

Sermon for December 31, 2017
New Year's Eve
"A New Testament"

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"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." (Jer. 31:31) A "new covenant?" What's a covenant? "Covenant" is just not a word that people use much now days. Basically, a covenant was an agreement of contract between two parties. We are familiar with contracts. Two people sign a piece of paper and agree to fulfill certain responsibilities.

In Bible times God drafted a contract with Israel. God promised to be their God and care for them. They promised to be God's people and follow God's will as described in the commandments recorded in the Bible.

The Old Testament in the Bible tells of how the people often failed to live up to their end of the bargain. In Israel God had bought a lemon. But it was not Israel's fault. They were only human. But even though people failed to live up to the contract God never let the people down. There were times that God allowed them to be conquered or experience hardship, but God always preserved them, and they have persevered until this day! God could have said, "You broke the contract! You can just disappear like all the other conquered nations." But God was true until the end.

Another word for Covenant is Testament. That brings us to the passage in Jeremiah that we just read. Jeremiah says that God is drafting a new contract, a new covenant, a new testament. The old

testament was written on stones and the people often ignored those written words. Often, they misunderstood or were led to misunderstand them. The laws were an expression of God's will, yet the people could not see their true meaning.

But this new covenant is different. It is not written on stones that can be misread or ignored. God will write it on the people's hearts. Their own hearts within them will bear witness. The truth of God will be communicated directly to them by the Holy Spirit of God.

And God would forgive their sins! Yes, they will still fall short, but their forgiveness will be assured.

We, the present-day church, are the fulfillment of that prophesy. Jesus came and died for our sins to pay for the price for our salvation, and he promised the Holy Spirit to all his believer. That Holy Spirit communicates with our hearts and helps us to see the true will of God.

Some refer to this as the covenant of Grace; most simply call it the New Testament. It is a contract signed in the blood of Christ who came to be our mediator in this matter. We fail on our part of the contract, but that failure is covered by Jesus' righteousness. The basic contract is the same. God says, "I will be your God and care for you like a good shepherd and you will be my people and follow me like loyal sheep."

We are here today to reaffirm that new testament as this new year begins. Our salvation is not dependant on our ability to fulfill our side of the contract. But we still want to live up to it as much as is humanly possible. And with God's help we can. So, let us reaffirm our relationship with God our Father, Christ our brother, and the Holy Spirit that by grace lives in us.