

Pastor Shaun Arndt

March 21, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Wonderfully New

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood—to Jesus be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have something new to tell you. It is entirely, completely, wonderfully *new*. Are you ready? It is new. Here it is: **Your sins are forgiven.** Let me say it again, since it's new: **Your sins are forgiven.** On account of Jesus Christ, God's Son, your Savior, the Lord has removed the guilt and punishment for your every single sin and imperfection.

Now my prayer is that with Spirit worked faith you are thinking to yourself that is *good news* indeed. But perhaps you're also thinking, "Um... Pastor, this isn't exactly *new*. It's kind of the central message of the Bible, that on account of Jesus, God forgives our sins. And when you say the Apostles' creed, you join believers who for 2 millennia have confessed: "*I believe... in the forgiveness of sins.*"

In fact, hearing your sins are forgiven, isn't even brand *new* today's service! As we do at the start of nearly every single worship service, we confessed our sins and heard the pastor announce to you the very words of Jesus: **I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** The prayer of the day and the hymn we just sang spoke of **forgiveness** through Jesus' life, death and resurrection! .

But I will stick by what I said. To hear that your **sins are forgiven** is entirely, wonderfully *new*. I will call that **new**, because that's what God himself does in our Old Testament Lesson from Jeremiah:

**Yes, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant...** If you skip to end of our reading you hear this: **for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.**

That little word *for* is very important! It tells you everything God says about this covenant is based upon, founded on and summed up in those words that tell you God **forgives sins**. The literal bottom line of this **covenant** is *the bottom line*: **The Lord forgives.** Yes, the Lord himself calls it **new**, and we might add **Wonderfully New!**

But it's not new as in *brand new*, in the sense it was never heard of before. No, for the message of God's forgiveness goes back to the beginning.

Already when the first two human beings plunged our human race into sin, God promised Adam and Eve He would send a Savior born of woman who would crush Satan's power and claim on us forgiving sin and rescuing from all the pain and death it brought to the world. Later, God repeated that same promise of forgiveness, promising the Savior would come from Abraham's family line blessing all nations with the forgiveness He would win.

And that means this **new covenant** came long before the other covenant mentioned in our lesson: **It (the new covenant) will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine.**

That other covenant in our lesson was the covenant God gave to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai in the days of Moses. And this gets kind of confusing because that covenant given through Moses is usually called the **Old Covenant**, even though the **New Covenant** of forgiveness Jeremiah speaks about was first promised long before the **Old Covenant!**

And that **Old Covenant** to Israel never replaced the promise of the Savior and forgiveness. Indeed, God gave the **old covenant** to help protect and pass on the message of the **New Covenant**. The special commands and regulations for the Old Testament Israelites were meant to help preserve them as a separate nation, so that the ancestors of the Savior would not be scattered and the promise forgotten and lost.

Many things in those Old Testament laws also served as pictures and previews of what the Savior would be like, or in the words of our lesson, they were tools that helped **each one teach his brother** to **Know the LORD**. The Savior would be like a priest who stood between people and God, He would be the rest bringer and restorer like the Sabbath and the Jubilee, He would be the sacrificial lamb who bore the sins of the world.

Besides this, those laws served the same purpose as the law and commands God has given to all people of all time. Like a mirror that shows a smudge of dirt on your face, the laws showed Israel their uncleanness and sin and the need to trust in the Savior to rescue them. Then those regulations guided grateful believers showing them how they could express their thanks to the Lord for His forgiveness in the coming Savior.

Now since the main reasons for this covenant were to prepare people for the coming of the Savior, the old covenant would only last *until* Jesus came into this world.

*That's* one of the points our reading for **Jeremiah** is making. The time is coming you won't need a temple and high priests and sacrificial lambs to **know the LORD**, but you **will know the LORD** personally, face to face in the flesh and blood Savior of Jesus Christ! In Christ, the invisible **LORD** could be seen, touched and heard!

