

God reveals a better deal.

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34 for 3/18/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

A covenant: It is a binding agreement between two parties. It is a written and sealed agreement that binds those parties to some course of action. Normally it is spelled out in the covenant what will happen to each party if they do not carry out their side of the agreement. There are consequences a person faces for not fulfilling their part of the agreement.

You may have 'sealed' a covenant at some time in your life if you have ever filled out and signed an application for a loan. In that loan "covenant" the lender agrees to give you money for a purchase and you agree to pay that money back over a period of time. If you don't pay the money back there will be consequences to face. More and more employers are having their employee sign a "Code of Conduct." This is a covenant in which the employee agrees to abide by certain rules and act in a certain manner while on the job. If the employee breaks that "covenant" they may end up being fired.

In his word before us today God speaks to us about covenants. While we may understand how a covenant works between people, how does a covenant work between people and God? Let's take a look.

The text starts out with God speaking of about his covenants. It says, **"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them"** (vs. 31, 32).

God had done some spectacular things in the process of leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt: God sent plagues on the Egyptians, so they would let the Israelites go. God rescued Israel from Pharaoh's army by parting the Red Sea. God safely led the people through the desert, feeding them, giving them water to drink, and lovingly caring for all their needs.

After all this God brought the Israelites to Mt. Sinai where he made a covenant with them. God gave the people the covenant his Ten Commandments. This was a two-sided covenant: God said, "If you do these things then I will bless you. If you fail to do these things then I will curse you." When Moses brought this covenant to the people they said they would do what God was asking of them. So the covenant was signed. It was signed with blood. An animal was sacrificed, and its blood was sprinkled on both the covenant and the people. This made the covenant binding, so if the people didn't keep their part of the agreement God had every right to bring his judgment upon the people.

The people of Israel were eager to agree to God's "deal." But the people failed to pay attention to a very important detail of this covenant: In connection with Israel keeping their side of the covenant, God demanded perfection. The people should have realized they were not perfect. In realizing they were not perfect the Israelites should have realized on their own they could not keep their side of the agreement. The purpose of this covenant was to help the

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people understand that they had to completely rely on God to make them perfect. God was using this covenant to point his people ahead to the coming Savior for the perfection that they needed.

Strangely enough, the people of Israel thought they could keep this covenant all on their own. They thought they could perfectly keep all of God's Commandments. But they didn't. Instead, they ended up breaking the covenant. They relied on themselves, and they failed; they sinned. They didn't keep their side of the deal because they loved other things more than God and they did not love their neighbor as themselves.

But God always kept his side of the deal. When the people relied on the Lord and kept his commands the Lord did exactly what he said he would do: he blessed the people. But when the people did not obey his commands God brought upon the people the curses that were in the covenant. God always did exactly what he said he was going to do.

The old, two-sided covenant of God's Law could not save the people of this world because the people would never be able to perfectly keep their side of it. From the time Adam and Eve committed that first sin in the Garden of Eden every person who has ever lived has broken God's Old Covenant. That Old Covenant condemns every person who breaks it to eternal death. And it's God's responsibility to make sure that his part of the covenant is carried out.

God knew the only way people could be saved was with a new covenant. And this new covenant would be completely different because it would be a one-sided covenant. Only God would be bound to keep it, and God himself would sign the covenant. The Old Covenant, those Ten Commandments, would still be in place, but this new covenant would take priority over the old one.

So, God reveals to us a better deal. **"This is the covenant I will make [...]. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more"** (vs. 33, 34). God so loved the world that he did not want to destroy the people of this world, but instead he worked to save people from their sins. God sent his Son, Jesus, to perfectly fulfill not just one, but both covenants. Jesus perfectly kept everything required of us from the Old Covenant. Christ perfectly kept ever law both the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Having perfectly kept the Old Covenant Jesus then went to the cross and signed the New Covenant with his own blood. As Christ hung on the cross God carried out all the punishment that the Old Covenant demanded. Then Jesus signed that 'New Deal' with his death, and in doing so he fully paid the debt we owed for breaking the Old Covenant.

After Jesus signed that New Covenant, God does something amazing: He takes that new deal and he gives to us the signed and fulfilled contract. God freely gives us this New Deal: He puts it in our minds and writes it on our hearts through the gospel. In that good news of what Christ has done for us God guarantees us forgiveness for every breaking the Old Covenant that we commit. Through the gospel God gives us the power to accept his New Deal and to receive its blessings.

It doesn't take us long to realize how we have broken God's first Covenant, his Ten Commandments. When God sets before us this New Deal, it isn't too hard to see how we benefit from this New Covenant.

Now, even though God has given us the power to accept this covenant it doesn't mean we cannot reject it. God's chosen people, the people of Judah and Israel, rejected God's first Covenant. And when God offered them this better deal through faith in Jesus most rejected

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that Covenant as well. God has offered us a better deal, a better covenant. We wouldn't reject that covenant, would we?

There are some who are always trying to offer us a 'better deal' than what God has given us. Our Old, Sinful self sets before us its deal and says, "You are most important. You are number one! What you want and desire is what really matters in this life. People should be serving you and caring for your needs." Of course, the World then chimes in with its deal: "Everybody's doing it, why shouldn't you. You want to be happy, don't you? Of course you do because you deserve to be happy! You deserve all the fame, power, money, and popularity that you have coming to you!" Then Satan comes along and offers us his deal. He says, "God's holding out on you. God's 'new deal' is holding something back from you." So, what does Satan offer? Every pleasure of body and mind with 'no strings attached.' Satan says that his offer gives you freedom to do whatever you like. He says with his offer you are free to choose anything, be anything, do anything; there's nothing to limit you or hold you down.

Those offers all sound pretty good, don't they? But what Satan, the World, and our Sinful Self don't mention, and don't want us to look at, is the fine print of their covenants. Their offers may look good, but when you read the fine print you soon realize that their offers are hellish ones.

To accept the deal of our Sinful Self is to gain temporary self-fulfillment at the expense of eternal salvation. To accept the deal the World has to offer is to gain temporary pleasure and happiness while throwing away eternal peace and joy. To accept the deal Satan sets before us is to gain temporary 'freedom,' but it means we end up forever shackled to a torturous, painful, and eternal death. Don't fall for their lies. Their 'covenants' are worthless. To accept them is to reject God's covenant which is not only better, its perfect.

To reject God's New Covenant is to reject God's Son and everything he has done for us. God's New Covenant says, "**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him**" (John 3:36). To reject Jesus is to reject God's forgiveness. No forgiveness means no eternal life.

Don't accept a phony deal. Instead, hold tightly to God's better deal. Don't turn away from God's New Covenant, a covenant in which God judged and condemned his own Son instead of judging and condemning you. Don't throw away the covenant that comes from the very heart of God himself, and that flowed from the sacred wounds of Christ. It is a covenant that is signed and sealed with Jesus' own blood. Instead, follow Jesus and embrace him in this new covenant. It is only by faith in Christ that we receive the benefits of this New Covenant: Forgiveness and eternal salvation.

God reveals a better deal: A covenant that he has signed, sealed, and guaranteed through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. It is a covenant that he freely gives you, no strings attached. It is a covenant that saves you eternally. Amen.