

Jer. 31:31-34 What is “New” in the New Covenant? (2nd version at Grace 05-31-2020)

Today, I would like to follow last week’s sermon on James’ use of the word law with a sermon on the new covenant. With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, James saw the old covenant come to an end as the new covenant is ushered in with Christ. During the Lord’s Supper, the night before Jesus died on the cross, he said: *“This is my body broken for you . . . and this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.”* What are we to make of this “New Covenant?” What is it? What did Jesus mean by these words? What does it mean for us today? In order to answer these questions, I would like to use an OT text. Please turn to Jeremiah 31, where we will focus on vv. 31-34. Let’s read it together. This morning I have 6 truths from this passage that will answer the question: *“What is New about the New Covenant?”*

1. The New Covenant is an Eternal Covenant. In this passage, God alone is the one who keeps it. Notice the words throughout this passage: *“I will make. I will put. I will write. I will be their God. I will forgive. I will remember sin no more.* We see the sovereignty of God in this great work! The emphasis here is upon God and his working, not the work of man. And what I would like to point out here is that all the covenants we see in the OT took place in time. In other words, they were covenants given by God to man, given by God to a people, in clear historical context. The Covenant to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to David, etc. were all given at a clear point in time (history). The Mosaic Covenant was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Then, Moses gives the covenant terms to the people and in the end they say, *“This is good. We will obey.”*

Well, the NC is not like the old Mosaic covenant (or the other covenants in the OT). The reason is that this covenant is an eternal covenant. This new covenant is the basis and fulfillment for all the other covenants in the OT in that it began before the foundation of the world in the sovereign plan of the triune God. You see, only God can fulfill an eternal covenant because He alone is eternal. This means He Himself must fulfill it. In this great eternal covenant, God the Father sends the Son. The Son does the work. The Holy Spirit applies what the Son does. In eternity past, the Father says to the Son, *“I will send you.”* The Son says, *“I will go.”* And, the Spirit waits to be sent to accomplish and apply the work of the Son. This covenant, fulfilled in Christ comes from the pure pleasure of God to complete his plan to save a people from eternity.

2. The New Covenant Will Not Be Broken. As the Old Covenant (represented by all the covenants made with man) was broken, the NC will not be broken. Look at v. 32. Jeremiah says [this covenant] is **“not like the covenant 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, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.”** Concerning the Law of Moses as a covenant, no Israelite ever kept it completely. As for us in relation to the perfect, holy, law of God in all that it means, we also break it. Paul says in Rom. 7:12: **“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”** There is nothing wrong with the law of God as represented in the Old Covenant. The problem has always been with man. We are law breakers. You may say this morning, *“I’m not so bad.”* But I say to you that if you’ve broken one command you’ve broken them all (James 2). Men, if you’ve looked at a woman with lust in your heart you are an adulterer. If any of you have ever thought evil about another person, you also break the spirit of the law not to murder. If you have not been content with you situation, you covet, wanting more than what God has given.

So what is the difference between the old covenant and the new? Well, when Christ came and died on the cross and rose again, he secured heartfelt obedience to the law for those who trust in him. You see the old covenant failed to produce obedience in the ones to whom it was given. The people broke it. In the new covenant, as we have seen, the work of the Son secures obedience. When Jesus said, “*It is finished,*” it was finished. The eternal covenant finds its culmination (fulfillment) in Christ’s death and resurrection.

This is why today, though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. While you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you. Jesus is the end of the law in that He kept it perfectly in both motive and deed. And, he offered himself up to God as an eternal sacrifice, appeasing the wrath of God for covenant breakers. If you are in Christ today, it is because Christ regarded your helpless state and shed his blood for your soul. And, if you are in Christ today, your sins, past, present, and future, have been paid for by the blood of Christ, who ushered in a new covenant. This covenant cannot be broken because Christ, the Son of the eternal God kept the covenant. And, it cannot be broken.

3. In the NC there is an internalization of the Law of God. Look at v. 33. **“For this is the covenant 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.”** The new covenant does something that old did not and cannot do. Here we see that in this new covenant God will do something in the hearts of men. We see this same idea in some of the other prophets. Concerning a great time in the future Ezekiel says of God, **“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”** It is the same principle when God asked Ezekiel, **“Son of man, can these bones live?”**

In other words, the new covenant spiritualizes the law in such a way that sinners love and delight in the law of God. Here is what I think this means. In writing the law upon the heart, in giving Israel a believing and obedient heart, God is fulfilling the original intent of the covenant at Sinai. The law will become the wellspring of all they think, say and do. In other words, God’s people will love the law because their hearts love Him. And, here is the way Jesus defines obedience to the law. He said, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And, love your neighbor as yourself.”** In Matt. 7:12 Jesus said, **“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”**

Brothers and sisters, until the law of God was written on my heart in the way Jeremiah is speaking, I worked and I worked and tried to be good. Everywhere I turned, I failed. I wasn’t faithful in Bible reading. I wasn’t faithful in church attendance. I wasn’t faithful to be kind to my neighbors. I wasn’t faithful to love God as I knew that I ought. Oh, how I failed. But, God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love toward me, even when I was dead in my sins (and in my inability to keep the law), made me alive together with Christ—by grace I was saved—and raised me up with and seated me in the heavenly places in Christ. . . For by grace I was saved through faith, and this was not my own doing, but was the gift of God, not a result of my works, so that I would not boast. For I am his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand (in this eternal covenant), that I should walk in them.

