

Jeremiah 31:31-34 Hebrews 7:15-22

The Better Covenant part 1

For the better part of this past week I was at a conference in Indianapolis. I left Monday and came back on Thursday evening. It was called the Fellowship Gathering and it happens every year, two years ago I also went and it was in Nashville. It is a gathering of like minded pastors and elders who love Jesus and want to see Jesus lifted high in the church. The theme for this year was Jeremiah's promise from Scripture in 29:11 – "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm, to give you a future with hope." It is always so great to be together with pastors who love Jesus, but we can sometimes forget this promise of Scripture, and as we learned last week about God's promises, they always come true.

Worship was awesome, imagine a room packed with about 700 pastors and elders singing at the top of their lungs praises to Jesus. I was reminded over these past few days of whom we serve. In fact, both of our Scriptures for today remind us of whom we serve. We serve a Savior who loves us and knows us, and provides each and everyone one of us a chance to know and love him as well. Today we will learn about a better covenant that was established by God for us, for our future of hope and for our welfare. We read that this is a better covenant. Let's read.

READ

When we began in our Jeremiah reading we hear clearly another promise that the prophet makes and that is that a new covenant will be established between God and us. So, if there will be a new covenant it means that during the writing of Jeremiah there was a what? An old covenant. Well, what was wrong with the old covenant? According to our Hebrews reading the author states that it was weak and ineffectual because it didn't make anything perfect. Jeremiah promises that there is going to be a relationship between us and God that is completely different from what it used to be. First, we have to understand what it used to be like.

Under the Old Covenant there was only one group of people who actually had the ability to approach God and they did so on behalf of the people. Remember Moses and how much time he spent with God and then would come down the mountain and tell them all that God has said to him. So only Moses got to spend time with God. Then the Levites, the priests, were given the responsibilities of the sacrifices and the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and interact with God, but he did that on behalf of the people.

This was the Old Covenant, this was what took place in the Old Testament before Jesus came on the earth, before God became flesh and dwelt among us. The relationship between us and God was simply one where we could not approach God, but we had others who approached God on our behalf and so we just did what we were told, and every year we would sacrifice something to make sure that when we didn't do what we were told that God would be okay with us. We never really knew, because we really didn't have a personal relationship with God. Jeremiah says that this is going to change. A new covenant is going to come into place where God will no longer interact with us through the law, through commandments, but rather God will write his law on our hearts.

God will be the one to place his presence on our hearts. This personal interaction between God and his people will be such that God will demonstrate his love for us so personally that we couldn't even break the covenant if we wanted to because it was written on our hearts. Look at vs.31, and this covenant would be for the forgiveness of sins. Before someone else would ensure that our relationship with God was okay, but the day would come, the prophet states, that our relationship with God would be so personal, and he would know us so well, and he would see us that he would write it on our hearts for the forgiveness of sin. Because we were going to sin, but God would cover even that. This is true for all us, whether we obey God or not, he is going to write his covenant on our hearts, this new covenant, this better covenant.

In the Old covenant you followed the law, the new you followed a person, we are in a relationship with God in the flesh. Hebrews describes this transition from the old to the new and the difference it makes in our lives as people loved and created by God. Consider this as a better hope that we, the people of God, have secured a quality of access to and a relationship with God that were not possible under the Levitical laws. As a result the author of Hebrews calls it a better covenant.

The last line of our Hebrews Scripture is that Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant. Jesus not as a mediator, he is that, but the author uses a different concept here. He calls Jesus the guarantee of a better covenant. How do we see a better covenant. Well, to begin with, Jesus promises greater things for his followers. If we follow Jesus and become his disciples and obey him, this is what is in store for us in this new and better covenant. He tells us that we will do greater things. Look John 14:12, then look at 15:5. But we are warned that it is possible to try and serve God but not really have God. Look at Matthew 7:21, and then the story in Acts 19:11-

16. We can do ministry for God without God. That is a real danger, especially if we don't really live fully into this better covenant that God has placed upon our hearts.

We can come to church and participate but not really have God have any impact on our lives. That is serving God without God. We can pursue what seems like godly things but not really take the time to be in that relationship that God wants us to be in with him, that personal relationship where we spend time with him and actually care about what he wants for our life. Jesus is the one who in vs.19 introduces to us a better hope than what we ever had in our life. But we have to take the time and the effort to approach God and to be in communion with God. The church is in danger of serving God without God, of doing ministry for God without God. What a concept, what a tragedy, a church that has the covenant written upon their hearts but their hearts are cold to the commandments and the desires of God.

This new commandment, this better covenant, finds at its core obedience to God as the way in which to release the potential that is a part of this covenant. Stacy has been gone a lot and I have been in charge of the plants, that are tiny. I managed to completely kill the baby cucumbers that were beginning to grow because I forgot to bring them in from the cold. The basil is inside and looking a little pale, and the tomato plants are also inside and starting to bend over and wither.

But we have a climbing plant that has not really climbed over the years that we have been at the house, but this year it finally has taken its place on the trellis. It is growing from the ground up and starting to spread out on the trellis and flowers are present and will be blooming soon. We are like that plant which has to be grounded in Jesus and then it branches out and is able to flourish and bloom and spread out across its potential. In all that we are doing in our lives, the business of it, we often find it hard to live in the better covenant because we are not grounded in Jesus.

Did you know that all through the 19th century the word priority was always in the singular. We had a priority in life and it was one, whatever that was. It was only in the 20th century that this word began to take on the plural form, where now we freely talk about priorities, as in many. But it doesn't really make sense, because if you have many priorities then you have no one priority. This is what we are missing, is one priority who is seen in the person of Jesus Christ. We have many priorities and Jesus is one of many. Do you know what the

secret of a sustainable life is? I know so many of you who want to know this answer. The secret to a sustainable life is a sustainable life.

We are the ones who make our schedules, no one forces us to live the frenetic lives that we live, we choose that. This is not following the better covenant that God has placed upon our hearts. When Jesus is the priority then we have a peace, and an assurance, and a peace that we can only have when he is the priority. When we are missing that then we are pursuing other priorities, even if they are churchy things, then we are doing ministry for God without God.

But at the core of this better covenant is a God who sees us. Did you know that the Christian story begins with what? Beauty, that which is good. God creates and after every thing that he creates it is God. The Christian story doesn't begin with a battle or chaos or good versus evil, it begins with God and beauty and a garden. This is where the better covenant is supposed to take us. No matter what disappointment we may feel or experience we serve a God who is always asking: Where are you? We serve one who always pursues us. That gives us hope. We have a God who sees us.

This better covenant reflects a God who sees us. Isn't that what many of us want, just to be seen, to be known, to be understood. One of our main speakers was Drew Hyun who is Korean American and he spoke of the pressures that many young Asians feel, especially if they are second generation of performing well in school and that as a result their relationship with their parents is sometimes very, very strained, to the point that these young people don't really think their parents know them or even care about them much at all. So an experiment was done where these young people and their parents were put in a room and they had four minutes where they were not allowed to speak to each other, they just had to be in the same space with each other. Look what happened.

In the new covenant, in the better covenant, we are seen, God knows us intimately. We are about to take communion together as body of believers. Communion which is a sign and symbol of the covenant that God has established with us which allows us to approach the throne of grace to take part in the meal which he provides for us and in which he participates with us. Let us live in the better covenant that God has set before us. Amen.