

Victory in the New Covenant

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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We come to a time of preparation, a time of approaching the Lord's Table. I have some things on my heart to share with you as we do that. I was thinking the last couple days, particularly about the statement of our Lord as He took the cup the night in which He met with His disciples, the night before His arrest, His betrayal was consummated. And He took the cup and said, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood." And that becomes the focal point of His table, the new covenant. And yet I've often thought to myself, "There may be many people who don't understand the meaning of the new covenant. They know the Lord's Table. They know the cup represents His blood and the bread His body, but the new covenant sort of may escape them." And that would be a horrifying thing, were we not to understand the very heart of the Lord's Table which is the new covenant. When Jesus said, "This cup symbolizes the new covenant in my blood," He was really not introducing the concept of the New Covenant. It had been around a very, very long time.

In fact, open your Bible to Jeremiah chapter 31. Centuries before Christ, in the time of the Prophet Jeremiah, ministering on behalf of God to the Jewish people, there came the introduction of a New Covenant. In Jeremiah 31:31, we read, "'Behold, the day is come,' sayeth the Lord, 'That I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which My covenant they broke, although I wasn't husband unto them,' sayeth the Lord, 'but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days,' sayeth the Lord, 'I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be My people, and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them,' sayeth the Lord, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'"

Now in that marvelous passage is the promise of the New Covenant, which Jesus said was fulfilled in Him. He is the fulfillment of that New Covenant.

Now I want you to notice two things in the New Covenant. The first is at the end of verse 34, and it has to do with the forgiveness of sin. The New Covenant carries with it the forgiveness of sin. The second is in verse 33, putting God's Law in the heart. The New Covenant also carries an internal power to cause obedience to the Law of God. So what Jeremiah is saying is, "There will come a New Covenant. It will provide forgiveness of sin and a new divine enabling to keep the Law of God."

You say, "Why was that important?" Because the Old Covenant basically provided neither. The Old Covenant did not provide a single sacrifice which could cause the forgiveness of sin. There was sacrifice after sacrifice, over and over, and never the sense of full release from sin's guilt. And the Old Covenant never provided an inward consistent control and power for the keeping of the Law of God. Both of those realities awaited the New Covenant.

Now I want you to open your Bibles to the New Testament and the 8th chapter of Hebrews. I mentioned to you the New Covenant in the words of Jesus, which, by the way, are recorded by Matthew and Mark and Luke. I mentioned to you the Old Testament passage of Jeremiah, where we read the New Covenant. Now Hebrews chapter 8 brings the two together, making a comparison that is very, very important between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant, showing how, in fact, the prophecy of Jeremiah is indeed fulfilled in Christ.

The theme, by the way, of the Epistle to the Hebrews is really the superiority of Christ. And one of the ways in which He is superior is that He brings with Him a better covenant than the Old Covenant. The New Covenant in his blood, prophesized by Jeremiah, is far superior to the Old Covenant. That is the basic theme of this 8th chapter.

Let's pick it up in verse 6. Speaking of Christ, the writer says, "Now hath He"...that is Christ..."obtained a more excellent ministry, a more excellent service, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." Now here we find the Lord Jesus Christ coming with a more excellent service to God than the Old Covenant provided, a better covenant based on better promises. Oh, it wasn't that the old wasn't good, for it was good, for it was good in its service. It was good in terms of its covenant blessing. It was good in terms of its divine promises, but this is better. Jesus is a better mediator of a better covenant based on better promises. The New Covenant, then, is superior.

By the way, I believe that Hebrews 8:6 may be the apex of the whole Book of Hebrews. It speaks of the most salient reality in terms of Christ. He brings us something far superior to anything that Judaism has even known in the past, and for that matter, anything anyone else has ever known in the past. This is the finest offering that God has ever made to man...the New Covenant.

Now notice verse 7: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." If the covenant of the Old Testament, the covenant given to Moses, the covenant of law had been perfect, had been flawless, had been faultless, had been able to accomplish all that God wanted to accomplish, there never would have been a New Covenant, right? In other words, the very fact that there's a New Covenant says that the Old Covenant needed to be improved upon. It needed to be bettered. And the average Jew is going to say, "Wait a minute. You cannot improve on the Old Covenant." And some of them are still saying it today and holding

tenaciously to the Old Covenant.

But it wasn't faultless, and let me tell you basically why. First of all, the Old Covenant could not provide a final sacrifice for sin. It just repeated and repeated inadequate sacrifices. And every time a person sinned, they had to go back through the whole process again, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, lifetime after lifetime. So the Old Covenant never provided a fitting final full complete sacrifice for sin.

