

Dear Friends in Christ,

One day I went into the cell phone store. I was told, “We will upgrade your plan. You will pay less and we will give more time to browse the internet.” I was suspicious. I was thinking, “*How many more dollars a month will this cost me?*” “None” was the answer. I walked out of the store with a new contract that was cheaper, offered more and it didn’t cost me a dime! That doesn’t happen very often where a company, tears up your old contract and offers you a new and better contract at no cost.

Yet, this is what we hear from the Lord God in Jeremiah. He in time will take away the old contract which is called a “covenant.” The Lord God will write a new contract or covenant. We are told it will not be like the old two-sided agreement. We are reminded today that the New Covenant was one-sided contract written in the blood of God’s Son Jesus.

You and I are not Jewish or under the Laws of Moses, never-the-less, we were born under the death sentence of sin. This New Covenant which is based on the forgiveness of sins is very important for you and me. It reminds us of why we will observe and celebrate the holy days of Holy Week. Let’s look at this thought...**You Are Blessed Under the New Covenant! (New Contract)**

1. The New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant.

To understand why the New Covenant is better, we must know a little bit about the Old Covenant. We will then understand why the new is better than the old.

A. The best word to describe the Old Covenant is “rules.” The Lord God would call Israel his people and he would bless and protect them. In order to be his people, they had to be holy. They accomplished this by following the rules.

1. We often think of 10 Commandments. There were hundreds of rules. We know that they were to love their neighbor and show compassion for the poor. They also needed to keep their tents free of mildew. Bury garbage and waste outside the camp. They were unclean when they handled a dead body or animal carcass. Then there were rules to make yourself clean again.

2. There were times when people broke God’s rules which made them

unholy. It did not matter if it was intentional or unintentional. There were rules for sin offerings. A person took an appropriate sacrificial animal to a priest and he made a sacrifice for the person. The forgiveness of sins was pronounced, and you were restored as one of God's holy people.

3. The covenant arrangement did not work. The reason was not because the rules were too difficult. It was because the people did not repent. By Jeremiah's time, they refused to turn back to the Lord from idol worship, adultery, robbery, violence and all kinds of sins. They would offer temple sacrifices at times, but their hearts weren't in it. Even though the Lord had destroyed their brother and sister Israelites in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they did not turn back to the Lord. Jerusalem was destroyed.

4. How are you and I doing in our relationship with the Lord? Israel's history is a warning for us. The warning is that it is easy to turn our backs on the Lord and engage in unholy living. It may seem like it is easy to turn back to the Lord, the church doors are open. However, over half of all Christians in America, do not come back to the Lord each week. The nature of sin is that it draws us away and it tries to keep us away from the Lord.

It is useful for you and I to remember the Old Covenant rules about worship. I pulled this black curtain in front of the SotV altar. The Old Testament temple had the altar hidden away. Only the priests could go in the holy place at special times. The high priest alone could go by the Lord on the Day of Atonement. To accentuate this, men were only allowed to the area in front of the sanctuary. It would be as if Pastor Kirby and I were the only two people who could come into this area of the sanctuary. The men would be out in the entryway and the women, children and non-members would be out on the porch. The message is that no sinner approaches a holy God on their own.

The Lord God separates himself from sinners. We need to repent and receive God's gracious forgiveness while he calls us. We need to hold onto his grace. Eventually Jeremiah's voice went silent. All that was left was God's judgement. This is a sobering message as we live in an era where sin runs rampant and Christians face many temptations.

B. Weren't there any believers left in Jerusalem? Yes, and Jeremiah was one of them. To those who were listening, the Lord promises a New Covenant which will be different and better. The heart of the New Covenant is found at the end of verse 34. **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”**

1. In chapter 33:8 the Lord states, **“I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.”** The worshipers in the temple had to wash before they worshiped, but they were made clean by the blood of the lamb that the priest sacrificed for their sins. The worshiper had forgiveness because the animal pointed ahead to Jesus, God’s Son, shedding his blood for sin at the cross. St. John in his first letter assures us that **the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.** (1 John 1:7)

2. Some of the sins that the Israelites committed before the fall of Jerusalem were horrific. There were child sacrifices and cannibalism. Today Christians have abortions in their past, sins of abuse and other horrific sins that we don’t want anyone to know about. The Lord promises that **he will remember our sins no more.** God knows they happened, every sin is forgiven in Jesus and God doesn’t acknowledge or bring up those sins anymore. This is grace we want to always remember and hang on to!

