relationship with the people He created – *and for love to be meaningful it has to be voluntary.*

God could've mandated worship – made us automatons – programmed us to mechanically obey Him... Instead God allowed us to choose.

If Kathy married me because someone brought her down the aisle at gun point, there wouldn't be a lot of romance in our relationship. I'd never be certain of her love for me... Understand, for love to count there has to be a choice not to love. And this is what makes lovers so vulnerable.

Yes we can sin, and walk away from God, and spend eternity in hell – but without that risk there'd be no love in the world, or love in heaven.

Understand sin is sin. In a sense, one sin is no more evil than another sin. All evil displeases God and causes us to fall short of His glory.

But not all sins have the same consequences.

Think of it this way, the wages of sin is death – and when a man is dead he's dead. One dead guy isn't any more or less dead than the next dead guy. There are no degrees to death, *but there are degrees to decay.*

There are dramatic differences between a guy who's been dead for 2 hours, and a guy who's been dead for 20 years. There are degrees to decay - which helps us grasp what happens to humanity after Adam.

Jesus is a better head than Adam. Jesus is a better prophet than Noah. Jesus is a better example than Abraham. Jesus is a better deliverer than Moses. Jesus is a better king than David.