Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In this room there are 170 odd individuals. But I have noticed that some men and women always sit together. And some of them have the same children sitting with them every week! And they don’t just sit together, either. I have also noticed that when the man asks the woman to do something, she does it, and when she asks him to do something, he does it, and when they ask the children sitting with them to do something, they do it. But they don’t ask anyone else to do those things, just the ones sitting with them. Why is this, do you think? Well, the answer is obvious, isn’t it; it is because of relationships. There are husbands and wives and parents and children here. And these relationships have a huge influence on how these individuals relate to others in the relationship.

So, you might be wondering, what does this have to do with Leviticus 26? Well, to understand Leviticus 26, you have to understand the relationship context that undergirds it. This was not God giving random laws to some random people; this was His law for a people He was in relationship with. And the relationship context is **covenant**. Look at **verse 42**: God said, “*Then I will remember my covenant with Abraham*,” and **verse 44**, “*I will not spurn them, neither will I destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God,*” and **verse 45**, “*But I will for their sake remember the covenant I made with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD*.” So the laws we read here are given in the context of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. And the human relationship that this is most like this covenant relationship is marriage.

* Just like marriage, God and the people of Israel were bound together in an exclusive relationship. God had said, “*I will be your God*,” and the people said, We will be your people.
* And just like marriage, both God and the people of Israel promised to be faithful and devoted to each other. So at the end of the law, the people will say, We promise to keep these commandments.
* And again, just like marriage, if Israel kept her promises, she would enjoy all of the joys and privileges of this covenant relationship, but if she broke her promises, she would lose the joys and privileges of this covenant relationship.

And that, in a nutshell, is what Leviticus 26 spells out. This is God saying to His covenant bride, if you faithfully obey the commandments that you have promised to obey, I will bless you, but if you disobey, I will curse you. And we are going to explore these covenantal blessing and curse provisions in the sermon today. And ultimately we want to get to what all of this means for us as the Lord’s people today.

But to get there, we must understand that covenant – this special, marriage-like relationship – is always how God relates to His people. It began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. And it continued with Noah and then with Abraham, as God established the nation of Israel. And now, through Moses, God was unfolding more about how He and His people would live together in covenant relationship *with the Law*.

I hasten to add though that this covenant is the **Covenant of Grace**. Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden, God entered in to a covenant of grace. And it is slowly unfolded and unpacked as we progress through the Old Testament to the coming of Christ. But at its heart, it is the promise of God to live in covenant with all who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. That’s why it is the Covenant of *Grace* – it is not something we deserve or can earn; it is all about trusting in Christ. And I make that point because there are lots of commandments in Leviticus. And Chapter 26 is all about if you do this I will bless you and if you do not do this I will curse you. And it would be easy to think that God’s covenant relationship with Old Testament Israel was just about obeying the law. But that is not the case; the heart of the law was trusting in God’s promise to send Messiah. And this will be a crucial point when we come to what all of this means for us today.

So four main parts to today’s sermon: We will break this chapter down into three parts and then we will end with what it means for us today. And our theme is very simple: It is **The blessed life of a covenant keeper**.

1. So let’s begin with a few more words about God’s relationship with Israel, which come out in the first and last verses of the chapter. And our heading here is **The Covenantal Context**.
   1. Before the blessings and curses provisions begin, we read words in **verses 1-2** that are very similar to how chapter 19, the summary of the covenant law, began. They warn the people against idolatry and require Sabbath observance and reverence of the sanctuary. So God gives the 2nd and 4th commandment special attention. The 2nd Commandment, as we saw last Sunday afternoon, is about right worship – no idols and worship me only as I have commanded you, and the 4th Commandment is about observing the Sabbath day. And the repeated emphasis that God gave these two commandments in the context of the law is very revealing and instructive. This was Him saying to Israel, so much about our relationship will depend on these two commandments; how you do with them will basically be a litmus test of where you are in this relationship.
      1. Have you done a **litmus test** boys and girls? A litmus test is when you dip a piece of litmus paper into a liquid or gas to test the pH level. So if you dip red litmus paper into your solution and it turns blue, then you have an alkaline solution.
      2. So if Israel was staying away from idolatry, and if the Sabbath was being observed and right worship was considered important, there was surely true faith in Israel. But if there was widespread idolatry and corrupt worship, it meant the absence of true faith.
      3. And if you know your Old Testament history, you will know how accurate this is. With each **king**, the first thing we are told is whether they promoted idolatry or removed it. And much of the history of the good kings involves accounts of how they reformed worship. And when you read the **prophets**, again and again they take aim at Israel’s idolatry and her corrupt worship.
      4. So these two commandments were a vital part of how the people lived with God in this covenant relationship.
   2. But if we look at the **last two verses** of the chapter, we see another very important and foundational principle of this covenant relationship. And the principle is this – **God is a *good* God and His law is *good* and it is for the *good* of His people** (Repeat).
      1. The end of **verse 45** is very much like how the 10 Commandments begin, as God talks about how he rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. So in **verse 46**, when God says, “*These are the statutes and rules and laws that the Lord made between Himself and the people of Israel*,” He is saying, my law is the law of your rescuer. So you know that I am a good and compassionate and slow to anger God. And you have to remember that when you think about my law. I have not given it to you because I am cruel or because I want to make your life miserable. It is a *good* law and it is for your *good*.
2. So that is the covenantal context or background of what is to follow. So let’s look, secondly, at **the Covenantal Consequences**.
   1. Verses 3-13 lay out the covenantal blessings that will follow national obedience. And I say **national** obedience because the focus here is all the people together – if all of the people or most of the people were striving to live according to God’s commands, these are the blessings that would follow.
      1. And there are basically **three categories of blessing** – God’s *provision* in verses 4-5, God’s *protection* in verses 6-10, and God’s *presence* in verses 11-13. So there would be an abundance of rain and harvests, there would be peace in the land and victory in war, and the people would literally experience the presence of God among them, we see in verse 11.
      2. So if the people were careful to honour the Lord and to demonstrate their love for Him as the One who had promised to send Messiah and who had rescued them from Egypt, by striving to obey His commandments, He would bless them and bless them and bless them.
      3. And the high point of covenant blessing for Israel was the time of David and Solomon. With both kings, there are descriptions in Scripture of that time being a time of prosperity and peace and enjoying the presence of the Lord.

