



# Sermon Growth Guide

**January 3, 2021**

**Wonder - Into the Promise**

**Jeremiah 31:7-14**

**Key Verse:** Jeremiah 31:10 "Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands..."

**Big Idea:** In Christ we are restored and set to dancing, proclaiming the goodness of God to the ends of the earth.

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## Foundations

Jeremiah chapters 30–33 are all about restoration. While Jeremiah 30 is mostly about restoration to the land, Jeremiah 31 takes us into restoration of the people to the Lord. When we consider our main verse for this week, Jeremiah 31:10, we learn that the people ought to "proclaim the word in distant coastlands" precisely because the Lord "will watch over his flock like a shepherd." 500–600 years later Jesus will say, "I am the Good Shepherd" and the future tense "God will watch over his flock" becomes the past and present tense "God has watched over his flock and is watching over his flock." Later in Jeremiah 31, in verses 31–34, we find an astonishingly clear response to the "how" God will do this. A New Covenant is on the way!

There is little question that Jesus had Jeremiah 31:24 on his heart as he approached the cross. In Matthew 26:28 we read, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The restoration celebrated in Jeremiah 7–14 is given a name in verses 31–34. As we celebrate communion this week, remember and celebrate that God has promised us restoration with Himself for centuries and that long-awaited union arrives in Christ Jesus.

Gathered together with your circle, open your time of study in prayer. Ask the Spirit to guide and guard your spiritual formation, your growth in Christ.

## Understanding God's Word

In the opening of our passage this week, the people of God are instructed to "Sing with joy... shout for the foremost of the nations... make your praises heard." What is the Lord up to in Jeremiah 31:7–14 that is such cause for jubilant witnessing to everyone who can hear?

Moving down Jeremiah 31 to verses 31–34, what is the "new thing" that the Lord promises to do?

## Applying God's Word

Because of God's "everlasting love" and "unfailing kindness" (31:3), He moves to restore His people to Himself (31:7–14) through the establishment of a New Covenant (31:31–34). How can the internalizing of this Good News change the way you view your life this week? What in your life needs re-prioritizing?

## Witnessing God's Word

In Christ we are restored and set to dancing, proclaiming the goodness of God to the ends of the earth. How can your circle help you grow in your excitement about being called to be a proclaimer of the Good News to the ends of the earth? Identify one person you would like to share the Good News with this week. End your time praying that all those identified by your circle will come to receive Christ.

Happy New Year, First Pres! This weekend we conclude our **Wonder** series. The word that is brought to bear on our minds so substantially this week through our Scripture passage is the word “restore.” Restore. Restoration. In its verbal form, ‘to restore’ means to “bring back,” “reinstate,” “return to a former condition,” “repair to the original state.” If a coin is unjustly taken away from its owner it ought to be reinstated in full and promptly to the owner, restoration ought to take place. Do you feel like anything was taken away from you in the year 2020? Do you need restoration?

This is the part of basic communication when I would think of a single home run illustration to show you what restoration looks like, but do you know what comes smashing into my mind? This one question: What in the world does not need restoration? My car is leaking oil on my driveway. My son so faithfully soils his diaper. My wife, Cassie, and I need to remodel our shower so it maintains its structural integrity. I updated my laptop to a new operating system last month and ... CRASH, restoration required. What in the world does not need restoration?

And then there’s the real deep aches of life where you and I so clearly need restoration. The kinds of pain that wake you up at night, or keep you from sleeping, or both. The kinds of brokenness that cause all the vices to rise up and all the anxiety and panic and despair to settle into our hearts.

What in your life needs

restoration? Or maybe you think like I do and ask instead, “What in the world doesn’t need restoration in my life?” So here we go, restoration. I need it, you need it, we need it, and a lot of it. Let’s pray and then let’s receive together the Word spoken by Liza Cunningham, one of the class of 2021 First Pres Fellows (Jeremiah 31:7-14).

Did you catch the rich foreshadowing in the text? Restoration. “I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.” Our passage before us stands squarely in the larger Jeremiah chapters 30-34 block that is explicitly making declarations of restoration again and again.

Up until now, that restoration has been primarily land restoration, restoration of the land. Jeremiah is prophesying in chapter 30 that one day Israel will lose her land, necessitating land restoration. And, of course, this prophecy is fulfilled when King Nebuchadnezzar leads Israel off to Babylon.

Now, in Jeremiah 31, land restoration gives way to another kind of restoration altogether, soul restoration. If land restoration can stand for any restoration that is, at the end of the day, temporal, then soul restoration is talking explicitly of a restoration of eternal value. It’s one thing to restore my car’s oil leak. Eventually, even the most experienced mechanic will be ready to send my car to the landfill. It’s an entirely different thing to speak of a restoration that lasts ... forever. Real, lasting restoration. True restoration. Restoration with God. Restoration that lasts in perfect purity throughout all eternity. That’s where Jeremiah 31 takes us.

