

A New Covenant – Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jer 31:31-34. We're in the middle of a Christmas series called All Things New. Because at Christmas we *give* all things new, and in our world God is *making* all things new. After the Fall of man into sin all the way back in the Garden of Eden, God has been renewing and restoring his creation. Starting with us. And a major part of that, is *a new covenant*; a new promise. Christmas celebrates the coming of Jesus, to make all things new through a new covenant.

It's a word we don't use much, but it's all *over* the Bible. In fact, the two main *sections* of the Bible are referred to that way. Testament means covenant. The *Old* Testament referring to the *Old* Covenant, the covenant God made with the ancient Israelites; and the New Testament referring to the *New* Covenant, the one God offers *today*.

So let's make sure we know what it is.

A covenant is a binding promise between two parties that governs their relationship. Think marriage. A covenant between a man and a woman. To have and to hold, for better or worse, 'til death do us part. It's a binding promise between two parties that governs their relationship.

Same for covenants with God. They're promises that govern our relationship with him. Promises with stipulations; things you have to *do*. And guidelines, things you *can't* do. Along with blessings for obedience and consequences for disobedience. It's a binding promise between us and him, with certain requirements and rewards.

And while there are several in the Bible, forming a framework on which to build his kingdom, the *New* Covenant is the most important. Because it's the one that all the others point to, and lead to, and find their fulfillment in.

And just like last week, I hope that by the time we're done, you understand and appreciate the New Covenant like never before. And if you're not a part of it, if you've never embraced it, I hope you will. Because ultimately, Christmas celebrates the coming of Jesus, to make all things new through a new covenant.

➤ But it started centuries *before*. In Jer 31:31. "*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.* (ESV) Let's stop there, and start with this:

1. The New Covenant was promised through Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34)

It's the first of 6 aspects you can't afford to miss. A promise was promised. Foretold. No less than 550 years before Jesus was born. Almost 600 years before it become operative. And though it's ancient history, you can't afford to miss it because it increases our trust and hope. Our *trust*, in God's Word. That what he says, he does. And our *hope*, that even in the *darkest* days of our lives, God's at work making all things new.

That's the context here in Jeremiah. He was prophesying during a time of *terrible* suffering. The Israelites had been divided for 300 years, they were languishing in Babylonian captivity, and Jeremiah himself was exiled to Egypt. And yet God gives him a message of hope. "*Behold, the days are coming . . . when I will make all things new. With [both] the house of Israel and the house of Judah.* Divided and rebellious and exiled as they were, God was *still* promising a new relationship.

New, in that it was not going to be *like the covenant* [v32] *that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt* [800 years before], *my covenant that they broke* [referring to the Old Covenant], *though I was their husband, declares the Lord* [their loving leader, provider, and protector]. This isn't going to be Windows 2.0, it's going to be a whole new apple.

For this is the covenant [v33] *that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.* No longer are God's desires and God's commands going to be an external thing, but internal. Written not on tablets of stone, but impressed on their soul.

And I will be their God, and they shall be my people [corporately and individually]. *34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me* [personally], *from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.*

In other words, they won't have to be *taught* to know God, they'll know. They'll know him personally. Because it's part of the covenant; part of the promise. Under the Old Covenant, you may have been a *member* of God's people, but you didn't necessarily *know* him. You didn't necessarily have a relationship with him. You had to be taught; you had to be shown; you had to be near; like the priests.

Under the New Covenant, *they shall all know me* [v34b] . . . *For I will forgive their iniquity* [their wrongdoing], *and I will remember their sin no more.*" The implication being, that repeated sacrifices would no longer be *needed* under the New Covenant. Forgiveness would be full and final. What a promise. What a covenant. What a blessing.

But they had to wait 6 *centuries* for the fulfillment. We wait 6 *minutes* for something and lose all hope. And 6 weeks nearly *shatters* our trust.

But the promises of God ought to be a different story. The New Covenant was. Because after centuries of waiting . . .

