

Jeremiah 31:31-34 AM

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, may you place your promises on my lips and write them in our hearts by the power of your Holy Spirit so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen. Amen. May be seated. Amen. We are in the third week of a sermon series on the story of God.

We are attempting to go from Genesis chapter 1 to Revelation chapter 22 in nine weeks. It's like being an F1 driver.

We've divided this into three major sections. First, God speaks. First, God speaks. Then God dwells. And finally, God reigns. And this is the third week of that focusing on the speaking God, the God who speaks.

In the first week, we're in Genesis 1. God speaks creation into being. In the second week, we were in Deuteronomy chapter 4. God speaks to his creation to reveal himself.

[1 : 2 0] And now we're in Jeremiah chapter 31. God speaks to declare his promises to the ones to whom he has revealed himself.

Now covering the whole Old Testament in three weeks is a bit like looking at the rocky mountains from outer space. We know they are there.

We surmise they must be pretty large. But we are missing a lot of the beauty on the ground that you would see if you were able to hike through them. But such is our lot.

And so to Jeremiah chapter 31, we go. You can find this on page 666. And it's important to remember what has been going on in the Old Testament going up to this point.

And if I'm to distill it down very quickly, it goes something like this. God created the world. He saw that it was good and he blessed it. Humans rebelled against their creator and tried to ruin creation and themselves.

[2 : 2 1] And ever since, God has been on a redemption mission. Another way you could put it is a covenant-making mission. Now that word is really big in our passage. Our passage says right at the beginning, verse 31, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with my people.

Now up front, I just want to ask the question, what is a covenant? Really simply, it is a formal bond or pact between two parties that commits them to a lifelong relationship.

That make sense? Formal bond or pact that commits them to a lifelong relationship. And covenants typically include three elements. So it's two of the elements that Chris already mentioned in the children's talk.

Is there are mutual promises made to one another. I'm going to do this for you. I am going to be committed to you in this way. This is how I'm going to live in light of the fact that I'm in a relationship with you.

The second thing is there are signs of the covenant. There are rings and there are colors. In the Old Testament, it was circumcision and it was the Passover meal.

[3 : 29] And in the New Testament, it's baptism and it's the Lord's Supper, which we will celebrate today. Signs of the covenant that has been made in the relationship that we're inhabiting. And then the third thing, which Chris didn't mention but was gesturing towards, is the covenant has to be ratified by blood.

So you have mutual promises, you have signs of the covenant, and then the covenant needs to be ratified by blood. We are staking our very lives on this.

And throughout the Old Testament, we see that God's way of trying to redeem creation, his way of trying to draw his wayward people back to himself, is to keep doubling down on entering into relationship with them.

So his people go far astray and there's wickedness in the earth. And he makes a covenant with Noah and doubles down on his grace. Things go awry from there and he makes a covenant with Abraham and he triples down on his grace.

Things go awry from there and he makes a covenant with Moses and he quadruples down on his grace. Things go awry from there and he makes a covenant with David. And I don't even know what the word is for that. And what we see is that by the time we get to Jeremiah speaking to a people that are in exile, there is this pattern that has emerged in the Old Testament.

[4 : 53] God blesses, humans squander the blessing, and God blesses afresh. Or another way to put it is God is gracious, humans sin, and God gives new grace.

And so throughout the Old Testament we see a constant cycle of grace, sin, new grace, grace, sin, new grace. And Jeremiah 31 is a poignant and powerful new grace moment in the life of the people of God.

Jeremiah is very intentional in how he describes this. He wants us to know that this moment of grace is different than everything else that has come before in the Old Testament. It is genuinely new, he tells us in verse 31.

This is the only time in the Old Testament this phrase new covenant is actually used. And it's not simply new in time, like this is the most recent. It's new in kind.

So it's not like the latest electric car built by Tesla. It's like the first electric car ever built. It's something we've never seen before. Verse 32.

[6 : 01] It's not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

So here's the heartbeat of Jeremiah 31. The images of God is a brokenhearted husband whose heart has been broken by the unfaithfulness of his people as his spouse.

But instead of divorcing her, he has decided to remarry her. And he is going to rewrite his marriage vows. And his marriage vows this time are going to be even better than the ones before.

And the point is, his promises are going to be so heart-meltingly beautiful that his unfaithful spouse will be transformed and her heart will be changed toward him forever.

Brothers and sisters, if there's one thing I want you to get this morning, it's simply this. That God blesses us and he gives us grace. And when we squander it and when we turn away from him and when we run from him and when we forget him, how does he respond to us?

[7 : 06] He gives us deeper grace. He doubles down on his promises. He commits even more fully and even more costly because he wants us to be with him forever.

So three simple points this morning. There's a promise made. There is a promise kept. And there is a promise received. So the promise made, this is the bulk of our passage.

