

A PROMISE FULFILLED**JEREMIAH 31:31-34**

How much do you know about the Holy Spirit? Someone has said that many of us think that the Holy Spirit is like our pituitary gland. You know it's there, you're glad you've got it, you don't want to lose it, but you're not exactly sure what it does. Well, the Holy Spirit does a whole lot. Around the world today, Christians are celebrating the Day of Pentecost - a very important event that happened about fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus. You can read all about it in Acts 1 and 2. The word "pentecost" means fiftieth in the Greek language. Now the Holy Spirit – the third Person of the Trinity – had been very active and involved in the world and among human beings since creation. But the Day of Pentecost was a new and defining moment in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to followers of Jesus in a way He had never been given before. He was now able to indwell the spirit – the inner life – of each and every follower of Jesus. Also, on the Day of Pentecost, the Church of Jesus Christ had its official beginning. By Church, I mean the group of people past, present, and future from every tribe, nation, and language around the planet who have repented of their sins, put their faith in Jesus and what He accomplished at the cross and empty tomb, and who are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Not only was Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection prophesied about and foretold in the Old Testament, but so also was the Day of Pentecost. One such passage is found in the book of Jeremiah written about 600 years before the actual Day of Pentecost. We're taking a journey through Jeremiah's prophecy which can feel like hiking through a dry, hot desert spiritually. But, now and then, we come upon oases – places of spiritual insight, celebration, and encouragement – where we can get a wonderful, much needed, and thirst-quenching drink of spiritual water. Let's read the passage I'm thinking about just now.

Now Jeremiah used the word "covenant" several times in those verses. A covenant is basically another word for a contract. A rental agreement is a covenant. A mortgage is a covenant. You likely have a covenant with your cell phone and Internet providers. A contract – or a covenant – is an agreement between two or more people or two or more organizations. God had a covenant – a contract, an agreement – with the people of Israel. He promised to be their God and they promised to be His people. He promised to protect, prosper, and bless them if they stayed faithful to Him. The covenant also made it very clear what would happen if the people were not faithful to Him. God would bring disaster upon them. This covenant – or contract – was ratified by Moses and the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai about 800 years before Jeremiah. After a few hundred years, a sad truth emerged. The people of Israel still wanted God's protection and prosperity, but they didn't want to stay faithful to Him. They preferred the false gods and idols worshiped by surrounding nations. They permitted and promoted injustice and the abuse of the poor. Personal morality went down the tubes. God sent prophet after prophet to them, but it didn't do any lasting good. So, through Jeremiah, God just stated the obvious. The original covenant He made with Israel – their contract – was broken beyond repair. It wasn't fixable. God then finally enforced all the negative

provisions of the covenant He had withheld for hundreds of years. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was demolished. The people were deported and exiled.

Can you imagine how depressed and demoralized the Jewish people must have felt living out their lives year after year in Babylon and other foreign cities – hundreds of miles away from Palestine? Israel was no longer a nation. God had abandoned them. There was no hope for the future. “Not so fast,” said Jeremiah. God was up to something. He wasn’t finished with Israel. He still had a purpose for them. But His new plan involved a new covenant – a new contract – that was going to be a whole lot better than the old one. I’m convinced what we just read together – what the Lord said through Jeremiah - was ultimately fulfilled 600 years later on the Day of Pentecost. And what makes it even more wonderful, is that you and I – 2600 years after Jeremiah and 2000 years after the original Day of Pentecost – are the beneficiaries. What Jeremiah predicted and what actually happened in Acts 2 impacts your life and mine powerfully every day we live. First of all, because of the Day of Pentecost, you and I have...

A NEW AND BETTER FOUNDATION TO BE FORGIVEN BY GOD.

In a few minutes, we’re going to have the privilege to partake of the Lord’s Supper again. Do you remember what Jesus said on that occasion? “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mt 26:28 NIV) Paul, the great Christian leader, told us, “In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’” (1 Cor. 11:25 NLT) If a relationship with God is like a house, then it needs a foundation. The foundation of a relationship with God always begins by dealing with the sin issue in human beings. God is holy; we aren’t. We’ve messed up and we continue to mess up. The penalty for sin? Death for the one who commits sin. Until and unless your sin problem and mine is resolved, a relationship with God can’t even begin. Nor can that relationship with God be sustained long term.

You and I have been offered a foundation for our relationship with God that’s new and better than what God’s people under the old covenant ever experienced. That new foundation was provided fifty days before the first Day of Pentecost when Jesus became our substitute on the cross. How did God address the sin issue under the old covenant – the old contract? Sins were forgiven by animal sacrifice. God allowed His people to transfer the guilt of their sin to animals who were then killed or sacrificed as payment for human sin. God allowed animals to die as a substitute. But many Scriptures make it clear this was a kind of “stop gap” arrangement until Jesus came. God hints at a far better arrangement in Jeremiah’s prophecy. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.” (Jer. 31:34 NLT) What Jesus did was far better. How so? He provided a perfect solution to our sin. Animal sacrifice was never really an adequate foundation for the forgiveness of sin. But when Jesus died on the cross, it meant a morally perfect person acted as a substitute for morally imperfect human beings. That was a far better solution.