But secondly...and I think we missed this, and this is what I want to emphasize...the Old Covenant never provided an internal control. It never provided a constant monitoring of the heart. It never put inside men a continual principle of life which could cause them to walk the rest of their days in obedience to God. And that's what it was missing. It just couldn't enable people to fulfill its obligation.

In other words, the Law of God was written in the Old Covenant...that is the law of Moses put on tables of stone and then developed from there, and all of the law given to Moses. And that was imposed upon the people, and they were told, "Keep that law. Obey and be blessed; disobey and be cursed." Right? The problem was, it was very difficult for them to obey because the pressure was external, and they lacked the power that was internal. In other words, they were pressured on the outside to obey, but they did not have that enabling on the inside that we experience in the New Covenant.

Am I saying they didn't love God? No. Am I saying they only obeyed legalistically? No. Let me tell you what I am saying. They did love God. In fact, God told them in Deuteronomy 6, the shamah which we saw recently in our studies of Matthew, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." And I believe that many Jews at many intervals in their life did exactly that. I believe they loved God with their heart. I believe there was a depth to that.

David, for example, in penning Psalm 1:19, says, "Oh, how I love Thy Law. It is my meditation all the day." And then later on in verse 111, "Thy testimonies have I taken as in heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Thy statutes always." In other words, it isn't that there was nothing desiring from the heart; it isn't that it was all external, and that is a misconception. The law was external, but there were times when the heart, the deepest part of the man, longed to do that law and obeyed that law.

It was just...and mark this...that the heart was fickle. That sometimes the heart longed for that, and sometimes the heart longed for something else. That's why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." And the Old Testament individual would have moments when his heart was filled with love for God, when that deepest part of his being, that core of his existence, that nature that he possessed, that disposition that was in him, in his inner man, longed

to do God's will, delighted in God. And then there would be other times when his desires would be so sinful, so vile, and so fleshly that you would almost think he was a total schizophrenic.

For example, you have a man like David, who on the one hand writes Psalm 1:19 and pours out a heart of love to God, and "Oh, how I love they law, and oh, how I delight in Thy Commandments," and turns right around and commits adultery, commits murder, multiple marriages, and on and on. And you look at an Old Testament figure like that, and you say, "The guy is a dual personality."

You see, it was the inability of the Old Covenant to control the heart, to put the guard on the heart, to keep the heart. You look at a man like David, and you read his Psalms. You read the 23rd Psalm, a Psalm of tenderness, a Psalm of gentleness, a Psalm of sensitivity. You read the wonderful Psalms of praise that he offers to God. You read Psalm 32, and out of that Psalm comes the brokenness that he feels over sin. And you read Psalm 52, and out of that...51 rather...the brokenness again that he feels over his sin, and all of this tenderness. And you know him as a man who sings sweet songs to God. And then on the other hand, he's not even allowed to build a temple because his hands are covered with blood. He's a massacring marauding kind of warrior. And you say to yourself, "What kind of a consistency or inconsistency is this?"

The Old Testament Covenant...the Covenant of Moses...the external law covenant could not bind the heart because the heart resisted that. And so the Old Covenant could never make of men all that God wanted men to be. It was hard to keep the heart. It was hard to guard the heart. The fault was not with the law.

Notice verse 8...God said...this is a quote, by the way, this whole passage here from Jeremiah 31. The writer of Hebrews is going right into Jeremiah 31 here, the New Covenant passage. And it says in verse 8, "Finding fault with them." It isn't finding fault with "it"...there wasn't anything wrong with the covenant. It isn't that God found fault with the covenant. It is God found fault with them. There was something wrong with them. The law was Good and Holy and just...Paul says that in Romans 7...they just couldn't live up to it. I mean momentarily they could, and periodically they could, and now and then they could, and once in a while their motives were right, but there was no sustaining of that. And that's why the Old Testament saying appears to be such an incredible dichotomy of personalities.

I look at the Old Testament...a person like you does too...and there's a tremendous disparity in many cases. And we wonder how someone who in one moment of time can love God so greatly, and in the other moment of time can cultivate such disobedience. And that is an essential understanding that comes to those who perceive that the Old Covenant did not provide the full enabling. I'm not saying it didn't provide any. It didn't come up to the level of the New Covenant in providing that. And so it was very hard to guard the heart.

And so the Lord found fault with them, and he said this...and here comes Jeremiah 31..."Behold, the day has come,' sayeth the Lord, 'when I will make a New Covenant.'" " I've got to do something new, something better, something that provides one forgiveness on a full final and complete basis, and secondly, enablement to keep the heart so there's not vacillating, but there's consistency." And those two things are the essential elements in the New Covenant.

