Restoration

Read Jeremiah 31:31-37

Key verse: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31).

It’s been said that in the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed, and in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed. In these verses, Jeremiah 31:31-37, God through the prophet speaks to the beleaguered peoples of Israel and Judah. But “concealed” in this word of hope for ancient Israel and Judah is a prophetic word for all peoples regarding the new covenant that Jesus Christ would bring.

Verses 35-37 are words of promise and hope that the Jewish people would need during the dark days of the Exile. During the time that Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem and took many of the Jews into exile, God sent a word of promise and hope. It included this pledge of God’s faithfulness to his people: “If the created order should vanish from my sight, declares the Lord, only then would Israel’s descendants ever stop being a nation before me. The Lord proclaims: If the heavens above could be measured and the foundation of the earth below could be fathomed, only then would I reject Israel’s descendants for what they have done, declares the Lord” (vv. 36-37).

Verses 31-34 speak of a covenant between God and Israel—one that Israel failed to keep—and of God’s intentions to make a new covenant: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It won’t be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant with me even though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

“No, this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. They will no longer need to teach each other to say, ‘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 wrongdoing and never again remember their sins.”
One of the profound differences between the old and new covenants is that the new covenant gives us a new kind of relationship with God’s laws and provides a way, through Christ, for our hearts to be changed: “I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts” (v. 33).

Dr. David Seamands explained: “The [Old Testament] law is a guideline for our conduct, to tell us how love behaves and how to obey God in order to please him. It contains ethical principles to teach us how to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The law is no longer an external instrument of justification or sanctification, a code we must try to follow. The law for the Christian is internal as the blessed Holy Spirit writes these laws upon our hearts and empowers us to keep them” (from God’s Blueprint for Living by David A. Seamands).

In the new covenant, the fundamental issue is the issue of the heart. Kyle Idleman gave this illustration: “Imagine you’re out for a hike on a beautiful spring day and you come to a creek. But there’s something wrong with this picture. You notice that someone has dumped trash into the stream—an ugly sight. Judging by some of the empty soda cans, the trash has been there awhile. And there is an ugly film on top of the water. You can’t just leave the scene as you found it, because it would bother your conscience. So you stoop down and begin gathering the trash.

“It actually takes several hours before you can begin to see a difference; it’s amazing how much junk is there. You sit back, rest for a moment, and realize you’ll have to keep returning each day until the site is truly clean. But when you come back the next day, it’s as if your work has been undone.

“In fact there’s more trash than before. Somehow the garbage bred overnight. You think about the unlikelihood of someone coming to this very spot to dump their garbage in the few hours while you were away, and you realize that something smells fishy—so to speak. So you begin to follow the creek upstream.

“Sure enough, you come to a garbage dump that has been there for years. It’s emptying into a passing creek. Your cleaning job only opened up a gap for more stuff to settle. You could go and clean every day….If you want your creek to be clean, that means going directly to the source and dealing with what’s there” (from Gods at War by Kyle Idleman).

Thank God for a new covenant that, through Christ, provides forgiveness for our failure to keep God’s ways. Thank God for a new covenant that changes our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Thank God for a new covenant in which God’s laws are written on our hearts. Thank God for a new covenant in which we are filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, who helps us increasingly to follow God’s will and way.

“I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts.” Thanks be to God! (Contact Michael at mikesigler@ozarkfumc.org.)