

Heart

Jeremiah 31

The Open the Bible series is showing us how the whole Bible is one story and it all points to Jesus. We have journeyed through the law of God in the first five books and then flew quickly through the history of Israel. Now we are catching a few highlights from the prophets. But ***all the way through it is about Jesus.***

Here is how the apostle John sums up **the gospel**:

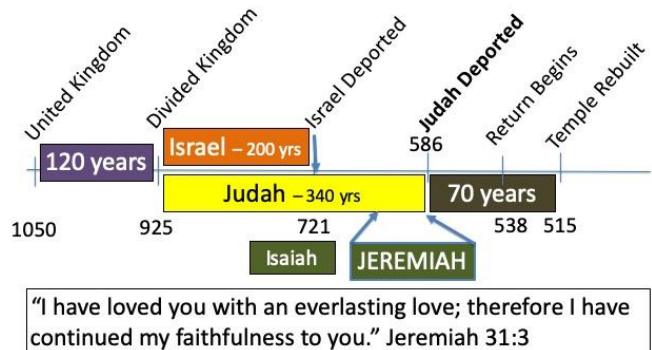
“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins... We love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:10,19 NIV

God IS love. It is essential to His very being. Father, Son and Holy Spirit have eternally existed in a loving union of mutual devotion and worship. This is why ***a Triune God is more glorious*** than a simple monochrome deity. God in Three Persons is the overflowing fountain of love. One monolithic, all-powerful being - the Allah of Islam - is not defined by love and has no opportunity to love but can only demand allegiance and submission.

The God of the Bible is the God who is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and compassion.” The nation of Israel experienced this love and faithfulness. But ultimately that overflowing love was poured out through Jesus - the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Here is how the prophet Jeremiah says it in 31:3 - “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” [Timeline Slide w verse.]

Jeremiah was a prophet after Isaiah. Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord when the Assyrian empire conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord from the time of the good king Josiah and his reformation through to the conquest and deportation of the southern kingdom of Judah - the last forty years for Judah before their 70 years of exile.



Jeremiah was the one who predicted ***70 years of punishment*** but who also foretold the return of Israel to their land. Jeremiah 29:11 is probably the most famous verse in his book: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you - to give you hope and a future.” Those are very comforting words of hope and assurance. And they come just two chapters before this one in Jeremiah 31. Yes, judgment was coming for the sin of God’s people. But that would not be the end of the story - for ***God’s love is an EVERLASTING love.*** God’s love is a faithful, enduring, COVENANT love.

But how could God remain faithful and loving toward an unfaithful, disobedient, sin-filled nation? The answer is right here in front of us: **a NEW COVENANT.**

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers...”
Jeremiah 31:31-32a

This passage shows us **five characteristics** of this new covenant. Notice the HOPE here - “**the days are coming.**” That refrain runs through all of Jeremiah and especially this chapter. “The days are coming, declares the Lord.” In times of stress and worry and fear, let’s hold on to hope - let’s stand firm in our faith in our steadfast, faithful, covenant-keeping God. “The days are coming,” when our sojourn on this earth will be over, when Jesus will come back, when he will wipe every tear from our eyes, when he will right every wrong and bring us home to be with Him forever! “The days are coming.”

Five characteristics of the new covenant: First, it will be:

The New Covenant:

1. Unconditional

“I will make a new covenant... not like the covenant I made... my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband.” Jeremiah 31:31-32

Now, parts of the old covenant were unconditional, but parts were very conditional. God’s promise to Abraham to bless the whole world through Abraham’s offspring was UNconditional. God’s promise to David to provide a king to reign on his throne forever was UNconditional. But **God’s promise to Moses** - the covenant symbolized in the ten commandments - **was CONDITIONAL.** “I set before you today life and blessing, death and curses.” God promised to bless His people IF they obeyed and He promised to discipline and punish them if they disobeyed. Listen to these very specific promises in Leviticus 26 - around 800 years before Jeremiah.

The Mosaic Covenant

“But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it...” Leviticus 26:27-28

The Mosaic Covenant

“And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation... Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies’ land... As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it.” Leviticus 26:33-35

Here is the reason for **70 years of exile** - that was the number of years the land did not get a sabbath rest, as God had commanded. Because the nation did not trust Him to provide and demonstrate that trust by keeping the sabbath of rest for the land, God Himself provided a sabbath rest for the land through a 70 year time out in Babylon.

That was the nature of the old covenant. There were blessings promised if the nation obeyed but curses promised if they did not. No one in Israel during the exile could claim that God had not told them what would happen. It was all spelled out right there in the Law of Moses.

