

Promise Kept: Christ
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The highpoint of God's judgment on the nation of Judah (or maybe we should call it a lowpoint) happened as King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians surrounded the city of Jerusalem to destroy it. King Zedekiah must have been beside himself. For years the shepherds of Judah had been saying, "Don't worry. Nothing bad is going to happen!" They were wrong just like God said. I wonder what was going through Zedekiah's mind in those last moments when he realized that those words were all lies. Only one prophet told Zedekiah the truth; it was Jeremiah. But not it's too late; all hope seems lost.

God came to Jeremiah and gave him the most peculiar command. God said, "Jeremiah, your cousin is going to come to you and he's going to offer to sell you his field in your home town. Jeremiah, I want you to buy that field." Now, just imagine this for a minute: God wants Jeremiah to buy a field with his own money when the land is currently being conquered by the Chaldeans. What good is this field? He's going to buy a field that's currently be seized by a foreign army. It's all going to be Chaldean land as Nebuchadnezzar claims Judah as his own. It sounds like the coveted ocean front property in Arizona. It looks like Cousin Joel is making out like a bandit! Seems like a complete waste of money.

But leave it to God to turn everything upside down. Cousin Joel isn't getting the deal; Jeremiah is getting the deal. God let's Jeremiah know what he's up to in Jeremiah 32:14-15 (READ). Do you see? God's not done! It looks like he's done; it looks like all hope is lost. Nebuchadnezzar has surrounded Jerusalem; it's going to be burned with fire. Thousands are going to die in the conquest; thousands more are going to be captured. Nothing can stop the armies of Babylon. But nothing is too hard for the Lord and God always has a good plan in mind for his covenant people So, God says, "Jeremiah, as a sign of hope, go buy the field from your cousin because someday I'm going to bring my people home. My people will live in this land again; my people will trade and do commerce again in this land; my people will sow and reap in the fields again. And when they do, your family is going to have an extra 40 acres to farm. I know all hope *seems* lost, but it's not."

That's just a taste of the hope and promise found in Jeremiah. Throughout this book, we have these little nuggets of promise; promise of restoration in a sea of judgment and destruction. A common observation made by many of you when we've talked about reading Jeremiah was how depressing all the sin and judgment was. And you're right, that stuff is discouraging. That's why I want to end our 6 weeks in Jeremiah by highlighting the good news. It's so important for us to see the good news in spite of the bad, both in the scriptures, but also in our lives.

The most important aspect of the good news in Jeremiah is the revelation of a new covenant. Throughout the entire Bible, we learn that God is about covenants. That's how he

operates; that's how he relates to his people. That means that God enters into relationships of promise with people. When he makes a covenant with his people, he makes a promise with them and they make a promise to God. And here's what we learn in the Bible about these covenants: God always keeps his promise, but the people never keep theirs. So, this sets up a problem: God can't be in an intimate relationship with dirty, rebellious people. God is perfectly holy; he's pure in every way and so God can't join himself to those who are dirty and rebellious. It's not that he doesn't forgive; he forgives all the time (that's one of the biggest misunderstandings of the OT depictions of God... that he doesn't forgive), it's just that every time he forgives, the people keep breaking their promise.

So, in God's infinite mercy and grace, he organizes and devises a new covenant. A covenant of another kind. This new covenant is described in rather specific detail in Jeremiah 31-33. Let's read 31:31-34 (READ).

I want to draw your attention to a couple of things about this new covenant. First, notice how the forgiveness of sin is the reason or ground for one's knowledge of God. Look at the structure of vs. 34; it's important (READ). Those in this new covenantal relationship with God will all know the Lord *for* (because) I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

Every peaceful, joyful relationship with God through Jesus starts right here. We know God when he moves towards us in gracious kindness to forgive us of our sins. That's how we know the Lord. So, I need to ask you: Do you know if your sins are forgiven? Don't make the mistake thinking they just are; sometimes we think that way. We just presume our sins are forgiven; we just guess that they are. We have this *everything just work out in the end* kind of presumption in life. Friends, the Bible offers us no such hope. Our sins are only forgiven when God graciously reveals to us the ugly reality of our sins and how we deserve God's punishment. But also, God reveals to us his gift to us in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. He reveals to us that Jesus died on a cross to pay the penalty of our sins so we can be forgiven. And we're forgiven when we see all of that and say, "Yes!" in faith; when we say, "I agree with all of that!" in faith. When we look upon Jesus with hopeful, thankful eyes and we embrace Jesus as our very life, our very all in all, that's what the Bible calls being born again and we are forgiven by God of our sins. That's where the joy of knowing God begins; being forgiven of our sins. Don't ever think our relationship with God starts or is based on anything other than the forgiving grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Also, vs. 33 says God will write his law on their hearts. Notice what this produces? It reestablishes the relationship between God and his people. *I will be there God, they will be my people*. Now, why is that important? It's important because that's the way we will be able to keep our promise of obedience. God demands obedience from his people. He always has and he always will. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise. But what's so great about God's new covenant promises is that he saves us by his powerful Spirit and changes our heart to enable

us, to empower us, to motivate us to obey his commands. We don't obey to be saved; we are saved so that we can obey. Do you see the difference?

