Jeremiah 31:34c “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

New and improved! So state the advertisements. It seems as if every year there is a new improved something out there. The problem is that the new and improved something is usually the same old product and the only thing that has changed is the packaging and the claims for the product. Okay, so maybe that laundry detergent gets things 30 percent whiter, but I am not sure that my eyes can tell the difference in how white the white is. And as I understand it, laundry detergent packaging has got to change to become less edible? Silly world!

I have often wondered if the world of the Bible was encumbered by such claims and shenanigans? Do you think in the days of Abraham there was someone selling the “new and improved camel harness?” Or when David was king, do you think he had to put up with a whole slew of fellows coming in to equip his army with the “newer, stronger, sharper swords” or even perhaps “the lighter, more colorful, spear resistant shield”? In the days of Jeremiah the prophet of our text, do you think there were people around promoting “new and improved” gods?

I say all of this half in jest and yet at the same time I don’t think that mankind has changed all that much since those days. I think men have been promoting and advertising ever since the very first product went up for sale and the first dollar was made. I even think that back then, just like today, people would do whatever they could to make the sell. Yes, they might even slightly stretch the truth! And yes, the church has been guilty of working to make the “sell,” make religion exciting, help religion meet your perceived needs rather than working to promote the truth of God.

If you would consider that what I have just said was true of the church even of Jeremiah’s day you might begin to grasp the problem that this prophet of Israel was faced with. Already the people of Israel, for quite a number of years, had bought the lie about the new and improved gods. The Canaanites had successfully marketed their false gods among the Jews, which accounts for much of the godlessness that was going on. Somehow these people were convinced that a false god was better than the true God, but welcome to the nature of the world! Worse yet, these people didn’t seem to grasp that what they were now doing in the name of God was an affront and embarrassment to the truth.

Now if you think Jeremiah felt bad over these conditions, and he did, then just imagine how God felt? After all, He was the one who made the Israelites his people. He was the one who had given them the covenant of the law. He was the one that right now and for centuries, they were in the process of ignoring and denying!

What is amazing is that God does not lose his cool over this. God isn’t like you and me. He doesn’t sit down in a situation like this and figure how to best get even with the ingrates! What God does is show his loving and gracious side. What God does is display patience and forbearance. What God does is extends and renews his promises of salvation. Yep, when people are most ignoring God, God again renews his promises of a new covenant. Let that be our theme for this day. **The New Covenant.**

You might wonder what it was that was to be so wonderful and unique about the new covenant which God was promising. After all, in all the covenants or contracts that we know in the world rarely is one so different from the other that it is worth getting excited over. For that matter, I’ve noticed over the years that once a new contract is in place and all the hoopla over how good it is or isn’t dies down, work goes on as usual because new contracts just don’t bring that much change.

Yet in this particular case it would! Keep in mind what the first covenant of God was. The first covenant was the law of God. The law with its does and don’ts. The law that threatened the greatest of punishment for even the slightest of breaks. It was the law and its threats that God was promising to do something about.

One would think that the Israelites would have been thrilled to hear of this New Covenant that was to replace the old. However it seems that people were filled with too much apathy. The law of God had been harsh on them, so they thought. After all, this law of God covered everything they did: Religious, political, social and home life were all regulated by God’s Law, but in truth for their good. And in truth, just like it is today, no matter which way they turned, they couldn’t get it right. Right from the beginning, when the law was first given, the people proved they couldn’t get it right. God spoke to them at the Mount and they cried out they didn’t want to hear his voice. God had his servant Moses come up on the Mount to get a copy of his Law and right away the people decided to make and worship the golden calf! Nope, they just couldn’t get the Law and what it said right.

Of course, the biggest problem was that the people failed to see the promises of forgiveness and eternal life that God had offered to them, the shadows of hope and forgiveness they needed. That forgiveness was going to be because of the grace and mercy of God. Yet the Jews had rejected the truth of God. Remember, they had bought into the false ideas of new and improved gods. Perhaps we had better take a closer look at that.

What is interesting to note is that the new gods these Jews were following had the same kind of rules and laws that God’s law had. Well, actually, the new gods allowed for much more laxity in certain things. Laxer rules for home and business. The new gods weren’t concerned with cheating, purity, honesty, honor and respect. But the new gods did demand greater sacrifices in time, talents and treasures. Again how interesting! When one actually looks at it the new gods ask for more and take more. The new gods even asked for children to be sacrificed as burnt offerings and this was done. And the new gods allowed sexuality as a part of religion! Sad to say, the Jews were busy practicing religion…it just wasn’t the true God and his truth they were following.

