

A New Covenant  
Jeremiah 36:1-4, 22-23, 27-28, 31:31-34  
Luke 22:19-20

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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Jeremiah 36:1-4, 22-23, 27-28, 31:31-34

In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

Then Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the Lord that he had spoken to him. Now the king was sitting in his winter apartment (it was the ninth month), and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Luke 22:19-20

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'

Jeremiah is a troublemaker. At least that's how King Jehoiakim sees him. The king just wants to relax and enjoy being king. I mean, it's supposed to be good to be the king, right?<sup>1</sup> And if he wants to worship other gods and encourage his people to do things that are perfectly accepted in other countries, things like child sacrifice to an idol, why is this prophet so bent out of shape about it?

The covenant between God and the people says that Jehoiakim is king. That means he *should* lead the people in worshipping God, and living just lives, not cheating the poor, and things like that. But the king doesn't see that he really *has* to do it – I mean, what's God going to do about it? The Northern kingdom got conquered by the Assyrians, but that's not going to happen to *him* and *his* people. *He's* descended from King David. And *he's* very good at playing the great powers of the world – Babylon, Egypt, Assyria – off against each other.

So the king bans Jeremiah from the palace. He doesn't dare kill him, because the man is not only a priest, but God's prophet, too. But he doesn't want to hear from him anymore. At all.

So God has Jeremiah dictate all that God wants the king to hear, and send the scroll to the king. The scroll says that God has appointed Jeremiah to judge "over nations and empires, to dig up and pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant."<sup>2</sup> The scroll says that God will use an empire in that part of the world to destroy the kingdom, and then God will build something in the ruins.

The king's response is this: (takes a piece of paper, and rips it from top to bottom). He physically destroys the scroll, burning it in the fire.

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<sup>1</sup> Allusion to Mel Brooks' *The History of the World Part I* is entirely intentional.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 1:10.

Jeremiah writes it down again. The king is not able to destroy God's word, no matter how hard he tries.

God does all that God said God would do. Jerusalem is destroyed. Jehoiakim's people are led off into exile in Babylon. God does make a new covenant with God's people, and this time with a much larger group. Being descended from Abraham and Sarah is not required. All of humanity is eligible to be part of this covenant. The Apostle Paul tells us that we are adopted, grafted into the family tree of God's people, through this new covenant, the one sealed in Christ's blood.<sup>3</sup>

Truly I tell you, my siblings, we are beloved children of God. That is an amazing thing, more wonderful than anything any of us can achieve on our own.

But...

I don't know about you, but, when I was growing up, there were some expectations of children in my family. We would go to school. We would at least try to do well in school, and to follow the rules. We would show up to church, appropriately dressed. We would behave reasonably appropriately at church, too, or at least not disrupt things too badly. We would stick up for each other, even when we didn't want to.

I'm guessing that there were some expectations for you, when you were growing up.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 11: 17-24, Luke 22:18-20.

As a child, I was never literally asked the question, “Who do you think you are?”. But, when I was asked that question as an adult, it made sense. As a child in my family, there were expectations.

As children of God, there are some expectations of us.

Just like King Jehoiakim, it is not enough for us to just claim our family membership. We have to be aware of those expectations.

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.<sup>4</sup> That means love God more than we love anything else.

Love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>5</sup> Even those neighbors we don’t want to love.<sup>6</sup> Loving ourselves even when we don’t think we deserve it.

Do justice. Not just justice for people who look like us. Justice for everybody.

Love mercy. Not just for ourselves, but for everyone. C. S. Lewis said that “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”<sup>7</sup> Forgiveness isn’t easy. Forgive anyway.

Walk humbly with our God.<sup>8</sup> We don’t get to substitute what we want for what God says to do. We don’t get to decide that God’s promises and commandments apply to some people, and not others. That’s not our call to make. God loves even the people we think don’t deserve it, which is a good thing, if we’re really honest with and about ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 12:29-30

<sup>5</sup> Mark 12:31, Luke 10:25-28.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:29-37

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

<sup>8</sup> Micah 6:8

This is a high standard. It's not exactly the same thing as being a good citizen, or a good American. Occasionally, it may even conflict with what some people see as being a good citizen, or a good capitalist. Lately, it will cause some people to accuse us of "playing politics," when we're doing the opposite.

When that happens, we have to choose. "You can't worship two gods at once ...You can't worship God and Money both."<sup>9</sup>

We won't always be able to live up to these expectations. That's where God's mercy comes in for us, and we can try again.

If we follow these expectations, and let them set the tone for how we deal with other people, then the world around us will be a better place. It doesn't matter whether other people follow these expectations – the world can still be better because of what we do.

So, as we deal with this difficult time, remember who you are.

You are a beloved child of God, a participant in God's new covenant.

That is a wonderful thing. There are some expectations of God's children, and those expectations can be challenging. But, in the long run, they lead to the kind of world that all of us want to live in.

Thank God.

Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:24, *The Message*.