

Jeremiah 31:31-34 PM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 January 2025

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Folks, yeah, grab a seat, grab a seat. Nice to see you all, lovely to see you all.

If you don't know me, my name is Aaron, I'm the minister here at St. John's. After the service, if you want to have a really interesting conversation, you should have it with my friend Steve Burgess down here, who is a really old friend from New Zealand.

And so we were young Christians together back in the old country. He's a pastor of a church called C3 in Auckland, which is part of a denomination of about 600 churches around the world.

And he's also on the global executive team. So he travels a lot and he has responsibility over whole countries. So anyway, really fascinating guy. Have a chat to him afterwards. Steve Burgess there.

And just so you know, if it's helpful to know, his love language is physical closeness and touch. So just bear that in mind when you chat to him. Just like talk really closely to him.

[1 : 0 7] Yeah, he'll love that. First thing you know, first thing you should know about the sermon is that it's going to be a bit shorter than normal. And some of you are smiling and I find that offensive, to be honest.

I tend to preach as long as I think it's going to take me to explain something. And I just don't think it's going to take me that long to explain this. So let's move on.

So we are week three into a new sermon series called The Story of God. And what we do is, at St. John's, typically we just work our way through a book of the Bible verse by verse. But we're doing something different tonight. We're doing a survey of all of Scripture.

And we're asking the question, what are the really big things that God has to say to us in the Bible? What are the really big things God has to say to us in the Bible? What's the, like, what's the, if we just really get to the point of it, what would those points be?

I remember chatting to somebody a couple of years ago here at church. They had a bit of a beef with me about something I said in a sermon, I think.

[2 : 1 4] They didn't like what I said. And so we organized a phone call. And she, lovely, such a lovely woman, very Vancouver-y. And so just danced around.

We just had this weird, strange dance in this phone call. And I didn't know what was going on. And she just kept saying, I'm just wondering. Maybe I'm just sort of thinking as I'm throwing ideas around.

When you said, I'm just wondering. And I had no idea what was going on. And I said, please, please. I don't know what's happening right now.

I'm from a very primitive island. Can you just talk to me directly? Just say exactly what you're thinking. And she did, and it was very helpful, actually. See, that's what we're trying to do with this series.

We're just trying to go, what's the big points? What are the big things that God would want us to know about? What's on the heart of God, the biggest things on his mind? So we're week three into it.

[3 : 13] Week one, all about creation. Week two, the fact that God speaks to us. He's not silent. And tonight we have another high point in Scripture. It's Jeremiah 31. Before we get into the details of Jeremiah 31, I kind of need to, we need to get the lay of the land, though, don't we?

Because unfairly, we're just jumping right smack into the middle of a book. So here's my Jeremiah overview in about one minute. Okay, so 600 BC.

So Jeremiah is a priest. That's like his job. But God also called him to be a prophet. And he mostly warns, in his prophetic stuff, he mostly is just warning Israel against all their spiritual dodginess, right?

And that dodginess included, like the elites were kind of like oppressing marginalized people, widows and orphans and stuff. They were worshiping idols. And God told Jeremiah to warn them that if they don't knock that stuff on the head, God would let in a neighboring country and overthrow them, Babylon.

So Jeremiah wasn't very popular. Like he wasn't the guy, if you're having your conference, nobody's inviting Jeremiah because he was just a complete downer.

[4 : 26] No one liked what he was saying. Anyway, they didn't knock it on the head. Babylon did invade. And Jeremiah was caught up in that whole thing.

And that's called the exile. Now Jeremiah as a book is really interesting because it covers the before and after of the exile, the before and the after.

So Jeremiah is like about 50 chapters, but short of 50 chapters, I think. The first 24 chapters are just warnings to Israel. It's like, you know, stop building these shrines. Stop taking advantage of poor people.

He's like, he's begging, he's begging his country to turn back to God and they keep rejecting him. So that's the first half of Jeremiah. Jeremiah. The second half of Jeremiah is basically the stories post-exile.

So it's like it's Babylon's come in and they've stolen all these people and it's terrible. That's what the second half is about. It's a before and after. But, but, right in the middle of it, between the before and after, there is like this hinge chapter.

