

**Text: Jeremiah 31:31-37**  
**Title: “Deep Change” Pt.1**

As a follower of Christ, He is Lord over every area of your life, including your life's work. And what the Lord gives you to do often isn't easy and, in fact, you may not look forward to going to work every day. And that's why we have to depend on God for the strength to do our work for His glory, even when it's really hard. That's true whether you're a school teacher or a doctor or a homemaker or an engineer ... or a prophet of the Lord like Jeremiah. Open your Bibles to Jeremiah 31. We've been camped in this book of the Bible through the summer and we've seen that Jeremiah was a servant of the Lord who was given an enormous and often unpleasant task. His ministry was to deliver God's message to His people that tough times are ahead because they had rebelled against the Lord ... turned their backs to Him, not their faces. They will be conquered by a nation called the Babylonians and they will be in exile for seventy years. But they must submit to their conquerors, settle down, humble themselves and live through the days of discipline. So the first twenty-nine chapters of the book are pretty much doom and gloom. But I told you last week that we come to Jeremiah 30-33 and there's a different tone. God told Jeremiah to write a book containing the message of these four chapters ... a book within a book. This section is sometimes called “The Book of Comfort (Consolation)” because it reassures the exiles that God isn't finished with them. They have a future and a hope. In spite of their failures and all they have suffered, He still loves them with an everlasting love. Jeremiah says that in...

**Jeremiah 31:3 - The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.**

Over and over again God has drawn (rescued) them with His “loving-kindness.” That's the great Hebrew word *hesed*. Over and over again they have turned their backs to Him, not their faces. But God is committed to the holiness of His people. He is intent on breaking the cycle of their idolatrous rebellion. He is about to enact something that will change the relationship forever.

**Jeremiah 31:4a - I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.**

So there will be a restoration of the people to the land from which they have been taken into exile. Go home this afternoon and read all of Jeremiah 31 to see what a beautiful restoration God has in mind for His people in the land He gave them. But I love it that the Lord calls them “O, Virgin Israel.” Now what about all their

promiscuity and their chasing after other gods like they were lovers who could give their life meaning? Listen, God's love is redeeming love and powerful love that can take a disgraced person and remove the guilt and replace it with purity and holiness. He will bring about such a deep change that His people will once again be like an innocent virgin in His eyes. **Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.**

We have before us here one of the most staggering and precious promises God ever made. And it's not just a promise made to the Jews 2500 years ago. When God made this promise He also had you and me in mind because I'm going to show you how this promise was ultimately accomplished by His Son Jesus Christ. And this is such an towering part of the Bible that I'm going to take two Sundays to let us just be amazed by this.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I read somewhere that when people go to visit the Grand Canyon in Arizona the average time spent actually looking at the canyon is only seventeen minutes. I'm not sure how they calculated that, but it's an amazing statistic. People drive days to get there and walk out on to the observation platform to view one of the most magnificent sights in the world, snap a few photos and seventeen minutes later they leave. Well we are standing here today at what might be considered the Grand Canyon of the Old Testament. We'll take a little extra time with this passage to see what's so amazing about it.

**Read Jeremiah 31:31-32a.** So the Lord plans to enact a “new covenant” this is not like an old covenant that came before. This is the only time in the Old Testament where those words “new covenant” appear. Jesus and the NT writers use the phrase often, but it's only here in the OT. So what's up with this? Let's start with a definition of a covenant.

**A covenant is an agreement that establishes a relationship between persons who make commitments to one another.**

You see, all through Bible history God related to people based upon covenants ... agreements that establish relationships between persons. People in biblical times were very familiar with covenants. Actually there were different kinds of covenants because there were different kinds of relationships. (I learned this from Dr. F.B. Huey, a world-renowned OT scholar and author who is also a member of our church.) Sometimes covenants were like *treaties* between two parties whose power was not equal; so the stronger would put obligations on the weaker. The king of a strong nation would say to the king of a weak nation, “Here's the deal. You agree to pay me taxes and I agree not to invade your land.” Sometimes

covenants were like *contracts*, as we know them today. Both parties are equal and they agree on mutual obligations. You sign a contract for your cell phone or cable TV service. You agree to pay them some ridiculous amount and they agree that you will only have a signal about half the time. But when it comes to God's dealings with Israel there's a different kind of covenant. It's more like a *grant*. This is where there are parties of unequal power, but the stronger one obligates himself for the wellbeing of the weaker one. The stronger one does the heavy lifting in the relationship. And that is the nature of God's covenants with Israel.

Now as you read your Bible you see different covenants, but the old covenant that God has in mind here in Jeremiah 31 is the covenant that He made with Israel through Moses. Now stay with me. You'll see in a minute how all this fits together.

Rewind back to Exodus when Israel had been in slavery in Egypt for 400 years. God came to a man named Moses and told him to lead the people out of Egypt. God told Moses to go to the king of Egypt and say, "God says, 'Let my people go;'" And the king said, "No!" So God performed a series of miracles that allowed the people of Israel to escape from Egypt through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Then having redeemed His people in that miraculous way God met with them at Mt. Sinai in the desert. He called Moses up on the mountain and revealed to Moses the covenant that God was making with Israel. He will obligate Himself to provide for them and protect them and forgive them. Their part of the covenant was to keep His commands which God gave to Moses inscribed on two stone tablets ... the Ten Commandments. And that's what it means in v.32 that the new covenant will, "not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt ..."

Now there's a New Covenant being enacted ... a superior covenant. And what we see here is the grand vision of God to bring about deep change in the lives of people who enter into a relationship with Him. The New Covenant provides for...