This is how we make sense of passages that say, "Faith without works is dead." This is how we make sense of passages that say without holiness we will never see God. This is how we make sense of passages that say (1 John 3:6), "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him." Don't those verses make us a tad uncomfortable? It makes it sound like God only saves people who do good works. But those feel uncomfortable when we forget the order. God saves and then we obey; we never obey to get saved.

We have covenant-keeping power from God as part of his promise to us. He puts his Spirit within us. He writes God's law on our hearts. He changes our insides in such a way where we know freely and gladly obey his words so that we keep the promise to obey him. Now, you might be thinking: *It sure doesn't feel like that, Brian? I just seem so stuck! I keep on screwing up.* I get that; I can get trapped into sin sometimes, too. But can I mention two mistakes that we often make?

The first mistake we make is forgetting that it's a process. It's a journey. Do you remember when God led his people into the promised land, keeping his promise to the people? Do you remember how the land was filled with enemies? God promised to drive them out. God made that promise to do it himself. But do you remember how he did it? He did it through the faithful obedience of the people over time. God says this in Deut. 7:22, "The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little. You may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you." And in the rest of that chapter God highlights the dangers associated with those nations and not to become trapped by their customs and ways. Why didn't God drive them out all at once? Wouldn't his power be shown more clearly by ridding the land of all the other nations? Apparently not. And that's an analogy of God's sanctifying work in our own lives. The presence of enemy powers and temptations all around keeps us humble, it keeps us dependent, it keeps us hungry for his power more and more. It's never an excuse for sin; but it's a reality we need to face.

The second mistake we often make is by trying to defeat our sin in our own effort. I'm guessing we all could give countless stories of our fervent resolve to be holy and our failed attempts at it. But that's because we trying to do it ourselves rather than looking to God to do it by his divine power. We're not relying on his grace. God will do it for us and in us. Just like he said to the Israelites in Deut. 7:23, "But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed." You may remember that there were times that the people tried to go into the promised land and they were utterly defeated. Do you know why? They tried to do it on their own. Friends, we need to start letting God win this victory for us by looking to him. But sadly, we don't. Col. 3:2 tells us to, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth," but we keep our eyes on the things of this world. Really, think about this: we get frustrated by our patterns of sin, yet our minds and our eyes are firmly

fixed on earthly things. Earthly goals. Earthly entertainment. Earthly comforts. Earthly values. Earthly troubles. Be honest: how often, how regularly, how intense do you obey Col. 3:2: *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth?*

One of my main prayers and hopes for our time in Jeremiah was for us to identify with the problems in Judah. I wanted us to see ourselves in them. I'm a covenant breaker like the people of Judah. I'm constantly tempted to follow my own heart, to trust my own wisdom and insight. And my flesh likes it when others affirm my direction in life rather than correct my self-sufficiency. I can see how I can be half-hearted in my faith; I'm tempted to fool others, to even fool myself, that my faith is just fine when it's not. I think one of the best things God can do through this Jeremiah study is to help us see we struggle with the same temptations. Because if that happens, we'll be hungry and desperate for God's rescue, which we learn comes in the form of a new covenant; a new relationship of promise. But that should make us wonder: how will God make this new covenant with us? That's where Jesus comes in.

Turn to Heb. 8. Do you know what chapter 8 is all about? It's about how great God's new covenant is; how it's so much better than the old covenant. I'm not going to read it, but look at vs. 8-12; do you know where those words come from? Jeremiah 31; the exact words we just read. The writer to the Hebrews is telling us that the new and improved covenant is the one promised in from Jeremiah 31. Now, jump over to chapter 9 and read with me vs. 11-14 (READ).

Those verses tell us, show us that this new covenantal relationship God enters into with his people is made by Jesus Christ. This new covenant was ratified and guaranteed by Jesus as he sacrificed his own life for the sins of his people. Vs. 14 is a great verse; look what it says. The blood of Jesus is so precious and powerful that it will *purify our conscience from dead works*. That's a reference to God's forgiveness. Without forgiveness our conscience is dirty and we should feel guilty. But Jesus' blood purifies our conscience. The sacrifice of Christ was powerful enough, sufficient enough to satisfy the wrath of God. So we are purified - forgiven. But notice what's next; there's a purpose: *to serve the living God*. When we experience this purification and forgiveness we're mobilized and empowered by God's grace to serve Him; to live our lives for him. And, of course, we do that when we serve other people in his name. Jesus fulfills the covenant promises of God found in the new covenant.

So, take that last step. If you can feel your need for a new covenant, that just means you can feel you need for Jesus. My hope today was to increase your hunger for Christ; my prayer today was that God would use his word to make you eager for one thing - Jesus Christ in you, the one who makes the new covenant possible. Our time in Jeremiah will be completely successful if it results in you seeking, delighting, hoping in Christ all the more.

Key verse: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Questions for the week

- What does forgiveness of sins do for us according to the sermon? Meditate on its importance in our relationship with God.
- Why is looking to Christ for his empowering grace so challenging?
- Read Hebrews 8 and 9 again. What important messages and truth do you see?