

Sermon: “New Covenant: God Writes It On Our Hearts”

Series: “Jeremiah and God’s Great Faithfulness”

Text: Jeremiah 31 April 16, 2023 Dave Sattler NSAC

Sub-Texts: Luke 22:19-20; John 20:21-22; Hebrews 10:19-23; Revelation 21:3.

Sources: Bible Gateway, NIV Life Application Bible, YouVersion. Commentaries: Derek Kidner & David Pawson. Books: “Contextualization and the Old Testament” by Jerry Hwang (2022), “Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion” by Philip King (1993), “The Love of God” by Jon Levenson (2016), “Run With The Horses” by Eugene Peterson (1983), “Old Testament Exegesis” by Douglas Stuart (1984), Images: unsplash.com. Sermon: B-Dick (Mar 26/23, NSAC). Song: “One Thing Remains” by Jesus Culture (2005).

I. Introduction:

- Hello, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC. Thank you for joining us—in person and online. It’s great to be together.
- **<Slide>** Today we resume our series in the book of Jeremiah: **“Jeremiah and God’s Great Faithfulness.”**
- Around 626 BC, the prophet Jeremiah is *commissioned to call out*, and to *call back* the people of God who have lost their way—again.
- For the next 41 years, Jeremiah ministers. And he agonizes over the message he’s to deliver and shudders at the conduct and plight of his people: There *will* be consequences for their sin.
- Israel has committed *double idolatry*: Replaced its God with images of foreign gods made of wood and stone. And, by messing around with other gods, they’ve *cheated* on *their* God, Who “*married Himself*” to Israel, after the exodus, in the **covenant** at Mt Sinai.
- Now, to warm us up for the sermon today, let’s take another “*Straw Poll*.”
- Keep score on your papers. There’ll be a revealing *diagnostic* at the end.
- **<Slide> Question #1:** When things go wrong, are you quick to: A) **Take personal responsibility?** Or, B) **Blame others?**
- **<Slide> Question #2:** When looking for direction, do you prefer: A) **Old familiar methods?** Or, B) **New untried methods?**
- **<Slide> Question #3:** Do you typically look to the future: A) **With hope?** Or, B) **With gloom?**
- (If you scored **B-A-B**, this message is for you! The rest of you can take a good stiff nap. Some of you look like you need one!)

- **<Slide>** Much of the population of the *northern* tribes (generally referred to in the text as “Israel” or “Jacob” or “Ephraim”) have been *already* hauled off to captivity in Babylon.
- Now, only the *southern* tribes remain: Judah and Benjamin (collectively called “Judah”)—and closest in vicinity to Jerusalem.
- After many chapters warning about sin and coming judgment, we come to Jeremiah 31, where the Lord, through the prophet, paints a picture of **another great exodus and a new covenant—better than the old.**
- With enemy siege engines pounding the walls, and Babylonian armies encroaching Jerusalem, from prison (not a safe or *hopeful* place), the prophet Jeremiah offers this surprising message: “There is **hope** for your [future.]” (31:17)

II. Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31

<Slide> 1 “At that time,” declares the Lord, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.” 2 This is what the Lord says: “The people who survive the sword will find favour in the wilderness; I will come to give rest to Israel.” 3 The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. 4 I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful. 5 Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit.”

<Slide> 9b “I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father,” [declares the Lord], “and Ephraim is my firstborn son.” 10 “Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd.’ 11 For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.” 12 They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.”

<Slide> 15 This is what the Lord says: “A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and

refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” 16 This is what the Lord says: “Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,” declares the Lord. “They will return from the land of the enemy. 17 So there is hope for your descendants,” declares the Lord. “Your children will return to their own land. 18 I have surely heard Ephraim’s moaning: ‘You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because You are the Lord my God.’ 20 Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore My heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,” declares the Lord.

<Slide> 25 “I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.” 26 At this [Jeremiah says] I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me. 27 “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. 28 Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the Lord. 29 “In those days people will no longer say, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ 30 Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.”