## **1. EXTRAVAGANT GRACE**

Notice in v.32 the Lord says that "they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them."

In the Old Covenant the Lord had bound himself to Israel like a husband to a wife. But His people had been unfaithful to Him. In Jeremiah's day they had committed spiritual adultery by worshipping false gods and idols ... idolatry. And it wasn't just that they were flirting with these gods by hanging out at pagan altars. They

were actually committing sins in doing that, particularly the sin of sexual immorality. I mentioned earlier in the series that in Jeremiah's day the Temple that was supposed to be dedicated to the worship and praise of the Lord God was used as a house of prostitution. We're also told that some even sacrificed their children to these pagan gods. Can you imagine that? You see, immorality, or any other sin for that matter, doesn't happen in a vacuum. It starts when our backs turn to God, not our faces. We aren't truly worshipping God and loving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. When our hearts turn away from God there's no end to the evil we can do.

And the sad thing about them, and us, is that we are incapable of changing ourselves. Time after time in Jeremiah the Lord calls His people to repent. But they just carry right on with their sin. And we can't look down on them because we know that we are just as incapable of changing our idolatrous and immoral hearts.

Now here's what so amazing about God. He says "You have been unfaithful to Me. But I will remain faithful to you. Your unfaithfulness is not greater than My faithfulness. Your sin is not greater than my grace."

Now you're already sensing this, but what you're seeing here is the New Testament of Jesus in the Old Testament. All the old covenants God made with Israel were incomplete. What brings the Old Covenant to completion is the New Covenant which is fulfilled in Christ.

That's amazing. God in His extravagant grace makes a new covenant with the ones who broke the old covenant. He could have said, "I'm done with you," but He didn't. And while we are incapable of changing, God in His amazing grace takes it upon Himself to make our faithfulness possible. And here's how He does that. He not only provides extravagant grace; He provides for...

## **2. INNER TRANSFORMATION**

**Jeremiah 31:33 - "This is the covenant I will make with the house 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.**

God understands our inability to change ourselves and that's why you see over and over in the New Covenant the Lord saying, "I will, I will, I will" (five times). The Ten Commandments said, "You shall." In the New Covenant the Lord says, "I will." God is a pursuing God who refuses to let us live below His glorious

purposes for us. So this is not just something that God *proposes*, because He knows how weak we are. It is something God *accomplishes* by doing something different. His law will move from being something “out there” to something “in here.”

**In the Old Covenant God’s law was written on stone tablets. In the New Covenant God’s law is written on human hearts.**

Just like God engraved His Law (His will) on stone tablets for Moses to teach the people, God will engrave His Law (His will) on human hearts. When God’s Word and His will is *out there* we can run from it and ignore it. Warren Wiersbe says it this way: “The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The Old Covenant tried to control conduct; the New Covenant changes character.”

**ILLUSTRATION** - You can bring an old pig into your house, put her in the bathtub, scrub her down, polish her nails, put a ribbon on her head, brush her teeth and spray her down with Chanel No. 5. But you know what will happen the first time you open the door and let the pig back outside. She’ll head straight for the nearest mud hole and wallow in it. Why? She likes it because it’s in her nature.

The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Jesus said:

**Matthew 15:19 - For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.**

The words of a hymn are familiar to some of us: “Prone to wander Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, Lord. Take a seal it; seal it for Thy courts above.” That’s what we need God to do.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I enjoy golf. I’m not that good at it myself, but I know enough to appreciate when someone else, like Jordan Spieth, is really good at it. And because I love the game and admire people who are good at it, I might dream what it was like for Jordan Spieth to win the British Open earlier this summer. I might dream what it would be like if I could climb into Jordan’s body and play that final nine holes at the Royal Birkdale Golf Club. I can dream all day about being in Jordan Spieth’s golf shoes on the final round of the British Open, but I know exactly how that would go. It would be a colossal failure. In fact, last week I played golf with some buddies and I struggled to break 100. But things would have been dramatically different if Jordan Spieth had been in Mike Dean’s golf shoes. He would have chewed up that course like a Putt-Putt course. Mike Dean in Jordan

Spieth's golf shoes equals frustrating failure, no matter how hard I try. Jordan Spieth in Mike Dean's golf shoes equals just the opposite ... the game of golf played the way it's supposed to be played.

But let me tell you something that is infinitely more impossible than Mike Dean playing golf like Jordan Spieth. It is Mike Dean completely living up to the perfect, holy law of God. And that's true for you as well. We are incapable, in our own strength, of changing our sinful hearts, no matter how much we want to or how hard we try. And that's been the story throughout history. But God has a vision for deep change for us, and the only way that change can happen is for our hearts to change. And God takes it on Himself to do that.

**Jeremiah 31:33b - "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.**

And that's the difference between the superficial change that happens when we try to be religious, and the deep change that happens when we are transformed by Jesus Christ when He comes to live in us. That's what happens when we are saved. The change begins from the inside out. God's Law is written on our hearts, transforming us from the inside out. God's work in us changes our "want tos." We begin to *want* to obey the Lord.

God showed the prophet Ezekiel the same truth:

**Ezekiel 36:26-27 - I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.**

That reminds me of what Paul said in ...

**Philippians 2:13 – It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.**

So when we are incapable of changing our hearts God obligates Himself to do that ... to get at the problem of the rebellion of our heart and our tendency to run away from God. And that's what makes possible the new relationship that is the result of this New Covenant.

**Jeremiah 31:33b - I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

That's where we'll pick up next week. But this is what the Christian life is and this is who you are, follower of Jesus.