Lent 5 Jeremiah 31:31-34
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God Explains Holy Week – A "New Covenant"
I. The need for a new covenant.
II. The terms of the new covenant.

Dear Christian friends,

HOW would you describe what Holy Week is **all about**? Jesus dying to pay for the sins of the world? Jesus' conquering death and bringing us the **sure hope** of heaven? That's **obviously** TRUE – but Jeremiah here takes a DIFFERENT APPROACH. Jeremiah **explains Holy Week** as God making a ***"new covenant"*** with us – a new CONTRACT or **agreement**. Holy Week is God making a ***"new contract"*** with us.

I've never been involved in CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS. **Pastors** generally don't go on strike or HAVE A UNION **representing** them. I haven't signed any contract with you to preach **"x" amount** of sermons for **"x" amount** of dollars. But many of you have **been involved** in NEGOTIATIONS – whether **negotiating** renting some land, a new contract at work, etc.

Today we get to sit **with Jeremiah** in a NEGOTIATING SESSION with God. God has put on the table His ***"new covenant"*** with us. As He does that GOD EXPLAINS both 1)the need and 2)the terms of this ***"new covenant."***

I. The need for the new covenant.

God describes this ***"new covenant"*** or **contract** by saying, ***"It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt."*** The ***"old"*** covenant takes us back to Mt. Sinai. There God had made a covenant with the Israelites and told them, ***"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you will carefully listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you will be My special treasure out of all the nations. You will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation."*** Those were the BASIC TERMS of the **"old contract"** – IF THEY OBEYED God they would be God's special people. But there was a problem with that contract.

The problem was NOT WITH GOD. God kept His side of the bargain. **Not once** can God be accused of NOT LIVING UP to **His part** of the contract. Israel's history is a WRITTEN RECORD of **God's faithfulness**. We really should say that **God went** OVER AND ABOVE what was required of Him.

The problem wasn't WITH THE COVENANT itself either. The DUTIES of **both sides** were clearly spelled out. **Both God** and Israel knew exactly what was **required** of them **under** this contract.

The problem was WITH THE PEOPLE! ***"They broke My covenant,"*** God says. Broke it NOT JUST ONCE or twice but over and over! The OT is **both** the RECORD of God's faithfulness and **patience** AND the **record** of Israel's unfaithfulness and **rebellion**. If anyone ever had the right to FILE A GRIEVANCE it was **God with Israel**!

"They broke My covenant, although I was a husband to them." The **old covenant** was not a **mere** BUSINESS ARRANGEMENT. God compares His relationship with Israel to a marriage. God does the same with His ***"new covenant."*** We – **the Church** – are called ***"the bride"*** of Christ. The kingdom of heaven is a ***"wedding banquet."*** Jesus coming for us on the Last Day is ***"the bridegroom coming for his bride."***

That's the PERFECT comparison! **Marriage** is ALL ABOUT love – trust – faithfulness – commitment. **Marriage** is a total giving – a NOTHING-HELD-BACK giving – of yourself to your spouse. There are other women in my life but ONLY ONE is my wife. There are other special people in my life – my

parents, children, grandchildren, etc. – but ONLY ONE is my wife. SO IT WAS for God – there was ONLY **Israel**. So it SHOULD HAVE BEEN for Israel – ONLY the Lord.

""They broke My covenant, although I was a husband to them." TIME AND AGAIN the prophets rebuked the Israelites for **all kinds** of sin. Greed – **selfishness** – sexual immorality – INDIFFERENCE, etc. But **all those sins** were really ONLY SYMPTOMS of the **real problem** – spiritual adultery. Israel had been unfaithful to her **divine Husband** and had sought out ***"other lovers"*** as the prophets put it. Rather than being the LOVING WIFE Israel had played the prostitute. **For Israel** is wasn't ONLY GOD.

Adultery is a devastating sin. It's a betrayal of another person's love and **trust**. It goes right TO THE HEART of the relationship and CUTS THE HEART right out of it. That's the way we NEED TO SEE and **understand sin** – starting with our own sin. **Here** God has so loved us – showered on us His **blessings** and **attention** – proved over and over His love and **faithfulness** and COMMITMENT to us – and how do WE RESPOND? We ignore and defy and avoid Him. Our BELOVED is not **so well loved**. Other people and other things have COME BEFORE Him in our hearts and lives – have COME BETWEEN God and us. Spiritual adultery – there's NOTHING PRETTY about it!

