

Jeremiah 31.31-34—The Hope of the New Covenant

I. Introduction

- a. The OT Scriptures are extremely important. I want to give you a message of hope and Paul makes it clear at the end of Romans just how important the OT Scriptures are and what they are to produce.
 - i. (Rom. 15:4) ⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
- b. Not only did Paul think they were important for giving hope but Jesus knew the promises had long been told.
 - i. (Lk. 24:27) ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
- c. The hope we have is bound up in the promises of God and they find their yes and amen in Jesus Christ for we cannot have a relationship with God without forgiveness of our sins and perfect righteousness. And a covenant relationship is only in Jesus Christ.

II. Main Point

- a. The hope of the new covenant

III. Outline

- a. A Walk Through the Hopelessness in Jeremiah
- b. False Prophecy led to false hope
- c. The Hope of the New Covenant

IV. Exposition

- a. It's really hard to see the hope of the New Covenant without seeing the hopelessness of the scene in Jeremiah. As you probably know, there's a lot of judgment declared.
 - i. You probably already know that when you open your bible to one of the prophets, something bad is about to happen. They are not stories of perfect bliss but they usually have words of hope...at least a few.
 - ii. The prophets stand and speak on behalf of God to God's covenant people. Thus, Jeremiah is God's spokesman to call them to repentance and faith.
 - iii. As you might have also notice, not everyone who was rescued from slavery in Egypt was happy about it. Whether they expected immediate perfect bliss or they were just hungry for their normal routines and the food they enjoyed isn't immediately apparent. So it is with a nation of people.
 1. God had made a promise to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through his seed—that is, a child—and that child's identity would be from Abraham's descendants.
 2. But his descendants eventually find themselves in need of food in Egypt where they eventually become slaves. Some cry out to the Lord for deliverance and the Lord rescues his people.
 - a. And that's the issue. Not only was a seed to come forth from Abraham to bless the nations but Abraham was in a relationship with God by faith. Through that relationship came the promise.
 - b. That promise continued to be passed on to the child of God's own choosing. From Isaac and then to Jacob whom God renamed Israel who then made up the twelve tribes.
 3. God's gracious hand was upon them. They are the chosen nation and through them he will provide a blessing—that is, salvation—for all peoples.
 - a. Of course, salvation is necessary due to the fall of man. God had made a covenant with Adam. God created man and designed that they would have a relationship based on God's parameters.

- b. They were to live in the enjoyment of fellowship with God by enjoying the gifts and purposes given to him but he could not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And if he did, death would come. The consequences of that covenant are still binding on all humanity. We are all by nature sinners like our parents.
- iv. Following the nation's rescue from Egypt, God made another covenant at Mt. Sinai. When I say covenant, I mean a relationship between God and his people that has stipulations laid out by God.
 1. Like my marriage to Kimberly, I promised to be her husband and she promised to be my wife. No one else has that responsibility and privilege. Neither of us are to give ourselves to anyone else. We promised to love one another exclusively in that way. Only death would separate us.
 2. That means you cannot have a relationship without commands to obey and promises to keep.
 3. And every relationship must begin with trust. Adam was to trust the Lord in the Garden and that trust was broken when he disobeyed.
 4. Israel was to trust the Lord to care for them but they broke their trust/faith by disobeying the commandments of the covenant.
 5. Part of their trust was in the fact that God would provide a means of salvation for them through this promised child. Many looked to the day: (Jn. 8:56) ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."
 - a. How did he see it then? By faith.
 6. Eventually, many began to rely on the keeping of the commandments instead of God. Some abandoned God and his commandments altogether.
 7. But it has ALWAYS been that the righteous shall live by faith because man cannot be righteous according to the law. The commands were the parameters of the relationship. Live by faith and keep my commandments.
 - a. Can you imagine saying that you love and trust the Lord but do not do the things he loves and do the things he hates?
 - i. You say you love him but you love the pleasures of the world more.
 - ii. You say you trust him but when life gets hard you abandon the Lord.
- v. The scene in Jeremiah has its focus on Judah who have abandoned the Lord and obviously do not love YHWH, their God. As you know the nation was divided and at this point in the story, Israel was already in exile for the same thing. Jeremiah is calling Judah to repentance or God will send them into exile for their breaking of the covenant.
 1. Jeremiah prophesied from Josiah to the Babylonian captivity.
 2. Jeremiah told the house of Judah that Babylon was an instrument of God's wrath against them. The only remedy at this point was to accept God's punishment by submitting to Babylon.
 3. When the people of Judah heard this, they replied to Jeremiah by saying that God would never abandon his people and the house of David.
 4. Jeremiah's response was—you have broken the covenant.
 - a. Before entering the Land, they renewed the covenant of Exodus 19 in Dt. 27-29. If they obeyed, then God would bless them. If they disobeyed God would curse them.
- vi. The first 25 chapters of Jeremiah are an indictment against the unfaithfulness of Israel dating back to when God cared for them in the desert up to Jeremiah's own day (2:1-3:5). (Sailhamer)