<Slide> 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 them,” 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 neighbour, 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. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

<Prayer> ‘Lord, please move me out of the way. Come and speak to us by Your Spirit. We’re hungry to hear from you.’

III. Biblical Teaching: Jeremiah 31

1. <Slide> God's Everlasting Love (V3)

- This gripping depiction of God's covenant love is a breath of fresh air!
- Indeed the flavour of the language switches here in Ch31 ... from the cold rhetoric of a courtroom to the deep personal emotion of a parent.
- Here God speaks *lovingly* about drawing His *children* back to Himself, saying: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."* (v3)
- God says: *'My children will find Me—eventually. They will be drawn back to Me because I love them with an everlasting love.'*
- APP—I sense it's a message some need to hear this morning. Perhaps you're sitting in church feeling "un-lovely" or "un-loveable" today; be reminded: The God of the Universe loves *you* with an everlasting love.
- As the song goes, Q: [God], *"Your love never fails, never gives up, never runs out on me."* —Jesus Culture (2005).

2. <Slide> God's Covenant Words (V1/33)

- *Contracts*, modern-day patron-client agreements—often contested or simply broken, don't quite cover it.
- Used to establish formal relationships (mostly between two equal parties), *covenants* were prevalent in the ancient world.
- So, that *God initiates this covenant* with people is quite extraordinary.
- V1: *"At that time," declares the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people."* And again in v33, *"I will be their God, and they will be my people."*
- Ten times (eight in the Old Testament and twice in the New) God expresses His relationship with His people using these *covenant words*.
- One could say this sums up the grand theme of the entire Bible, beginning in Genesis and culminating in Revelation: *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.'" (21:3)*
- <Slide> Important to pause here a moment: **God is a family God.**
- In Himself, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—community, family ... *fashioned* right into the Godhead.

- Part of being created in the “*image of God*” is that God places everyone into a *family*.
- And, God desires to be the God of all families—starting with Israel and now God invites *us*, His followers, to be part of the “*family of God*.”
- And I tread carefully here, because, not all of our experiences of family are exactly positive. This is hard, I know. But I believe that God’s *Church*, in all its beauty and mess, is equipped to be a *family* for people—even for those who don’t have family—or live far away from loved ones.
- And, when God’s people come together from *vastly* different walks of life and form a *church family*, it’s a beautiful display of His handiwork!
- Plus, God puts people into families to prepare us for eternity—to be part of His family forever! Something to look forward to!

3. <Slide> **God Surprisingly Renews His Covenant (V4/20/32b)**

- Against all odds, God *renews* His covenant with His people ... despite their blatant sin and wholesale rebellion.
- That God doesn’t simply end it, and take the ‘out-clause,’ is rather surprising. Graciously, *covenant renewal* is *always* on God’s heart.
- God says: “*they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them.*” (v32b). So, to still call them “*Virgin Israel*” (v4/21), after *all* their *spiritual* promiscuity, gives us a window into God’s incredible mercy.
- V20: “*Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore My heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,*” declares the Lord.
- Here we *feel* the Father-heart of God *beating* for His children.
- Sure, He’s had to discipline His “*unruly*” (v18) kids—even allow them to be taken prisoner to Babylon, *but* Father God now waits with open arms: His heart “*yearns*” for His prodigal children to return.
- APP—To the parents in the room: We never stop loving our children.
- Yet it’s so hard when they turn away—or, don’t seem to be coming back.
- I want to encourage you, parents: Having had His own Father-heart broken, God *gets* it—He feels *for* you. And, God *loves* your children, He *has* them—and God is *with* you in your pain.

4. <Slide> **A New Covenant Not Like The Old (V30-34)**

- Chapter 31 marks the high-point in the book of Jeremiah and is often considered the “watershed” in the entire Old Testament. How so?

