

Sunday January 26, 2020
 Lesson 9: God's Covenant With Us
 Scripture: Jeremiah 31: 27-37

Context:

The next covenant to study comes from one of the prophets. Jeremiah is known for his willingness to call the people to account for their behavior. Prophets had a way of simultaneously irritating the people and also bringing them hope in the midst of disaster or impending doom.

As a prophet, Jeremiah faced troubles for his speaking up in the tumultuous times of the late seventh and early sixth centuries. Like Isaiah and other prophets, Jeremiah was deeply involved in the politics of his day and paid a high price: ridicule, rejection, persecution, imprisonment, and exile.¹ In addition to rejection, Jeremiah represents the suffering of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem during the final years of the Davidic monarchy, especially the minority who disagreed with the kings of Judah in their rebellion and their failure to continue the reforms to the law.² Throughout the book of Jeremiah, there is a current of seeking hope in the face of criticism and anxiety.

The chapter for today's lesson comes from what is known as part of the "book of consolation." Much like the book of Isaiah and the other prophets that are divided into sections, the book has mini addresses that fit with a theme. This section contains passages of hope and comfort for the future.³ For many of the prophets, their messages of doom and gloom were interspersed with these nuggets of consolation for those who saw all the things going on and mourned about the amount of pain and despair.

In this consolation passage, there is a promise of a new covenant God will form with the people. This covenant will not be like the one made with Abraham, Moses, or David. This new covenant will forgive the people for their sins and will not look to their past transgressions as to whether God will stay in the covenant or not.

This new covenant will have the people knowing who God is and their role in being the children of God. God will claim them wherever they may be and there is nothing that can stop that fact. While the people may be scattered or away from home, the natural order will always be that God calls them God's own people and children.

The allusion of the sun and moon rising, the stars shimmering in the sky, and the sea having waves roar point to the fact that God's love and promise is as natural as these things. Only if humans can fully stop these things or measure everything about them will God's covenant stop. The point is made that these things will probably never happen which is meant to affirm and console the people. God will not abandon them and they will continue to receive God's love and promises. They will continue to be God's people

¹ Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 367.

² Ibid., 367.

³ Ibid., 365.

even when they are forced into exile and when they are invaded.

Application:

The book of Jeremiah ranges from the messages of doom and gloom to the one read today, one of hope and consolation. Most people are more familiar with Jeremiah's verse from chapter twenty-nine: "For I have plans for you to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This particular verse is used to make us feel better about ourselves and give us the warm fuzzies.

However, this passage might be a better one for us to study and internalize into our psyche. It is wonderful to think of God having a plan for us, but it might be more important to think of God having a covenant with us in which we grow with God. We are reminded this life is not all about us and our happiness. It is about us living with God and growing in our walk with Christ.

In the case of this covenant from Jeremiah, we are reminded that we will fail from time to time in our how we live our lives. Like the people of Israel, we mess up and we sin. Our relationship with God is not always as pretty or clean as we want it to be. We like the idea of being in relationship with God as long as it doesn't cost us anything. If it involves us giving up something or doing things we don't like, we usually want the option of bowing out and moving onto something else.

I have noticed a recent trend in our society in which people seem to want to have their cake, eat it, and then devour more. If they are told the word "no," either all hell breaks loose or the people want to drop whatever they are in to move on to something they think will be better. Commitment does not seem to be at an all time high.

While I think there is always a place and a time for everything and that some things have seasons, I wonder if we jump around commitments because we don't want to do the hard work of being in covenant. As revealed in the commentary by the prophet Jeremiah, covenant is not something that is necessarily easy. The people of Israel struggled time and time again, wanting to have their cake and eat it too. It seemed to be a struggle for them to understand that being in a covenant demanded a response from them. The response wasn't necessarily meant to be easy or make them feel great about themselves. It was not for them to make lots of money and simply be "happy" without having to think about anything or consider their relationship to God and to others. The covenant was to remind them that God loved them and wanted them to grow in trust, love, and responsibility.

Today I think that everyone could stand to look at the covenants and the commitments we have made. Whether it be wedding vows, ordination vows, or even club vows, have we honestly sought to uphold them and honor what we vowed to do? If you find yourself making excuses or blaming other parties, it might be good to seek some counsel and pray about the covenant God has made with you. Remember the words of Jeremiah and seek to honor what God is doing in your life and the grace and mercy that has been extended to you. Consider how God has claimed you as one of God's own and that commitment is one that God will not negotiate on.

Do you honor the commitments and covenants you have made? What do you do to hold yourself accountable when you don't feel like doing something? Why do you think it is so important to reflect on the covenants that people have made? How does the

understanding of God's covenant with humanity bring you hope?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009