And so borrowing that great passage out of Jeremiah, the writer of Hebrews delineates for us the elements of the New Covenant. Follow them, would you please? I'll give you a handful of them. Number one...becoming very briefly...number one, the New Covenant is authored by God. "Behold, the day has come," sayeth the Lord, "When I will make a new diathaykay"...not soon thaykay...that's the word...normal word for covenant. It means a promise made between two individuals. Soon thaykay... that's coming together and making a covenant with each other. This is diathaykay...it's when one individual leaves a will or a testament to someone else.

It's not a two-party deal. God didn't agree with us. We didn't say, "Look, God, You do that, and we'll do this, and we'll get together." We didn't say, "Well, Lord, we'll do so many good things, and then You do a few things, and we'll get together on this agreement." No, it isn't that at all. God made the agreement all by Himself...it is diathaykay...it is a will and testament from God. All you can do is receive it or reject it. It is a divine covenant. It wasn't invented by Paul, the apostle. It wasn't invented by the writer of Hebrews, or by Peter, or by Jesus even in His earthly ministry. It is a God-ordained, God-authored covenant, and not one made by bargaining with men, but one made solely and only by God as a will and testament left to men, either to receive or reject. So the first thing we learn about the New Covenant is that it is God-authored.

The second thing...it's unique. The word "new" is the word "kinoss." There is a word for new in time or new chronologically...that's "netoss." We say "neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelism." There's even a party called neo-Nazis. That means new, that's all...that means new in time, new in chronology, new by the clock or the calendar. The word here is "kinoss." It means new in quality, new in the sense that there's never been anything like this qualitatively. This is a superior covenant, not just a new one in time, but a new one in quality. It goes to a level the other one never went to.

In fact, would you notice verse 13? The new one is so qualitatively superior, that the old one is now decaying and growing old and ready to be abolished, ready to be completely obliterated...that word, "vanish away," is used of the obliterating or wiping out of a city, or obliterating an inscription, rubbing it right off the stone, or abolishing a law that was on the books and is taken off and no longer to be on the books. In other words, the Old Covenant is gone. The old mosaic legal system is gone in the sense that the Old Testament presented it. It is replaced by the New Covenant. God's law hasn't changed. His moral standards haven't changed, but He has a new and better covenant. It is qualitatively superior, and it obliterates and cancels the Old Covenant. Therefore, any people still trying to live by the Old Covenant have missed that covenant which alone can provide the proper

relationship to God.

So it is a covenant authored by God. Secondly, it is unique. It is completely distinctly new and better.

Thirdly...and mark this carefully, would you please? It is a covenant made with the Jews. At the end of verse 8, it says that God made this covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. And there you have the two familiar terms, one identifying the northern, and the other the southern. Together they simply mean collective Israel. God made his covenant with Israel. The New Covenant, dear friends, is not and never was made with the church; it is made with Israel. It is a covenant with Israel...the New Covenant is God's covenant with Israel.

You say, "Does that exclude me?" No. God's covenant with Abraham was made with Abraham. But we are blessed, aren't we, by Abraham. And when we come to God in faith, we become blessed in faithful Abraham. We can enter into those covenants. God made a covenant with Abraham...we enter into that by faith. And God makes a covenant with Moses and any person living in the world during the economy of the Mosaic Covenant by obeying the Law of God, by keeping the sacrifices and the ceremonies, by loving God from the heart...could enter into the provision and the blessing of that Mosaic Covenant. It was made with Israel, but others could enter in.

This goes all the way back to Genesis 9, where it says that the people of the world will be blessed in the tents of Shem. God will take His redemptive line through Shem, through the Jews...they will be the fount of blessing...all of us can drink from that fount. But they are the fount...that's what Jesus meant when he said, "Salvation is of the Jews." He didn't mean that only Jews can be saved. He meant that the stream of salvation flows through Judaism, through the Jews...I should say racially through the Jews, not Judaism. And so we are blessed in entering in. And the New Covenant is made with the Jews, and we can participate in that by being blessed again through God's provision made by a Messiah sent through the line of the Jews. So we're not left out, but we must identify the covenant as made with the Jews...it's very important that we understand that.

Now there's another element to this, and this gets to the core...verse 9..."This new covenant is not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them out by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." It's not like the Mosaic...that's what happened when they went out of Egypt. Remember, Moses went up and got the law, and the Mosaic Covenant was established. And the Mosaic Covenant said, "Do this and live. Don't do it and you'll die." It was a covenant...are you ready...of law. It was an external covenant...it was on the outside. It said, "This is what you're supposed to do to please God and be blessed."