2. It was foreshadowed by Jesus (Luke 22:19-20)

That's the second aspect you can't afford to miss. The New Covenant was promised through Jeremiah, and foreshadowed by Jesus. At none other than The Last Supper. When Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room the night before his death. Eating the Passover meal that God-fearing Jews had been observing since the time of the Exodus.

And at one point, Jesus changed everything. The entire meaning. **Luke 22:19-20.**

He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you." [No longer representing the brokenness and suffering of the ancient Israelites, it now represents *my* brokenness and suffering. Foreshadowing his death the very next day.]

Do this [eat this he said] *in remembrance of me."* [At which point they *had* to be thinking, "Remembrance of *what*? You're right here. Alive and well."]

[20] *And likewise* [he took] *the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

After 600 years of waiting, and 400 years of silence, Jesus refers to the prophecy given through Jeremiah, and says, "This is it. This cup and what it contains, now has *new*

meaning. It's now symbolic of God's *New Covenant* promise. His promise of a new relationship, and new desires in our heart, and complete forgiveness."

After lying dormant and nearly forgotten, Jesus resurrected it with one sentence; foreshadowing his death. A death that included the shedding of his blood.

That's the *third* aspect you can't afford to miss.

3. It was **secured with his blood** (Heb 9:11-14)

Turn with me to Heb 9 for this one. What Jesus alludes to and foreshadows at The Last Supper, saying *this is the new covenant in my blood*, Hebrews makes explicit.

Heb 9:11-14. In the midst of a discussion about the Old and New Covenants, v11 says . . . *But when Christ appeared* [as opposed to before, under the Old Covenant] *as a high priest of the good things that have come* [a mediator and communicator of things associated with the *New Covenant*], *then through the greater and more perfect tent* [referring to heaven, as opposed to the tabernacle; under the Old Covenant; a tent] (*not made with hands, that is, not of this creation* [still talking about heaven]) . . .

When Christ appeared . . . [12] He entered once for all into the holy places [the presence of God], *not by means of the blood of goats and calves* [like was done in the Old Testament] *but by means of his own blood* [his own death], *thus securing an eternal redemption* [an eternal forgiveness; just like Jeremiah prophesied].

[13] For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh [if the Old Covenant cleansed outwardly, superficially], *[14] how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience* [our heart] *from dead works to serve the living God*. [Way more! The blood of Jesus purifies way more. Because it's way more precious and way more effective.]

No wonder God could promise through Jeremiah that he would remember our sin no more. It was paid for with the life of Jesus; his Son. No longer securing a *temporary* forgiveness, but an eternal one. An *eternal* redemption; an *eternal* covenant.

Don't miss it. Jesus shed his *blood* for you, to have a *relationship* with you, forever.

And . . .

4. It's **sealed with the Spirit** (Eph 1:13-14)

Just like we saw in Ezekiel last week. Ez 36:27 – *I will give you a new heart* [God said] . . . *and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*. Sounds a lot like Jer 31, doesn't it? *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts* [their new heart]. *And I will be their God, and they shall be my people*. God with them. God in them. Via his Spirit.

Jeremiah promised it, Ezekiel clarified it, and Paul affirmed it. **Eph 1:13-14**.

In him [in Christ] *you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, [you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit* [promised by Ezekiel] *[14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance* [the inheritance of the covenant; life with God] *until we acquire possession of it* [face to face], *to the praise of his glory*.

The New Covenant is not only secured by the blood of God's Son, but sealed by the presence of God's Spirit. Guaranteed. Talk about blessed assurance. Don't miss it. And don't miss out. Make sure you believe. That's the 5th aspect.

5. It **applies to those who believe** (Heb 9:15)

Those who believe the promise. Those who believe in Jesus. Not just Jews from *the house of Judah* or *the house of Israel* as Jeremiah first said it, but *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord (Rom 10:13). Because it's *those of faith who are the sons of Abraham*, Gal 3:7. Those who belong to *Jesus* are the *Israel of God* (Gal 6:16; Rom 9:6-8). That's what the *New Testament* teaches.

