

TTS Foundations 2023-25: **[S19] "In One Church" (P1/4)**

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[1] Introduction to Ecclesiology

Remember, the Foundations Course is structured around the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty – maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father: God from God; Light from Light; true God from true God; begotten, not made; of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried, and on the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen. [Nicene Creed, 325AD/381AD]

TODAY: "We believe in One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" [P1]

- **On Ecclesiology – our theology of the Church.**
 - **REFLECT:** What subjects do you think are covered here?
 - (E.g. Sacraments / Government / Discipline / Preaching / Vocation / History / Worship / etc.)

A few important observations before we begin.

[1A] Three Introductory Observations

- **[A] We're 'coming to land' – i.e. we're approaching the end of our Foundations Course, and now the topography is becoming clear.**
 - I.e. as we build our theology of the Church together, key themes will begin to crystallise.
 - Theological anthropology – re: new humanity.
 - Christology – re: body of Christ.
 - Pneumatology – re: gifts + anointing.
 - Kingdom of God – re: the Church's vocation.
 - Scripture – re: preaching and worship.
- **[B] Ecclesiology does not define Evangelical mind as much as it used to, or as much as in other traditions.** (Esp free trad)
 - **REFLECT:** Why do you think this is?
 - Church history is not taught.
 - Same mistakes get made over + over again.
 - No institutional Evangelical 'union'.
 - Ev. Congregations are only loosely confederated.
 - Networks (e.g. New Frontiers), and the CofE – but no single body.
 - No reason for us to consider an 'Evangelical Ecclesiology'.
 - A tendency to regard polity & structure as a/doctrinal.
 - As if practice of the Church is done 'post-theology'.

- In truth, everything is theological.
 - Do we sing hymns or Psalms only?
 - Do we have elders or priests?
 - Do we baptise adults or infants or both?
 - Do we give communion to children?
 - Do we have deacons or leaders?
 - **KEY:** *What we DO as a Church reflects what we think ABOUT the Church* – its nature, vocation, and its ties to history.
- **[C] When it comes to ecclesiology, we so often seem to be trapped between two pitfalls.**
 - ON THE ONE HAND:
 - The High Institutionalism of Roman Catholic Church / Eastern Orthodoxy.
 - ON THE OTHER:
 - The liberal instincts of low denominationalism.
 - In Evangelicalism – emergent Church.
 - (E.g. in Methodism, Anglicanism – ‘messy church’, ‘bread church’, ‘forest Church’, Fresh Expressions, *etc.* In free Churches – Santa Claus on stage at Christmas!)
 - Like many of you, I’m typical in this regard.
 - I.e. I was raised to assume a culture of Church that was [a] lacking in forms / [b] lacking in authority / [c] lacking in a true ‘Christendom’ culture.

[1B] The Need for a Magisterial Theology of Church

- **Our theology of the Church must not be incidental, but deliberate.**
 - We must reclaim a ‘*magisterial*’ doctrine of the Church.
 - One that accounts for its authority and splendour.
 - One that holds it up as a City on a Hill.
 - One that encourages a different culture.
- **In calling for this, I’m arguably joined by Scripture.**
 - **LOOK:** Matt 16:16-19 / Eph 3:20-21 / 1 Tim 1:14-15
 - Is our theology of the Church big enough for these?
- **I’m also joined by great witness of Church history.**
 - E.g. by the Church Fathers:
 - “He shall also judge those who give rise to schisms, who are destitute of the love of God, and who look to their own special advantage rather than to the unity of the Church; and who for trifling reasons, or any kind of reason which occurs to them, cut in pieces and divide the great and glorious body of Christ. ... For no reformation of so great importance can be effected by them, as will compensate for the mischief arising from their schism. He shall also judge all those who are outside the pale of the truth, that is, who are outside the Church, but he himself shall be judged by no one” [Irenaeus – *Adv. Her.* IV.XXXIII.7]
 - “No one can have God as his father, who does not have the Church for his mother” [Cyprian of Carthage – *De Catholicae Ecclesiae*] – **re: ‘Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus’.** (Outside of the Church there is no salvation.)

