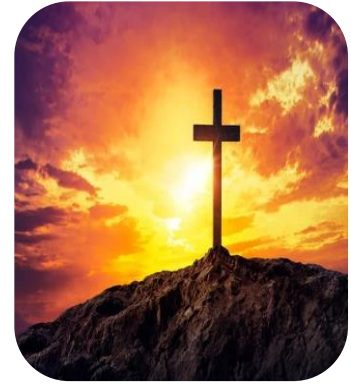




THE ROAD TO CALVARY



WEEK FIVE: IT WAS A NEW COVENANT AND A NEW CHURCH

Most religious writers believe that the words COVENANT, and TESTAMENT are interchangeable. We talk about the Old and New Testaments which are also the Old and New Covenants. A covenant is of course, a binding contract, stronger than just an agreement, between two (or more) parties: a covenant cannot be broken. If *The Road to Calvary* initiated a new covenant, we need to understand the old covenant.

There were in fact a number of covenants beginning with the one God made with Noah after the flood when he promised that he would never again cover the whole earth water, and the rainbow was the symbol of this covenant in *Genesis 9 (particularly see vs 8 to 13)*.

Read: Genesis 12:1-7, chapter 15 and 17:1-14

God made covenants with Abraham (Abram). This is absolutely central to the biblical story. You may recall that God promised Abraham a land, descendants and blessing. This promise to Abraham was that through him all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. God also instituted the covenant of circumcision which was an external sign of God's continuing covenant throughout the generations, as Abraham's dynasty grew. The Israelites arose through the grandson of Abraham, Jacob – also named Israel, the son of Abraham's son, Isaac.

In *Exodus 19 and 24* God established his covenant with the people of Israel through Moses. He gave them his Law, meant to govern, and shape the people of Israel in the Promised Land. *Exodus 20* lists what we know as the Ten Commandments, the framework for behaviour and attitudes. It was not a means of salvation, but it distinguished the Israelites from the surrounding nations as a special kingdom of priests. This was a conditional covenant defined by blessings and curses based on obedience or disobedience (*Deuteronomy 28-29*).

In *2 Samuel 7* we read of the covenant God made with David where God promised a descendant of David would always sit on the throne to rule God's people. It was the

promise of a Messiah, who became the hope for the following generations watching and waiting: we know that Jesus came from David's line.

Basically, the Old Covenant (we will wrap them up as one), was governed by law that prescribed the behaviour God required but the people continually broke this. It contained a sacrificial system that only temporarily removed the peoples' sins. It was the priests who represented the Israelites to God, but the people could never enter God's presence themselves.

One of the great old hymns says:

Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away its stain.

So, where are we on ***The Road to Calvary?*** The Old Covenant leaves us stuck in a bad place, or can we have hope.

Let us move on then to the New Testament or New Covenant, instigated through the death of Jesus at Calvary. This was of an entirely different order. Was he the awaited, long expected Messiah? We certainly needed a way back to God.

The Gospels tell us the stories of the birth and life of Jesus, though very little about his growing up and not very much until he began his ministry when he was about 30 years old, then there is lots of information about his preaching and teaching, his miracles and healings, over a period of about 3 years, taking him on ***The Road to Calvary.***

We studied last week the scriptures concerning the journey to Golgotha. We learned of the cruelties that Jesus went through from the desertion of the disciples, through beatings, through humiliation by the authorities. Yet, as Isaiah 53 tells us, "*He opened not his mouth*". He had the power to summon ten thousand angels to rescue him, but Jesus had set his face to go to Jerusalem and suffer on our behalf. He was crucified at Calvary.

- Does it fill you with amazement that Jesus was willing to do this for you, for each one of us. Such love!
- What is our response to this sacrifice?

On the third day Jesus rose from the dead, our sin was put to death in the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross.

- Do you feel at peace because your sins have been forgiven?

In [Jeremiah 31:31-33](#) we read God's promise of this New Covenant:

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors 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.

"This is the covenant I will make with the people 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.

- What is the difference between the Old and New Covenants that Jeremiah writes about?

[Luke 22:14-20](#) says:

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

- Do you think the disciples had any understanding as to what Jesus meant?
- What does the New Covenant mean for us?

After his resurrection and prior to his ascension, Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit as God the father had promised. The Holy Spirit would fill them with power from heaven.

[Read Acts 2](#)

As the title of this study reminds us, not only was it a New Covenant but it was also a new church.

- How was the difference between the disciples on the night of the betrayal, and on the Day of Pentecost manifested?
- Jesus promised power after the Holy Spirit had come on them. That meant the ability to do the works that he had done. Can you think of examples of this in the early chapters of Acts?

- What was the immediate results on that day?
- How fervent are we in following Jesus?
- Do we seek guidance through prayer, about our role in God's church?

The Road to Calvary was hard for Jesus, yet he never hesitated to go to the end. As we celebrate his death and resurrection this Easter, can we too make a commitment to follow him more closely and be faithful in our walk with him?



Prayer:

Father, may we always remember how much our salvation cost. Help us to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit so that we too, have the ability to do you work.

Amen