* 1. But, the flipside of this is spelled out in **verse 14**: “*But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you*…” So if the people forgot all that the Lord had done for them and His promise to send Messiah, and turned to idols and corrupt worship and injustice and immorality, these are the covenant curses that would surely befall them.
     1. And what follows are five phases of punishment that are each introduced by words that describe the Lord striking Israel sevenfold for her sins. And the five phases are **disease**, **drought**, **destruction**, **devastation**, and **deportation** (or exile).
     2. And the words roll off the tongue, easily, but again, if you know your Old Testament history, you will know that all of these terrible things were experienced by Israel as she slid further and further into rebellion and disobedience. There were times of famine and plague and invasion, and parents ate their own children because of famine and siege, and then there was the horror of Jerusalem being destroyed and the people of Israel being sent into exile.

1. So that brings us to the third part of the chapter, verses 40-45, which are **the Covenantal Commitment**.
   1. As we said a moment ago, all of the phases of punishment laid out here in Leviticus 26 were visited on Israel by the Lord. And that is because **He is faithful even in punishment**! He did what He had promised to do if His law was ignored and broken. But note that these punishments were not God’s last word to faithless Israel. There is a very important word in **verse 28**: “*I myself will* ***discipline*** *you*.”
      1. As parents we have a duty to discipline our children. And the purpose of discipline is training; we want our children to learn a lesson from our discipline.
      2. And it was the same with God and Israel; these painful things were designed to train His child – Israel.
      3. And what the discipline of the Lord was designed to achieve was the repentance of His people. Look at **verse 40**: “*If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me … if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity … I will remember my covenant with Abraham*.”
      4. And again, from Old Testament history, this is exactly what happened. In exile, the people did repent and God did restore them to the Promised Land.
   2. But notice **verse 44**: Itsays: “*I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God*.” Let’s be very clear here: What Israel deserved was to be utterly destroyed. Generation after generation had ignored God’s law and embraced idolatry and corrupt worship and every kind of sexual immorality, and killed the prophets that God sent to warn them to repent! **So God’s choice not to utterly destroy them came before their repentance**. In fact, it was God who graciously brought them to repentance. And He did this because of His covenant. And this is the story of the Bible. Go back to the Garden of Ede; did Adam come to God and ask for forgiveness after the fall? No, Adam hid. God sought Adam and gave Him the promise of Messiah. Think of Abraham. There is absolutely nothing about Abraham that makes him somehow worthy of God’s attention. But God chose Abraham. Think of the people of Israel in Egypt. Were they seeking God in prayer and repentance? No. But He chose to rescue them because of His covenant with Abraham. And it is the same here. Yes, **verse 40** puts the emphasis on the repentance of the people, but verse 44 makes it clear that God’s covenant with Abraham is why He chose not to utterly destroy them, as they deserved, and instead to bring them to repentance.
   3. And ultimately this was because it was His plan to bring Messiah from out of His covenant people. And with the arrival of Messiah would come the new covenant and the new covenant people.
2. And this is where we turn in our last point, which is **Today’s Covenantal Community**.
   1. And this could easily be a sermon in itself but today’s covenantal community is not one particular nation; it is the worldwide church of Jesus Christ.
      1. In **John 4**, Jesus said that true worship was soon going to be not about just Jews and Jerusalem and the temple but about all those who worship God “*in Spirit and truth*.” **Ephesians 2** describes the church as “*the household of God**built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone*.”
      2. And this means that no one nation can claim a special relationship with God, including the modern state of Israel. The focus of God’s plan of salvation has shifted from one people in one nation, to what we call the catholic (small c) or universal church, all around the world, made up of people from every nation and tribe.
      3. So if you have repented and believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, God is your covenant God. And together with all of your brothers and sisters in Christ, you are bound to Him in an exclusive relationship. And do you remember what Jesus said about those who love Him? He said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*.” So you are under obligation to keep the law of the covenant.
   2. But before we say any more about that, we must say more about the covenant and the Lord Jesus Christ. The theme of this sermon is **the blessed life of the covenant keeper**. And while that does have application for our obedience, first and foremost it is about the Lord Jesus. You see, to keep the law of the covenant requires *perfect* obedience. Look at **verse 3**: “*If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will…*” And the plain fact of the matter is that Israel did not obey God, perfectly, ever. In fact, **Romans 8:7** is clear that sinful human beings *cannot* keep God’s law: “*For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot*.” And the whole thrust of **Galatians 3** is that being a child of God is not about our obedience to the law but about faith in Christ. Paul says, “*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham*.” And then he speaks about Christ redeeming us from the curse of law, “*so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith*.” And he finishes the chapter by saying, “*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise*.”