To keep it all straight, think of it this way: the old covenant at Sinai was just for those olden times, just for the 1500 years from Moses until Christ. But the **new covenant** is *always new...* meaning it applies for every age, for the old testament believers and for you and me today. It is **new** in the sense it will never get old!

And that means you can be sure this promise from God applies to you, yes you, on this day, this place, in AD 2021! **I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.**

Do you see what a stunning truth this is!/? The Lord our God knows all things. He calls the stars by name! He knows the number of every hair on your head and the hairs on the heads of every single of the 7 and ½ billion people on this earth.

But in the **new covenant** He **forgives** our countless sins so thoroughly, removes them so completely, it's as if the all-knowing Lord has no memory of them! **I will remember their sins no more.**

And that is truly **wonderful!** Because every day of our lives we have a new and constant need for this forgiveness! We entered this world with an **old** sinful heart full of selfishness that loves to look out for ourselves. We have a difficulty navigating through a day without wondering about how will this please me, what's in it for me.

We have broken God's commands no less than the Israelites of old. We quickly elevate people, activities and things in our heart as more important than the one true God. We fail to honor his name aright in our prayers and by telling others about him and giving him thanks for his countless gifts. And as Paul confessed in Romans 7, even when we do the right things, want to do the good, sin is right there in our hearts, fighting against it.

How countless must our sins be! And every single sin is an insult and offense to God who requires absolute perfection. Every single one deserves eternity in hell.

But in **the new covenant**, the Holy LORD God says: “What sin? I see no sin. You’re guilt is gone. I do not call it to mind. I will not condemn you. I have made you my people for life and eternal life.”

Is there a sin from your past, or your recent past, that still haunts you, troubles you with guilt and regret, makes you want to hang your head in shame. A sin you just can’t seem to forget? The Lord of heaven and earth, the One whose statement about that sin is far more important than what you think about it... the Lord says He has **forgiven it** and will **remember it no more**.

How can this be?! The answer is Jesus, who earned that forgiveness as the God-man by living in our place, living a righteous and holy life that is counted for all. The answer is Jesus who shed his holy blood on the cross, the **blood of God** to purify us from every sin.

Can you be sure? Yes. Because this **new covenant** is a contract, a deal, a pledge, where God Himself does everything!

You will search the verses of our lesson in vain for any “ifs”. Everything depends on the Lord here. It is the **Lord** who **makes** the covenant. It is He who puts his **law**, which could also be translated his teaching, his Word, into our **minds** and **hearts**. Even our being His people and knowing the Lord, is only the result of Him doing all this.

This covenant is a one sided promise, where God does all the work and gives us all the benefits! Kind of like Jesus’ cross, where He carried our sins and gives us His holiness. Or like Baptism, where we come sinful and unclean already from conception, and the Lord washes us clean with Word and water.

Or like the Lord’s Supper, where we come hungry and wretched with sin, and Jesus gives us His body and blood and the forgiveness and holiness He earned! You see the special tie in to Communion in our lesson, don’t you? You’ll hear it again in a little bit when in the words of institution where Jesus says **this is my blood of the new covenant**.

Truly this **covenant** is **wonderfully new**, where every promise God ever made is signed by Christ’s blood, sealed by his resurrection, and delivered to our hearts through the gospel message of forgiveness in Bible, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

But be warned! We could so easily turn away from this priceless treasure. **Your sins are forgiven**. May we never take that **wonderful new** message for granted, grow bored and hardened toward it. The history of this world is littered with examples of those who did just that tossing Christ aside, forfeiting their share in His saving work.

So may our prayer be that the Lord keeps us in the faith that sees we need His promise of **forgiveness new** every day. May we hunger for and treasure that message of forgiveness more and more as the years go by and find delight in the truth that the Lord never tires of telling us: ‘**Your sins are forgiven**.’ In resurrected delight you will see me ‘**make everything new**.’ Amen.

*The Lord says:*

*Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow.*

*Though they are as red as crimson, they will be like wool. Amen.*

We confess our Christian faith in the Lord's **new covenant**, using the meaning to the second article of the Apostles' Creed on pg. 7.