

"NEW IS NOW"

LAST SUNDAY I REFERRED TO THE DANGER OF MOUNTING "HOBBY HORSES" IN PREACHING – HAVING PET THEMES THAT SEEM TO REGULARLY EMERGE IN SERMONS.

THIS ISN'T JUST TRUE WITH A SPECIFIC THEME BUT WITH THE OVER-ALL DIRECTION ONE'S PREACHING MAY TAKE.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CONSCIOUS OF ONE SUCH DIRECTION IN MY PREACHING.

IF YOU TOOK A LOOK AT MY SERMONS OVER THE YEARS (*AND I WOULD NEVER – UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES – ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THAT!*), YOU WOULD PROBABLY CONCLUDE THAT THEY ARE GENERALLY POSITIVE IN NATURE.

I DON'T THINK I HAVE A TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON A "*SMACK YOU IN THE FACE BECAUSE YOU'LL SPEND ETERNITY IN HELL IF YOU DON'T SHAPE UP*" APPROACH TO PREACHING.

I CAN THINK OF AT LEAST TWO REASONS FOR THAT.

ONE OF THOSE REASONS SHOULD PROBABLY CAUSE ME TO DO A BIT OF SOUL-SEARCHING, WHILE THE OTHER IS, I BELIEVE, ENTIRELY LEGITIMATE.

THE REASON FOR THAT STYLE OF PREACHING THAT SHOULD BRING ABOUT THE SOUL-SEARCHING IS THAT EVERYONE WANTS TO HEAR GOOD NEWS.

WHEN YOU COME TO CHURCH, YOU'D RATHER HEAR SOMETHING UPLIFTING & POSITIVE AND MY GUESS IS THAT YOU'RE GOING TO BE MORE FAVORABLY DISPOSED TO A SERMON THAT TAKES THAT APPROACH THAN ONE THAT MAKES YOU FEEL PRETTY LOUSY ABOUT YOURSELF.

NOW, I SAY THAT SHOULD CAUSE ME TO DO SOME SOUL-SEARCHING BECAUSE – LET'S FACE IT – SOMETIMES WE ALL PROBABLY *DO* NEED TO FEEL LOUSY ABOUT OURSELVES.

YOU MAY REMEMBER THE PARABLE THE PROPHET NAAMAN TOLD DAVID ABOUT A MAN WHO HAD COMMITTED A GRIEVOUS SIN & WHEN DAVID EXPRESSED TOTAL DISGUST WITH SUCH BEHAVIOR, NAAMAN UTTERED THOSE UNFORGETTABLE WORDS, "*THOU ART THE MAN,*" REVEALING THAT IT WAS DAVID HIMSELF WHO HAD ACTED SO CONTRARY TO GOD'S WILL.

THAT KIND OF BRUTAL HONESTY FROM NAAMAN BROUGHT ABOUT DAVID'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS SIN & RESTORATION TO GOD.

SO IF I'M PREACHING SERMONS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD IN AN ATTEMPT TO JUST TO MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD AND – EVEN WORSE – TO MAKE YOU LIKE WHAT I HAVE TO SAY, THEN I PROBABLY NEED TO DO A BIT OF SOUL-SEARCHING ABOUT BOTH THE INTENT OF MY PREACHING AS WELL AS ITS EFFECTIVENESS.

I THINK THERE'S ANOTHER REASON, THOUGH, THAT MY PREACHING TENDS TO TAKE A MORE POSITIVE APPROACH THAT I THINK IS A LEGITIMATE REASON.

EVERY SERMON I PREACH IS BASED ON THE BIBLE & AS I READ THE BIBLE, THE GOOD NEWS IS IMPLICIT IN EVERY WORD OF IT.

THE BOTTOM LINE – THE END RESULT – THE LAST WORD – IS ALWAYS A WORD OF HOPE, A WORD OF GRACE, A WORD OF LOVE, A WORD OF MERCY.

WE EXPERIENCE THIS EVERY SUNDAY IN OUR WORSHIP TOGETHER.