"Yes, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with them." I've never been involved in a **bargaining session**. But I do know that you always want to negotiate with a STRONG HAND. It's easier to negotiate if they need me MORE than I need them. Sitting with Jeremiah at these **contract talks** we definitely have a WEAK HAND. God is IN CHARGE here. God puts on the table a NEW OFFER – a new contract. Let's look at…

II. The terms of the new covenant.

This ***"new covenant"*** is NOT NEW **in the sense** that nobody had ever heard about it before. This ***"new covenant"*** goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. It's ***"new"*** because it's SO TOTALLY DIFFERENT from the **old** covenant.

This ***"new covenant"*** is not YOUR TYPICAL **contract**. Listen and see if you can **tell what makes** this one SO DIFFERENT. ***"This is the covenant I will make…, declares the LORD. I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will each one teach his neighbor or …his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, …for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more."***

Do you see the difference? USUALLY a **contract** is two-sided and conditional – BOTH SIDES agreeing to do something **for the other**. "I will pay you **so much money** if you do **so much work**." But this ***"new covenant"*** is not based on ANYTHING WE DO. In this ***"new covenant"*** God drives a HARD BARGAIN – with Himself! The terms of this ***"new covenant"*** are all things God will do FOR US! **Under this** new covenant God commits Himself – OBLIGATES Himself – to do all these things for us.

The BASIC TERMS of this ***"new covenant"*** are ***"I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more."*** Yes, we've sinned. We've been unfaithful to our **faithful** God. We have not lived up TO OUR PART of the bargain. We justly deserve to be **punished** and **forsaken** by God. Those are facts God did **not** IGNORE or EXCUSE. But God can and does ***"forgive"*** all our sins because of what **His Son** Jesus has all done for us. Jesus lived for us that life of **perfect love** and **obedience** that we owed God. Then **on the cross** Jesus offered up His sinless life to personally pay for all our sins. Jesus died **our death** and endured the **hell we had** coming. BECAUSE Jesus has done all that for us God has FULLY and FREELY forgiven **every one** of our sins. That forgiveness is **not simply** a POSSIBILITY – a GOOD CHANCE. **This forgiveness** is not conditional – God WILL forgive us if we do whatever. Under the terms of this ***"new covenant"*** God comes to us **in Jesus** and says, "I HAVE FORGIVEN **all** your sins."

That's the BASIC TERMS of this ***"new covenant."*** Now let's look at its FRINGE BENEFITS. ***"I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts."*** The **old covenant** demanded obedience. This ***"new covenant"*** moves us to live our lives to God. **Under the terms** of this ***"new covenant"*** God makes us ***"new people – new creation"*** – God gives us a ***"new heart."*** The NEW MAN in us doesn't have to be forced to **go** to church or **to live** a holy life. Our new man WANTS TO DO what makes our Savior happy. To use the words of the psalmist our new man says, ***"I delight to do Your will, O my God' Your law is within my heart."***

"I will be their God and they will be My people." What comfort and confidence – what peace and encouragement **these terms give** us! As we go through life WE DO SO **as children** of God and **heirs** of heaven. As we deal with all that **this life brings** we can do so knowing that the ALMIGHTY God is our **"dear Father in heaven."** We have the joy and confidence of God WATCHING over us and TAKING CARE of us **every step** of the way. God has personally promised to ***"work all things"*** for our eternal good. God is ALWAYS THERE for us – always with us.

"No longer will each one teach his neighbor or …his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest." There are no special classes of Christians. **One Christian** is not better than another – doesn't have MORE PULL with God. We are all equal children of our heavenly Father. God's Word is NOT THE PROPERTY of **only pastors** and teachers. God's work is NOT THE WORK of **only pastors** and teachers. God wants all of us to LEARN AND SHARE His Word. God does provide His people with pastors and teachers ***"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."*** It's ALL GOD'S PEOPLE all working together for **the spread** of God's kingdom.

One last thing. We better check the FINE PRINT – look for any LOOPHOLES. With a ***"new covenant"*** like this one there must be SOME CATCH. This sounds TOO GOOD to be true. But it's all true with NO **fine print** or **loopholes**. The ***"days"*** of this new covenant HAVE COME. This ***"new covenant"*** was signed that first Good Friday – signed with the blood of God's Son. The TERMS of this ***"new covenant"*** are already in effect and will remains so until we are all safely home in the ***"new heavens and new earth."*** Amen.

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