

I.N.I.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 17, 2017
Jeremiah 31:31-34

In Christ Jesus, who fulfilled the Old Covenant for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have spent the last three weeks listening to sections from the book of Jeremiah. For the most part it has been much the same thought. Jeremiah proclaimed to the people a message of warning and destruction if they did not repent and turn back to the LORD. We know from history that they did not listen and the Babylonians conquered the southern Kingdom of Judah and carried them away into captivity which lasted for 70 years. But there would be a remnant that would return and be faithful so that some 500 years later the Messiah, Jesus would be born in Bethlehem as it was prophesied of in Micah.

This did not happen by chance, but by God's direction and guidance. It was because He had already made a contract with humankind? He didn't have to! But His love led Him to. The Old Contract went into effect on Mt. Sinai over 4,000 years ago. It was a two-sided agreement set up by God and given to Moses and the Israelites. It was His Law. But sad to say that agreement, that contract was broken as soon as it was made. Because of that broken covenant the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed and dispersed by the Assyrians and now the Southern Kingdom of Judah too would be attacked by the Babylonians and taken captive.

As we heard last Sunday, Jeremiah was prophesying all of this. But in the midst of his proclamations of gloom and doom, in the midst of his denouncing the people for their idolatry and self-reliance, their sinful pride and unfaithfulness, in the midst of his charging them with ungodliness and breaking the covenant that God made with their forefathers, in the midst of his prophesying that they would be carried into captivity, the Lord through His prophet brings them hope and comfort.

For the Lord through Jeremiah informs them that He will establish a New Covenant with them. And that is the truth that we would like to direct our hearts to this morning. Let us see:

HOW GOD NEGOTIATED A NEW CONTRACT FOR US!

The reason for new contracts is the desire to change, to get something different, usually something more than the last one, or in some hard economic times to at least keep the status quos. And most often the contracts that are drawn up and agreed to are pretty fair to both sides. But nowhere in the annals of history has there been a contract like the one negotiated by God for us! For it is totally one-sided! In this new contract God does it all. God fulfills all the requirements. God does all of the work. God makes all of the promises and guarantees.

We have broken down our theme into three parts.

I: THE NEED FOR THIS CONTRACT---SIN

Why did the people need a new contract with God in the first place? What was wrong with the old one? Well the problem was not in the contract itself but in the people involved in the contract. The Lord says in vs. 32 of our text: **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.**

The old covenant made at Sinai failed because God's people failed, they proved themselves to be unfaithful to the covenant. God did not! He says of Himself that He was like a faithful husband to them, loyal and true, but they went a-horning after idols, prostituting themselves before false, man-made gods. He was completely faithful in His love and care for them. They broke their side of the covenant as soon as it had been given with the worship of Golden Calves on Mt. Sinai and it continued to be that way for generations.

Even God's people, believers were unable to keep that first covenant because they are filled with sin. The people of Jeremiah's day were no different than the people of Moses' day and the people of Moses' day were no different than the people of Noah's day and the people of Noah's day were no

different from the people of Adam's day and unfortunately we are no different than any of them. We, too, have often been unfaithful to our Lord, running after the gods of this world---personal pleasure, materialism, security, money, recreation---allowing all of these external things to push God out of that # 1 place in our hearts. We do not deserve to be called God's people any more than the people of Jeremiah's day did. And that is why they and we need this new covenant. **Because of our sins!**

As we said the old covenant was a bilateral agreement in which Israel's blessings were dependent upon their obedience to the Lord's commands. So the need for the new contract was and is **SIN**---man's failure to live up to God's demands, God's standards of perfection. Human beings broke God's covenant by failing to fear, love and trust in God above all things and love their neighbor as themselves.

II: THE TERMS OF THIS NEW CONTRACT---FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS

The terms of this new covenant are worlds apart from the first. First of all it would not be new in the sense that it contained an altogether different means of salvation. For the old covenant presented salvation only through faith in the coming Messiah. But it would be new in the sense that it would be a unilateral agreement, i.e. one-sided—whose emphasis would be on the complete forgiveness of sins and faith in Jesus Christ, not on the keeping of laws—(ceremonial, moral or civil).

