

Fifth Sunday in Lent

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

Jeremiah 31:31-34

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

31 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. 32 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. 33 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. 34 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.

DIAGNOSIS: A Broken Covenant

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Looking beyond the Marriage Bonds*

God’s people were living like the couple that stays in the same house long after the marriage has deteriorated. The covenant between God and God’s people was broken. In the case of this relationship’s rupture, blame fell squarely on the side of the people and their ancestors. God made a covenant with them long ago, after taking them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt

(v. 32). To show the strength and permanence of the bond he intended to have with them, God even went so far to call himself “their husband.” But then the people’s eyes wandered. They started flirting with other gods, oppressing orphans and widows, and sacrificing their children (Jer. 7:6 & 7:31). They started living as if they were accountable to no one. They started living as if they had no husband at all.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *No Room in Their Hearts for a Husband*

A covenant had been made, but the people weren’t personally invested in it. It was written on stone, not on their hearts (v. 33). Not only was the covenant one step removed from their hearts; God was, too. They talked about God and taught one another about God (v. 34) but their hearts didn’t trust him enough to put him at the center. There were too many other temptations and desires crowding in their hearts to make room for God, their true husband.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Left with No Husband*

But God wouldn’t stand by and let the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah continue forever. Even though the people treated him as a scorned spouse, God was fully aware of their iniquity and sin. He would remember it (v. 34). As long as God remembered their sin, the people would have no hope of reconciliation. In fact, they would have no hope at all. No hope of joy, of peace, or of life itself.

PROGNOSIS: A New Covenant

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Faithful at Any Cost*

The Lord God cares too much about his unfaithful spouse to lose her. So God pledges to make a “new covenant” with his people (v. 31). It will be a covenant so new that no one will be able to anticipate the full extent of its power to reconcile God and

God's people. It will be a covenant made not with stone tablets, but with the life, death, and resurrection of God's own Son. The old covenant, the one the people broke, was made when God rescued the people from slavery in Egypt (v. 32). The new covenant will be made when God rescues the people from sin, death, and the power of the devil once and for all. He will do that through his Son's willingness to give his flesh and blood (Matthew 26:26-28) for the sake of God's people. Once that happens, "after those days" (v. 33), God promises his now-reconciled spouse, that he will forgive her sins and remember them no more (v. 34). With that forgiveness, God's people will receive life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Responding with Faithfulness*

Now the people will have eyes and hearts only for God, their true husband. God will write his law on their hearts (v. 33). His covenant won't be on tablets that they can set aside and ignore anymore. Since the people have seen the extent of God's faithfulness to them in Jesus, their hearts will remain faithful to the author of the new covenant. He will be their God, and they will be God's people (v. 33).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Sharing the Covenant*

The great news of the new covenant isn't only inside the people's hearts. Everyone can take part in it. God declares through the prophet, "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (v. 34). A restored relationship is news worthy of sharing. The faithfulness of God is important for everyone to know. A true reconciliation between God and sinful people, made through the new covenant of Jesus Christ, is life-giving. As recipients and descendents of this covenant, we have the privilege of inviting others to get in on it.