- "For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church" [Augustine – *Contra Epistolam Manichaei* V.6]
- AND – I'm joined by the Reformers:
 - "For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation... God's fatherly favour and the especial witness of spiritual life are limited to his flock, so that it is always disastrous to leave the Church" [Calvin – *Inst.* IV.I.4]

THIS EVENING – we're going to start building such a 'magisterial ecclesiology', together! What will this look like? It will be a four-part study, structured around one working definition.

The Church is:

God's precious possession – a new humanity *in* Christ, a new society *under* Christ, working for a renewed world *with* Christ, by the Spirit, for the Father.

God's Precious Possession – on God's love for the Church. (More later.)

A New Humanity in Christ – regenerated and united members / the marks of a true Church / invisible and visible / harlot Church.

A New Society Under Christ – the Church as the City of God / civic participation / Church government.

Renewing the World With Christ, By the Spirit, For the Father – the Church's means of grace / worship / preaching / sacraments.

We're going to start in a relatively simple fashion.

Looking at the Church as God's precious possession.

(NOTE: what do mean by the 'Church' here? The 'invisible' Church – God's own people, all those who are truly his. The Church as God sees her, not necessarily any one institutional expression.)

[2] God's Precious Possession – Five Key Images

Where should we begin? **LOOK:** Zeph 3:14-18

- *“Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival” [Zeph 3:14-18]*
 - **This is the beginning of all ecclesiology.**
 - We build our theology of the Church to the sound of God singing over his people.
 - **This can be something we as Reformed Evangs struggle with – in ways other Churches don't.**
 - BUT – we must come to grips with this for ourselves.
 - (Re: Warfield on Reformation as triumph of Augustine's theology of grace over Augustine's theology of the Church.)

To illustrate the preciousness of God's people, we're going to chart a way through five key images of Scripture:

[A] The Church as the Bride of Christ.

[B] The Church as the Heritage of Christ.

[C] The Church as the Family of Christ.

[D] The Church as the Body of Christ.

[E] The Church as the Nation of Christ.

BUT – before we do this, there's one more way to illustrate the preciousness of God's people. We're going to look at the Book everyone *knows* as an ode to the love of Christ for his people, but which is so scarcely examined. We're going to look at Song of Solomon Chapter 4. Let's take our time here – observing the wonderfully rich ways in which Songs captures the beauty of the Bride. (Please do bear with me – re: the challenges of interpretation.)

LOOK: Songs 4

[2A] Examining Song of Songs 4

- ***1 How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil.***
 - Innocence of soul / Temple of HS.
- ***Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead.***
 - Pertinent: [A] a simple description of beauty ("flowing hair!"), we know long hair is a bride's *glory* (cf. 1 Cor 11:15) / [B] Gilead is a subject of triumph for Israel and a promise to Manessah (Num 32:39-40).
- ***2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.***
 - The shepherd *washes* the sheep – and then they are *fruitful*.
 - ALSO – These are her teeth, with which she feasts.
 - (Re: Word and Sacrament.)

