

<sup>31</sup> *“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. <sup>32</sup> 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.*

*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. No longer will they teach their neighbor, 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. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

### **Embrace the New**

Standing by himself he tries to look calm. He knows better; hopefully no one notices his shaking clammy hands. Then the music changes and everyone turns in their seats. There she is. A smile breaks across his face. He can't believe how beautiful she is! How did he get so lucky? There's his bride, radiant in his eyes. “She's gorgeous... They're just perfect for each other” more than a few people are thinking as they watch the bride meet the groom. Then they hear it in the presence of God and these witnesses: promises. A covenant made between two people to remain with each other. To not leave when things change and are tough. To be faithful to each other as long as they both shall live. They are both ready to embrace the new, the new life, this new relationship. That also means things would be different. Life was different. They weren't the same people who were there before those vows. Certain things she wouldn't be doing anymore because she was in this new relationship. There were different things he would do because he wanted to make this relationship work. Marriage is, after all, a two-side contract both promising to be faithful to each other. It's built on a trust that each will keep their end of the covenant.

When the Lord leads Israel out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, he was bringing them into a relationship with him. As they stand at Mount Sinai and hear him speak, he's not some nameless god. He is the Lord who has chosen Israel to be his bride. He makes promises to be faithful to them. He will bless them so they prosper and grow. He will lead them, be with them in the Promised Land. And because he loves his bride, he tells them how they can make this relationship work. He speaks the words out loud and inscribes them on stone.

Israel makes promises too. They promise to be faithful. They promise to do and be God's faithful bride who will follow his commands. They embrace the new relationship they have with the Lord who is like a husband to them.

It's shocking how quickly they forget those promises they made in the presence of God and each other as witnesses already there at Mt. Sinai. It would be bad enough if it was a one-time occurrence. But it's far from it. Time and again you read in the Old Testament at how terrible of a spouse Israel is to the Lord. They cheat on him with the

wood and stone idols of the Canaanites while maintaining a resemblance of worshiping the Lord. They just go through the motions of worship as if God wouldn't notice their hearts were far from him. Instead of living apart as one for the Lord, they live like the people around them. When the Lord sends foreign nations who oppress the people, they would repent of their sin and turn back to Lord only to turn away and be unfaithful again. Even when the northern tribes are taken away, you'd think that the remaining people would have changed. And they do for a little while. But eventually they were right back at it again. Unfaithful to the Lord. Breaking promises. Cheating on him with false gods and not doing as he commands. You read through the Old Testament, you hear how patient God is, you see how Israel reacts and you might wonder: "How could you do that again?"

But then, how do you answer when you ask yourself that question? You know before you start making excuses for yourself to cushion the blow. You know before you try to dull down that pricking conscience. You know that moment after you realize what you have done and feel the shame washing over you. How did I do that? Why did I do that? Why did I do that again? We have our own long lists of unfaithfulness. We worship the Lord on Sunday, and then worship the gods of popularity and status during the week not living as the Lord call us but rather living like the world around us. We pray to the Lord at night after spending the day at the altar of the almighty dollar. We praise the Lord with our lips, then use the same lips to curse, swear, lie, deceive, speak cruelly about someone behind their back, tearing down instead of building up. We come here to worship the Lord, but your mind is off who knows where and thinking about who knows what. We serve the Lord and then go ahead and serve our favorite god, ourselves, going back to those pet sins again convincing ourselves this time will be different. And we then we ask: how could I do this again?

Just because the Lord has not burned us up in holy fire for all the times we have been unfaithful, do not take that to mean it's not a big deal. The people of Judah were about to face that truth. Jeremiah the prophet has the job to go to the people and tell them: the Lord has had enough. The Lord had been faithful all those years. He kept the covenant. They broke it. They had been unfaithful. They ruined the relationship. And now they have to face the consequences. They would watch their loved ones suffer and die. Those who would survive would be taken into exile. There was nothing they could do to stop it. Their homes would go up in flames. Their beloved temple will be torn down.

