

Wilderness Wisdom – The New Covenant©

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Micah 6:6-8; Luke 22:14-20 April 2, 2017 Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

Last week we talked about God's covenants made with the people of Israel – the chosen people. God made covenant promises with Abraham and when Abraham just could not believe that God intended for him and Sara to have a child at their ripe old age, God showed him a sign.

He actually "cut" a covenant as he had Abraham cut animals in half (all but the birds) and line them opposite each other. Then God had Abraham fall into a deep sleep and dream about the future. How his descendants would have many problems and heartache, how they would be slaves for 400 years, yet they would exist and they would be God's people.

And as a symbol of God's signature, sealing the deal, God passed a pot of fire through the middle, between the cut animals, symbolizing a "cutting of a covenant."

Aren't you glad we don't have to use that practice today? It sounds kind of bloody, huh? The Old Testament is full of bloody stories. Blood sacrifices of animals. We don't really like thinking too much about blood do we? You can read about that story in Genesis, chapter 15.

We've also talked about how God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, written on stone tablets, given as God's rules for living and for being blessed and happy. But it all went south when Moses came down from the mountain and found the offensive things the people had done.

They could not wait for Moses to come back. They thought he had left them. Apparently if humans don't have God to bow down to, we will make a god to bow down to. That's what the people did. They took off all their jewelry, melted it down and made themselves a golden calf to worship.

So, here comes Moses thundering down the mountain with the stone tablets. Remember the first commandment? You shall have no other gods before me? Whoa! The people are now in big, big trouble!

God was angry. Moses was angry. What were the people thinking? But Moses interceded between the people and God, and God gave them another chance. That's what we constantly learn about God, our Creator, our heavenly Father. God is a God of second chances. And third chances – and even more.

Moses then went back up the mountain and came back a second time with new stone tablets, with the Ten Commandments. The first ones had been smashed when Moses saw what the people had done.

Of course, the people still had a hard time following and obeying. Don't you think God must have been weary with these people who could not seem to trust, or obey, or get anything right much of the time?

But now we hear these beautiful words of promise from God through the prophet Jeremiah. "No longer shall my people 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; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

This covenant won't be the same as when I took my people by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Now 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."

Now, this covenant, this knowledge of the Lord will be planted in their hearts. God is so determined to have these people as his own people that he is just going to put it all in them and stop waiting for them to get it.

I think it really speaks to how much God's loves his people, don't you? It's like God says – I'll try this and this and if it doesn't work then I will just make it easy for them. I want them to know me and love me.

But wait. Even that didn't fully work, did it? We know that the people still turned away. There is much more left in the Old Testament that shows us that no matter what the prophets said, or what God did, the people just seemed lost and something more was needed.

And that something more was prophesied for years until finally one night in a little town called Bethlehem, (which means "House of Bread") a baby was born to a young woman and a man who was a carpenter. They followed the instructions they had been given by an angel and named this baby Jesus. His name means "The one who saves."

And Jesus would grow in knowledge and stature and would grow into his purpose for being on earth. His purpose was to reveal to the people how much God loves them. His purpose was to fulfill the scriptures of old. His purpose was to save God's people from their sin and disobedience. His purpose was to usher in the kingdom of God. His purpose was to conquer death that had control over humanity, because of sin.

He is Jesus, the Son of God. He is the "New Covenant" sent by God – a loving Creator who saw that no one could conquer living totally without sin. And He was God's solution. To send his own son to do what the people could not do – to save themselves from their sin; from themselves.

Unfortunately, this New Covenant also required the shedding of blood. This new covenant was based – instead of the sacrifice of the blood of animals – it was actually dependent on the blood of the Son of God.

No longer would God require lambs to be slaughtered on the altar and their blood to be given. Now, God gives the life of his own Son – God sent Jesus to be that lamb – the Lamb of God, the paschal lamb, the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

I was saying at bible study the other night that I find it interesting and disappointing that the hymns we used to sing that speak about the blood of Christ Jesus that was shed for us – for the forgiveness of sin – most of those hymns have been removed from our hymnal.

So, what do you suppose that means? Are we just too sophisticated, too educated, too enlightened to sing about and to honor Jesus' shedding his own blood for our sakes? Are we too weak in the stomach to think about how his blood was poured out for us? It's a gruesome thought, isn't it?

Well, it was a gruesome event that happened for you and me.

Jesus was at the table with his disciples just a little earlier, on the same night that he was arrested. They were celebrating and remembering the Jewish Passover. That's why they were there in Jerusalem. At least that was one reason. It was certainly why the disciples thought they were there. Jesus had asked for someone to go ahead and make the arrangements for the Passover Meal to be observed.

And they were at the table. You know the table. You've seen the picture. All the disciples and Jesus lined up on one side of the table. It's Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper painting. I love that classic picture but sometimes I think it looks sort of staged. Like Jesus said, "Ok, everyone come over to this side of the table to pose for the picture."

Anyway, they were there because they were devout Jews. And it was time for celebrating the Passover. So, they were at the table, going through all the long rituals of remembering and celebrating what God had done to deliver God's chosen people from the bondage of slavery. They were remembering how God had brought them out of slavery and into freedom; into new life with God. Jesus and his disciples went through that meal, that celebration on that important night – so important for the Jewish people to remember what God did for them. It was remembering the covenant God had made as He saved them, set them free from bondage, promised to be their God and that they would be his people.

So, can you imagine the surprised look on the disciple's faces when Jesus veered off from tradition at the end? They were about done for the night's celebration and suddenly he took bread and broke it and blessed it and said, "Now *this* bread is my body, which is broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me."

Imagine the wide eyes looking stunned, first at Jesus, then at one another, then back at Jesus.

And then he took the cup – there had been several cups of wine that night at the Passover meal, but Jesus took an extra cup of wine and held it up and gave thanks and then said, "This cup is the New Covenant – sealed in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Now do *this* in remembrance of me."

What? What is he talking about? Sealed in my blood? More blood? More blood for even a new covenant?

Actually, this blood is way more precious than any blood we read about in the Old Testament.

This blood that was shed is the precious blood of the Lamb of God. It is the blood of the Son of God. It is blood like yours and mine – human blood – yet divine too, because he was not only human but he was God's own Son.

After all the glasses of wine and remembering all that God did to save his chosen people – now we take another glass and Jesus says "Now do **THIS**." This is the new covenant sealed in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

Can you imagine the shock on the faces of those Jewish disciples? Of course it isn't as much shock as what they will endure later in the night and for the next few days.

You see, the new covenant actually is about blood, isn't it? Only this time it's about Jesus' blood. Now God doesn't require the sacrifice – the killing of an animal for sacrifice. Now it all depends on the shed blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is gruesome. It's not at all pleasant. It's not nice and neat. It was horrid. But once and for all, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He sent his only Son to the cross and he planted faith and grace in our hearts so that we would know him and believe. Jeremiah's prophecy has now finally come true.

And now, while grace is a free gift to us, our best response, I think comes from the prophet, Micah. He too, came out of the Old Testament but what God says through him is a perfect response for us as we accept the gift of grace we have been given.

And this is the response:

*What does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8*

That is the best way we can model ourselves after the one who came to give his all for us. Jesus is the New Covenant, given freely from the amazing grace of God. Let us, in awe and deep gratitude keep our focus on the cross of Christ. For through that hard and ugly tree comes our forgiveness; comes great immeasurable love.

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