      1. Brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, **the covenant keeper is the Lord Jesus**! It is He who kept God’s law perfectly. It is He who died on the cross to endure the covenant curses that believers in Israel and you and me, today, deserve.
      2. So covenant life, the blessed life, is the life of faith in Jesus Christ! **Ephesians 1:3** says, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing*.”
      3. And I cannot reinforce this point enough. You and me? We are sinners; we are unfaithful; we are weak; our obedience is like baby steps! But Christ lived a perfect life; He is faithful; He is able; He has given us His Spirit!
      4. And remember how God promised to not utterly destroy Israel because of His covenant with Abraham? Well, in **John 17** Jesus talks about how He came to give eternal life to all that the Father had given Him, in other words, all of His covenant people. And in **John 6**, Jesus said: “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out … And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day*.” Behind or underneath God’s covenant with Abraham is the covenant between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to save some of fallen mankind to present to the Lord Jesus as His eternal bride. And that promise cannot fail!
      5. And so, believer, the beginning and the end of your covenant relationship with God is the Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t ever forget that!
   3. But having said that, this does not mean that we do not have to worry about obeying the commands of the Lord.
      1. As we heard a few moments ago, Jesus said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*.”
      2. And earlier we read **Matthew 7**. And Jesus is clear there that there are two ways to live – the narrow path or the wide path, being a healthy tree that bears good fruit or a diseased tree that bears bad fruit, doing the will of the Father or not doing His will, having a house built on the rock or on the sand.
      3. And as we noted earlier, **God is still a *good* God and His law is *good* and it is for the *good* of His people**.
         1. And this is so important! I have told you before about **Rachel Gilson** who converted to Christianity from atheism and life as a lesbian. And on her journey she came to see that the Bible very clearly forbids same-sex relationships. But her big question was, why? What is the problem with same-sex relationships? And that is the big question of many people today – why are you Christians so against same-sex relationships? And we can try and lay out biological and social reasons, which are of some value, but ultimately Rachel Gilson said it came down to this: If I believe that God is a good God and His law is good and it is for the good of His people, I will obey His commands, even if I don’t fully understand them! Do you see her point, brothers and sisters? Covenant life, ultimately, looks beyond the commandments to the God of the commandments! For the in Christ person, “*Thus says the Lord*…” is enough.
      4. But note also that just as there were **consequences** of blessing or curse for God’s Old Testament people, in **Galatians 6:7-8** we read, “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life*.”
         1. So as a general principle, the way of blessing is the way of striving to obey the good law of our good God. But I hasten to add that that is not a guarantee of health and wealth and happiness. Our Lord Jesus obeyed God’s law perfectly and He endured much sorrow and suffering. And He told us that we can expect the same thing if we follow Him. But even if we experience all sorts of sadness and suffering in this life, we cannot lose because “*this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*,” as **2 Corinthians 1:17** explains!
      5. And when we fall into sin, as we inevitably will, this side of heaven, we turn to our covenant Lord in **confession and repentance**. We remember Christ and His sacrifice and His promise to never cast us out, and we get up and walk the narrow path again.
   4. Well, as we draw to a close, I want to make one more connection between our text and covenant life today. And it is with the opening verses of chapter 26. You will remember that I talked about **the 2nd and 4th Commandments** being a kind of litmus test of true faith in Israel. And I put it to you that the same is true today: Where there is a close and living relationship between Christ and His people, there will be a hatred of idolatry and a love of the Lord’s Day and biblical worship. And church history bears this out. We are in a Reformed Church. That name is about the Reformation of the 16th century. So what was it about the church that needed reforming? Well, in John Calvin’s article, ‘*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*,’ he said,

*If one should ask on what things Christianity chiefly stands among us and retains its truth, the following not only certainly hold first place but also comprehend under themselves all the remaining parts and to that degree the whole force of Christianity: that people may know (1) how God is rightly worshiped and (2) whence they must seek salvation for themselves. When these things are taken away, even if we boast the name of Christ, our profession is empty and useless.*

So because of how Leviticus 26 begins and because Jesus said that the Father seeks those who worship Him “*in spirit and truth*,” and because of the lessons of Church history, may we be and remain those who flee from every form of idolatry and who love observing the Lord’s Day and who love biblical worship.

And may we do this always looking to Christ, our covenant head and covenant keeper. Amen.