The Lord says in vs. 33-34: **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.**

In the old covenant made at Sinai, God's Law—His immutable, holy will—was summarized and written down on two tablets of stone. In the new covenant, that holy will of God would be put into man's heart by the Holy Spirit. Paul states that in II Cor. 3:3: **YOU SHOW THAT YOU ARE A LETTER FROM CHRIST, THE RESULT OF OUR MINISTRY, WRITTEN NOT WITH INK BUT WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD, NOT ON TABLETS OF STONE BUT ON TABLETS OF HUMAN HEARTS.** Here of course we are talking about God's will for all of mankind to be saved. The word for Law in this section of Jeremiah is best understood as teaching or doctrine and therefore is speaking about the second great teaching of God—the Gospel, the Good News of God's love and forgiveness through His Son, our Savior Jesus.

The differences then between the terms of the old and the new covenant are these. The Sinai Covenant demanded perfect obedience—the New Covenant offers forgiveness of sins. The Old Covenant of Sinai was written on tablets of stone—the New Covenant is written into the hearts of its members. The Old Covenant included all the physical descendants of Israel---the New Covenant includes all those who know the Lord Jesus through faith—Jew and Gentile alike, all believers. In the Old Covenant the forgiveness of sins was seen in types and shadows of that which was to come—in the New Covenant we have the body, the reality, the fulfillment of those types in Jesus.

Another condition of the New Covenant is that we do not have to teach members of the Covenant to know the Lord. They will all know Him by faith. Those who believe in Jesus as their Savior are named here as members of this New Covenant. We need not tell fellow Christians to become Christians; they are already Christians by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in the New Covenant. That does not mean that we do not share the Word with our fellow believers. For we know that sharing the Gospel is very important in order that we all grow in our faith and in our knowledge of Jesus and God's will in our lives. But they, the members of this New Covenant shall all know Jesus by faith, or else they would not be members. From the least of them---the thief on the cross--to the greatest—King David; from the youngest—a newly baptized infant---to one of the oldest—all of them shall know the Lord.

This new covenant is sealed to us at our baptism. For in and through baptism God makes this new covenant with each of us. Through baptism He seals and gives to us the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of our sins and the faith to believe it. In His Supper He gives us His body given on the

cross with the bread and His blood shed on the cross with the wine for the forgiveness of our sins. He does the giving through the Means of Grace—the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments

Therefore as we said, the terms of this new covenant is one-sided, unconditional. God does not say, “I will..., if you will;” but rather “I will!” This covenant is completely dependent upon God’s grace rather than on man’s worthiness or efforts. That is why it is of such a comfort to sinners like you and me. The Old Covenant was until Christ came. This New Covenant is timeless.

The Old Covenant was for the children of Israel. This New Covenant is not restricted to a certain nation; it is for all who believe.

III: THE NEGOTIATOR OF THIS NEW CONTRACT---OUR SAVIOR, JESUS

With every contract there must be a negotiator, a mediator. This New Covenant has one, the best One, the only One who could bring about this Contract—Jesus Christ. Jesus came to keep God’s Law that we could not keep. His righteousness is credited to us. Then He went to the cross to shed His blood as full payment for all of our sins so that we could have complete and everlasting forgiveness for all of our sins. Our debt was paid in full. In our text we read God saying: **FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, AND THEIR SIN I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.**

The Hebrew tense here is an imperfect which means an ongoing action. God is saying “I will continue to forgive” and this forgiveness is free. No work of ours, no self-earned holiness, no condition for us to do this or do that. God forgives, period! Why? Because of our Negotiator. He earned it for us. That is why we can happily confess in Luther’s explanation to the third article of the Apostle’s Creed: **“In this Christian Church He daily and richly (fully) forgives all sin to me and all believers.”**

A negotiator has to work hard and long to make a contract that is agreeable to both sides and make both sides happy. Christ gave His life in order to negotiate this contract between God and man. It was according to God’s will that His Son fulfill His justice and keep the Law as man’s Substitute and it was according to God’s will that His Son would suffer and die in order to reconcile the sinful world to Himself as fully redeemed. And it is to our eternal happiness that we have been brought into this Covenant by the Holy Spirit’s working on our hearts through the Gospel.

One last question. Why does God have to go to such great lengths, to make a covenant, a contract agreement with us? It is because we sinful people have a difficult time in believing it. We think that it is too good to be true. Therefore God puts Himself under oath, under a contract, under a covenant to assure us of His loving grace and forgiveness in and through His Son.

One ambitious statistician has counted more than 7,000 promises in the pages of Scripture. The Lord repeats His promises to us over and over again because our sinful, doubting hearts need to be reassured over and over again. There is nothing in this world as reliable as this New Covenant which God through Christ makes with us! I repeat-- There is nothing in this world as reliable as this New Covenant which God through Christ makes with us!

Hallelujah!

Amen.