Application: God's people love God from the heart. And because they love God, fruits of this motivation flow naturally. There is great power to obey God. (Maybe consider all the ways we see obedience in hard times. See Heb. 11).

4. In the New Covenant All God's People Are Teachers. Look at v. 34. **“And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they shall all know me, . . .”** So, what is new about this teaching? Well, under the OC (OT), who were the official teachers? Think about it. They are the prophets. They are the priests. They are the kings. With the new covenant, this changes. Part of the newness of Jeremiah's covenant seems to be a “democratization” of the teaching office. In other words, all the people teach. Now, this doesn't mean that all God's people will teach a Sunday school class, or preach like Jimmy. Here is what this means. In the new covenant all who are in Christ will have more access to revelation than did even the teaching priests and prophets and kings of the former age. The emphasis here is not so much on the actual role of teaching, but on the availability of revelation made known to the new covenant believer through the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Joel speaks of this New Covenant when this will be fulfilled. He says, **“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.”**

Under the OC the prophets, the priests, and the kings that teach are given a portion of the Spirit in order to teach the people. Special revelation comes to them. In the NC, EVERY believer is given the Spirit fully. If you are in Christ today, the revelation you have through the Spirit in this “new” covenant is far greater and clearer and more effective than any gift given to the prophets, priests, and kings, or anyone under the OC.

5. In the NC All of God's People Will Know Him. Look at the end of v. 34: **“for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”** What does this mean: “*all know me?*” After Egypt God gathered a people together and set them apart. Although they spent 40 years in the desert, God still provided. God still protected. God still brought them into the Promised Land. In this way, we see an ethnic Israel, a people of God that were clearly identifiable. But, I must ask, “*Did all of ethnic Israel “know” God by faith?*” Absolutely not! Many of the Israelites benefited as God's people, but yet had no faith. So what does it mean to know God? In Rom. 2:28-29 Paul says, **“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”** Yes, they all received his blessings, but not all were circumcised in their hearts. There was still a remnant. In Jer. 31:7 we see the entire context for this passage: **“For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.”** In the new covenant, all who are in Christ are the remnant. All of those who are in Christ, know God.

And what follows from this truth is that now, the nations are included in this remnant. All God's people include the nations, not just ethnic Israel. The OT is full of these kinds of prophecies. This is NEW. I have heard that the motivating verse for William Carey to give his life in service to reaching the nations in India was Is. 54:2 which says, **“Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations.”** Listen to what the Father says to the Son in Ps. 2:8: **“Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”** This is part of the “*new*” in the new covenant. All God's people, whether ethnic Israel, or English or German, or Latin, or Tatar, or Kazakh or Bengali, or American Indian; ALL of them will know me. The implications for this are huge. Here are just a few: God will accomplish his purpose. The nations will be gathered. When we go the ends of the earth, the nations will respond. The nations were also included in this everlasting covenant from before the foundation of the world. We see very clearly the definite work of the Spirit in bringing sinners to Christ. In the fact that ALL will know him, paves the way for us to say, *“God's people will produce fruit.”* On and on we could go. What a glorious truth!

6. In the NC God forgives and forgets sin? Look at v. 34: **“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”** In the new covenant, there is finality to the work of God in forgiving sins. In other words, Christ is the basis for all forgiveness. Why is this? In the OC, we see that sacrifices were made week after week, month after month, year after year, so that there was no finality to their sacrifices. But, in the NC it is not so. ALL the work of forgiveness is fulfilled and finished in the blood of Christ. In the new covenant, God will cure the disease of sin forever. It will culminate in the finished work of Christ. Let me read one passage before moving to some applications. Rom. 3:21: **“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”**

Application – I hear people all the time talk about God doing something “NEW.” “Let's get on board with something “New” God is doing. Let's wait on God doing something “NEW.” We hear it over and over. We hear of people driving for hours and hours to attend a particular “*revival*” meeting (Ex: 12 Days at Elevation.) People have this mindset that they want to change something to get on board with some new “*movement*” of God. In church circles all the time, we hear about people wanting “*more*” or “*new*.” I would say this morning, “*the new has come*” and in one aspect the work of God is finished. When Jesus said, “*It is finished,*” the NC began and the OC was made obsolete. And, all we are waiting for now is his return.

The reason I believe so many Christians, or so called Christians, are looking for something bigger and better is because they don't understand the principles of the NC. They don't understand that ALL spiritual blessings are found in Christ. So, I would say to you this morning,

“Just BE a Christian.” We don’t need bigger and better. We don’t need all the things we think we might need to be a NT church. We need Christ. And, we need to understand that all the spiritual blessings of this life and the life to come are found in Christ (Eph. 1). It is finished. Simply rest in Christ, who is the Lord of glory.

So today, when you remember the words of Christ who said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” remember what is new. 1) It is an eternal covenant. 2) It will not be broken. 3) It will produce fruit in our lives and give us power to obey God. 4) All God’s people have special revelation by the Spirit in that all of us are teachers. 5) ALL of God’s people know him. 6) All our sins are forgiven based on the person and work of Christ.

This is the new covenant!