[5 : 34] Chapter 31. And it's this small collection of actually really hopeful words from God. So in between the two dire kind of things, don't do it, don't do it, don't do it, don't do it, don't do it.

Oh, it's done. You know, you've been taken over now. In between that, there's these beautiful chapters. Words that point us to Christ, actually. See? And the big point of them is God's going to make a way through all of this.

It's a complete mess, but God's going to make a way. Your apostasy, your sin, will not get the final word here, even though it looks really grim. God's faithfulness will win. That's Jeremiah in a nutshell.

Okay. Now, for our particular chapter, what's the big idea? We're just going to keep drilling down, okay? The big idea for our chapter is basically this. The hopeful word is this.

Jeremiah is saying, God is going to make a new covenant because you broke the old one, and this new covenant is going to be in the future at some point.

[6 : 42] That's kind of it, really. Let's drill down even more. For us, the new covenant that Jeremiah points to is the one we enjoy now with Christ.

So that's really important. The new covenant that Jeremiah talked about is the one that we enjoy now. We know that because the night before Christ was betrayed at the Last Supper when he's in student communion, and we've said these words a lot, Jesus says, this is the cup of the new covenant.

So we're in that new cup. The one Jeremiah talked about, the new covenant, this is what we're in so far. Okay, so that's been 40,000 feet. Now we can get into some details. So the passage talks about covenant a lot.

So it's probably important you know what a covenant is. Right? What is a covenant? Because we're talking it up a lot. Covenant.

Amazing. Covenant. Covenant. Covenant. Amazing. What's a covenant? I actually was talking to somebody this week about something. I was talking to them. I was talking to them up about Chick-fil-A, actually. That's what I was doing. And I thank you.

[7 : 48] And I said to this person on staff, Chick-fil-A is the best fast food. And they said, they said, no, it's not even as good as McDonald's.

And I said, shut your mouth. Like this guttural response. Shut your mouth. What the hell? Anyway, I can't remember why I was saying that. What are we talking about?

Covenants. Okay, covenants. Covenants. Covenants are incredible. So, covenants are how God relates to His people.

That's how, you would just read the whole Bible. Covenants are how God relates to His people. So what is a covenant? Well, it's an agreement. But it's not like, just like this legal thing. It's not like a legal agreement, like just a legal agreement, like a cold thing.

And it's obviously not just like an emotional pledge. You know, like, you know, will you go to prom with me? Will you be my boyfriend? Or something like that. It's not just like a pledge.

[8 : 50] And it's not just a contract. It's this incredible blend of law and love. Of law and love. And that's what's great about a covenant. Because it's personal.

There's a personal commitment, a personal relationship aspect to it. So like in the passage, which we'll get to in a moment, when God says, Israel, you broke the covenant.

There's this line. He goes, you broke the covenant even though I was a husband to you. So He brings in that kind of picture that they don't understand. So it's very personal. But it's way more meaty than just a personal commitment.

It's way more intimate. It's way more crunchy. Because it's got this whole legal thing attached to it as well. I'll explain that a bit more. Okay, so God makes this covenant, these beautiful agreements that are a mixture of love and law.

And this sort of is outlined in our passage. So let's dig into it. So I'm going to skip verse 31. It's on page 660 if you want to open your Bibles. They're in the pews there.

[9 : 54] We'll skip 31. We'll come back to it in a moment. Okay. Let's jump into verse 32. And then go back to 31.

So verse 32. Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day that 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.

So what does all that mean? So now we're getting into the details here. Now we're into the weeds. So God chose a people. He loved these people. He rescued them from Egypt.

They were slaves in Egypt. Many of you know the story. Death visits Egypt. God's people are saved through putting the blood of the lamb over the doorpost then. Then God took them to Mount Sinai, gave them the Ten Commandments, the legal kind of requirements of living in relationship with God.

So, so far, really, really good. So how did that whole thing go? How did it go? How did it go? So Moses came down from the mountain. Moses came down from Mount Sinai. He's just received, he's just received the law of God, right?