Not only that, but the writer of Hebrews applies the New Covenant promise *directly* to believers, by quoting this passage in the New Testament; Heb 8. Do you see it there on the previous page? It's the longest quoted passage from the Old Testament in the New.

Driving home 2 main points:

- A. The New Covenant applies directly to those who *believe*.
- B. The Old Covenant doesn't. Look at Heb 8:13.

After quoting Jer 31 in v8-12, it says in v13 – *In speaking of a new covenant, he* [God] *makes the first one obsolete*. *And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*. The Old Covenant no longer applies; not the particulars and consequences. The *principles* still apply, to live right; but not the particulars. It's obsolete in that respect. Obsolete in governing our relationship with God. That's the second reason it's quoted at length and emphasized.

➤ The first, is that it applies to those who believe. Look at Heb 9:15. After saying that the blood of Jesus purifies our conscience, it says:

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant [the go-between of a new relationship with God], *so that those who are called* [those who believe] *may receive the promised eternal inheritance*.

If you believe in Jesus, and repent of your sin to live for him, you're called.

And the result, is that the New Covenant *applies* to you. Including *the promised eternal inheritance* of a new heart, new desires, new relationship, and new life.

➤ And the reason, is found in the *second* half of the verse. *Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant . . . since a death has occurred that redeems them* [rescues them] *from the transgressions committed under the first covenant*. Transgressions and sins that were only *temporarily* forgiven.

The point being, that the death of Jesus ensures that the New Covenant applies to *all* who believe. Believe in the promise, believe in Jesus, and believe in his death to pay for your sins. Don't miss that. And don't miss out.

And last, don't miss the fact that . . .

6. It's **remembered at the Lord's Table** (1 Cor 11:23-26)

The New Covenant is promised, foreshadowed, secured, sealed, applied, and remembered. To see *that*, turn with me to 1 Cor 11:23-26.

In the middle of a scathing rebuke for failing to show proper reverence and fear of the

Lord at his table, Paul says in the last part of v22:

Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. [23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you [in other words, you know better], that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And then he connects it to the New Covenant, just like we saw in Luke 22. *In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* In memory of my death, to secure the covenant. *The new covenant in my blood.*

When we eat and drink at the Lord’s Table, we’re not just remembering the *death* of Jesus, we’re remembering *The New Covenant*. The New Covenant death of Jesus.

➤ And, we’re *proclaiming* it. Like Paul says in v26 – *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.* We remember the New Covenant death of Jesus at his table, and we *proclaim* it. That it’s true, and glorious, and personal. And we do so, until he returns to receive us unto himself, and there’s no longer any *need* to proclaim it. Because there’s no longer any chance to apply it.

Just by the very acts of eating and drinking, we remember and proclaim the Gospel. The New Covenant death of Jesus that saves our soul and makes us whole.

Unfortunately, far too many don’t. They don’t remember and they don’t proclaim; just like the Corinthians. Because they treat it lightly and participate flippantly.

➤ Don’t go there. Because v27 says – *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty considering the body and blood of the Lord* [guilty of not *remembering*, guilty of not *proclaiming*, guilty of not *honoring* him as they should]. *[28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* [Examine his heart for sin and ill-motives.]

And if you don’t come clean, don’t participate.

[29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly [if we truly examined ourselves], we would not be judged [by God]. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord [whether through sickness or otherwise], *we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.* [In his grace and mercy, we’re disciplined for the sake of correction and salvation.]

The Lord’s Table is no small thing. Because remembering and proclaiming the New Covenant death of *Jesus* is no small thing.

Promised, foreshadowed, secured, sealed, applied, and remembered. Don’t miss it. Don’t miss God’s work to make all things new. Especially you.

Prayer – Father, impress these truths on our hearts, and be exalted in our presence as we remember, and appreciate, and consider all that you’ve promised, and all that you’ve done.

You Are Loved