Yeah, the problem of the people was unbelief. Had these people paid attention to the Lord in the first place a lot of their problems wouldn’t have arisen. While it is true that a harsh and overbearing set of rules can be oppressive and can lead to apathy, God’s law was not that! For that matter, God’s law is one of the most unique things the world has ever known.

I say that because God’s law had a two-fold nature. On the one hand God’s law was designed to show mankind how truly sinful they were. God wanted perfect people (like he created) and the law constantly showed how imperfect fallen man is. The Law did just what it was supposed to do.

However, the other side of God’s Law was designed to point out to man the very hope to be found in God. From the very moment of sin God had promised a Savior who would deliver man from sin. In every ceremonial law that God had given the Jews, it was the Savior that was pointed to. When they entered the Temple with their sacrifices and laid their sins on that animal it is what the Savior would do for them. When they killed their sacrifice, it pointed to the sacrifice the Savior would make. The sacrifice was burnt in fire just as the Savior would suffer hell for us. The sacrifice made it possible to enter the Temple just as the Savior would make it possible to enter into fellowship with God. The list could go on and on. The Law of God showed sin but also showed the need of a Savior and pushed you to the hope and wonder of that Savior.

Fact is the Israelites were so wrapped up in doing the outward thing that they forgot the inner message. They forgot that the first covenant was going to be replaced. It was going to be replaced by the Savior who would perfectly fulfill every demand of the Law and become our substitute for sin. The first covenant or old covenant was going to be replaced. It would be replaced with a new covenant, a covenant unlike anything man had ever imagined.

Do you know what is at the heart and core of this New Covenant? There are those who think that such verses like 33 and 34 form the heart and core. Those verses say, **“After that time, declares the Lord, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”** Now pay attention! We are told in the New Testament that the time of Jesus brought the fulfillment of these words. So…have people since then become perfect? Are all people Christians or followers of God? Do all people follow and obey the Lord?

The problem is that too many think the New Covenant is about how people are to live and so they teach and preach obeying God, doing the right thing, or today, themes of social justice and freedom. But really, that is the old covenant, the Law! The new covenant is not about living the right way or doing the right thing, and yet the new covenant is about people becoming perfect but not in the way the world thinks. The heart and core of this promise of God is found in 34c. **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”**

God would bring a Savior who would win for all people the forgiveness of sins. Through this Savior, the forgiveness of sins is offered to the world. God would have his Savior pay for the sins of all the world for all of time. And if you understand these words in the light of the Savior, you would grasp that what God is going to do will become ours when God **“puts his law in their minds and writes it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.”** These words speak to us of faith. In this case, the word for law should be understood to be the idea of “word.” We will have the word and promises of God in our hearts. We will believe and trust in God with that gift of faith that God gives. We will then be God’s people who have all the blessings and benefits God’s Savior provides. Through this Savior, everyone who believes will be considered by God to be perfect in every way. This is what God has promised in Jeremiah. This is what God has brought us in Jesus. It is the very Gospel message that we treasure so much.

It is in Jesus that we are made new people. It is in Jesus that God forgives our sins and overlooks our wickedness. It is in Jesus that you and I receive new hearts and minds. Hearts and minds that desire to follow Jesus and God’s Word. It is in Jesus that we experience and grasp the full wonder and joy of this new covenant that God has offered to all of mankind.

This covenant is different. It doesn’t demand of us. It doesn’t threaten us. It showers us with the grace and love of God. It wakes us from the darkness of unbelief and gives us the light of faith. It takes our hearts stained with sin and washes and purifies them because of Jesus. It wonderfully and powerfully changes us from lost to saved, from blindness to sight, from death to life, yes, from the slavery of Satan to being children of God and heirs of eternal life. This covenant strengthens us with the assurance of salvation. It guides and motivates, comforts and heals!

And the true wonder of this covenant is that it is all through the power and promises of God. It is not about what we do and are…it is about what we believe and know, about our hearts turned to God and his power to save and forgive. About trusting what God has promised and given in Jesus!

The majority of people in Jeremiah’s day may have missed the wonder of what God was promising. I pray that we are not the same way. I pray that we see the wonder of what God has done for us in Jesus! I pray we believe this wonder and with that become the recipients of this great and awesome promise of God. And that we know, “Our wickedness is forgiven and our sins are remembered no more.” Amen.