- **3 Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.**
 - Confession of mouth saves – like Rahab’s spies and scarlet thread (Josh 2:18).
 - On the pomegranate – priesthood (Exo 28:33) / Temple (1 Kings 7:18) / Conquest (Num 13:23) – cf. v.13.
- **4 Your neck is like the tower of David, built in course; on it hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors.**
 - Not haughty or stiff, but a neck adorned with jewels (1:10).
 - Not vulnerable, but strongly attached to the Head.
- **5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle,**
 - Cf. Isa 66:11 – re: milk and sustenance!
- **that feed among the lilies.**
 - Cf. 2:16 and 6:3 – HE grazes in lilies, he IS the lily (2:1) – i.e. she is like a fawn that grazes on lilies, i.e. her milk feeds on HIM.
- **6 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.**
 - Mount of offering and worship – re: nativity.
- **7 You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.**
 - Cf. Eph 5:27 – a bride without blemish.
- **8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon.**
 - Conquest – re: Deut 11:24. (“Your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon...”)
- **Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon,**
 - Conquest again – (“We took from the two kings of the Amorites the land beyond the Jordan, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount Hermon [Deut 3:8])
- **from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.**
 - Call to holiness? Away from idolatry?
- **9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.**
 - Cf. 5:1, 8:1, 1:10 – BOTH sibling AND Beloved.
- **10 How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!**
 - The delight of God in his bride – in her love and fragrant worship.
- **11 Your lips distil nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue;**
 - Conquest again – a land of milk and honey.
 - ALSO – preaching – word like honey. (“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” [Ps 119:103])
- **the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.**
 - Re: Hos 14:6 (“his fragrance like that of Lebanon”) – [A] she smells like the Bride! / [B] note the internal evidence of spiritual reading.
- **12 A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed.**
 - A theme returned to in v15 – Church as Eden.
 - Fountain sealed – re: sealing of the HS. (Re: Richard Sibbes)
- **13 Your channel is an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices—**
 - Many of these items feature in the tabernacle / temple.

- E.g. Cinnamon and myrrh in the anointing oil (Exo 30:23) – contrasted by featuring in fall of Babylon in Rev 18.
 - E.g. aloe said of Israel in Num 24:5-7.
- **15 a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.**
 - The watered garden of the exiles' return (Jer 31:12) – and the living water of John 4.
- **16 Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad.**
 - Re: Isa 43:6 and the north wind that brings sons – re: the calling of the HS, calling up the elect. And why? SO THAT the fragrance may be known.
- **Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.**
 - The Second Adam with the right to Eden, to the tree of life (recapitulated in the cross) – the choicest fruits as his inheritance.

NOW – let's return to those four central images.

[A] The Church as the Bride of Christ.

[B] The Church as the Heritage of Christ.

[C] The Church as the Family of Christ.

[D] The Church as the Body of Christ.

[E] The Church as the Nation of Christ.

[2B] The Church as the Bride of Christ

- **LOOK:** Exo 29:45 / Deut 7:7-8
 - **DISCUSS:** What do these passages describe?
 - God freely chooses to be known BY his people.
 - God freely chooses to dwell WITH his people.
 - This is a theme picked up throughout Scripture:
 - *"They shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the LORD GOD"* [Ezek 34:30]
- **But this isn't just mild benevolence – God is 'passionate' for his people, and about them.**
 - **LOOK:** Isa 62:1-5
 - **DISCUSS:** What are your thoughts?
 - Note v.5 – an incredibly significant theme, foundational to our theology of the Church.
- **Did you notice v5? When God tells the story of redemption, he tells it like it's a love story.**
 - **LOOK:** Ezek 16:8
 - The first love – sweet, tender, caring.
 - **LOOK:** Hos 2:2-5
 - The adultery – idolatrous, rebellious, unfaithful.
 - **AND YET:** Hos 2:14-23
 - The promise of reconciliation – gracious, righteous.
 - (When Christ appears, how does he describe himself? As the "bridegroom" [Matt 9+25].)

[2C] The Church as the Heritage of Christ

- **Throughout the OT, God uses a very interesting phrase to describe his people.**
 - **LOOK:** 1 Sam 10:1 / Ps 33:12
 - **DISCUSS:** What do you think this term means?
- **It's remarkably easy not to see what is being said – but it has a two-fold meaning, made more explicit elsewhere.**
 - **[A] LOOK:** Isa 65:11-12 – re: *"I shall allot him a portion with the strong..."* [Isa 53:12]
 - **KEY POINT** – God's people are his reward.
 - His bounty – the reward for his sufferings.
 - **[B] LOOK:** Deut 4:20, 9:20 – his inheritance.
 - His heritage, his inheritance – his 'retirement'.
 - I.e. when he sits and rests – we will be with him.
 - (Re: Eph 1:11 – in Christ, we now share in this.)