VIRTUALLY EVERY SUNDAY OF THE YEAR AT EASTMINSTER, WE INCLUDE A “PRAYER OF CONFESSION.”

VIRTUALLY EVERY SUNDAY, AS YOU READ THAT PRAYER & THEN AS YOU TAKE TIME TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR OWN PERSONAL SINFULNESS, YOU MAY – AND SHOULD – FEEL PRETTY LOUSY ABOUT YOURSELF.

I KNOW THAT MANY OF YOU – PERHAPS *MOST* OF YOU – ON OCCASION READ THE WORDS OF THE CORPORATE PRAYER & THINK, “*WHEW! THAT’S PRETTY HARSH! OH, THAT’S NOT ME, THOUGH. THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE GUILTY OF THOSE THINGS – BUT NOT ME. I MAY DO SOME THINGS WRONG OCCASIONALLY, BUT – COME ON – I’M NOT THAT BAD!*”

AND IT IS TO YOU – WHEN THOSE ARE YOUR THOUGHTS – THAT NAAMAN SAYS – “*THOU ART THE MAN – THOU ART THE WOMAN!*”

HE SAYS IT BECAUSE WE ARE – EVERY ONE OF US – SINFUL IN OUR BEHAVIOR.

BUT, YOU SEE, THE REASON WE USE A TIME OF CONFESSION EACH WEEK & THE REASON IT CORRESPONDS SO NICELY TO THE BIBLE IS BECAUSE IT DOESN’T END WITH CONFESSION.

OUR ELDER DOESN’T JUST CALL US TO CONFESSION, HAVE US ACKNOWLEDGE OUR COLLECTIVE SIN, SILENTLY CONFESS OUR PERSONAL TRANSGRESSIONS & THEN JUST MOVE ON WITH THE REST OF OUR WORSHIP.

IT ALWAYS ENDS – AS THE BIBLE DOES – WITH GOOD NEWS.

IT ENDS WITH AN ASSURANCE THAT GOD LOVES US & FORGIVES US.

IT ENDS WITH A WORD OF HOPE.

IT ENDS WITH A “THANKS BE TO GOD!”

IT ENDS WITH US BURSTING FROM OUR SEAT – RISING FROM THE DESPAIR OF OUR FALLENNESS & PROCLAIMING “*GLORY BE TO GOD!*”

NOW WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH THE PASSAGE WE’VE JUST IN JEREMIAH?

IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH IT.

THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST STUNNING, REVOLUTIONARY & LIFE-ALTERING PASSAGES OF THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

IT’S A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF WHAT WE’VE JUST BEEN TALKING ABOUT.

WHEN JEREMIAH WAS CALLED TO BE A PROPHET, HE WAS CALLED TO BRING A MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT UPON THE PEOPLE FOR THEIR SIN.

THE FIRST 28 ½ CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK ARE PRECISELY THAT – WORDS OF JUDGMENT.

THE PASSAGE WE READ LAST WEEK, FROM THE LAST HALF OF CHAPTER 29, FOCUSED ON THE PEOPLE’S EXILE TO A FOREIGN LAND & THE LONG DURATION OF THAT EXILE.

WE COMPARED IT TO OUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC EXILE.

THE END OF THAT PASSAGE, THOUGH, ENDED WITH A NOTE OF HOPE.

THE NEXT PART OF THE BOOK – CHAPTERS 30-33 - WHICH INCLUDES THE PASSAGE WE READ THIS MORNING – IS A SECTION THAT HAS BEEN LABELLED “THE BOOK OF CONSOLATION.”

IN THESE CHAPTERS, JEREMIAH CONSOLES THE PEOPLE IN ONE OF THE DARKEST PERIODS OF THE NATION’S HISTORY.

THE NATION HAD BEEN DIVIDED INTO TWO KINGDOMS – ISRAEL IN THE NORTH & JUDAH IN THE SOUTH. ISRAEL HAD BEEN OVERTHROWN BY THE ASSYRIANS & THE COUNTRY WAS IN RUINS.

A HUNDRED YEARS LATER, IT WAS BABYLON THAT OVERTHREW JUDAH.