2. The wonderful blessings of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is more than forgiveness. The Lord goes on to mention other wonderful blessings that come from the New Covenant.

A. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”

1. The word “law” probably is best understood as “teachings, doctrines”. The New Covenant is about the Gospel. The Holy Spirit works through the Good News of Jesus to grow our faith and to fill us with joy.

2. I have noticed that our aged church members who can’t come to church anymore will often say a familiar passage with me. If I start reciting John 3:16, they say it with me. I have noticed with people suffering from dementia, how they say the Lord’s prayer with me. I can see in their eyes that they remember it, even when other things have been forgotten. The Lord writes his Gospel on our hearts. He continues to do so.

B. Another blessing is mentioned. **“I will be their God, and they will be my people.”** Under the old contract, the people of Israel were God’s people as long as they followed the rules. If they did not, the Lord had the right to end the relationship and he did. Notice in this blessing there is no “if.” **“I will be their God, and they will be my people.”** This is God acting alone. He graciously makes us his own through the Gospel. He claims us as his children. Since he does this, there is no doubt as to our status.

C. The last blessing is mentioned in verse 34. **“No longer will they teach**

their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.”

1. “To know the Lord” means to know Jesus and believe in him as Savior.

No Christians will have to tell another Christian to “know Jesus” because they will.

2. What we can do is encourage each other. Encourage each other to come to church and receive the Gospel.

What a blessing that the curtain in front of the altar has been removed. You can freely come into the sanctuary because Jesus has opened the way.

Heaven is also open to you. As you come in you see the Baptismal font where the Lord made his covenant with you and made you his own. You can approach the altar and actually receive the body and blood of Christ with the bread and the wine. His body and blood made this new covenant of which you are now an heir.

We are wonderfully blessed under the New Covenant!

Conclusion: It would be nice if the mortgage company or the bank would call and say, “*We have torn up the old contract. You don’t owe us anything.*” It would be nice, but it won’t happen.

It is amazing and wonderful that when it comes to the most important matter of all--our life with God and eternal life--that God acted for our salvation. Jesus didn’t tear up the Old Covenant, he fulfilled it for us. Then he established a New Covenant when he suffered and died for us. The New Covenant is better. We have been given forgiveness and eternal life. Don’t live life as if you were slavishly keeping the Old Covenant. Live in Jesus, doing his will and rejoicing. Amen.

General: Some Greeks would see Jesus. He reflects that hour has come for him to be glorified. When he is lifted up he will draw all people to himself. Before the glory is an agonizing which is already present in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Hebrews 5 we get an intimate view of the mind of our Savior and how he became the source of salvation for all people.

Context: The Lord has condemned Judah for her impenitence. (chaps. 15-29) The Lord remains faithful. (chaps. 30-33) He promises a return from exile. (30) He promises a new covenant. (31) (The Lord confirms the promise through and object lesson, chap. 32)

Malady: The old covenant of rules and regulations under Moses could not save, because the people broke the covenant.

Propositional Statement: The Lord promises a new covenant in which life will be much better because it is based on the forgiveness of sins.

FIRST LESSON - Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV 1984)

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," 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 a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV 2011)

31 "The days are coming," declares the Lord,

 "when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
 and with the people of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant

 I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
 to lead them out of Egypt,

because they broke my covenant,
 though I was a husband to [a] them, [b]"
declares the Lord.

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time," 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.
34 No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
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"For I will forgive their wickedness
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Footnotes:

- a. Jeremiah 31:32 Hebrew; Septuagint and Syriac / and I turned away from
- b. Jeremiah 31:32 Or was their master

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON - Hebrews 5:7-10 (NIV 1984)

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:7-10 (NIV 2011)

7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

GOSPEL READING - John 12:20-33 (NIV 1984)

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all

men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

John 12:20-33 (NIV 2011)

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up^a from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Footnotes:

a. John 12:32 *The Greek for lifted up also means exalted.*