1. Judah did not heed the lesson from northern Kingdom, Israel's defeat and exile (3:6-10). Therefore, they were more guilty. (Sailhamer)
2. Obviously, God continually offered them forgiveness. At this point in Jeremiah, the Lord had been calling them to repentance and yet they refused. Even while prophesying doom upon them, repentance and faith were available.
 - a. But they presumed upon God's grace and the covenant at Sinai. "We will be fine. God will be gracious. Surely he will not give us over to Babylon and allow the Temple to be destroyed."
 - b. But Jeremiah 7 makes clear that there were conditions for blessings in the Sinai Covenant.
 - i. They were basically saying something like a marriage gone wrong, "Though I am married to so and so I can have any woman I want and still have the blessings of my wife and marriage."
 - ii. They were to worship YHWH only but they didn't. They worshipped other gods but wanted the blessings of protection and fruitful crops that came only from God above.
 - iii. Is that what it means to love your wife? Is that what means to love your God?
 - c. "God's intention for his people Israel was never to bless them without requiring sincere obedience to his law. Even when he brought them out of Egypt, it was not to give them sacrifices and offerings as mere duties to perform. Rather, it was that they might walk in his ways and do his will. Israel, however, did not obey God, and to this point, they had not trusted God and obeyed his law. Judgment and punishment were certain." (Sailhamer 376).
 - i. This clearly revealed that God's people had uncircumcised hearts. After Moses renewed the covenant with them before entering the land in Deuteronomy, he knew what would happen and Moses looked beyond a time of punishment and exile to a day when God would circumcise their hearts.
 - ii. (Deut. 30:1-6) "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ² and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.
 - iii. It has been God desire that his people love him with a whole heart not merely duty.

- iv. These laws were written in stone and they were merely external commands they did not want to keep in their heart. And their hearts became as hard as the stone tablets.
- vii. The message Jeremiah delivered to Judah from God put him in danger several times with the people. Jeremiah was rescued every time.
 1. In ch. 14, At times, Jeremiah would plead to the Lord for the people but the Lord rebuked him for siding with the people (Sailhamer).
 - a. (Jer. 14:21) ²¹ Do not spurn us, for your name's sake; do not dishonor your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us.
 - b. (Jer. 15:1) Then the LORD said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!
 2. Yet, even with the impending judgment and exile in Babylon, blessings in the midst of curse were available: (Jer. 17:7-8) ⁷ "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. ⁸ He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."
 3. Even in exile which was a curse, the Lord would bless the man who trusted him.
- b. But there was a terrible danger among them. There were false prophets that did not speak God's word.
 - i. These false prophets caused false hope. Even the King of Judah found himself asking for a word of hope from Jeremiah. King Zedekiah had Babylon at his front door now and the false prophets had given him false hope.
 - ii. The only hope available was for them to surrender to Babylon. (Jer. 21:9) ⁹ He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have his life as a prize of war.
 - iii. The king was responsible for leading the people to follow the LORD's commands. Chapter 22 expresses hope for the king who leads in righteousness..
 1. Will the king lead his people to submit to the yoke of Babylon?
 2. This was God's wrath against them for having broken the covenant. Their willingness to accept God's punishment at the hands of Babylon would be a sign that they trusted the Lord and received what they deserved.
 3. But only the false prophet had words of comfort. A prophet by the name of Hananiah prophesied falsely contradicting Jeremiah.
 4. But the Lord would respond by saying: (Jer. 27:14-16) ¹⁴ Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon,' for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you. ¹⁵ I have not sent them, declares the LORD, but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you." ¹⁶ Then I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, 'Behold, the vessels of the LORD's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon,' for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you.
 - a. Hananiah was saying only 2 years but Jeremiah said, no, 70 years.
 - b. (Jer. 28:11) ¹¹ And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years." But Jeremiah the prophet went his way.

- c. (Jer. 28:13)¹³ "Go, tell Hananiah, 'Thus says the LORD: You have broken wooden bars, but you have made in their place bars of iron.
 - i. False hope leads to a yoke of iron instead of wood.
- c. Where is hope? Well, it was to trust the Lord and obey him because the Lord had plans to save them. A new covenant was going to be promised.
 - i. It's common to use this verse out of its context: (Jer. 29:11)¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.
 - 1. Exile wasn't the end. They were to trust the Lord. They must trust and obey and wait. Hope is waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled.
 - 2. It's hard for us to get excited for the right reasons at Christmas. If you were being taken off to a foreign land, words of hope sound really good.
 - 3. (Jer. 30:3)³ For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it."
 - 4. "God's wrath against Israel would not destroy them. It would only serve as the Lord's discipline (Sailhamer 381).
 - 5. Peace was coming by way of David's Son. (Jer. 30:9-10)⁹ But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. ¹⁰ "Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the LORD, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid.
 - 6. So, when the people were to be restored to the land, it was again based on a covenant.
 - 7. This time, it would not be a covenant written in stone but written on their hearts.
 - ii. There's a new Exodus coming. And this time it's not Moses leading the way but rather that promised King. He will set the captives free. He will purchase forgiveness and righteousness through his death and resurrection.
 - 1. This new Exodus...this new covenant was pointing to a day in the future. The peace they would have would be peace with God.
 - 2. He would no longer remember their sin but forgive them.
 - 3. And in God's justice, a perfect sacrifice was needed. So, the promise King would also be a priest who did not offer goats and bulls but himself.
 - 4. Through this one, all the nations would be blessed with salvation by faith in this promised one.
 - 5. They will trust and obey the Lord as now God's commands are written on the hearts of men not on stone. They will love the Lord with a whole heart. They will enjoy forgiveness as they are rescued from the slavery of sin and they will enjoy fellowship with God.
 - iii. This covenant is based on better promises. It is by faith, in who? Jesus Christ. In him we have forgiveness and righteousness. And all who trust in him will have eternal life...eternal redemption.
 - 1. And we walk in his ways by faith. Not relying on the law to be righteous but relying on Jesus' perfect sacrifice.
 - 2. The Holy Spirit of God now comes and dwells in us...inside us...empowering us to obey gladly.

V. Response

- a. This is the hope of Christmas. Christ was the One "Coming" to save. He is the greatest gift of Christmas. And he demands that you come follow him for his yoke is easy and his burden is light.
- b. Repent and believe and follow the Good Shepherd.