[10 : 58] So what I'm doing now is I'm explaining this whole thing of like, you broke the covenant, okay? What that means. Moses comes down, comes down from Mount Sinai to find the Israelites are church planting.

Are they church planting? No. No. Are they doing young adult catechism? No, right? They haven't started a school. They're not doing good stuff.

They're like, they're worshipping a golden calf. Like the covenant hardly made it off the mountain before we ruined it. So that's verse 32.

God says, you've broken the covenant. You've broken the covenant, verse 32, which explains verse 31. This is the reason verse 31 is there. Verse 31 says, behold, I'll make a new covenant with you.

Why? Because of verse 32. Okay, that's the first couple of verses. It's quite easy, right? Quite easy. Let's jump to verse 33 and 34 now.

[12 : 00] What's going to be different about this though? Like you had this covenant, didn't even make it off the mountaintop before we completely blew it up. So God says, I'm going to make a new one.

It's like, wow. Like, what? It's like going back to your old girlfriend. Like, why would you do that? You broke up with her because she was crazy.

Like, something was going on. Why would you do that? Like, what's going to be different this time? Okay, verse 33 and 34 explains it. For this is the covenant that I'll make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

I'll put my law within them. I'll write it on their hearts, on their hearts. And I'll be their God and they will be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, know the Lord.

For they shall all know me from the least to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Okay, so what do we learn? Well, you hear, if you sort of slide your eyes over it, there you see this wonderful balance of law but relationship of intimacy.

[13 : 05] But how is it different? Can it be different this time? Well, first thing, the law is no longer written in stone. It's not this thing out there. It's on people's hearts. So God's standards are no longer this external thing.

Like, you know, you have a picture of a family member in your house you don't like. You can just sort of flip that picture down. I don't have to look at them anymore. Like, they can't just ignore it. The law of God is going to be like an internal principle.

So, I mean, we're talking about the Holy Spirit here, right? The Holy Spirit, the very life of God will be in us rather than this thing out there just sort of talking to us. Now, this is important because under the new covenant which we have in Christ that Jeremiah was talking about, this new covenant, it's important to know it's not like God got lax on law keeping.

It's not like, oh, we've got Jesus, ten commandments, don't have to worry about that. Don't have to worry about that nonsense anymore. Just Jesus. It's just cuddles and giggles now. Cuddles and giggles.

No. It's like, it's like stepping it up. Like, I think, oh, we've got Jesus, don't worry about this. No. Like, there's still law. It's just not outside. It's in us.

[14 : 23] It's like heightening the whole thing because now you can't ignore it. And it's in there to recondition your life, to recondition your heart and God is saying, like, I'm going to put my life into you.

I'm going to empower you to keep these commandments. So that's one difference there. So what else is different under the new covenant? God says, I'll forgive their iniquity. Remember it no more. I mean, that is, that is a wild thing to say to these people 2,600 years ago because all they knew was the sacrificial system which I'll come to in a moment.

So what does that mean? Oh, forgive their iniquity. It may, well, so it doesn't, it doesn't mean that God literally forgets. That's silly. That's, that's, we're talking about God.

That's silly. God is not going to actually forget. Biblical forgetting is when someone doesn't act on what they know. Biblical forgetting means someone doesn't act on what they know.

God is not going to act on our disobedience. But how? Why is he not going to act on our disobedience in the new covenant? I mean, is he just not taking it seriously anymore?

[15 : 32] Is he just not into it anymore? Is just, is just like the sweeping under the carpet now? All that stuff doesn't really matter anymore? No. No, not at all.

Let me put some context to this. So back in the days, there was this regimented system of sacrifices that didn't really deal with sin. So what they would do is, you know, they'd sacrifice these animals, there was a liturgy all around it and stuff.

And what it did do was this, it did remind people every time they did it that sin was very serious. And the priest would put his hand on the thing that was being killed.

And this indicated to the people, it said to the people, this poor thing's going to die instead of you guys right now. So it did present sin as a very serious thing that must be dealt with.

So that was quite helpful. But it never dealt with a heart issue, never dealt with a core issue. And so it had to be repeated over and over and over again. So it had this whole system in place, right? Hebrews 10 talks about this.

