

What is it that makes the New Testament new? Is it because it has replaced the Old? Like getting a new pair of shoes to replace a pair that is worn out and not good for anything? No, that's not what makes the New Testament new. Yes, it is true that some things have come to an end in Jesus, things like the way that Israel was commanded to worship or animal sacrifices and so forth. Their purpose has been fulfilled in Christ. But we still keep the Law, Christians. The Ten Commandments are things that we hold onto, because they are things that will never pass away even in eternity. So no, that's not what makes the New Testament new.

Is it because it's different from the Old Testament? Is that what makes it new? That it's going off in some totally different direction, like I'm going to take an airplane instead of a car because they're two very different things? Or I'll trade in my flip phone for a smart phone, because it's something new and improved? Is that what makes it different? No, that's not the case either. The New Testament is not totally different from the Old. I know that sometimes you'll hear people say things like, "Well, in the Old Testament people were saved by their works, but in the New Testament we're saved by grace." But that's not true. People in the Old Testament were saved by faith just as much as we are. We are all saved by faith in Christ, even if we don't know him yet by name, even if we were still waiting for him. So that's not what makes the New Testament new either.

What makes the New Testament new, Christians, is the power of God to transform lives, to change hearts. Because the Old Testament was something that was outside of God's people. It ultimately left the heart unchanged. This is why if you read the Old Testament you'll very often see Israel going astray, turning away from God, and wandering off into sin so often. Their hearts were still the same. But in the time of the New Testament, God gives a new heart to all who call on Jesus Christ by faith. And that heart delights in the Lord. It wants to follow after him. To put it another way, as the Bible says, in the New Testament God gives the Holy Spirit to all people, and through the Spirit we become the children of God. The Old Testament looked forward to this. It could only wait for this to happen, because the fullness has come only in Jesus Christ. To use an analogy, the Old Testament is the plant, and the New Testament is the flower. And that's what we see happening in our Old Testament reading from Jeremiah today.

Because the prophet Jeremiah lived towards the end of the southern kingdom. During his lifetime, God's people were carried away into exile by the Babylonians. Jeremiah lived to see the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah saw with his own eyes the destruction of the first Temple. And God had sent Jeremiah to proclaim this coming judgment to his people. Jeremiah was sent to call Israel to repent and to turn away from their sins, so that they might avoid this disaster which was coming upon them. But Israel refused to listen. They ignored all of his warnings and brought judgment down upon themselves. That's why Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet. He was sent to warn of coming destruction to a people who refused to listen.

But Jeremiah was not all doom and gloom. No true prophet of God can be. Jeremiah also pointed towards the faithfulness of God, that God was going to keep his promises. And Jeremiah told Israel that they had a future, even if they had to pass through destruction to get there. God would bring them back, and he would restore them once more. And we hear this clearly at the beginning of this section, of which our reading is a part. In Jeremiah chapter 30, we are told: "For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they

shall take possession of it." Though they would be taken away, God would restore them again. Though they would be destroyed, God would rebuild them again. And at the heart of this restoration would be something new, and that's what we see in our reading for today.

Jeremiah says in verse 31: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." So when Jeremiah spoke these words, what God was going to do was still very much in the future. Jeremiah and the people who lived in his time would not live to see its fulfillment. They could only wait for it. They could only watch for it from afar. That doesn't mean that it was pointless for them, as if it had no meaning or as if it had no comfort. Those who believed could still have faith in that promise. They could hold onto it and know that God was going to do it. And holding onto it in that way made them true believers, as much a part of the Church as we are. They were not cut off from this promise just because it was going to happen sometime far in the future. They could know that God was going to do something new, that he was going to bring a new covenant.

And Jeremiah gives us the first reason why this covenant would be new in the following verse, verse 32: "Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord." So this new covenant, then, would not be like the old, the one that was put in place at Mount Sinai. It would be something different. But it would not be different because Moses was somehow evil or because the Old Testament was somehow defective or bad. Rather, it was because they broke the Old Testament. It was a testament that they could not and they would not keep. Even though God was their husband, leading them out of the land of Egypt, even though God had shown steadfast love to them from generation to generation, yet they still kept turning away, even now in the days of Jeremiah. The problem was not the Old Testament, Christians. The Old Testament was good. It was just. It was holy. And God had given it to his people at Mount Sinai as an expression of his love toward them. No, the problem was not the Old Testament. The problem was the people. They were no different than what they were before. From the days of Moses until the days of Jeremiah, they had always been the same. The same old heart, the same old sins, the same old turning away from God. Even while they were at Mount Sinai, they had broken the covenant when they made the golden calf while Moses was still on the mountain. And nothing had changed in the days since then. But this new covenant would be something unbreakable. It would be something which would transform God's people forever. They would never be the same again.

And so Jeremiah goes on to give us another reason in verse 33: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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." And now we see the heart, Christians, of what makes the New Testament new. God would put his Law on the hearts of his people. It would no longer be something outside of them, something external to them. Because in the Old Testament, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. He had written them on the stone tablets which he brought down from the mountain. And the Commandments were perfectly clear. The reason why Israel did not keep it was not because they were somehow confusing or that they lacked clarity. But they always remained on stone. They were not written on the heart. The Old Testament ultimately left the heart unchanged. It was still the same as before.

But again, this is not because the Old Testament was somehow bad or that it was somehow defective. God did not give his people something subpar. Rather, the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus, because only through faith in Jesus could we be saved. Only through faith in Jesus would we become what we should be according to God. Without Jesus, there can be no salvation, and only in Jesus is the gift of the Holy Spirit given to all people. And through that same Spirit, Christians, the heart is changed, and we are made new. So in other words, without Pentecost the Law could only ever be something outside of us, something external and not written on the heart. But now because of Pentecost, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have been made new. Jesus has come, and now the Law has been written on our hearts. And we have been changed from within, so that we are different from what we were before.

And we see this also in the last verse of our reading, verse 34: "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Now, God is not saying that teaching will somehow be useless in the time of the New Testament. He still gives pastors, after all, in order to teach. But rather what we see here is a picture of that gift of the Holy Spirit, of the new heart which we have because of the Gospel. In the time of the New Testament, all will know the Lord. No longer would there be a division between those who had the Spirit and those who didn't. All will have the Spirit. All belong to Jesus. All are one in him. And through Jesus Christ, we have become a new creation, and we follow him with our whole heart which has been changed from within.

And we see this last of all, Christians, in words that we so often hear: "In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" And so we see it clearly. Through the blood of Jesus which is given to us here, we are made part of the New Testament. Because it is the blood of Jesus, Christians, which changes hearts. It is the blood of Jesus which washes away our sin. It is the blood of Jesus which makes us different than we were before. Do you want to be free of the sins which are still holding on to you? There is power in the blood of Christ. You will be free. That is what makes the New Testament new.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, in whose blood we have been set free from sin, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us today and cleanse our hearts, so that we may follow after you in all things and become like you both now and in eternity; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.