We get this in verses kind of 33 and 34. And there are three things to this new covenant. The first is God promises a renovation of the heart. Look at verse 33.

First thing he says, what's new about this? I will put my law within them. And I will write it on their hearts. It's the image of Mount Sinai when God took his finger and wrote his law on the stone tablets to give to his people the Ten Commandments.

Now he's writing his law directly on our hearts. And it's a similar promise that's made in Ezekiel chapter 36. But the imagery there is even more dramatic. God will perform a radical heart surgery transplant.

[8 : 17] Heart transplant. And the surgeon will be the Holy Spirit. It says in Ezekiel 36, You see what Jeremiah 31 is doing?

God is saying that the heart of the issue is a human heart issue. Now we have this tendency in our world to miss it.

We have a tendency to misdiagnose what's going on in the world. G.K. Chesterton has this wonderful little book called What's Really Wrong with the World? And he addresses lots of different ways that people engage it.

And he said one of the things that we most often do wrong when trying to diagnose what's wrong with the world is we start by analyzing the disease and then we end by looking for the cure. And he suggests that actually in spiritual and social matters, it needs to be the reverse.

We start with the cure and that gives us a real clue to what the disease is. And so here we have God saying, I'm going to put my law on your hearts.

[9 : 29] First thing in the new covenant, and it gives us a clue to the deep issue that he's seeking to address in humanity is an issue of the heart. Now we have a tendency to misdiagnose what is wrong with the world by confusing the symptoms for the disease.

Let me see if I can explain. I think we often say that wealth inequality is one of the world's biggest problems. It's true. Some have and some have not. And Jesus comes into the world and he says, no, not quite.

The real problem is that you love money and that you believe that your source of significance and security is going to come from having more of it. It's a heart issue. Or we might say that there's power inequality is one of the major things that's wrong with the world.

And that's true. Some have more power than others. And it can be based on race or gender or class or any number of things. And Jesus comes along and he says, not quite so.

So the real problem is that you want to be great and you're seeking after positions of power often at other people's expense. You want to make a name for yourself.

[10 : 35] It's a heart issue. We say that crime and corruption is what's really wrong with the world. Some obey the law, law and order, and others don't. And Jesus comes along and says, not quite.

The real problem is that your heart is full of evil thoughts. And theft and coveting and deceit and pride and foolishness is a heart issue. He even says in Mark chapter 7, all these things come from within.

They are what defile the person. And so Jeremiah 31 is putting his finger on something that Jesus picks up on and drives home for us.

That our hearts are full of disordered loves. We love the wrong things. And sometimes we love first things second and second things first.

So there's this wonderful little quote from John Stott. He says, in God's order, we are designed to love God first, love our neighbor second, and love ourselves third.

[11 : 32] Sin reverses the order completely. Putting ourselves first, our neighbor second, and God somewhere far behind. End quote.

And so the purpose of God's law in the Old Testament was to reorder our loves. To reorient our heart towards God. That's why Jesus summarizes the law.

I think Chris already read it in our service. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And then love your neighbor as yourself. It's a reordering of our hearts towards the Lord.

And so God says, this is the first thing that I'm going to do. I'm going to deal with your heart. And the second thing he says is God not only promises the renovation of our hearts, but God promises the restoration of our relationship with him.

Look at verse 33 on the bottom third of it. He says, I will be their God. And they shall be my people. In other words, I'm going to belong to them.

[12 : 33] They're going to belong to me. Then verse 34. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and teach in his brother, saying, know the Lord. For they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

See what's happening here? God's saying, I'm going to deal with this deep heart issue. And as I deal with that deep heart issue, it's actually going to bring my people into a restored relationship with me where they're going to know who they really are now.

And they're going to know who they really belong to. And they're going to be in a direct and personal and intentional relationship with me in a way that they haven't experienced before.

We will be able to say before God with renewed confidence and assurance, I actually know the Lord.

And I know who I am as one who belongs to the Lord. I am at peace with him. I belong in his presence. I'm held by his love.

[13 : 38] In sickness and in health and for richer and for poorer. So the first promise is a renovation of the heart. And it leads to a second promise, which is a restoration of the relationship.

But the third promise is like the foundation of the house. All the other promises of God rest on the firm foundation of his promised forgiveness.

Look at the bottom of verse 34. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

Forgiveness is God's intentional forgetfulness here. And we're told that it's the doorway to all the other blessings of God in the scriptures.

Salvation is like a vast mansion that God invites us into. And every room belongs to us. And as we go into each room, we discover adoption. And we go to another room and we discover cleansing.

[14 : 39] And we go to another room and we discover assurance and peace and hope and joy. And God is saying the front door to that vast mansion is forgiveness. That's the way that you get into all the other riches of God.

