

**“Special Covenant with God”, Jeremiah 31:31-34 (03/21/21)**

**(Slide 1)** Today, I would like to open this sermon by asking one interesting question. Have you ever tried to cut water with a knife? How can we cut water with a knife? Perhaps, your first response would be: Cutting water? Are you insane? It's impossible. Actually, in the Bible, we see God divided the water through Moses. Exodus 14:21-22 says, “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” But that's God's work, not Moses'. Then how would you cut water by yourself? I was trying to think and find the answer. Think about what happens when water freezes? It will be changed into ice, and then we can cut it with a knife. Yes! I did it! I think that I am a genius. However, we know the ice will be changed into water again, and soon divided ice becomes one water again. No matter how we try to divide the water, it can't be divided. So, actually in Korea there is one proverb that says, “Lovers' quarrel is like cutting water with a sword” because they are soon mended. While I was reading the scripture, the image of cutting water made me look back at our relationship with God. When our mind froze and divided and separated from God, we didn't know that we had been one with God. However, soon the love of God melted our hearts and minds and made us one with God again.

**(Slide 2)** Today's scripture from the book of Jeremiah reminds us of the covenant of God, which leads us have a real hope in our lives. This text is part of a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to the people who are prisoners of Babylon, shortly before the fall. Jerusalem the capital of Judah, is already embedded with troops from Babylon, so the people of Jerusalem have fallen into the pit of despair. In this situation, what did the prophet Jeremiah want to say to them? And what did they want to hear from him? Both of them would have dreamt of hope from God who can overcome this situation. The people of Judah thought that God loved

them specially, so they believed that God would save them from the Babylonian Empire. Furthermore, they remembered what God did for their ancestors who were slaves of Egypt. Therefore, the people of Judah truly believed that God would save them from this tragic situation. However, they were defeated in the war and only utter fail loomed ahead of them. How much they cried out to God seeking God's help, and how sad they were and how frustrated they were! They were totally hopeless and helpless because all their hope was gone. In this situation full of despair, God says to God's people through the voice of the prophet Jeremiah: God will make a new covenant, which is different from the one that their ancestors made with God. The old one was written on stone, and it indicates that God is the God of Israel, and God will take care of them and protect them.

**(Slide 3)** However, the new covenant will be written not on the stone but in their hearts, which means it will not be changed and kept forever, and it indicates that God is God of all, even for the sinner. As we see in the Bible, God is the one who speaks to God's people. The text from Jeremiah clearly shows that God continued to talk to God's people. Verses 31 to 34 all consist of God's words as indicated by the phrase "says the Lord." When God created this world, God made it with the word of God. Since then, God continuously speaks to God's people. No matter whether they are in joy or whether they are in sorrow, God consistently speaks to God's people. From the word of God, God lets the people know how to live life as people of God. This relationship of God and God's people is revealed in the covenant between them.

**(Slide 4)** God is a God of covenant. God continually speaks to God's people, and God's love is revealed in the covenant of God. In other words, the covenant of God is a promise, which is signed by the special love of God for the people of God. Thus, through the covenant of God, we know how God loves us, how God protects us, and how we live for the glory of God as the ones who are loved by God as God's people. Originally, a covenant was a formal written agreement between two or

more people or groups of people that was recognized in law. But in faith community, we understand covenant as the entering into a continuing relationship and committing oneself to this relationship. As Christians we see ourselves as a people of a covenant with God, because as we have faith in God, we are entering into a continuing relationship with God, and we are committing ourselves to this relationship.

Fundamentally, God showed his covenant to us through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and to respond to God's grace, we – Christians – make our profession of faith through baptism. Furthermore, although some people doubt the need for church membership, I think it also is a holy covenant in front of God in a way that we are entering into continuing relationship and committing ourselves to more responsible relationship with this faith community. And importantly this covenant is not one-sided but mutual. God is always speaking to us through this covenant beyond time and place. In this covenantal relationship we know that we are the people of God, owning the covenant of God. Also, in this covenantal love, we will not be remembered by our inadequacy and wrongdoing in front of God. Therefore, this covenant, which is God's promise for love, is enshrined in us and will continue forever. When we read the Bible, it is easy to think that we are in a totally different context from the people in the Bible. However, when we look at ourselves carefully and honestly, we realize that we are just the same as the people who lived their lives in the times and places recorded in the Bible.

**(Slide 5)** Looking at our lives, we are just like the people of Judah in today's text. Some of us may struggle with a health problem or financial difficulty or lack of job opportunities, and some are in trouble /because of relationship issues or marital or family discord. This makes us feel that we are alone walking in the darkest valley. So, we may think that there is no hope at all in our lives. Thus, we think that God has totally forgotten about us. Where is God? If God is really alive, why would God allow me be in this place of despair and this time of suffering? No matter how hard we try to feel the love of God in that situation, we still struggle with a sense of the absence of God and God's

love. However, today, God is speaking to us with God's steadfast love. "I am God of all, and you all are my people."

**(Slide 6)** Whatever happens in your life, I will always be with you, protect you, comfort you, and love you forever." This love is for all. And this promise will not disappear for any reason. We are all in this covenantal relationship with God regardless of our circumstances. God is always working in us, even in the midst of our frustration. Furthermore, God goes on saying that God will be revealed to all throughout the world, and God will forgive us and will not remember our sins. God is a God of forgiveness. God wants to move us from despair to hope with God's forgiving love. In this covenantal love, we are all forgiven.

**(Slide 7)** Now, in the season of the Lent, I hope we all remember the covenant of God that is already in us and the love of God that is revealed all over the world. As we take steps in our lives, especially during this season of Lent, please remember that we are all, from the least to the greatest, connected with God in this covenantal love. This love of God is always leading us toward a hopeful future, not holding us in the valley of despair. I would like to close this time reminding us of this proverb, "Lovers' quarrel is like cutting water with a sword" Remember, a relationship between God and us is like water, we will never be divided. We will never be separated from God's love. God leads us to a hopeful future with his steadfast love. Therefore, let us remember the covenant of God, which enables us to have hope in any circumstances and leads us to live in hope.

Praise God! Amen.