



“A Preview of Coming Attractions”

Texts: Psalm 51:1-12 and Jeremiah 31:31-34

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There is a familiar old maxim that tells us that “you cannot teach an old dog new tricks.” My dog, Buckeye, is five years old, and I think he has learned all the tricks he is going to learn. There is little question that whether we are dogs or people, the older we get the more challenging it is to learn new things – or even accept new things.

I have entered the years of my old dogdom and I notice that I am less interested in learning some new things. My family will tell you that I have begun sounding a bit like the old guy that yells at the neighborhood kids to get off his lawn. I don’t think that it has gotten that bad, but when you are an old dog, you are usually the last to know.

However, I have learned a new trick. I should say that my wife, who is a good person, taught me a new trick. When we are going to see a movie that starts at, say, 7:30 p.m., we try to get to the theater around 7:50 p.m. This allows us to avoid the majority of the commercials and previews of movies that are soon to be released. It works remarkably well. We miss the preview of coming attractions.

The people of Judah, to whom the prophet Jeremiah ministered, could not miss the preview of coming attractions. Jeremiah made it clear to them. He spoke to them with words that resonated in their hearts and spoke to their souls.

The people of Judah had one question on their minds” “Where was God?” The Temple had been destroyed. The Davidic line of kings had come to an end. Exile was the lot for many. “Where was God?”

It never occurred to them, of course, that they had been less than faithful to God. The words of the prophets had held them accountable for rampant injustice, the abuse of the poor, the amassing of power for themselves, their misplaced trust in weapons and leaders instead of trusting in God. The people had wandered away from God. Still, they wondered, “where is God?”

If Jeremiah was tempted to blister them with words of judgment and condemnation, he sidestepped the temptation magnificently. Rather than pounding them with words of verdicts and guilt, Jeremiah speaks to the people of Judah with words of hope and consolation.

God will make a way where there is no way. God will bring hope where there is only despair. God will bring peace in the midst of chaos. God will bring wholeness where there is only brokenness. God will be in action – making a way for newness in the midst of destruction.

Jeremiah offers Judah, not a word of condemnation and denunciation, but the good news that God will act, God will be at work, God will do the work of restoration. The old way is done. A new way is coming.

Jeremiah offers “a preview of coming attractions.”

Through the prophet, God offers the promise of a 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; 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; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

God is promising a new thing – a new covenant – one that does not need to be etched into stone tablets, or posted in classrooms, or made into monuments on court house grounds. This new covenant that God will make will be written on the human heart. It will be as near as our next breath. It will be experienced and lived by all people and no one will be unaware of what that relationship with God is all about.

Tele-evangelists with their snake oil charm will be out of work – glory to God – because everyone will know the Lord. Ignorance of God’s will and way will be a thing of the past. All people – from the least to the greatest – will know who God is and what God expects of us.

And in that new covenantal relationship, iniquity will be forgiven and sin will be forgotten. God and humankind will have a new and different relationship – more intimate, more cherished. Whatever may have marked the disfigured the past will be gone. Everyone, everywhere, will know God and walk in God’s way.

Jeremiah is offering us a preview of coming attractions.

Whether I am at home in Evansville, or in Denver, or Crested Butte, or any of the places I sometimes roam, I hear distress and concern from the people around me. That worry covers a multitude of matters, from the nature of our government, to gun violence in our schools, to the deteriorating condition of our natural environment, to the plight of the poor, on and on and on it goes. These are not inconsequential matters. They are life and death issues in many cases.

And I have had some people say to me, “where is God?” How can God allow beautiful children to be slaughtered in their classrooms? How can God allow the injustice and unfairness of governmental decisions to prevail? How can God allow the poor to be so abused and neglected? On and on and on it goes.

We are, in no small way, like those ancient Judeans. We turned our back on God and went our own way and now we’re sorry we did. We want God to make everything right. We want God to fix it. We want God to clean up our mess.

But, instead, God offers something more. God offers us a new relationship – with God and with each other. God offers us a new covenant – a new agreement – a new relationship.

We catch glimpses of it every now and then. We see the acts of kindness and compassion. We experience the support and encouragement offered by others. We welcome the hospitality and unexpected generosity extended to us by one we hardly know. We cherish the friendship and the camaraderie of those who reach out to us and to whom, we in turn, reach out.

A few weeks back, the Sunday morning flowers were given by a person in honor of two former teachers. You may call it coincidence – as a Calvinist, I’m supposed to have a problem with coincidence – or you may call it serendipity, but the sister of one of those teachers was sitting near the donor. They struck up a conversation that I have little doubt blessed them both.

The signs of this new covenant are very often quite simple. They are signs of newness and freshness. They cheer us and warm us and renew our spirits. They bring light in the midst of darkness and hope in the midst of despair. They are present now and they are coming in new and grander ways.

Jurgen Moltmann, the great 20th century theologian, reminds us: “In the promises, the hidden future already announces itself and exerts its influence on the present through the hope it awakens.”¹ Do I need to remind you that there was once a dead-end, realized in the broken body of a crucified man on a hill in Jerusalem? Everyone thought that was the end of it. But then, on Sunday, there was an empty tomb. God was doing something new.

A new covenant, a new awareness, a new way of living. It’s coming soon to a world near you. Don’t miss it.

For now and evermore. Amen.



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