[2D] The Church as the Family of Christ

- **When you read the NT, you often find the apostles assuming a critical image – often without much further explanation!**
 - E.g. **LOOK:** Gal 6:10 / Eph 2:19 / 1 Pet 5:9
 - The *family* of believers. The *household* of God.
 - This image is then employed by Paul in various ways:
 - **LOOK:** Rom 8:29 – predestined that Christ might be firstborn within a large family.
 - **LOOK:** 1 Tim 3:4-5 – even affects eldership logic.
- **This is one of those images that's easy to take for granted.**
 - **AND YET – DISCUSS:** What is its significance?
 - Christ the Son of God / Brotherhood of Christ / The home of God will be among mortals / Making a family of the nations, bringing peace.

[2E] The Church as the Body of Christ

- **One of the more obvious images for the Church? The Body of Christ – used especially in Paul.**
 - **LOOK:** 1 Cor 12:12-26
 - **DISCUSS:** What is the significance?
 - What does Jesus ask Paul?
 - *"Why do you persecute me?"* [Acts 9:4] – Christ IN and TO one another, and to the world – re: 'little Christs'.
 - **BUT ALSO – LOOK:** Col 1:24-25
 - Connected to union with Christ – participating in his mystical body, even in our suffering.

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[2F] The Church as the Nation of Christ

- **The last image Scripture uses for the Church is perhaps one of the most controversial in the modern Church.**
 - **LOOK:** 1 Pet 2:9-10
 - We are God's people – royal priesthood, holy nation.
 - **DISCUSS:** To whom were these titles applied before?
 - **KEY POINT** – Israel! (Re: v10 – echoing Hos 2.)
- **BUT WAIT – are we just taking titles and promises meant for the nation of Israel and giving them to the Church?**
 - For example – **LOOK:** Jer 31:31-34
 - Re: v31 – for Israel or the Church?
 - **LOOK:** Matt 21:42-43
 - Does this mean that Israel has been replaced?
 - Has God pressed Ctrl+C on their promises?
- **Let's examine this further, using the Book of Romans.**
 - **LOOK:** Rom 2:28-29
 - True Jewishness is predicated on belief.
 - **LOOK:** Rom 4:11-13
 - Abraham is the ancestor of those who believe.
 - **LOOK:** Rom 9:6-8
 - True Israel, those who are truly of Abraham, are the inheritors of this Abrahamic promise of faith.
 - **LOOK:** Rom 11:17-20
 - Gentiles have been grafted onto the olive branch of True Israel – by faith alone.
- **The NT teaches that true Israel, God's covenant people, has not been 'replaced' – but exists now in the Jesus community!**
 - Taught in numerous places. For example:
 - *"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise"* [Gal 3:29]
 - *"[Remember] that at one time you Gentiles by birth...were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us"* [Eph 2:11-14]
 - Indeed, the Book of Hebrews quotes Jer 31, confirming its application to the Church:
 - *"For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance"* [Heb 9:15a]
 - Even the language of Christ makes this application:
 - **LOOK:** Ps 80

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This was the consensus of the Church for 1800+ years:

- Amongst the Fathers:
 - “As therefore from the one man Jacob, who was surnamed Israel, all your nation has been called Jacob and Israel; so we from Christ, who begat us unto God, like Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David, are called and are the true sons of God, and keep the commandments of Christ” [Justin Martyr – *Dialogue With Trypho* CXXIII]
 - “For if we hold with a firm heart the grace of God which hath been given us, we are Israel, the seed of Abraham: unto us the Apostle saith, ‘Therefore are ye the seed of Abraham’ [Gal 3:29]. Let therefore no Christian consider himself alien to the name of Israel” [Augustine – *Exposition on Psalm 114.3*]
- Amongst the Reformers:
 - “The completion of the Kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, [is] to include the whole world. ... The Israel of God is what he calls the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles” [Calvin – *Comm. On Rom 11:26*]
 - “We most surely believe that God preserved, instructed, multiplied, honoured, adorned, and called from death to life his Kirk in all ages since Adam until the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh” [Scots Conf. V (1560)]
 - “As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God, who rightly worship and embrace him by true faith in Jesus Christ, who is the only Head of the Kirk, even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus. This Kirk is catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the chosen of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles” [Scots Conf. XVI (1560)]
- There are obviously some nuances. For example:
 - The Church has had a long history of anti-Semitism.
 - Re: certain Fathers + Reformers.
 - Different traditions handle this differently. For example:
 - The RCC emphasises *continuity* – Ref trad *unity*.
 - Dispensationalism – e.g. Scofield Bible.
 - Also – we must leave room for Rom 11:25ff.
 - “*I want you to understand this mystery...*”

But in summary – God has only ever had one people, who are his precious possession, his children and heir to all his promises.