Here's another reason the new foundation was better. What Jesus did was permanent. The old way of being forgiven had to be repeated often. Many animals had to be sacrificed – day after day, year after year. But when Jesus died on the cross, it was a sacrifice that only needed to be done once for all time and eternity. That's why the Bible says, "Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time." (Heb. 10:10-11 NLT)

On January 16, 2013 André Cassagnes died in Paris at the age of eighty-six. Cassagnes was in his early thirties when he created a plastic device with a glass screen on which children could draw by turning little knobs. Since the inside surface of the screen was coated with aluminum powder, moving the knobs resulted in drawing images on the screen as an unseen movable stylus scraped away the powder. By turning the device upside down and shaking it, the little black images would magically disappear. Cassagnes's toy began to be sold in the United States back in 1960. Anyone remember what it was called? Etch A Sketch! Since that time more than 100 million of those little drawing machines have been sold allowing it to be named one of the top 100 toys of the 20th century. Like an Etch A Sketch, sin makes its mark on the screen of our lives. The evidence of our disobedience before God is indisputable. It's not a pretty picture. But when we put our trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the blotches of sin on the screen of our lives are erased and we're made like new.

Right there's another reason this new foundation is better than the old one. It delivers a far better result in the lives of the forgiven. God offers us full forgiveness, permanent forgiveness, and forgiveness that opens the way to have an ongoing relationship with the God of the universe. But the passage in Jeremiah promises more than a new foundation. Because of the Day of Pentecost, you and I have ...

A NEW AND BETTER ABILITY TO OBEY GOD.

While the covenant God offers us today is indeed new and better than what was offered God's people in Old Testament times, there's still a lot of continuity – a lot of similarities - between the two contracts. Under the old covenant, God wanted His people to obey Him. Obeying God glorified God and resulted in blessing for His people. Under the new covenant, God still wants His people – you and me – to obey Him. Obeying God still glorifies God and is still the best way to receive God's blessings. How many of you want to experience God's blessings in your life consistently? Good. Don't just believe in Him; obey Him. Do life His way. Not once and awhile, but consistently. Obedience opens the door to God's blessing. Disobedience short-circuits God's blessing.

The old covenant did a great job of explaining what kinds of behaviors pleased God. Think of the Ten Commandments for example. But it became evident over time that God's people lacked the innate ability to obey God. They failed and failed badly. They knew very well what was right and wrong, but they lacked the ability to obey God consistently. A big change was needed. Through Jeremiah, the Lord said, "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts." (Jer. 31:33 NLT)

In the Old Testament, your heart was where you did your thinking, choosing, and deciding. It's what shaped both the inner intentions and outward actions of your life. God wanting His people to obey Him from the heart was nothing new. What was new was God promising He Himself would give us both the desire and the ability to obey Him. Through another Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, God was even more explicit about what He was going to do on the Day of Pentecost. "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations." (Ezk. 36:26-27 NLT)

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was made available to God's people in a new and different way. God didn't give us new instructions on how to please Him. What it meant to obey God didn't change. Instead, God put the Author of the old instructions – the Holy Spirit - inside of followers of Jesus to enable and to help us to obey them. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit makes all the difference. Through Him, we now have a new and better ability to obey God, to please God, and to live lives that truly honor Him. Of course, this new and better arrangement was celebrated in the New Testament. "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit (that's the new ability) has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses (the old covenant) was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do (the new covenant).... God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins (That's the new foundation of forgiveness we discussed a few minutes ago). He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1-4 NLT)

Now, personal effort in obeying God is still needed and sometimes that's very hard, long spiritual work. Why? We still have a sinful nature. It's not as if the Holy Spirit obeys God for us. We have to co-operate with the Holy Spirit. For example, all of us have attitudes and behaviors that God says we need to put to death. For example, greed, lust, racism, a vicious temper, contempt for the poor, self-centeredness, or pride. It's never easy or pleasant to kill off something that's just become a natural, every day part of us. We need a power source outside of ourselves to help us with that task.

