

## "Birth of the New Covenant" – Jeremiah 31:31-34

As we celebrate the Christmas season, we rightly focus on Jesus' birth. Yes, as the saying goes, Jesus is the reason for the season.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (John 1:14a)*

God became man. He shared our common lot. He lived a perfect, sinless life, then He offered that life up on the cross at Calvary. Because Jesus was born a human baby, we have the opportunity to be reconciled to God. By simply believing in His finished work, by confessing our sinful state and turning to Him, by declaring Him to be the Lord of our individual lives, we can be saved from the eternal hell we so richly deserve.

This birth represents the dawn of a New Covenant. Now, the New Covenant would not come to completion for another 33 years, but it represents the only hope for we human beings. Through the Nation Israel, we learn that human beings are completely incapable of living lives that are pleasing to God. Through Moses came the Law, 613 precepts given in Leviticus. Yes, they are summarized in the Ten Commandments and to please God, we would have to keep them perfectly. But nobody could, except for Jesus Himself. We're all guilty of violating the Law. We are all guilty of cosmic treason.

*But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

This little baby would, some 33 years later, conquer sin and death. In doing so, He instituted a New Covenant. This birth we celebrate is the birth of the New Covenant. So, I thought it would be good this morning to reflect just a bit on what this New Covenant entails. And we are going to begin in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is called the 'weeping prophet'. It is for good reason. Jeremiah was given the task of delivering an extremely unpopular message of certain judgment and for the most part, his message would fall on deaf ears. He endured a lifetime of suffering as a result and he witnessed the overthrow of Jerusalem by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

Reading the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations can be a bit of a downer, but God is still gracious. Even within the gloom and doom of these very intense prophecies, we see His amazing grace shining through. And that's why we find ourselves in Chapter 31, beginning with verse 31.

*"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

Now, before we drill down into this wonderful, glorious promise, we need to ask the question, "To whom is it made?" Because, right there in the verse 31, the prophet mentions the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Then, is this promise for the Nation Israel? Yes. Absolutely!

Is this promise only for the Nation Israel? No! Because under the covenant given to Abraham, all nations would be blessed through Israel. This New Covenant is for everyone who would believe from all nations.

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:27-29)*

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then this promise is for you. Jesus instituted the New Covenant by His sacrifice on the cross and we commemorate His sacrifice in the ordinance of Communion. When Jesus instituted this memorial,

*... He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant** in My blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:19-20)*

However, the New Covenant is only available to those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)*

It doesn't matter if you are an ethnic Jew or a Gentile dog. If you have turned to Christ, this New Covenant is for you.

So, let's look into this New Covenant for just a bit and the first thing you should notice is that it is not at all like the Old Covenant. It is fundamentally different. Verse 32 again: This new covenant is ...

*... not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, (Jeremiah 31:32)*

This is referring, of course, to the Law of Moses, the Sinai Covenant. This was a conditional covenant. If you obey, you would receive blessing. If you don't obey, you receive cursing. The focus is completely on human performance. Human performance failed spectacularly.

*My covenant **which they broke**, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:32)*

The Old Testament is a tribute to human failure. God showed incredible kindness, incredible patience toward the children of Israel. God is always faithful. Human beings always rebel.

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)*

Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians and said:

*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)*

The Law of Moses cannot save, because nobody can keep the Law perfectly. But as we realize that we are incapable of keeping the Law, we learn that we need something else. That is, Someone else.

The New Covenant would bring a new nature, a transformed nature.

*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; (Jeremiah 31:33)*

Charles Spurgeon explained this much more eloquently than I could: He said, “Things required by the Law are bestowed by the gospel. God demands obedience under the law; God works obedience under the gospel. Holiness is asked of us by the law; holiness is wrought in us by the gospel.” By the Gospel, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us.

When you come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, He immediately saves you from sin’s penalty, but then, something amazing starts to happen to you. The Holy Spirit starts transforming you from the inside out. God begins to write His precepts on your heart and you find you have also been saved from sin’s power. It doesn’t happen all at once and we will never be completely free from sin while we occupy these earthly bodies. But more and more, you find yourself wanting to do things that please Jesus.

This is the work of Almighty God. “I will put my Law on their minds,” He says. “I will write my Law on their hearts.” God, through Jesus Christ, gives the believer a transformed nature!

But wait; there’s more!

*I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:33)*

This is nothing less than a new relationship with the Creator of the universe. By nature, we are estranged from God. We were His enemies.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

By faith in Jesus, we move from a position of enmity with God to being members of His own family!

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:14-17)*

Are you led by the Spirit of God? Have you been born again from above? If you can believe that Jesus died for you and then rose again, you have been born of the Spirit. If you have, then you have been adopted into a royal family and you have an inheritance that is truly out of this world!

*... an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:4-5)*

This new relationship is a personal relationship.

*No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:34)*

To know Jesus is to have a personal relationship with Him. It is not enough to know about Jesus. It is not enough to be a member of a church or a denomination. It is not enough to be baptized or to participate in the Lord's Supper. It is not enough to respond to an altar call or to sign your name on a Gospel tract. You must personally know Jesus.

"How do I do that?", you might ask. Well, you can't.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

You see, when it comes to salvation, God must do the work. When the disciples murmured among themselves, saying, "*Who then can be saved?*" (Mark 10:26)

*But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)*

So, what you need to do is, ask the Lord for the faith to believe. And whenever you talk to God, it pays to be honest. "Lord, I don't know that I really believe, but I want to believe. I believe I'm a sinner. I believe, Jesus, that you died on the cross to save sinners. I believe that You loved the world so much that you sent your Son, but do You really love me enough to save me? To forgive me? Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

Look at the last bit of Jeremiah 31:34.

*For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)*

Jesus died on the cross to pay the death penalty for your sins. He rose again to life again and you can have a personal relationship with Him. On the basis of Christ's finished work, God will forgive your iniquity. Not only will He forgive, He will also forget your sins. It will be as if you had never sinned in the first place.

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

That is the essence of the New Covenant. God does for us what we could not do for ourselves. All He asks in return is that we simply believe and follow Him.

*... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)*

In a very real way, the work of instituting this New Covenant began with a miraculous birth. Isaiah prophesied 700 years before the event:

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)*

Jesus is Immanuel. That means He is God with us! The Word became flesh! He is the greatest gift ever!

Merry Christmas indeed!