- Well, here, more than 500 years before it came, Jeremiah's the first to prophesy: *'There's going to be "a new covenant" ... "not like the covenant [God] made with your forefathers."* (v31a/32a)
- And, just how will this *new covenant* differ from the old?
- There are several clues in the text.
- V30: *"Instead, everyone will die for their own sin."*
- *Personal responsibility* will feature in the *new covenant*.
- Instead of riding on the spiritual 'coat-tails' of their parents, or reaping the consequences of the sins of past generations, in the *new covenant*, there is no place to hide—or to blame. It's us before God called to account—each person responsible for their own actions.
- Beginning of v34: *No longer will they teach their neighbour, 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.*
- In the past, only certain people had access to God. The rest were to keep their distance. And, through Moses, the High Priest, the Levites, God communicated to His people.
- However, the *new covenant* features God's *direct revelation* and opens up the possibility of *personal relationship with God* available to all *"from the least to the greatest"* (v34b).
- Another magnificent feature of the *new covenant* is God's *forgiveness* and *remission* of sins without animal sacrifice.
- End of v34, Lord declares: *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

IV. <Slide> Life Applications

- Well, it's time now to 'land the plane' on some application points.
- ***What does the new covenant mean for us today?***

A. <Slide> *Encountering the God of Grace.*

- ILL—Perhaps you grew up in church with the rules of Christianity drilled into you—dominating the teaching content: *"Thou shalt not!"*
- Sure there were the Ten Commandments, but there were lots of other add-ons: *"Don't drink, don't dance, don't listen to rock n' roll ..."* As if by *not* doing—or by being *against* these things, one could get closer to God.

- Yes, God’s law is good. But, *perfect* law-keeping is impossible for humans and priding ourselves on keeping the law (ticking all the boxes) is *not* what God wants from us!
- To me, it seems many fall away who’ve been discipled only in law-keeping. Lately I’ve witnessed many long-time Christians “*deconstruct*” the faith of their upbringing—check out, or, run away altogether—angry.
- And I believe this is fuelled, in part, by the fact they’ve never really met the **God of Grace** themselves—a glorious feature of the new covenant.
- **<Slide>** Listen to these *inviting* words from Hebrews 10:19-23:
“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”
- APP—Not sure where you’re coming from today. But, if you’ve never met Him before, the **God of Grace** longs to introduce Himself.
- You may say, ‘Sattler, you don’t know me—I got a rap sheet a mile long! If God only found out, He’d reject me in a heartbeat!’ Simply not true.
- God already knows *everything* about you—the good, the bad, and the ugly and God still loves you more than you could ever imagine!
- Here’s the point: Until we **encounter the God of Grace**, we will never possess a faith that truly lasts—or sustains. The **God of Grace** invites us to “*draw near*” to Him in loving relationship.

B. <Slide> Receiving the indwelling Holy Spirit.

- The God of the Christian Story is deeply personal.
- From the outset, God desires relationship with His creation.
- While humanity’s stubborn refusal to obey God continues to place a barrier between holy God and sinful us, God continues to pursue His precious creation.
- “*I will be their God, and they will be My people*” is the cry of God’s heart.
- And, throughout history, God goes to great lengths to bridge this gap: He brings His presence *through* leaders, prophets, priests, and kings.

- God's glory *fills* the temple.
- Then, 2000 years ago, God the Son Jesus *comes* to earth to *be* one of us—He's even given the name: "*Immanuel, God With Us.*"
- **<Slide>** And, in John 20, the resurrected Jesus comes: *19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*
- And days later, at Pentecost, God pours out His Spirit on people from all nations. Just as He'd promised in Jeremiah 31, God goes one step further: The Holy Spirit *indwells* the hearts of believers! God goes from writing the law on stone tablets to "*writing His law on our hearts.*" (v33)
- This is nothing short of remarkable—and represents both the *gift* of God's presence and the *deep* work of transformation God offers His people through His Spirit—should we choose to surrender and cooperate.
- **<Slide>** APP—Friends of NSAC, when we invite Jesus into our lives the *new birth* is not over. Post-salvation, God longs by His Spirit to do an *ongoing sanctifying* work in our lives—to transform our thoughts, our attitudes, our words, our relationships, how we use our time, how we invest our talents, how we spend our money—God even wishes to *reshape our desires* to *His* will.
- Over the years, it's been such a joy to witness God doing this in many of your lives. In these days, may our hearts be open to **receive** more of the life and ministry of the **indwelling Holy Spirit** in our lives.