On February 10, 2013, a fire broke out in an engine room of the Carnival cruise ship, Triumph. The fire knocked out the ship's power, leaving the vessel drifting in the Gulf of Mexico. 4,200 passengers and crew were left in limbo. The lost power made it impossible to operate the flush toilets, keep cool in the un-shaded waters of the deep sea, and preserve and cook all the perishable food on board. Passengers reported long lines for food, shortages of fresh water, illnesses, and widespread boredom. Many passengers slept in hallways or outside to escape the odors and heat below decks. CNN dubbed the Triumph "the cruise ship from hell." The ship finally ported safely in Mobile, Alabama four very long days later. The ship's loss of power wasn't just a tragedy for the passengers. Carnival lost hundreds of millions of dollars due to this incident. Apparently, Carnival learned their lesson. In June 2013, Triumph set sail once

again, but this time it was outfitted with new emergency power capabilities. Carnival learned when the power goes out, the party's over. When followers of Christ aren't connected to our power source – the Holy Spirit - things quickly deteriorate.

We still have to ask for the Holy Spirit's help. We still have to submit to Him. But now it's definitely possible for any follower of Jesus to live a life that pleases and honors the Lord consistently. Not perfectly, but consistently. We've been given a new and better ability to obey God and to please God. On the Day of Pentecost, God put God inside of us to help us obey and please God. Here's one more truth about the Day of Pentecost you should know about. Because of the Day of Pentecost, you and I have...

A NEW AND BETTER EXPERIENCE IN KNOWING GOD.

Jeremiah used a phrase in these verses I realized just this week is found in several places in the Bible, "I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Jer. 31:33 NLT) That phrase or idea shows up first in Genesis when God said to Abraham, "This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you." (Gen. 17:7 NLT) It also appears in the book of Revelation, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them." (Rev. 21:3 NLT) That concept – or a variation of it – shows up in many places throughout Scripture. It's really another way of describing God's mission. Yes, God wants to save or rescue as many spiritually lost human beings as possible. But for what purpose? He wants us to become a part of His family. He wants to relate to us in a personal, intimate way. It underlines the fact that God is the most relational Being you will ever encounter. God is not a "loner" – as the fact of the Trinity – emphasizes. God wants us to know Him and He wants to know us. Literally from Genesis to Revelation, God is creating a people for Himself – an eternal family.

Part and parcel of this new covenant was a more intimate and more deeply personal experience of knowing of God than was possible in Jeremiah's day. When you read the Old Testament, you realize some people really knew God intimately – leaders like Moses and David, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. But apparently that same level of deep intimacy just wasn't widely available to every individual among the people of Israel. All that changed under the new covenant. God said through Jeremiah, "I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already." (Jer. 31:33-34 NLT)

Let's be careful not to misinterpret what's being said there. God isn't saying you will just automatically know everything about God there is to know. He's not saying you'll never have to be taught or to learn about God. God is saying, however, that one result of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life will be a deep, powerful, intimate sense of connection with God. It's the result of two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotions, and will. You truly love God now. You are loyal to God. You desire to be faithful to Him. You want to obey and please Him. Old Testament people didn't relate to God like that? A few did. But now under the new

covenant, God said, “For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already.” (Jer. 31:34 NLT) What’s the difference? The presence of the Holy Spirit who came to us on the Day of Pentecost. I think about what happened to the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Jewish temple at the moment of Jesus’ death. An unseen hand ripped it into two pieces. Meaning what? The way into a personal, intimate experience of God was now open to any and to all. And the evidence of this new, intimate experience of God or knowing of God is an ongoing and total personal transformation throughout our lives: our attitudes change, our behaviors change, our purpose in life changes, our values change, our ways of relating to other people change, our lifestyle choices change. Are you personally experiencing – or knowing God – like that? You can. It’s completely available to you and to me – all because of what happened on the Day of Pentecost.

The Aswan High Dam on the Nile River measures 375 feet high and 11,000 feet wide. Egypt's President Nasser announced the plan for construction in 1953. The dam was finally completed in 1970. The next year, in 1971, there was a grand dedication ceremony and the 12 turbines with their ten billion kilowatt-hour capacity were unleashed with enough power to light every city in Egypt. During the long period of construction the Nile River wasn't completely stopped or dammed up. Even as the reservoir behind the dam was filling up, part of the river was allowed to flow past. After all, the people downstream depended on it. They drank from it; they washed in it; they watered their crops and turned their mill-wheels by it. It was their life. But on that day in 1971 when the water from the reservoir poured through all those turbines for the first time, a power was unleashed that spread far beyond the people down river and brought possibilities to the Egyptians they'd only dreamed of. Well, the Day of Pentecost was like the dedicatory opening of the Aswan High Dam. Before Pentecost the river of God's Spirit blessed the people of Israel and was their very life. But after the Day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit spread out to light the whole world. Nothing was taken away. So much was added. It was like ten billion kilowatts of spiritual power were unleashed enabling the Church of Jesus Christ to be born and then to take the light of the gospel to every tongue, tribe, and nation. Every follower of Jesus in this room is on the receiving end of what happened on the Day of Pentecost.

You've been given a new and better foundation to be forgiven by God. You've been given a new and better ability to obey God. You've been given a new and better experience in knowing God. Thanks be to God!