There was no security there, because you might do it for a while and then not do it. You might be blessed for a while and then punished. There was no clear conscience. There was no freedom from guilt. And as I said earlier, once in a while, a true heart was offered toward God, and there was

blessing, and then the heart would become fickle and disobedient. And the cursing would come. And there was this fickleness and this vacillation, and it was very hard to guard the heart.

And the end of verse 9 says, "Because they continued not in My covenants." In Jeremiah's passage, He says, "I was a husband to them, but they were an unfaithful wife, like in Josiah." In other words, we had a relationship in that covenant that couldn't stay together; it kept disintegrating. The people drifted away. They had a hard time guarding their hearts, keeping their hearts. "They continued not, and I regarded them not. I no longer regarded them as My people. I divorced them. I sent them away, as it were."

But the New Covenant isn't going to be that kind of covenant. It isn't going to be an external covenant. It isn't going to be like the one that was given to Moses when they came out of Egypt. It isn't going to be the kind of covenant you don't continue in. It isn't going to be the kind of covenant where you belong to God for a while, and then you don't belong to God. It isn't going to be the kind where you kind of fade in and out.

And then the key...and the 5th element of the covenant in verse 10..."For this is the covenant"...here it is..."that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," sayeth the Lord. Here it comes..."I will put My laws into their mind and write them in their hearts. And I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people." And there's finality in that...no more in-and-out stuff. No more being married a while and then divorced. No more vacillation. No more fickleness. "I will put My law, not around them on the outside on tables of stone and pieces of parchment. I will write My law in their mind, and I will write it in the heart, the very core of their being, from which the issues of life proceed. And then permanently, I will be to them a God, and they will be to Me a people." And this is the 5th element of the New Covenant...it is internal.

And I believe this is the introduction to what we know of in the New Testament as the new nature, the transformation of the inner man, a total new being, a total new disposition toward God, a recreation of the inner part of man, what Peter calls the "divine nature" given to us.

Now here's the difference, beloved. In the New Covenant, it isn't that we are to do the best we can to keep the laws of God which are outside of us. In the New Covenant, it becomes the delight of our heart to do the law which is planted within us! Marvelous. Everything goes internal.

Now you must understand, there's one other great passage in the Old Testament that bears on this, and it's Ezekiel chapter 36, and you need to look at it as we draw this together...Ezekiel 36, oh, what a passage...marvelous passage. Now follow carefully...this too is a passage on the New Covenant and stands on a par with Jeremiah 31 as the two greatest Old Testament texts on the New Covenant. Listen to what Jeremiah says...or what Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 36:25, and notice three provisions in the New Covenant. One, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all

your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Do you notice the permanence of that? The first provision of the New Covenant is cleansing. No more vacillating from God to idols. No more vacillating from cleanliness to filthiness. "Once and for all, I will clean you. And once and for all, I will remove you from your idols." Great thought. There's a finality in that cleansing. There's the forgiveness, the full and total and absolute and full kind of forgiveness and deliverance that the old simply look forward to. The first element is cleansing.

The second...verse 26..."A new heart also will I give you. A new Spirit will I put with you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh. I will give you a heart of flesh." Do you see the problem in the Old Covenant? The problem of the Old Covenant was, they had what kind of heart? A stony heart...it did not conform to the law of God. It resisted that confirmation. Once in a while, it could be drawn that way, but it wasn't the right kind of heart. But the New Covenant takes out that old kind of heart that can't be all that God wants it to be, and puts a new heart, a new Spirit...that's the new nature, folks, in Ezekiel 36:26. That's the new inner being. That's the new inner man. That's the new creation that happens in the New Covenant.

And the third thing...first, cleansing, secondly, a new inner being, thirdly...verse 27..."And I will put My Spirit within you...the Holy Spirit." Oh, my. The provision of the New Covenant...God's going to write His law in our hearts. God is going to write His law in our minds, inside of us, internally. How so? By cleansing inside of us, by washing out all that filthiness, by washing out all of that ungodliness.

It's just what Titus 3 says by the washing of regeneration. Regeneration washes out the old. It washes out that old disposition unfavorably toward God. It washes that out...it cleanses that out, and it puts in a new heart, a new Spirit, a new inner being. And then it puts the Holy Spirit in there, and what is the result...verse 27..."That internally you are caused to walk in My statutes, and to keep My ordinances and do them." Great truth, isn't it? I mean we are thrilled with the New Covenant because it goes inside, and it washes out that old, and it puts in that new, and energizes it by the Spirit of God that we, from the inside, are caused to walk in God's ways.