So unlike the conditional covenant through Moses, God promised a new covenant that would be UNCONDITIONAL.

The New Covenant:

1. Unconditional

“I will make a new covenant... not like the covenant I made... my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband.” Jeremiah 31:31-32

God says the covenant was **like a marriage** in which He was the husband and Israel the wife. Israel broke the covenant - just like a wife who committed adultery with another man, thus betraying her vows to her husband.

God was perfectly faithful, loving, generous and good. In spite of all that God did for them - rescuing them from Egypt, bringing them into the promised land in victory over many nations more powerful than they, giving them everything they needed along the way - in spite of all of this, Israel continually turned away from the Lord. ***They became like a promiscuous and unfaithful wife*** - like a prostitute, in fact. Though God was the perfect husband, Israel became repugnantly impure in sin.

Therefore, **God sent them away** - giving them a certificate of divorce - and sending them out of their land and into Babylon. The old covenant was a ***covenant of JUSTICE*** based on the LAW. God did nothing wrong in sending Israel away. He did exactly what He said He would do. The covenant relationship was CONDITIONAL upon the obedience and faithfulness of Israel. Since Israel failed to obey Him, God was perfectly righteous to send them away.

The same thing will prove true for ***everyone who ends up in hell***. For anyone who does not come under the New Covenant, they by default remain under the old one - which is a covenant of justice. If you don't come under the grace of Jesus you will remain under God's law of justice. God is not unrighteous to do this - He would be unjust to do anything else. Hell is the place of ultimate justice. It is the fulfillment of the Law.

C.S. Lewis points out that **the laws of nature** are not soft and warm - they are ***“hard as nails.”*** The strong survive. The big fish eats the little fish. There is nothing wishy washy about this world God has made - the rules are hard as nails and absolutely consistent. Gravity works every time. The laws of motion make no exceptions, even if you really didn't mean to glance down at your phone when the truck suddenly loomed in front of you...

The same thing is true of God. God's righteous character was revealed in the old covenant - a covenant of justice that was CONDITIONAL.

The New Covenant:

1. Unconditional - based on the *performance of Jesus*, not ours

“I will make a new covenant... not like the covenant I made... my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband.” Jeremiah 31:31-32

Thanks be to God, **the New Covenant is UNCONDITIONAL**. It does not depend on us or our performance at all. It is all about the performance of Jesus – His righteous life applied to us. Hear this, brother, sister: if you belong to Jesus by faith then you are under the new covenant and your relationship with God is now UNCONDITIONAL. God is committed to you NO MATTER WHAT. Nothing can break that bond. Nothing can snatch you from the Father’s hand. No one can separate you from God’s love. He will NEVER leave you or forsake you. Jesus will be with you to the end of the age. The Holy Spirit lives inside you and will never move out. You BELONG to Jesus without condition.

Secondly, the New Covenant is:

The New Covenant:

2. Internal

“For this is the covenant that I will make... I will put my law **within them**, and I will write it **on their hearts**.” Jeremiah 31:33

The old covenant was EXTERNAL. It was about obedience – keeping the law. It was written on stone tablets in the 10 commandments. Those ***stone tablets*** represented the justice of God – His righteous requirements. They were heavy and immovable. Those are the standards of God – who is perfectly righteous, holy and good.

He demands absolute worship – we must have no other gods beside Him. He will tolerate no idolatry – no making of any images, no adjusting of His nature. He requires obedience according to His rules, not the rules of people. So under the law you have to keep the sabbath very strictly and eat specific foods. Obviously you can’t lie, cheat, steal, kill or commit adultery. But neither can you COVET. Envy and lust are forbidden in the law.

These are heavy standards and they stand over everyone on earth as images of God’s immovable justice. ***God’s Law is hanging over this world***, and anyone who does not come under the protection of the new covenant will be judged by the righteous standards of God.

But the new covenant is INTERNAL. Instead of being etched in stone tablets that reside in a distant and inaccessible temple, the New Covenant is inscribed on our hearts. God places His law INSIDE us.

At the moment of salvation several things happen all at once:

Immediate Gifts of Salvation:

- All sins forgiven
- Righteous status granted
- New heart given
- Holy Spirit indwells

At the moment you put your faith in Jesus he washes away all of your sins – past, present and future. He takes your sins upon Himself and covers you with His perfect righteousness. In the

same moment God takes your cold, dead heart of stone and replaces it with a new heart of flesh – that is called being **“born again.”** Your old self – your old life – is crucified with Christ and a new creation comes to life in Christ. Into that new, holy heart the Holy Spirit immediately comes to dwell. The new believer becomes the temple of the Spirit.