- “*The descendants of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age*” [Isa 60:14-15]
 - ALSO – this is simply helpful, re: the saints of the OT.
 - They are our brothers + sisters in Christ!
 - (Re: BCP + Ps 95, “when your fathers tempted me”.)

[3] When Did God's Love Begin?

There is complexity here, of course there is. BUT – the question at the heart of all this?
When did God start loving us?

To answer this question, we must deal with one of the most important words in Scripture – ‘covenant’.

Let's put together a broad picture – with two caveats.

FIRST: there are always going to be questions when we apply any ‘scheme’ to Scripture – indeed, good Christians differ on precise details. SECOND: Theology Geeks... this is a simplified scheme! Don't get your knickers in a twist over details.

[3A] Covenant Defined

- **Before we even begin: what exactly is a covenant?**
 - More definitions than you can shake a stick at!
 - “A voluntary convention, pact or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage” [John Owen]
 - “A divine bestowal of grace by which God [takes] chosen people into fellowship, telling them that God would be their God and they should live as God's people” [M.E. Osterhaven – in WH to Ref Theo]
 - “A covenant is an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship” [Grudem]
- **In short – a covenant is God's gracious pledge to his people, that if they walk within the bounds that he himself has established, he will not just bless them but walk with them.**
 - “If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully... I will look with favour upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you. ... I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. ... But if you will not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments ... [If you] break my covenant... I will set my face against you” [Lev 26:3-17]
 - Blessings for obedience, penalty for disobedience.
 - We see several of these covenants in Biblical history.

[3B] The Covenant with Adam – A Covenant of Works

- “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’” [Gen 2:15-17]
 - **The word isn't used – but this is a covenantal moment!**
 - A God-initiated pledge to his own – blessings for obedience, punishment for disobedience.
 - The so-called ‘covenant of works’: “At Adam [my people] transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me” [Hos 6:7]

- **We know the rest of the story – our mother and father fell.**
 - They broke the covenant and endured the punishment of God. EXCEPT...
 - *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel"* [Gen 3:15]
- **Even now, another covenant is hinted at...**
 - It's just beginning to make itself known.
 - **READ:** Eph 1:3-4

[3C] The Covenant with Abraham – A Covenant of Grace

- *"[After he was blessed by Melchizedek] the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great'. But Abram said, 'O LORD God, what will you give me, for I continue childless[?]... He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them'. Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be'. And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness"* [Gen 15:1-2, 5-6]
 - **The next great covenantal moment after Noah.**
 - Often called the 'covenant of grace'. Why?
- **Not based on his works, nor his prestige, nor his earthly circumstances. Just God's undeserved favour.**
 - How is he made righteous before God? Faith in him alone.
 - THEN GEN 22:8 – *"God himself will provide the lamb"*
 - Something is coming into focus... – **READ:** Eph 1:3-4

[3D] The Covenant with Moses – A Covenant of Law

- **God is faithful to his covenant of grace with Abraham – Sarah gives birth to Isaac, who gives birth to Jacob, and all of Israel through him.**
 - When they were suffering in Egypt, what moved God to save them?
 - *"God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham"* [Exo 2:24]
 - When God explains why he saved them at all, what reason did he give?
 - *"It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart upon you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the **oath** that he swore to your ancestors"* [Deut 7:7-8]
- **So God honours his promise to Abraham – not death + destruction for his descendants, but redemption out of slavery!**
 - More than that, he makes them his very own people:
 - *"The LORD said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and Israel"* [Exo 34:27] – **not even a dog!**
 - (The so-called 'Mosaic Covenant' – the Law.)
- **Now this is the 'old Covenant' – but even here, something is promised. Even here, something else is breaking through.**
 - The sabbath rest, the sacrifices, the year of jubilee, the paschal lamb, the promise of God's presence.
 - *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; and will heed such a prophet"* [Deut 18:15]