And, yet, in the midst of all of this Jeremiah speaks the Lord's promise. "I will make a new covenant," says the Lord, "It will not be like the old covenant made at Mt. Sinai. **"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. No longer will they teach their neighbor, 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"** (vv.33-34). How can this be?

Why would the Lord be willing to do this? It doesn't make sense. Instead of kicking Judah to the curb and abandoning them, the Lord promises to bring them in even closer than before. How could the Lord love them, again?

Again, how do you answer that for yourself? Once we stop making the excuses for ourselves or listen to the excuses people make for us, once we stop blaming the circumstances and other people involved, once we stop listening to the lies we tell ourselves and are finally honest, we know how we have been unfaithful to the Lord. How could he forgive me again when I've fallen into the same sin? It can't be because of something we have done or would do. Even the best things on our best days are pitiful in the grand scheme of everything. As much as we wish to be able to take away a single time we have been unfaithful to the Lord, we know better. Think about it: a bouquet of flowers doesn't take away the hurtful words spoken after a lost temper. It doesn't work in our earthly relationships; how is it any different with our relationship with God? And the devil is more than happy to point out the obvious to you as well. He loves to dredge up the past and remind you of things you had thought were long forgotten. How could God want anything to do with me? How could a just God who does not ignore sin, who punishes those who hate him and do not follow his will, want me? How could the Lord love me, again?

It's not a bad question. It's the greatest scandal of all time. The God who saves takes on flesh and blood and becomes fully human. The one who saves came not to be served but to serve and to give his life. The God who saves does it in suffering. The thought of what he will suffer for you troubles Jesus' heart. He's well aware of what he will face. But shall he say: "**Father, save me from this hour? No, it is was for this very reason I came to this hour,**" Jesus says (John 12:27). And so at what is his greatest humiliation lowering himself, the Son of is Man is glorified. He becomes a curse for us being lifted up from the earth onto the tree of the cross. On that cross Christ is condemned in our place along with the devil and this world. His blood pours out. His life is given up. But now the debt of your sin is forgiven. The guilt of your sin has been taken away as far as the east is from the west. The Lord remembers your sin no more; so why do we think we need to? The prince of this world, the lying devil, is judged and driven out. It is finished. The days are no longer coming; the new covenant is already here at the cross. There God's wrath is appeased and his love is poured out for you. For this is why Jesus came into this world: to live perfectly as you could not, to suffer the torments of hell and to die so that you would not, and to live again so that you might live with him for eternity.

It's on that same cross Jesus draws you to himself even closer than before. He has made you holy setting you apart as his own so that neither no one nor anything else can make a claim on you. You are his own. He's cleansed you by the washing with water through the word in baptism and presents you to His Father in heaven as His radiant bride without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish (Ephesians 5:26-27). He grins from ear-to-ear when he thinks of you. He is proud to call you his own. There's no shame here. It's

been taken away. There's no stain of sin. You've been washed clean. These aren't just empty words spoken and gone. He writes them on your heart so that you know the Lord who has revealed himself to you and by faith he creates you believe to be true. From the least of them—a little baby unable to do much of anything on their own—to the greatest—the oldest member battling dementia/Alzheimer's. Neither may be able to verbalize it, but with the Word written on their hearts, they know the Lord. And you do too. Because God promises: "I will forgive your sins. I will remember them no more." This isn't a onetime thing. He's doing it again and it doesn't run out.

He's brought you into this new relationship—embrace it. Embrace the new covenant made by Jesus. Run to the font remembering your own baptism dear brides of Christ. Repent of your sins turning away from that old life of sin embracing the new you have in Christ. Run to the Lord's Supper where that new covenant in Jesus' blood is given and poured out for the forgiveness of your sins. Run to the Lord who has embraced you as his own whose promise and covenant is that no one and nothing can come between you, his bride, and his love. Amen.