

MVLC Sermon 17/03/2024

If we weren't so influenced by the Latin language (via our good friends, the Catholics) our bibles would be divided into the 'Old Covenant' and the 'New Covenant' – proper biblical names – but we are stuck with the Latin terms 'Old Testament' and the 'New Testament'.

Naturally, if our bibles were divided Old Covenant and New Covenant rather than Old Testament and New Testament it would help us a lot in understanding this Covenant stuff Jeremiah is talking about today (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Here it is: God says: The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with my people. Nothing like the [old] covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them out of the land of Egypt; That covenant they broke although I was like a husband unto them. This is the new covenant that I will make with my people; After those days, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah is acknowledging that the Old Covenant is broken and he's foreshadowing a New Covenant is coming.

?? Is it possible that something God created is now useless, and obsolete?

?? Could it be that God created something that was never going to work?

Before we go on there's one thing that is exactly the same in both the Old and the New Covenants – in Hebrews (9):..without the shedding of Blood there is no forgiveness – fundamental in the Old and New Covenants.

Let me put it to you that God did create something which is now useless, and obsolete - something which would never work?

Why? More on that in a moment.

We have to spare a thought for these Old Covenant Prophets – like Jeremiah. Jeremiah had to tell the people their sins were intolerable – in this case the Israelites had completely and utterly walked away from God – they had intermarried with the Canaanites and were worshipping their sex gods.

Then Jeremiah had to introduce new things to God's people – can you imagine it today – “hey you people are terribly bad and listen I've got something new for you...”

God told Jeremiah a way of introducing the subject. *Go and buy a giant earthenware pot – the bigger the better. Go in front of the leaders and throw the pot on the ground – smash it in front of them. While you have their attention say this: (are you ready this is not for the faint hearted?) This place will no longer be called the Valley of Ben-hinnom, but the Valley of Death. I am cancelling all my plans for my people and I'll have them killed by their enemies.*

I'll stack their dead bodies to be eaten by the crows and wild dogs. I'll turn this city into a museum of atrocities that anyone coming near will be shocked speechless by the savage brutality. The people will turn into cannibals. Dehumanized by the pressure of the Babylonians, they'll eat their own children! Yes, they'll eat one another, family and friends alike.' This is you, declares the Lord, if you do not acknowledge that you have broken every one of my laws and you are sorry for your sins.

Later on God told Jeremiah to have another go: *God said to Jeremiah go and buy a pair of underpants and wear them for "a while" and do not wash them. A "long time" went by.*

Then God spoke to Jeremiah again. Now your take underpants off and go and hide them under a pile of rocks and leave them there for "a while".

We don't know how long all this took but it says after the underpants that had been worn by Jeremiah, that had never been washed, that had been hidden in the rocks, were well and truly rotten.

Any way Jeremiah was told to say: *These underpants were once tight around my loins – this is how I wanted it to be – you my people, and me – tight – together. Now look they are rotten –This is you, declares the Lord, if you do not acknowledge that you have broken every one of my laws and you are sorry for your sins.*

Of course, the people fell on their knees and repented of the evil they had done. Not very likely!

They formed a committee to plan the worst death possible for Jeremiah – but first they threw him in a dungeon – the floor was 'Mirey Clay'.

Jeremiah is saying through God's graphic object lessons the old way is over you are doomed – you cannot obey the Lord – not even for a minute.

The Old Covenant where you obey God and he looks after you it is finished.

The days are coming where there will be a New Covenant – this covenant will be that God himself will fulfill the law for you perfectly – the old will be obsolete – not my words but God's in Hebrews (8).

Here is the heart and soul of the New Covenant:

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people....

I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

The original question can God create something which is now useless, and obsolete - something which was never going to work?

The answer is written: (*Hebrews 8:13*) *By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.*

The Old covenant relied on priest shedding the blood of bulls and sheep and goats day after day to offer the people a kind of restoration with God.

If nothing else the daily ritual might have reminded them of their sins as an innocent animal is slaughtered instead of them.

The New Covenant is subtly and vitally different: (*Hebrews 9*) *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter [God’s presence] by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption [for all who believe].*

We are people of the New Covenant – given to us in The Cup of Salvation.

On that first Passover night, and every night thereafter, there were 4 cups set on the table – each one represents a promise made to the Israelites when God rescued them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 6:6-7.)

The Cup of Sanctification “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

The Cup of Deliverance “I will rescue you from their bondage.”

The Cup of Salvation “I will save you with an outstretched arm.”

The Cup of Praise “I will take you as My people.”

Which Cup did Jesus take at the supper? **The cup of salvation!!**

What shall I render to the Lord for all his goodness to me – I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

The New Covenant is in that cup – the cup of salvation.

That’s why many Pastors are “thingy” about individual cups – especially Pastor Paul and myself. Jesus said “do this” – as he took the cup of salvation – “do this” not that. Seriously, Covid? How many other diseases has there been in history before Covid and we didn’t get them.

I have seen so many people come to church masked to the hilt and then go Coles, or to coffee afterwards with no mask – they hold the stair rails – chat with friends – no worries – but somehow here, in God’s presence, we do that and not “this”.

So, do we chuck out our Old Testaments – the fat section of our bibles?
Of course not.

For those who want to obey God to the letter to be saved the fat section is vital – but they are doomed – they can't do it.

We trust Jesus who has fulfilled every law perfectly for us – so we don't need the fat bit? Right?

No! For us the Old Covenant becomes a guide to live a life of thanks.

For us it is a guide how to give a reasonable, responsible, offering to our God who saves. For us the fat bit is "Heilsgeschichte" the history of salvation - it is a collection of God's promises which lead us to Jesus. From the beginning – the Alpha and the Omega.

For us the fat bit shows us what we can't do – it leads us to Jesus who does it for us. In fact this is the entire purpose of the Old Testament today – it is the entire work of the Holy Spirit – **to show us what we are meant to do – and then show us that we can't do it – then to lead us to Jesus our saviour who has died in our stead.**

The New Covenant - He does it all, he lives and dies for us, we do nothing in terms of salvation – we live a life of thanks and praise.

I know the writer to the Hebrews says the fat bit of our bibles is obsolete – I think it's a bit harsh – but remember he was talking to people literally moving from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant as he was speaking.

We are long time New Covenant people – Instead of saying it is obsolete could we not say the Old Testament is now "repurposed" – "recycled" – now it shows us the seed of salvation from before time – now it shows us our sin and leads us to repent – now it leads us to Jesus - now it shows us how to live a life of thanks. The Fat bit is vital – it has a new purpose.

Slim Dusty sings:

*Looking forward, looking back; I've come a long way down the track
Got a long way left to go; Making songs, from what I know
Making sense of what I've seen; Looking forward, looking back*

We look forward to eternal life with Jesus – the New Covenant.

But we only know where we have come from – what God has been through – we only make sense of the New Covenant by looking back at the Old Covenant.

Lord we thank you for the Old and New covenants – so we can see Jesus was always destined to save us. Help us appreciate your love for the world by as we love the world, Amen.