BOTH COUNTRIES HAD BEEN DEVASTATED.

ALL SEEMED TO BE LOST.

HOPE WAS GONE.

IT IS IN THAT ENVIRONMENT THAT JEREMIAH’S MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A MESSAGE OF HOPE.

WHAT HE SAYS HERE THAT’S SO STUNNING, SO REVOLUTIONARY & SO LIFE-ALTERING IS THAT A GENERATION WILL NO LONGER BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE SINS OF THEIR ANCESTORS.

TIME & TIME AGAIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WE READ OF THE “*SINS OF THE FATHERS BEING VISITED UPON THE CHILDREN.*”

WHAT GOD IS SAYING, THROUGH JEREMIAH, IS THAT THIS WILL NO LONGER BE TRUE.

FROM NOW ON, EACH PERSON & EACH GENERATION WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN ACTIONS.

THIS WAS A STUNNING PRONOUNCEMENT.

BUT THERE’S MORE.

THERE IS SOMETHING FAR MORE STUNNING, FAR MORE REVOLUTIONARY & FAR MORE LIFE-ALTERING.

IN THESE WORDS, WE HEAR THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A NEW COVENANT.

THIS NEW COVENANT IS SO INCREDIBLY RADICAL THAT EVEN TODAY WE HAVE DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING & ACCEPTING IT.

WHAT WE’RE FAMILIAR WITH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT COVENANTS IS THE COVENANT GOD MADE WITH GOD’S PEOPLE IN THE EXODUS JOURNEY & CULMINATING AT MT. SINAI WITH THE GIVING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

IT WAS AN AGREEMENT – GOD WOULD DO THIS & THE PEOPLE WOULD DO THIS.

IT WAS A *CONDITIONAL* COVENANT – “*IF YOU DO THIS, I WILL DO THIS.*”

“*IF YOU KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS, I WILL BLESS YOU.*”

THAT’S THE COVENANT WE KNOW, ISN’T IT?

AND IT MAKES SENSE.

BOTH PARTIES OF THE COVENANT AGREEMENT HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY & THE COVENANT IS DEPENDENT UPON THAT MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

WHAT GOD SAYS THROUGH JEREMIAH IN THIS PASSAGE IS STUNNING.

IT'S REVOLUTIONARY.

IT'S LIFE-ALTERING.

LISTEN TO IT AGAIN – BEGINNING IN VERSE 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.”*

NOTE THAT THIS IS A MESSAGE FOR BOTH ISRAEL & JUDAH – A NEW COVENANT WITH BOTH THE NORTHERN & THE SOUTHERN KINGDOMS.

AND NOW - A REMINDER OF THE OLD COVENANT – *“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.”*

DO YOU SENSE THE ANGUISH EXPRESSED BY GOD?

TO USE THE ANALOGY OFFERED HERE, GOD WAS FAITHFUL IN THE MARRIAGE BUT THE PEOPLE WEREN'T.

AND NOW – THE NEW COVENANT: *“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;”*

THIS COVENANT ISN'T WRITTEN ON TABLETS OF STONE LIKE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE.

*“AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 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;”*

AND NOW, LISTEN TO THESE CLOSING, STUNNING, REVOLUTIONARY & LIFE-ALTERING WORDS: *“FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, AND REMEMBER THEIR SIN NO MORE.”*

WHAT MAKES THESE WORDS STUNNING, REVOLUTIONARY & LIFE-ALTERING ISN'T SO MUCH WHAT IS THERE AS WHAT ISN'T.

THERE IS THE ABSENCE OF A SINGLE WORD THAT MAKES THIS PRONOUNCEMENT BY GOD SOMETHING THAT WE FIND VERY, VERY DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT.

WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD & WE FIND IT PERHAPS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

NOTICE THERE IS NO “IF” INCLUDED BY GOD IN THIS NEW COVENANT.

THIS IS STUNNING.

IT'S REVOLUTIONARY.

IT'S LIFE-ALTERING.

THE OLD COVENANT SAID, *“IF YOU DO THIS, GOD WILL DO THIS.”*

THERE'S NONE OF THAT HERE.

