

## Looking Forward and Godward: *Contemplating the Promises and Covenants of God*

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Introduction:

Thomas Frey Illustration.

In Psychology, our past shackles our present, hence we are still bound by these events in our life that affect our very present. But the alternative is looking to the future, letting the future—which is spotless and still clear—define the things that we do in our present.

Example: if you want to graduate, if you want to have this or that, if you want to stay healthy, etc.

Covenantal Background:

Likewise, God calls us to “look forward to what lies ahead of us” (Phil. 3:13). In the same verse, it states that we need to forget what lies behind us. This phrase does not mean that our past is inessential, but it contextually means that we do not need to be preoccupied with the things or events in the past because it pulls us away from what God intended for us. It distracts us to reach the goal and forward-looking.

But wait there’s more, in the next verse (v. 14), shows that we need to be intentional in reaching toward the goal for the prize. “To press” means.... In order to gain this prize. What then is the prize? In Greek, using the preposition “of,” meant the same object. Meaning, epexegetic genitively, the prize itself is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hence, our Anniversary team calls us both to look forward and Godward—which both points to Christ. Why? Because looking forward is limited and insufficient in experiencing abundance and spiritual flourishing. That is why, we need to both look forward and Godward to something transcendent—something that is yet to come, and something that is beyond this material world—a biblical-eschatological perspective in journeying life.

Transition:

We know that the “futuristic” way of Thomas Frey is based on a historical survey, research, and other secular sciences. But we need to understand that even in the Bible, God calls us to do likewise. Remember that we are told to “conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27). The term “conduct” means to follow or to live like you are part of this empire or kingdom. Paul is telling the church at Philippi to live as if they are already in heaven. Why? Because all Christians are already kingdom citizens. (Migrating from the Philippines to America; changing your citizenship; therefore, you follow and abide according to the government laws here).

It is in this kind of idea where we will explore today. (Yes, that is just an introduction; I was told that since today is our anniversary, then it means I can preach for 2-3 hours—just kidding). Let us read our main verse, Jeremiah 31:34.

Main Idea:

There are many ways to comprehend the entirety of the Bible. Themes, schema, salvation history, high criticism, descriptive, and others subjective. One of the prominent themes in understanding the whole Bible is through its scriptural covenants. Moreover, SBC theologians advanced that these covenants intertwine with the establishment of God's kingdom.

To be clear, take note of this, the Israelites looked towards the future of the coming Messiah. Once it was fulfilled in Christ, the disciples looked towards the inauguration of the kingdom of God commenced in His death and resurrection. Afterward, the early church, together with the disciples, after the ascension of Christ, looks toward the future return of Christ, His second coming for the completion and consummation of all things. Indeed, throughout the Bible, the people of God are looking ahead, forward-looking, and focusing on what is set before them in the future.

In other words, Israelites hang on to this messianic hope—future-looking, focusing on what is ahead of them—both forward and Godward. It is in this certain future that they still have hope—a living hope.

Now, in verse 31, it speaks about the last days—we are living the last days, which is also known as the days are coming. It was inaugurated during the realization of the “new covenant.” What is this new covenant? We learn in verse 31 that it speaks about the unity of the divided kingdom—they were both included in the covenantal promise.

Then, the next verse (32) states that this covenant will not be the same as covenants to the Sinai/ Mosaic covenant. A different one, meaning the other one will be ended soon. But this old covenant was broken, not just once but many times.

Remember that a divine covenant requires shedding of blood or an offering of life within the covenanted partners to appease the violation of the covenantal relationship. Providentially, instead of the Israelites who deserve to die since they repeatedly broke the covenant with God, it was God who initiated the reconciliation by dying on the cross as the atoning sacrifice to all the sins of the world—which includes the future people, like us.

That makes the essence of Christ's death because Christ is both fulfilling all the duty of the old covenant and opening the new covenant. In order to start a new one, the old must be fulfilled and must have a sacrifice to appease the justice and righteousness of the Holy God. This makes us see that the only person who can both represent humanity to God, and God to humanity—in Christ. Because Christ is fully-man and fully-God (the doctrine of hypostatic union) then He can be both for us and God's representative because He is God (Heb 1:1-3; Col 2:15-20). *God is reconciling to himself.*

Now, this thought makes it clear why the Israelites long for the awaited messiah.

Focusing on verses 33 and 34, understanding that this new covenant is different from the old one. In verse 33, God said, *“I will put my laws in their minds and write it on their hearts,”* this statement alludes to the 10 commandments which were written in the two tablets given to Moses. Being part of the new covenant entails that this law is now in our hearts. These are no longer isolated nor ignorant to us, but instead, we know that these things are part of our daily living.

This also points to Ezekiel 36:26-27, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*

Making it grandeur, God said that He will be their God and those who are part of the new covenant will be His people. In application, the church as now the one who is part of the covenant family makes us realize that we are indeed God’s people. God’s chosen children are no longer limited to a certain nationality, but it now extends to all who will put their faith in Christ—Christ, as said above, the fulfillment and realization of the new covenantal promise.

In verse 34 again, those who are part of the new covenant are given the grace to “know the Lord.” God’s knowledge is no longer alien to us but is now experienced fully and wholly by His people. (Remember last Sunday’s topic about experiential knowledge and the fear of the Lord).

Finally, the gift of forgiveness that God will no longer remember our sins is only possible through the availability of this new covenant. That is why Israelites eagerly waited for the coming messiah because they will be once and for all forgiven. Being forgiven entails being put back to the promised land, having the blessings of God, anyone now will be released from the bondage of sin; those who are part of the new covenant will now have the opportunity to have *shalom*—wholeness and flourishing life.

Remember, that these are already true and happening to us. We, as the church, are the new covenant community, the covenantal family of Christ. These promises that are rooted in the covenant of God are now within our reach. We just need to continue living forward and Godward just as the Israelites.

Outro:

Similarly, as the Israelites looked forward and Godward in the coming of the messiah—fulfilled in Christ, we—therefore, as Christians—also need to do likewise, to look forward and Godward in the coming of Christ for the completion and restoration of all things. In His return, the Celestial city will be brought down, the presence of God is now felt in our faces; no more cry, no more pain, no more depression—it will just be full of joy, love, peace, and wholeness.

That is why, church, we ought to look forward and Godward as we contemplate one by one, little by little the promises of God in this whole year. (I already have the topics for the entire year, until March; I might send it to the Heart Team tomorrow). Moving forward, for my conclusion.

Conclusion:

Looking into Hebrews 12:1-3, it shows us that the idea of “forward and Godward looking” permeates the entire Bible. We are called to “look unto Jesus,” we already tackled that focusing our life on Christ is both forward and Godward. It is in this manner of living individually and as a church that we can truly experience and maximize the goodness of our Lord and Savior.

With the help of the Spirit who leads and points us to Christ, we—UCBC—will be able to stand firm, keep the faith, moving forward while clinging to the covenantal promises of God! Let us contemplate the beauty and the unspeakable joy of God’s faithfulness to our church in pursuing godliness, future hope, and full satisfaction in Christ.

Church, praise be to God our Father who has sent His Son—Jesus Christ—the love of God, the One who has the fullness of God’s fear and knowledge, the very source of our hope, the personification of truth with the Spirit’s illuminating power, we will altogether journey this path called life while we eagerly wait for His return.

Small church as we are, few in numbers, imperfect, flawed, and finite, but we have a God, who is infinite, big, and full of grace. In Him, Christ the head of this church, I am proud to be part of this covenanted family. How about you?