

Sunday Sermon: March 18, 2018

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Sermon Theme: A Deal Too Good to be True.

- ³¹ *“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.*
- ³² *It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.*
- ³³ *“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*
- ³⁴ *No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

What is the best deal you have ever gotten? Was it a low-low price on a car? Was it a refund or money off because you had a bad experience? Maybe there was something on sale that was ridiculously low. We all have a story when we have gotten a great deal that is almost too good to believe.

On the other hand, we also might have gotten a deal that seems so good at the time, but we realize later that it wasn't so good. Maybe it was a scam, maybe it wasn't as good a price as we thought, maybe the product wasn't what we expected.

We all want a good deal, but are scared when the deal seems too good to be true. When it comes to “good deals” a healthy skepticism can be a good thing. It helps us make wise decisions and not fall for the scams that are out there.

There is one place that a healthy skepticism is a bad thing. That is with our God. In his Word, God says many things that are too good to be true. He does things that are too amazing to believe. He does these things so that we will throw aside our skepticism and believe in him above all things.

In the Word of God before us this morning, our God makes us a promise about forgiveness that seems too good to be true. Yet, as we look at that promise this morning we will not only see that it is true, but that Jesus has already carried out this promise for us.

We make deals all the time. Most of the time when we make those deals, it is a two-sided deal that is beneficial for both sides. The simplest of deals is the spending of money. In this simplest of deals there are benefits for both the supplier and the consumer. The product or item benefits us and the money benefits the supplier.

We make deals with our children. If you clean the room, we will get pizza later. The clean room makes it easier for mom and dad to see and get around, the pizza benefits the family, but especially the children who really like pizza.

We make deals with our coworkers. If you will do that portion of the work, I will do this portion of the work. In the end both parties, should come out on top by splitting the work so that one person doesn't have to do it all and the other none.

God made a deal, a covenant, with Israel. He repeated this promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and even to Moses. The deal was very simple. “If you will be my people I will be your God.”

The terms were very simple. God would watch over the Israelites. He would provide for them, protect them and bless them above any other nation. In return, the people were to worship and praise God, hold him as their only God and walk in his ways.

This seems like a pretty good deal for the Israelites. We see the benefits for them in what God said, **“I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt.”**

Having someone rescue you from poverty and slavery in another nation would be a pretty good reason to thank someone and to celebrate them, even if that was the only thing they ever did for you. But that phrase about Egypt was really picture language that opened up the scrapbook of God's love for his people. When Egypt was invoked, it was not only about the deliverance from slavery and poverty, but also the protection that God gave to them. It was about the 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the pillars of fire and cloud that led them through the desert, the manna and quail, and then the glorious conclusion of coming to the land of Canaan where God gave them one amazing victory after another.

We certainly see God keeping his end of the deal. But how was Israel in keeping their end. A deal is only as good as its weakest link. The bank can loan us money for a car, but if we can't pay for the car, the deal is worthless and the bank will make sure we know that. If we pay for something with a check that is no good, the person will not let us keep that item. If somebody comes into our business and wants us to do work for them but tells us they won't pay, we'll say no.

A deal is only as good as its weakest link and who was the weak link in this deal? It was the Israelites. Just days after God had shown his power through his final plague. Just days after Israel left Egypt praising and thanking God, there was grumbling and complaining against God as their backs were against the Red Sea with the Egyptians coming for them. They no longer thank God or trust in him, they are demand to go back to Egypt and be slaves again.

Even after God has delivered them from the Egyptian army by parting the Red Sea and has ended the threat of the Egyptians by bringing the waters crashing down. Just weeks later, they come to Mt. Sinai. Moses went up the mountain to gather from God his Law. Moses is gone just a little too long and the people demand that Aaron make them an idol that they can worship as their god.

This is not an isolated incident. Israel continually turned their backs on God and wanted to do their own thing.

There are many people who want that deal that God gave the Israelites. They think they can do better than the Israelites. Maybe as you were thinking to this brief history of the Israelites maybe you thought, "What was wrong with those Israelites? I would do better than those Israelites. I would follow God, I would be good enough. I can earn those blessings from God. I would never grumble and complain or turn from him like those Israelites did."

Although we might think that we would be better, our lives are full of grumbling and complaining, lack of trust in God, and idolatry. We are not good enough to follow this deal. We cannot follow its rules. Think about yesterday, what were the specific ways that you sinned yesterday. Were they in thoughts, words or actions? Were your personal sins, sins of pride, selfishness, sex, or lying? Did we bow down to a false god by trusting in our money or in our self more than God? We sin, just as much as those Israelites. If this were our deal, we would break it in as many ways as they broke it and we would be in as much trouble and expect as much punishment as they did.

We know what comes next right? We know what happens when we break a deal. Let's play a game: What happens when: You don't make your car payments: _____. You don't have enough money at the store: _____. You promise the family to go out for supper, but you don't _____. The workers do terrible work on the remodel _____.

When a deal is broken there is usually a price to pay. Sometimes it is money, sometimes more time and effort, sometimes jail time. Usually the person hurt by the broken deal is angry and upset. The banker doesn't want to give us the car for free if we stop paying. They don't want to talk about lowering the cost of the car. If you are short \$100 at the store, the manager does not come out and offer the items for free. If the builder does shoddy work, we don't ask them to come back and pay them triple the cost.

When a deal is broken the last thing we think about is doing something nice for the other person. We want justice. We want things to be made right, sometimes we may even go to court and have them settle a broken deal.

God had no reason that he should change the terms of the deal he had made with the Israelites. He had no reason to show them love and kindness when they broke his deal. He had kept his end of the deal perfectly. Yet, as God looked at sinful people, not only those Israelites, but also us, he didn't decide that he was going to demand payment. He didn't demand that his injuries be made right again, he didn't demand satisfaction for the many times the people disobeyed him. He did something that seems too good to be true. He broke the deal he had made and he made a new one that is far better than the old. Listen to the terms of this deal. **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."**

God has made a new deal that is so much better than the old. It is too good to be true. God promises that through faith in him, all of our sins are taken away. He will forgive not only the little ones, but all the wickedness that lives inside of us that shows itself in so many ways. God will not keep our sins on file until the time when they are needed. He will remember them no more.

This is not a 2-sided deal. It is a one-sided deal where God does all the work for us. 7 times in this reading we hear God say the work I. God tells us what he will do for us and there is nothing that he expects in return.

This promise of God's grace and mercy is given freely and fully. God makes a deal with us where he is doing all the work. Not only does he make this deal with us, he has already kept the promise. He has carried out his deal with us. Our blessings of faith, forgiveness, life and salvation are sealed for us in the blood of Jesus.

The apostle John tells us, **"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** The Apostle Paul tells us that our God has done what he has promise, **"God reconciled the world to himself, through Christ, not counting man's sins against them."** Just as God says he will do, he has done we are forgiven, we are holy, we are heaven-bound.

Our God makes us a promise that is too good to be true, he carries out that promise through Jesus in a way that seems too good to be true, and he gives to us all the blessings of faith, forgiveness, life and salvation seem too good to be true. Yet all of it is true. Our heavenly Father has promised us that through Jesus, he has **forgiven our wickedness and remembered our sins no more.**