And the key word is the one at the very beginning of the sentence. It says, for. In other words, all the promises I've just made, God is saying here through Jeremiah, all the other promises I've made depends on this final promise.

It is the foundation that makes all the other promises possible. How can this be so? Well, think about it with me for a second. Can you connect with another person's heart if you've not forgiven them? Can you commit to being there for someone and cherish them and having an intimacy and a belonging that you have with nobody else if you have not forgiven them?

Can you experience deep intimacy with someone if they have not forgiven you? So Jeremiah is saying here that forgiveness is the key to the door that unlocks all the other promises and riches of God.

And that's why Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, he chose to use this language of a new covenant. And he connected it with his blood.

[15 : 54] When Chris leads us in the communion service, we'll hear that. It's because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. So when Jesus is celebrating the Lord's Supper and he's explaining to them what he's about to do on the cross the night before his death, he points them to his blood that is going to be shed for them.

It is going to lead to the forgiveness of sins, which is going to unlock all the promises that God has for his people in the new covenant. So that's why he says this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

And he says, drink it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. So Jesus is essentially saying the night before he is betrayed, he's saying to his disciples, promises made, promises being kept.

And that's our second point. God keeps the promises that he makes. And Jesus says to his people, I am the one through whom Jeremiah 31 is being fulfilled. All the promises of God are coming true in me.

And so we learn that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God keeps his promises no matter what it costs him. And no matter how deeply we betray him, he sticks to what he has promised to do.

[17 : 20] I mean, this is really marvelous. Think about the fact what Jesus is doing on the night that he's betrayed. He knows that Peter is about to deny him. He knows that Judas is about to betray him.

He washes their feet anyways. And he gives them the Lord's Supper anyway. It's in the moment when Jesus is experiencing his closest disciples not keeping their promises to him, that Jesus is most faithful in keeping his promises to his people and his disciples.

And it gives us great hope, brothers and sisters, that in Jesus, God's promises hold true to us even in our darkest hour. Like in our moment of denial, he dies for us.

Even when we're faithless, he's faithful to us. I love the way that Paul put it. He said, God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You see, some of us are coming here this morning, I think, probably needing a new grace moment in their lives. Maybe we've denied him. Maybe we've betrayed him.

[18 : 32] Maybe we've forgotten his promises altogether. And we come back wondering, ooh, will the Lord still welcome me? Will he be true to me?

Will he forgive me and love me? And the answer in Jesus is absolutely yes. And it raises a question for us, I think, that's really practical. One of the things that I think Jesus' temptations teach us, that's quite profound, is that the way that Satan wants to get us off track and get our eyes off Jesus is to actually kind of dangle promises in front of us that seem better and more enticing and more graspable than the promises that God has actually already made to us.

So you could call them surrogate promises. And the world is full of these. So politics is a great place to see this. If you elect me, everything will be fixed.

If you buy me, you will look the way you've always wanted to look and feel the way you've always wanted to feel. If you eat this or go to this country or experience this thing, you will be energized in a way you've never felt before.

If you earn this amount of money, you're finally going to be secure. If you buy a home, you'll finally know stability. Good luck with that. If you earn this grade or this degree, others will finally think you're smart.

[20 : 24] If you get this job, others will finally think you're successful. If you say this or do this thing, post this post, people will finally accept you as one of their own.

If you accomplish this, maybe you'll finally feel a little peace about life. If you send your kids to this school, don't worry. They'll finally be Satan's mark. See, the way that Satan seeks to distract us from the promises that God has made to us is by dangling these surrogate promises.

These things that seem so much more tactile and seem so much more attainable than what God offers us. And we end up spending our lives frantically feasting on all the promises of the world like fast food restaurants.

Going from one to the next. When Jesus is sitting there at a three-star Michelin restaurant offering us the only food that is going to satisfy and sustain us forever.

A feast of God's faithfulness based on the power of his promises. So my brothers and sisters, whose promises are you trusting in your life right now?

[21 : 33] How are they shaping your life? This morning as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, Jesus invites you to receive his promises.

He invites you to rest your life on his promises as if your life really depended on it. Because all the blessings of a new relationship with God come through forgiveness.

If you want to know the one who made you and you want to be known by him. If you want to belong to him and you want to have a heart that is soft and sensitive to him.

You have to receive everything that he has purchased on the cross. Everything that he offers you at the Lord's table by faith. This is part of what I love about our communion liturgy.

Is that after Jesus says, this is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. We don't say anything. We just get up.

[22 : 34] We walk forward. We open our hands. We take the cup. And we drink down grace. Because once Jesus says, this is what I've done for you, there's nothing else to say.

Believing is receiving. Receiving is believing. As God immerses us in his promises that he has proclaimed over us. As he writes them in our hearts and minds.

As he makes them be a light into our path. As he promises us that he will be our God forever. And we will spend eternity in the joy of his powerful presence.

I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.