Let’s read verse 7 again, “Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, ‘Lord, save your people, the

remnant of Israel.” Now, why exactly ought the people sing and shout and make their praises heard? Well, today we need to zoom out from verses 7-14 to see the fullness of the restoration being prophesied. Verses 3 and 4: “The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful.’” The Lord says, I will build you up again; you will be rebuilt. Restoration. So much restoration, in fact, that you’re going to be compelled to take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful. The church gathers in joyful song and dance week after week because our restoration does not stop with temporal restoration, but continues clear through to eternal, covenantal restoration with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

And did you catch that God calls Israel, “Virgin Israel”? I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt... Those of you who know your Bible did a double take when I read “Virgin Israel.” “Virgin Israel” you asked, “pastor, you must have misread. Because you know that the prophets, indeed, Jeremiah up until now, have likened Israel not as a faithful bride in waiting, but as a whore who prostitutes herself before other gods again and again and again.” And you’re right, but I did not misread, “Virgin Israel.” Do you see what’s going on here? God is saying, “I am your faithful God and I am also your Restorer and I will save you and redeem you and call you by name.” You see, friends, God is also the creator of the universe, the

inventor of gravity, and He is so powerful and so loving that He not only rescues the unfaithful prostitute, you and me, but He restores us as if we had been faithful all along! Behold the overwhelming pronouncement of God that His people will once again be “Virgin Israel.” How much power, how much love is needed to return one’s very spiritual virginity? Scripture proclaims a Resurrection-power God who is characterized most by His faithful, perfect, cosmic-in-size love for His people. Today we adore the One who restores impurity to purity, thanks be to God!

Let’s turn briefly to the life of David to better understand soul restoration. As recorded in 2 Samuel 11, King David prostitutes himself before Bathsheba and in doing so abuses his power. King David is in this moment unfaithful. Unfaithful to God, unfaithful to Bathsheba, unfaithful to Uriah, unfaithful to the entire nation of Israel because when you are tasked to lead a nation your character counts all the more. No excuses, King David. And yet what does God teach us through David’s transgressions? Do you recall David’s cry for forgiveness in Psalm 51? “Against you (God), you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.”

Now, on one level this seems ridiculous. David has just transgressed the entire nation of Israel, a transgression that leaves at least one man dead, one woman widowed, and a nation temporally, functionally, leaderless. But on another level, King David understands what the Bible affirms over and over and over again: as the only truly

righteous One, God is always the most offended party and it is with the most offended party that ultimate restoration is needed. Therefore, you and I need most to be restored to God. Is restoration needed between David and Bathsheba? You better believe it! But that level of restoration is nothing compared to the restoration David needs with God, a sinner before the almighty righteous and pure King of Kings.

Like David, you and I find ourselves echoing David's penitence and cry for help. When you lie, you sin most against God. When you cheat, you sin most against God. When you covet, you sin most against God. Scripture calls your impure deeds sin. And the consequence of sin is death and separation from the lover of your soul forevermore, the wages of sin is more awful than is bearable to tell. And in a very real sense you and I come before God in the exact same position as David found himself in, a sinner before the almighty righteous and pure King of Kings.

This is the part of the story when the cynic, like jesting Pilot before Jesus, walks away. But I pray you listening now will hold on just a minute longer.

Verses 10 and 11: "Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.' For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they." He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd. It is God's good pleasure to watch over His

flock like a shepherd, but how? Aren't we at an impasse? We've sinned, God is holy, the law, which is the covenant of old, has been the way of restoration, but no sinful person can fulfill the law, impasse, cynicism sets in, and the cynic walks away. But God bids you wait and hope. And then 600 years later Jesus stands up before the religious power holders of his day and says, "I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," (John 10:11). He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd.

But how? How can the God up there, the "above-us God" do anything to watch over us who have sinned? Isn't it too late for restoration? Can a spiritual prostitute be made into a spotless bride? You see, we all of us need restoration in every dimension of our lives, but if we cannot receive restoration with our Creator, then all the other "little r" restorations will mean nothing in the end. Is there a way forward for the peoples of the earth in this new year?