Have you experienced this transforming power of the gospel? Do you remember when your heart suddenly changed? For some people it is very obvious – when God takes away all interest in drugs, alcohol, promiscuity and career advancement, replacing them with a hunger for God’s Word and a desire to please God. I recently connected with a pastor in New Jersey who was a **timeshare salesman for 20 years** until his life fell apart. His wife left him and he fell into a time of depression. In that time a friend opened the Bible with him and he joyfully gave his life to Christ. A few weeks later he went to his boss and said, “I have a problem. Money doesn’t motivate me anymore.”

Imagine. A time share salesman who suddenly was not motivated by money. His manager didn’t know what to do with that. And before long my friend found another place to work, eventually taking classes and becoming a pastor.

For some people the change is very obvious right away. For others of us the changes are more gradual and you notice over time – wow, I’m becoming more patient or more forgiving or more understanding or more humble. Maybe other people notice the changes before you do. But the reality for every true believer is that you are changing because you have a new heart. The Holy Spirit lives there, always reminding you that God loves you just the way you are but refuses to leave you that way.

The New Covenant:

2. Internal – Comfort and Conviction

“For this is the covenant that I will make... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Jeremiah 31:33

Two signs of the Spirit’s presence in your life are 1) ***the comfort*** of knowing you belong to Jesus and 2) ***the conviction*** of knowing you have to keep changing and growing to be more like Jesus.

Do you feel that comfort of having a new heart? Do you know, deep down, that you belong to Jesus? Do you feel that conviction from the Spirit as He identifies areas you need to grow – places you need to surrender more fully to the Lord?

God has written His law onto the hearts of every believer. And the Holy Spirit continually illumines God’s Word to help us understand the law of God so we can apply it in our lives. The new covenant is internal and intimate.

The New Covenant:

3. Intimate

“And I will be their God, and they shall be my people... For *they shall all know me*, from the least of them to the greatest.” Jeremiah 31:33-34

These are terms of intimacy and belonging. **We are HIS** – we belong to the Lord. He is ours – we are defined by Him. We know Him personally, intimately, just as He knows us. This intentionally sounds like marriage. The New Covenant is the marriage bond between Jesus and His church. We are the bride of Christ. We are waiting for our bridegroom to return so we can celebrate with Him in the great wedding feast of the Lamb.

Are we waiting for Him? ***Are we looking for His soon return?*** Are we watching and working? Are we protecting our purity like a young woman before her wedding night? Are our hearts captivated with love for our coming King?

Or have we lost our first love? Has our passion cooled? Listen to the passion Jesus has for us, His bride:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” Ephesians 5:25,29-30

““Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to **Christ and the church**.” Ephesians 5:31-32

Brothers and sisters, **we are ONE with Christ**. The believer is united with Jesus by faith – we are IN HIM. This is where those blessings come from. We are forgiven because our old sin-covered self was united with Jesus on the cross. We are righteous because we are united with His perfect life. We get a new heart because He gives us HIS heart. We receive the Holy Spirit because He pours out the Spirit upon us.

As a believer in Jesus you BELONG to Jesus. You are ONE FLESH with Him. Consider that. One flesh. This mystery is profound. How can sinners like you and me be ONE with Jesus? Only through the New Covenant.

The New Covenant:

3. Intimate

“And I will be their God, and they shall be my people... For ***they shall all know me***, from the least of them to the greatest.” Jeremiah 31:33-34

This is our great privilege and joy – to KNOW GOD – to be ONE with Him through Jesus. The new covenant is God’s unconditional commitment to us as our Father; it is our new internal reality as the Holy Spirit dwells in our new, re-made heart. And it is the intimate reality of being united with Jesus.

Do you know Jesus? I mean really know Him? Like you know your husband or wife or your parents or kids? Young people, there is a reality that old married couples tell you and it’s true – when you meet the right person, the one you’re supposed to be with – you’ll know. Before you meet that person you might get to know some other guys or other girls but you just won’t be sure. Then, when you start spending time with the one God has for you, you’ll know.

God has a way of connecting our hearts with one another – you understand each other, you enjoy each other, **you KNOW each other**. When Kristin and I first started dating we would walk the one mile loop around our little university – over and over we would walk that circle, just talking. Sometimes so much time would pass as we were walking we would suddenly realize that our legs were sore. But our hearts were filled because we both knew that this relationship was different, it was special. God made us for each other.