[16 : 37] Hebrews 10, 11. It says, and every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. Okay.

So under the new covenant, this is not the case. God says, I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm not going to remember your iniquity. How is that happening? Because there are going to be no more repeated sacrifices because Christ's sacrifice comes and once and for all it's going to deal with our sin.

That's what it means. Sin has been dealt with. Which means for us, for you, for me, we, we cannot be more justified before God than we are right now.

Jeremiah anticipates this and Christ fulfills it. So two big differences. The law is not out there, it's in it. It's in our hearts. It's in us right now which is wonderful.

And secondly, God has dealt with disobedience once and for all. The consequences of it fell on Christ, not on us. Okay, that's an explanation of the passage.

[17 : 45] Jeremiah 31, one of the high points of the Bible. One of the most important things that God wants us to know, that he is determined to forgive and he will make a way and he makes a way through Christ.

Now, to finish here for just a minute or two, I just want us to just spend a couple of minutes thinking about these two elements though. Law and love which make up what a covenant is.

There's the relationship, the intimacy, then there's the expectations, kind of the more the legally kind of stuff. Let's think about these for just a moment before we finish.

Because in the passage, God doesn't ignore the law, he elevates it, actually, puts it in us. And there's but still great intimacy. I'll be your God and you'll be my people, he says.

It's beautiful, it's genius. But here's the thing, we still have those things operating now, today, in our covenant with Christ, but in my experience, people in their relationship with God tend to experience these elements in sort of unbalanced ways, i.e.

[18 : 51] their relationship with God is all about keeping rules. As long as I don't swear, as long as I'm not really naughty with my boyfriend or girlfriend, as long as I don't do this or that, as long as I don't, you know, kind of lie on my tax form, I'm like I'm good, right?

Or vice versa. And I think it's a really healthy spiritual check-up thing to do to ask yourself, what describes my relationship with God? Am I more kind of like a law kind of person with God or am I more intimacy person with God?

Do I have those things kind of in balance? Am I just ignoring one over the other? Because it's important that both those things are operating in your relationship with Jesus. So let me just ask you like, let me just say it like this.

No, here's the way to think about it. Have you read the Bible and been confused sometimes because the Bible feels a bit conflicting around the issue of sort of grace and you read the Bible and you'll hear God say, I'm cutting you guys off, it's all over, you guys are done for kind of thing.

And other times you'll hear God say, I will never forsake you. Like Exodus 19, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. And you're like, well, what's going on? Is there a, feels like there's an internal conflict going on in the Bible sometimes.

[20 : 14] God's so hardcore sometimes. And other times he's just so loving and forgiving. What's going on here? Well, I think it's just this, it's not a conflict, it's just that sometimes we need to hear that God is angry about something.

Sometimes we need to hear that God hates the way people are treated. We need to hear that. And sometimes we need to hear that God will never let us go, that we can't out-sin the grace that extends towards us.

So the Bible gives us sort of both barrels there, both ideas, because we can be often unbalanced in our thinking. Sinclair Ferguson is this great old Scottish preacher and I listened to a sort of a thing the other day and they asked Sinclair Ferguson like, what's your advice on meeting with people as a pastor?

And he said, my job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. You guys heard that before? Comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. It's brilliant, isn't it? What does he mean?

He means that some people are on about just the whole I will never forsake you parts of the Bible, the covenant, the love part. And when that happens, you can be sort of, your conscience can get a bit loose, you can become a bit self-indulgent and those folks need their conscience disturbed by the holy demands of a holy God.

[21 : 48] Other folks, though, their relationship with God, it's all demands that, you know, you're kind of wired spiritually and you're a bit sensitive and you always feel guilty and you're disturbed, you feel disturbed and you need to be comforted and you need to hear God say, I will remember your sin no more.

The Bible says both things to us, which is wonderful, I think, isn't it? There's law, there's love, the Bible takes a hard line on both, both are addressed on the cross and we should experience both these things in our relationship with Christ.

We should hear Christ saying, the way you're, what you're doing over here is, it's no good, it's no good, you've got to stop that and also hear Christ say to you, I love you so, so much.

This is all part of the beauty and genius of the gospel, I think. Amen.