They tried awfully hard to guard the heart in the Old Testament. They tried awfully hard to subscribe themselves willingly and submissively to God. They couldn't do it. It has to come through regeneration. Regeneration brings about voluntary submission to the law of God. And that's why, when you become a believer, there's a new heart and a new Spirit energized by the Holy Spirit. The old thing is all cleansed out, all the filthiness is gone, and all the idols are gone in that new inner being. And the delight of that new inner being is God and God's word and God's law and God's glory and God's purposes.

That's what Paul meant in Romans 7:22 when he says, "For I delight"...and that's a strong word in the Greek..."I delight in the law of God after my inner man." See? Paul had no New Covenant regeneration. And in New Covenant regeneration, that old man was washed out of there. That old

self was washed out of there. And in its place was a brand new heart, a brand new self, and that brand new self delights in God, delights in God's law, delights in God's word, and carries on that delight. It's not a fickle delight; it's a constant delight. And he becomes God's, and God becomes his, and it's settled for good.

And in fact, it says in verse 12 of Hebrews 8, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities while I remember no more." Full forgiveness, complete forgiveness comes along with that new nature, that new creation, that new heart. That's what God gives. And when Jesus lifted up the cup and said, "This is the symbol of the New Covenant," oh, my, what a glorious anticipation that all that difficulty of trying to keep the law of God with a heart that wasn't made new, that wasn't fully enabled. And I'm not saying it wasn't enabled at all; I'm just saying it wasn't fully enabled as in the New Covenant. All of that is over.

And we are included in that...we who have come to Jesus Christ have experienced...Paul said in Titus chapter 3..."the washing of regeneration." That's the cleanse in Ezekiel 36:25..."the washing of regeneration and the renewing"...that's the new heart and the new Spirit..."of the Holy Spirit"...that's the planting of the Holy Spirit. And so we have what Paul writes to Titus really embracing everything that was promised in the New Covenant in Ezekiel chapter 36.

And 2nd Corinthians chapter 3...listen to this...verse 3...I love this..."You are an epistle," he says to the Corinthians. "You are a letter of Christ." One man said it, "You are enchristed." "You are a letter of Christ ministered by us"...listen to this..."written not with ink"...not on the outside...not on parchment, "but with the Spirit of the living God." A terrific thought..."not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

And then in verse 6, he talks about the letter killing and the Spirit giving life, and that the ministration of death...the old law...was written and engraved in stone. How much more glorious is the ministration of the Spirit?

So when Jesus lifted up that cup and said, "This is the time, gentlemen. This is the moment, and I am the event itself that brings about the New Covenant." He was saying something for which they had longed and longed, for that new inner heart, that new Spirit, energized by the Holy Spirit, for the washing out of that old, so that their deepest delight and profoundest joy and greatest desire was the law of God. And that's how it is for all those who've entered into the New Covenant.

To say, "Well, John, if all that's true, why do we sin?" Fair question...Paul says it in Romans 7:23...because there is still another principle warring in our members, our humanness, our flesh, against the law of God. And that's why we say, "Oh, wretched man that I am. Who's going to deliver me from the body of this death?" The inside is all new in the New Covenant, but we still are sort of incarcerated in our flesh, aren't we? Our humanness.

But think of it in the Old Covenant. In the Old Covenant, they didn't even fully have a new inside. So there they were with the same old inside and the same old outside, trying under external pressure from the law of the God and the fear of punishment, and some internal prompting by the Spirit of God, to live out the law of God. And it was not easy...you know it wasn't easy because it isn't easy for us, and we have a whole new inside, right? And they grieved over the inability to fulfill the law of God. We are one up on them in a better covenant. For a while, we still have our humanness until the day we go to Jesus Christ. We still have our humanness. We have, bless God, a new inner man which gives us more constant victory. So the pattern of our life is the delight in God. And the exception is the evil which our flesh brings to bear. And even when we sin...says Paul...we find ourselves doing things we really don't want to do, right? And not doing things that we should do. So that even sin in the life of a believer goes directly against his truest self, his purest desires.

That's what the New Covenant means to us. That's what it provides for us, the ability, because we have been washed of the old. We have been implanted with the new, energized by the Spirit, to live a life that is linked to God inseparably, but never returns to idols, never returns to the filth. And when we do sin, he says in verse 12 here, "He goes on cleansing and sins and iniquities he" what? "Remembers no more." That's the New Covenant...bless God.

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