So if you haven't found that person yet, be patient. Trust in God's timing and wait. And focus on knowing and pursuing the Lord. Because the same thing is true with Jesus. There is a moment when your eyes are opened, your ears are unstopped and suddenly you just know. You connect with the Lord in a special way, you experience His love and grace, **you know** that He is with you. As the passage here says – you don't need someone to tell you to "know the Lord," you just know Him. Here is how Paul says it in Romans 8:

The New Covenant:

3. Intimate – You just Know you're saved

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Romans 8:16

Here again is the internal, intimate work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. **The true believer in Jesus KNOWS that he or she belongs to Jesus**. You just know. The Spirit confirms it in your very soul. What this tells us is that each believer can know for sure you are saved. But you cannot know for someone else. The only way to gauge the reality of someone else's faith is by the fruit you see in their life. True believers persevere because the Holy Spirit is inside of us to comfort, convict, empower and guide us.

The New Covenant:

3. Intimate – You just Can't keep sinning

"No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him." 1 John 3:6

You may sin and mess up sometimes, but the Spirit always brings you back, always picks you up and gets you back on the path. Just as you know the Lord is with you, you also know that you cannot continue in sin. **You just can't**. And that conviction of sin and coming back to the Lord is one of the best signs that you ARE a true believer. A non-believer would just barrel ahead into sin and more sin without hesitation.

The new covenant is unconditional, internal, intimate and fourth:

The New Covenant:

4. Eternal

"If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease being a nation before me forever." Jeremiah 31:36

Referring to the sun, the moon and the stars; to the sea and all of creation – this FIXED ORDER – this established, orderly and enduring cosmos – God says His commitment to His people is even more fixed, even more immovable. Basically God is saying, if you trust that the sun will rise in the morning then you can trust that I'll be there for you in the morning. If you trust the ocean tides

and see how consistently they come in and go out, then you can trust me to be there for you. He goes on in v. 37 -

The New Covenant:

4. Eternal

“If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done.” Jeremiah 31:37

From the consistency of the creation to its vast size, God compares His own love and faithfulness to the heights of the heavens and the depths of the earth. The universe stretches out so far beyond the milky way galaxy it staggers the imagination. Voyager 1 has traveled around 3% of one light year. The observable universe has a radius of 45 billion light years. So we have “explored” an infinitesimal fraction of our little corner of the cosmos. God says “IF the heavens could be measured” then his patience would run out. If the earth could be explored to its deepest foundations he would cast them away for their sins.

The New Covenant:

4. Eternal

“I will never leave you or forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5

In other words, ***there is no limit to the enduring love of God***. His covenant is eternal. Nothing can change his commitment to us. Nothing can separate us from His love. This universe will one day fall apart. But God’s love for us never will. This earth has a limit to its depths, but there is no limit to God’s faithfulness. Hear these words of the Lord directly to you, His child: “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Never.

God’s covenant with us through Jesus is unconditional, internal, intimate and eternal. One more:

The New Covenant:

5. Redemption

“They shall all know me... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:34

This last point is the basis for everything. How can the holy God of heaven have an eternal, intimate relationship with sinners like us? ***Only through the redeeming blood of Jesus***. The new covenant we celebrate when we gather around the Lord’s table every month is the new covenant in the blood of Jesus. The old covenant was sealed with the blood of animals and therefore was conditional on more and more sacrifices. It was external, only covering sins for a time. It was impersonal and distant – only the high priest could enter the presence of God and only once a year. And it was temporary. The reason for the weakness of the Old Covenant was nothing deficient in God’s character or plan – it was simply that the redemptive sacrifice had not yet been provided.

So the old covenant’s purpose was to point ahead to the new one. And the more we understand the old covenant of justice the more we will appreciate the new covenant of grace.

The New Covenant:

1. Unconditional

2. Internal
3. Intimate
4. Eternal
5. Redemption

It is unconditional – it does not depend on us but entirely depends on Christ and Him alone.

It is internal – the law of God is written on our hearts.

It is intimate – the Spirit of God lives in us and we KNOW God through Him.

It is eternal – nothing can ever change our relationship with God through Jesus.

And it is all of these things because of the perfect redemption purchased for us by Jesus on the cross.

Let me close with the story of Al and Lisa Robertson. Al is known as the beardless brother in the Duck Dynasty family. While the family was building the business, Al was a pastor in a nearby church and his wife was helping out in ministry in various ways.