Earlier I said we were going to need to zoom out and survey more of Jeremiah 31 to get the full picture of what is going on. Look with me at Jeremiah 31: 31-34: "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. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, '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’s the problem? We need restoration of the utmost kind and we’re caught in bed with our sin, and we cannot save ourselves, despite what we think. Have you ever actually tried to “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps?” However quaint of an idea and dear to the Colorado pioneer spirit, it doesn’t actually work! You cannot be your own savior! If you think I’m tripping over myself right now, please, by all means, reach down and grab your bootstraps, or your ankles, or whatever you’ve got down there, and have a tug. Did anyone just float up off the pew—or the sofa at home? The cynic looks at sin and does one of three things: ignores it, scoffs at it, or presumes to be able enough to “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.” You ignore sin when you say in your heart, “I don’t see anything at all that needs restoring.” You scoff at sin by pretending it isn’t actually that serious of a thing. You presume to be good enough to beat sin on your own by thinking, “well I’m a good person who does good things, sin has no claim on me.” Yet Scripture says it’s there, it’s serious, and you’ll never beat it on your own. Humanity will never conjure up a vaccination from sin, causing us to walk in perfect love of God and neighbor.

We need restoration from beyond ourselves.

I know in the preacher’s handbook it says to only quote Mike Tyson once a year ... and technically it’s only been 10 days, but

technically in another sense we are in a new year ... so I ask you, have you heard about the time Mike Tyson had a run-in with an airline attendant? The airline attendant says, “Sir, you’re going to need to put your seatbelt on now.” “Superman don’t need no seatbelt,” replied the cynical Mike Tyson, who typifies the “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” postmodern skeptic who so falsely believes she doesn’t need any help in the world, much less saving from sin. The airline attendant looks back at Mike squarely in the eye and says without hesitating, “Superman don’t need no airplane. Now put on your seatbelt so these people can get to where they’re going.”

You can pretend that it really is possible to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, but at the end of the day, you’re only kidding yourself and you still need an airplane to fly and you still need a Savior from outside of humanity to enter in to help, to save you from sin, to restore you.

The people of God are implored in verse 4 of Jeremiah 31 to “take up your timbrels and to go out and dance with the joyful.” I have a tambourine here standing in for the ancient Israeli timbrel. And I hold it up and ask this question, “why, my brother, my sister, do you lift your tambourine high?” Is it because you have trusted in the chariots and horses of this world? The chariot that ignores sin, “I don’t see anything at all that needs restoring.” The chariot that scoffs at sin, pretending it isn’t actually that serious of a thing. The chariot that presumes to be good enough by thinking, “well I’m a good person who does good things, sin has no claim on me.” Or do you lift your tambourine high and go out and dance with the joyful because you know that your Restorer lives and he is worthy of your unending praise? Scripture says sin is there, sin is serious, and you’ll never beat sin on

your own.

But look at what else Scripture says, there is unending cause for wonder and joy and dancing “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant ... 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. ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more,” (Jeremiah 31: 31-34).

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took the cup and pouring it out he said, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27c-28) O, brothers and sisters, did Jesus not have Jeremiah 31 deep in His heart as He poured that cup? A new covenant, for the forgiveness of sins.

How will God restore us? How will God make Israel a virgin again? By coming to us in Christ. Jesus did not abolish the law, He fulfilled the law and at its fulfillment He declared a New Covenant. God is a covenant-initiating, faithful, powerful God who delights in restoring you to Himself. “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” (Jeremiah 31:33). Restoration of the greatest kind comes to you and me through forgiveness.

Our lives as witness must  
point to the reality that  
we have been restored,  
that our Restorer lives!  
As people watch you  
live your life this week,  
do they know  
you are a  
restored  
child of

God? Do they know that same restoration is freely available to them?

What does it look like to walk as a restored, forgiven child of God? Well, you're letting go of unrighteousness and you're picking up righteousness. Cassie and I are now through phase one of restoring our shower. Phase 1 was 100 percent demolition. There were walls, floors, doors, impurities that had to go in order for restoration to take place. What in your life do you need to let go of in order to live a more restored life? It could hurt. To remove the tiles I had to take a pry bar and hammer and break.

The later phases are the rebuilding phases. Good materials are brought in. Spiritually, are you committed to growing in the Fruit of the Spirit this year—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? Are you committed to living into our 7 values as a worshipping community? We're launching into a new series next week that will specifically address each one of our values. Are you committed to living for God?

We need all kinds of restoration, of course. But if we are not eternally restored to God, what do we gain in the long run? O, I pray that you be given the courage to stare down your sin this day. Don't ignore it. Don't scoff at it. Don't presume your good works do anything to measure up to real and perfect righteousness. Stare down your sin and place it at the promise of the cross, the only place it can be dealt with and leave you restored before your God. The price of admission? Faith. By faith we walk into the promise of full restoration this new year. It's not a new year's resolution, it's eternal restoration.