

Pastor's Message – 10/16/2022  
Jeremiah 31:31-34

A man had an appointment for a physical with his doctor. "You," said the doctor to the patient, "are in terrible shape. You've got to do something about it. First, tell your wife to cook more nutritious meals. Stop working like a dog. Also, inform your wife you're going to make a budget, and she has to stick to it. And have her keep the kids off your back so you can relax. Unless there are some changes like that in your life, you'll probably be dead in a month."

"Doc," the patient said, "this would sound more official coming from you. Could you please call my wife and give her those instructions?"

When the fellow got home, his wife rushed to him. "I talked to your doctor," she wailed. "Poor man, you've only got 30 days to live."

If you had to make substantial changes in your life today in order to avoid death tomorrow, could you do it? Statistics say there's a 9 to 1 probability that you can't. How does lasting change happen?

"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. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors ...  
"(Jeremiah 31:31-33).

A new covenant. A new contract. A chance to change.

Israel was at a crossroads, and whatever choice was made, nothing would ever be the same. Before we're too hard on the "house of Judah" and its apparent and consistent reluctance to change its ways, let's review our own attitude toward change.

Imagine that your doctor calls you up one day and tells you, "I've got good news and bad news. Bad news is that you're going to die within a month. Good news is that if you significantly change your lifestyle right now and for the next month and beyond, you'll live a long and happy life."

Could you make the change? Could you turn on a dime and go another direction with your life? After all, this is a real choice for

many people, so you'd think the odds would be fairly high, especially if you were told that if you don't change, you'll die.

The days are surely coming.

For a long period of time, Jeremiah's prophecies that "the days are surely coming" referred to the imminent fall of Israel and Judah to Babylon. At this point in the narrative, that fall has already occurred. The chosen people have been conquered, taken captive, and hauled off to live in a foreign land for seventy years. The Lord God has instructed the people to build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat, marry and have children, and seek the welfare of those neighbors (their enemies) with whom they are now living.

And the children of Israel are trying their best to do just what has been asked of them. But it is hard. It is hard to live through a time of loss and grief. It is hard to go on. Sometimes it feels as if they are just going through the motions.

I imagine that the words of the Lord God to the chosen people during this period must have "gone in one ear and out the other." That is, maybe they heard the words, but they did not find much comfort in them.

It makes me think about all the times in my ministry when I've tried to speak words of condolence to people who have suffered a tragedy. Someone's family member has died; and I say, "I'm so sorry for your loss." I tell people I will pray for them. I visit, and I try to listen. Maybe a few months later I will offer up some hope by saying, "It will get better one day. The passage of time will help to manage the hurt." But to someone who is in shock, or someone who is hurting deeply, or someone who is facing the end of his or her life, words don't always help.

In today's passage from the prophet Jeremiah, we have more words from the Lord God. And the Lord is saying, essentially, "Hold on to hope. It will get better one day. Time heals all wounds."

One day, the house of Israel and the house of Judah will be restored.

One day, you will be able to return to the land that the Lord gave to you.

One day, there will be a new covenant.

One day. Some day. The days are surely coming.

Could they hear it? Probably not at that point. But perhaps the thing that they could hear was the promise that when that day came, it wouldn't be about words. It would be a promise made on their hearts that the Lord would be their God and they would be the Lord's people, and all would be made well in the relationship once again and forevermore.

This is going to be *more* than words that they might or might not be able to hear. This will be a hope that is written directly on their hearts.

The days are surely coming," Jeremiah says. Regardless of how devastated and hopeless things may seem in the present there is a time coming when the people's knowledge and experience of God will be so intimate that God's will and desires will be imprinted in the very center of their lives.

God's message is not reserved for just a few. God reveals Himself and offers His presence to every person. "From the least to the greatest" he says in verse 34. Old or young, male or female, more educated or less, black or white, gay or straight, God writes His covenant on the very hearts of people. Even before we can name it – even before we may be aware – God has already put His mark of love on each person's heart.

God offers a word of hope, that in whatever circumstances, God offers grace and pours His love into our lives. Paul says much the same thing in his Letter to the Romans,

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:1-5, NRSV).*

Since each person has received God's grace, since each person has been blest in some way, we are expected to share that blessing. But some still need to hear; some still need to see it. Therefore, those who have hope must speak it, show it, and live it for those who have not. Those who have hope and have heard and seen God at work among us have the privilege, the duty and the joy of sharing God's love written on their hearts. Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you," and love means showing, revealing and being Jesus to others. It means telling the story and leading and bringing others to the light and warmth of God's love.

Having God's word imprinted on our hearts, having God's promise written on our hearts means telling and sharing the Good News of how God has blest us and changed our lives and how God can change the lives of those who have no hope – who are searching for answers to life's persistent problems and are at a crossroads in life. Having God's word written on our hearts means living with confidence and hope and seeing God at work. Having a relationship with God means that we share God's word written on our hearts and help others see and hear and know.