But while they were building an active ministry and raising a family, Al and Lisa's marriage was in shambles. Early in their marriage Lisa got involved emotionally with a man in the church. The two confessed the relationship to Al and broke it off before it became physical. But this introduced fear and mistrust to Al's relationship with Lisa. Al "forgave" Lisa but said, "If you do this again, I will divorce you." Since he did not trust her he set up strong measures of accountability. The result was a relationship based on fear and mistrust rather than open and honest communication. And after several years of this lack of intimacy, Lisa found the intimacy she was longing for in another man – and that relationship became a full blown adulterous affair that lasted over a year.

Eventually Al put the pieces together and confronted Lisa. Again she admitted what she had done, broke off the relationship and this time they took a time of separation. Though Al had grounds to leave her and many friends encouraged him to do so, he felt clearly led by the Lord to restore the relationship – and to do it the right way this time – not built on fear and mistrust but built entirely on grace and the gospel.

So Al and Lisa committed to counseling and a program that led them eventually to fully restore their marriage and family. They recently released a book called *A New Season* that shares this story and encourages all married couples – no matter how much trouble they are in – to seek healing and grace in Jesus in pursuit of full reconciliation and intimacy.

What a picture of the old and new covenant. At first, Al applied the covenant of justice – threatening punishment and divorce. The second time, Al applied the covenant of grace – working a process to truly and fully forgive Lisa as she worked a process to truly and fully repent of her sin. The result is a beautifully whole and loving relationship, a trophy of God's grace.

May this be true for each of us – that we are trophies of God's grace – marked by the restoring, reconciling power of the new covenant of grace!

Let's pray and then we will sing about the grace we have ***IN CHRIST ALONE!***

- “A new covenant” (v. 31)
 - UNCONDITIONAL - Not like the old covenant (v. 32) - which they broke
 - INTERNAL - “written on hearts” (v. 33)
 - The Comfort of belonging to Jesus
 - The Conviction of becoming more like Jesus
 - INTIMATE - “they shall know me” (v. 34a)
 - Salvation - You just know
 - Sin - You just can’t
 - Identity - “I will be their God”; belonging (v. 33b)
 - ETERNAL, unbreakable - “if the heavens can be measured... then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel” (v. 37)
 - “The city SHALL BE REBUILT for the Lord” (v. 38)
 - The whole valley of the dead bodies... SHALL BE SACRED to the Lord. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore FOREVER.” (v. 40)
 - REDEMPTION - “I will forgive their iniquity” (v. 34b)

Promise of RESTORATION

- Based on the faithful love of God - “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” v. 3
- After the discipline of God comes rebuilding - “Again I will build you” (v. 4)
 - “I am a father to Israel” (v. 9)
 - “There is HOPE for your future” (v. 17)
 - “You have disciplined me” (v. 18) “like an untrained calf”
 - ‘BRING ME BACK THAT I MAY BE RESTORED’ (v. 18)
 - “I will surely have mercy on him” (v. 20)
 - “When I RESTORE their fortunes” (v. 23)
 - “I will sow the house of Israel... I will build and plant” (v. 28)
 - “Everyone will die for his own iniquity” (v. 30)
- Through an INGATHERING - “I will bring them from the farthest parts of the earth” (v. 8)
 - “As a shepherd keeps his flock” (v. 10)
- Repentance - “with weeping they shall come” (v. 9)
 - “Lamentation and bitter weeping” over judgment (v. 15)
 - Stop weeping - “they shall come back” (v. 16)
 - “After I had turned away, I relented” (v. 19)
 - “Return, O virgin Israel” (v. 21)
 - “How long will you waver, o faithless daughter?” (v. 22)
- Into Joy and blessing “brooks of water” (v. 9)
 - “They shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord” (v. 12)
 - “The young women rejoice in the dance” (v. 13)
 - “My people shall be satisfied with my goodness” (v. 14)
 - “For I will satisfy the weary soul” (v. 25)
- REDEMPTION - “the Lord has ransomed Jacob” (v.11)
 - “A new covenant” (v. 31)
 - UNCONDITIONAL - Not like the old covenant (v. 32) - which they broke
 - INTERNAL - “written on hearts” (v. 33)
 - INTIMATE - “they shall know me” (v. 34a)
 - Identity - “I will be their God”; belonging (v. 33b)

- ETERNAL, unbreakable - "if the heavens can be measured... then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel" (v. 37)
 - "The city SHALL BE REBUILT for the Lord" (v. 38)
 - The whole valley of the dead bodies... SHALL BE SACRED to the Lord. It shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore FOREVER." (v. 40)
- REDEMPTION - "I will forgive their iniquity" (v. 34b)