IT'S ALMOST AS IF GOD REALIZED WE WEREN'T GOING TO KEEP OUR END OF THE BARGAIN & YET HE LOVES US FAR TOO MUCH TO LET US GO.

WHATEVER IT TAKES, GOD IS GOING TO MAKE THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WORK.

IT'S AN OFFER OF NEW LIFE & IT'S AN OFFER OF NEW LIFE NOW.

IT'S A CHANCE FOR THE PEOPLE TO START OVER.

IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A SECOND CHANCE.

BUT IT'S EVEN MORE THAN A "CHANCE" & MORE IMMINENT THAN AN "OPPORTUNITY."

IT'S ALREADY BEGUN.

WITHOUT THE PEOPLE DOING ANYTHING AT ALL, IT'S ALREADY STARTED.

IT'S THE NEW OF NOW.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY TELLS A WONDERFUL STORY OF A SPANISH FATHER WHO WANTED TO BE RECONCILED WITH HIS SON WHO HAD RUN AWAY FROM HOME TO THE CITY OF MADRID.

THE FATHER DESPERATELY MISSED HIS SON & PUT AN ADVERTISEMENT IN THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER.

IT READ, "PACO, MEET ME AT THE HOTEL MONTANA AT NOON ON TUESDAY. ALL IS FORGIVEN! LOVE, PAPA."

PACO IS SUCH A COMMON NAME IN SPAIN THAT WHEN THE FATHER WENT TO THE HOTEL MONTANA AT NOON THE NEXT DAY, THERE WERE 800 YOUNG MEN NAMED PACO WAITING FOR THEIR FATHERS!

HEMINGWAY'S STORY REMINDS US HOW DESPERATE WE ALL ARE FOR FORGIVENESS.

THE NEW COVENANT IS THE ASSURANCE OF THAT FORGIVENESS.

BEFORE WE EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE OUR SIN OR ASK FOR FORGIVENESS, GOD HAS ALREADY GRANTED IT.

YOU REACT AGAINST THAT, DON'T YOU?

THERE'S A PART OF YOU THAT RESISTS THAT MESSAGE.

IT'S NOT MY MESSAGE, THOUGH.

IT'S NOT EVEN JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE.

THESE ARE THE WORDS OF GOD.

TAKE A LOOK AGAIN IF YOU NEED TO.

THERE'S NO "IF" IN THE NEW COVENANT.

GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE.

GOD MAKES THE FIRST MOVE BEFORE WE EVER TAKE A STEP.

NOW THAT SHOULDN'T LEAD US INTO SOMETHING CALLED "ANTINOMIANISM" – LET'S GO ON SINNING IN ORDER THAT GOD MAY HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FORGIVE US.

RATHER, IT SHOULD LEAD US TO TWO OTHER THINGS.

FIRST OF ALL, IT SHOULD LEAD US TO BE SO OVERWHELMED AT THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S GRACE THAT PRECEDES EVEN OUR DESIRE FOR REPENTANCE THAT WE SHOULD LONG TO LIVE A LIFE THAT IS WORTHY OF THAT GRACE.

AND SECONDLY, IT SHOULD CAUSE US TO FOLLOW SUIT IN OUR OWN DEALINGS WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE WRONGED US – EXTENDING FORGIVENESS BEFORE IT'S EVEN ASKED FOR.

THE THOUGHT OF THAT IS STUNNING.

**IT'S REVOLUTIONARY.**

**IT'S LIFE-ALTERING.**

**IT'S THE NEW COVENANT & IT'S AVAILABLE NOW.**

**THE NEW OF NOW IS YOURS.**

**THAT'S ABOUT AS UPLIFTING A MESSAGE AS THERE IS.**

**YOU CAN'T AVOID IT OR DENY IT OR PREACH AROUND IT.**

**IT'S GOOD NEWS & IT'S RIGHT THERE IN THE BIBLE.**

**IF THAT'S A HOBBY HORSE, LET'S JUMP ON & RIDE IT TOGETHER! AMEN.**

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