- BUT ALSO – right in the middle of the Mosaic Covenant, you get this really strange moment.
 - *“When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind... and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul... then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes”* [Deut 30:1-3] → THEN →
 - *“The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live... For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you”* [Deut 30:6+9c]
 - **READ:** Eph 1:3-4

[3E] A Covenant Promised and a Covenant Revealed

- **As we know all-too-well, God’s people did not keep the Mosaic covenant. They broke it and rebelled against God.**
 - They turned to foreign wives and foreign gods.
 - A king so they *“may be like all the nations”* [1 Sam 8].
 - *“Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant”* [Ps 78:37]
 - They didn’t keep their promise, but God kept his.
 - Northern kingdom packed off to Assyria.
 - Southern kingdom packed off to Babylon.
- **BUT: “Comfort, O Comfort my people” ... yes, they’ve sinned against God, but he loves them with a love that surpasses knowledge.**
 - **LOOK:** Jer 31:31-34
 - What the Mosaic Covenant foreshadowed, now is explicitly promised.
- **Over five hundred years later, a child is born under Roman occupation – and with a heart full of joy, his mother prays this prayer:**
 - *“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever”* [Luke 1:54-55]
 - Thirty years later, her child gathers 12 disciples.
 - **LOOK:** Luke 22:19-22a

“For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined...” [Luke 22:22a]

Covenant with Adam – something hinted at.

Covenant with Abraham – something provided.

Covenant with Moses – something foreshadowed.

Covenant with Israel – something promised.

Can you hear it, B+S? Behind every covenant in Israel’s history, behind every divine promise, every solemn oath, every testimony and every pledge, there is another covenant that has preceded them all – one that shapes and directs them.

“I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: ‘I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations’” [Ps 89:3-4]
So... when, WC?

When did God start loving you? When did he start to smile at you?
 Was it this morning? This week? This month? This year? No.
 Was it 5 years ago? 10 years ago? 30, 40, 50 years ago? No.
 At the Cross? No.
 When Jeremiah lived? No.
 When Moses lived? No.
 When Abraham lived? No.
 When Adam lived? No.

"[He has] blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" [Eph 1:3-4]

It's so easy to go through the motions.
 It's so easy to say the right words.
 It's so easy to come Sunday after Sunday.
 It's so easy take it all for granted.
 It's so easy to coast; I know, I've done it.
 AND YET – this is how God loves his people.

[4] God Gives Everything To His Church

AND SO – we end where we started. To build a magisterial vision, we must begin with the sound of God singing over his people!

There is nothing like the Church in all the world. It is the rebuilding of the home, of the city, of the nations – a new humanity IN Christ, dwelling with God forever. Miraculous and supernatural.

LOOK: Ia 65:17-19 – A glimpse at new starlight.

This world is yours— there is not a speck of it which is not yours! The whole of it is yours, from the East to the West, and from the North to the South. The lands of virgin snows are yours. The wide, expansive ocean is yours. Yon blue sky with all its gems of stars is yours. "All things are yours." One man says of a certain part, "That is mine!" He knows not what he says—it is yours! It is let to him for a little while. He occupies it as a tenant. He is only the man who takes care of your house for you. It is your house, though he lives in it and enjoys the comfort of it. He stretches himself on the couch, but the house is yours— and it shall be yours, by-and-by, when Jesus Christ shall come a second time, without sin unto salvation, and shall reign gloriously upon the earth with His ancients! Then shall you wear a crown and shall be made a king and a priest unto your God, and shall reign with Christ upon the earth for a thousand years!"

– The Christian's Glorious Inventory, preached Sept 25th 1856