C. **<Slide> Finding hope in Jesus in the face of hardship.**

- In prison, the prophet Jeremiah awakes from his too-good-to-be-true dream (v26) and God says, '*All those **hopeful** things you've just been dreaming about, I'm actually going to make them happen.*' "*Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful.*" (v4)
- No way!

- Rachel, dear wife of Jacob, it says *‘will weep no more.’* (v16) Rachel, mother of Ephraim, whose descendants have already been carted off, and mother to Benjamin, whose family is about to be taken captive, “*Restrain your tears,*” God says, *‘Your children will return, Rachel. There is **hope** for your future.’* (v16-17)
- **<Slide>** APP—So, what is it you’re **hoping** for these days?
- Maybe you have loved ones far away (or, in trouble) and you long for them to come back home?
- Or, perhaps today you’re facing a massive life-obstacle that’s near impossible to see your way through? You may be grieving a heavy loss?
- Or, you’re finding it tough to feel hopeful at all about your future? Yes, it’s often difficult to imagine ... securing a meaningful bill-paying job, solid loyal friendships, affording a place to live in this city, feeling healthy enough to live well again, or having *something* to look forward to.
- Truthfully **hope** takes a lot of courage; it’s far less risky to simply languish and allow despair and cynicism to run our lives.
- But, the God of the Christian Story is the God of **hope**. He provides unshakeable **hope**—even when everything else is being shaken.
- I like how one commentator puts it, Q: “**Hope** acts on the conviction that God will complete the work that He has begun even when appearances, especially when appearances, oppose it.” —Peterson, p174
- In the face of hardship and loss may God today give us courage to hold onto the **hope** He alone provides.

D. <Slide> Celebrating the new covenant inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

- The **new covenant** is founded on the love and sacrifice of our Lord—His willingness to lay down His life for all humanity.
- Knowing we can never keep *our* side of the bargain, God steps in—and does the work Himself ... to keep the covenant alive!
- God declares: “*The days are coming ... when I will make a **new covenant** with the people.*”
- And Jeremiah 31:31 is realized, centuries later, in the words of Jesus at the institution of the Lord’s Supper: “*And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body **given** for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way, after the supper*

*[Jesus] took the cup, saying, “This cup is the **new covenant** in My blood, which is **poured out** for you.”* —Luke 22:19-20

- Jesus is the only person Who ever fulfilled the law, making Him the *perfect* sacrifice on the cross to *cover* the sin of all humanity.
- There’s a powerful reminder here in this meal that God stepped in and did for us what we could *never* do for ourselves.
- APP—We may try to do more good than bad, be better than most—or at least that guy (there’s a recent study done that the new moral line is set with Hitler—‘don’t be Hitler, but everything else is okay’), we may pursue good karma, try to be the best version of ourselves, but none of these attempts will ever suffice.
- We can never, by our *own* efforts, be “good enough” to win God’s favour or, deal with sin on our own.
- Why God offers this new proposal—the **new covenant** to us: Through *His* life, death, and resurrection, God reminds us to *stop trying* to make it on our own and put our *faith* in Him. Amen.

V. <Slide> Communion Instructions & Confession

- If you have put your faith in Jesus as your Saviour, you are invited to participate in communion. If you’re not ready, that’s fine, you are welcome to stay in your seat—or come for a blessing.
- In a moment you can come forward or, in the balcony, go to the back.
- Please hold your hand out and your server will put a piece of bread in your hand and say, “*this is the Body of Christ given for you.*”
- Then, you can take that bread and dip the end of it into the cup (not too deep) and your server will say, “*this is the Blood of Christ poured out for you.*” And then you can eat the bread.
- If you need gluten-free options, they are here at the centre aisle.
- I invite the worship team and servers to come now and take their places.
- Immediately following communion, during the songs, if there is something on your heart you would like prayer for, our prayer team members will be available: Dan & Andrea, // Joy & Renee, Ali & George.
- <Slide> **Lead Confession Prayer**
- Please come now and we’ll partake together.