

"A Matter of the Heart"

Covenants were not new to Israel.

God would make a covenant with Israel, and they'd break it.

So God would make another covenant with Israel, and they'd break that one, too.

In the last 4 weeks, we've looked at a number of covenants:

the covenant of hope God made with Noah,

the covenant of faith God made with Abraham & Sarah,

and the covenants of grace and love God made with Moses.

When it gets to the Mosaic covenant, God says "Let me lay it out for you clearly.

I love you, I have saved you again and again, everything that you have comes from me,
and all I want is for you to love me in the same way I love you.

Love me with all your heart and soul and body and mind.

Know that I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other gods before me.

That means I am God and you are not.

And in case you don't know what that looks like, here are some rules that will help you to understand."

And so God gives Commandments 2 through 10.

And as soon as God does that, that's where the focus went –

not to the first commandment to let God be God, but to the other commandments,

because those Commandments 2 through 10 were the things that people could check off –

the obligations, the expectations, the to-do list.

People could skip over that first commandment and say,

"Okay. I didn't kill anybody today. Check.

Didn't steal, didn't commit adultery, didn't lie, didn't cheat. Check, check, check, check.

Didn't envy. (well maybe I did, but that was yesterday...) Check."

And they could completely forget about loving God with all their heart & soul & body & mind
and letting God have total control of their lives.

And so God says to Jeremiah, "Tell the people that if these commandments aren't helping,

I guess I'll have to write a new covenant and this one I'm going to write inside of them –

This time it will not be something external but something internal.

It won't be as much about what people do, as who they are.

It will no longer be a to-do list, but a relationship.

It won't be a mind thing anymore, but a heart thing.

By the time we get to Jesus,

the Pharisees are still doing what humans have always done,

focusing on the rules, checking off the boxes, and acting as if they are God.

Jesus ends up being crucified; he dies, he's buried, he's raised from the dead,

and then he says to his disciples,

"After I leave this world, God is going to send the Spirit to live in your hearts.

God is going to send the Spirit to change your heart, to transform it,

to plant the very first commandment that acknowledges God as God and loves God
right smack in the middle of your hearts.

And at Pentecost that's what happened.

God made a new covenant with us.

God has promised to pour God's Spirit into our hearts and to plant in us an all-consuming love of God.
What God has to offer each and every one of God's children is something far more than we can ever imagine.
Life is about so much more than keeping commandments or checking off boxes.
It's about so much more than being active in church or living a moral life.
It's about so much more than doing charitable works for individuals or working for justice in society.
Life is about our relationship with the living God,
the One who created us and all that is,
the One in whom we live and move and have our being,
the One who has boundless power and endless love.

Knowing God is different from knowing about God.
Loving God means more than checking off our accomplishments.
It really doesn't matter how much we know about God,
how well we follow the rules, how committed we are to the church,
how much we do to help individuals, or work to change society.
If we don't acknowledge that God is God and we are not,
if we don't allow God to be in control,
if we aren't grateful to God,
if we don't love and trust God above all else,
then we've missed the entire point of our life here on earth.
We are here to be in an intimate relationship with God.

So how would you describe your relationship to God?
Is God a pen pal or a Facebook friend whom you have never met but with whom you communicate?
Is God someone you knew a long time ago but have fallen out of contact with?
Is God someone you check in with once a week?
Is God someone you talk with every day but who doesn't really affect your life?
Or is God the first thing you think about when you wake up
and the last thing you think about when you go to bed,
the One that's on your mind all day, the One you can't stop thinking about,
the One that you share everything with,
the One you know you can trust more than anyone else,
the One you know wants the best for you,
the One who pushes you to reach your full potential,
the One who supports and encourages you,
the One who can even tell you when you're wrong?

I had a friend who was telling me about the woman he loved.
He said "She absolutely drives me nuts sometimes. I get so frustrated with her.
And then she'll just do something that fills my heart and I fall in love with her all over again."

Isn't that what we all want?
Someone to fall in love with us all over – again and again and again?
Well, that's what God does.
No matter how we drive God nuts,
no matter how many times we break the relationship, no matter how many times we run away and hide,
God forgives us and falls in love with us all over – again and again and again.

And that's what God wants, too: for us to fall in love with God all over – again and again and again.

No matter how our relationships are with God at the moment,
my prayer for each of us is that those relationships continue to grow and deepen.
Specifically, my prayer for you this week is this:
May you fall in love with God all over – again – and again – and again.
May that all-consuming love fill you with a joy that you cannot hide, that you cannot keep inside.
And may that love put a light in your eyes, a song in your heart, and a dance in your step. **Amen**