If you are a die-hard football fan, this can be a pretty rough time of year. First of all, there is not much going on. But the little that is happening is often about one thing: guys unhappy with their contracts. For fans, it can be a difficult time of year, as you do not know how good your team is going to be because guys that are making 15 million dollars a year to play a game have decided that is not good enough. We have a hard time understanding that.

But there could be other times when we would agree with someone wanting to renegotiate their contract. A firefighter or police officer, who risks his life every day, who has a contract that says he will make $10,000/year, that does not sound right. They would probably want some renegotiation of that contract.

We look at something similar today. The Bible often talks in terms of us having a contract with God; it actually mentions several. The first contract we had was completely fair, but because of some things we had done, it worked out to be pretty bad for us. So today, studying the words of our text from Jeremiah 31, we look at OUR CONTRACT RENEGOTIATION.

To do that, the first thing we should examine is the old contract and why we would want a new one. The Lord talks about that contract - he calls it a covenant at the beginning of our text. After God rescued the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt and before he brought them into the Promised Land of Canaan, he led them to Mt Sinai where God made a contract with his people. God promised that he would be with the people of Israel, that they would be his people and he would be their God.

But there were conditions. Through Moses, God gave his people all kinds of different laws. God told them that if they obeyed these laws, then he would be their God and they would be his people. He promised rich blessings if they obeyed him – he would watch over them and protect them and fight for them and care for them and provide for them; he would make them the greatest nation on earth, if they obeyed.

If they disobeyed, the story would be much different. They would be cursed in everything they did - famine, disease, defeat by their enemies and ultimately destruction. We might wonder how they could agree to that. But at the time, the people thought it was a great deal and they agreed to it whole-heartedly. They replied: We will do everything the Lord has said. Notice that it was a two-way contract. God clearly said: If you do this, I will do that.

But there was a problem. The problem was not with the covenant, the contract itself. Even the people agreed that the contract was good. The problem was not with the one who gave the covenant either. The problem was with the people. Even though they said: We will obey these laws, they did not. Again and again they broke the terms of this contract. And over and over again God disciplined them for it. You would think that they would change their ways after that. But the same sins and rebellions kept showing up in generation after generation. Jeremiah, living 900 years later, could look around and see the same types of things going on in his day as was happening in Moses' day. And really, so can we. The problem with the first contract was not with the contract itself or with God;
it was with the people.

And the problem is still with the people. That first contract is the one that we were born under. It is the one that says: **Do this and you will live**, as Jesus said. But it also says that **The wages of sin is death**. And there is the problem. We have earned some pretty high wages with our sin because we have not kept up our end of that contract any more than the Israelites had. God says: **Love me more than your friends, your family, your children, your stuff. Trust me, and do not rely on your own understanding.**

**Honor and obey your parents. Bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Lead a pure life in words and actions. Watch your tongue, in how you use my name and in how you speak about others. Do not lead others into sin. Have only holy and pure desires.** But day after day we cross over those lines and break the contract we had with God. And that would have led to our destruction. And that would have been perfectly fair because we broke the covenant, just as Jeremiah says that the people of Israel had. It is not hard to figure out why we would have wanted to renegotiate our contract.

But what is not as clear is why God would want to do it. Most times, people will only renegotiate if they can benefit from it. We may have wanted a new contract, but what reason did God have to renegotiate? He had kept his end of the bargain. He really had no reason to renegotiate - except his love. The new covenant did not really benefit him and it certainly did not come easy. But out of his love for us, he made a new deal, a new contract, a contract that focused on one thing - the cross.

Listen again to the terms of this new contract: **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. They will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.** Notice the difference? The old contract was two-sided; if the people did this, God would do that. This new covenant was one-sided. It was all God. Because we could not keep the old covenant, he brought a new one - one that was sealed in the blood of his Son.

Because we could not keep the terms of the old contract, God sent his Son to do it for us. As our Substitute, Jesus kept those terms perfectly, which counted for us. Because we had racked up so many sins against that old covenant, Jesus became our Substitute also in death, and paid the price that we owed and took the penalty that we deserved. Because Jesus fulfilled the terms of the old contract, God gives us a new one, with very different terms. Through Jesus, the new contract reads: **I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.**

That can be easy to overlook or to take for granted, especially for those who have been Christians their whole lives. But I think we here are where the devil works the hardest. He tries to break us apart and cause divisions. He tries to get us to look to what we do instead of what Jesus has done. He tries to get us to look inward to find assurance of our salvation. And at some point or another, for all of us, he is successful in that. And we can often start to question our faith and our salvation, and be left almost in despair wondering how we can be forgiven, or if we can be saved. That is especially when our contract means so much to us.

How can we be sure? We have a contract! What could be more certain than a contract with God himself? A contract that says that we do not have to do anything, that Jesus has already done it all. A contract that says that because of his perfect life and
innocent death, every last one of our sins is forgiven and forgotten by God. Did you catch that? He does not even remember our sins anymore! What a model for our forgiveness. And because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we have a contract that says that we too will rise, to live forever in heaven.

Let that be your comfort. When the devil tries to lead us to guilt over our sins, we can answer: **I have a contract! God does not even remember those sins anymore.** When he tries to fill us with fear over what God might do to us because of what we have done, we can answer: **I have a contract!** When those doubts come calling, wondering whether God could really love someone like me, we can answer: **I have a contract!** When we face the uncertainty of our future, we can be confident, because **I have a contract!** We have God's guarantee of his love and forgiveness and protection and his blessing in this life, and of an eternal home with him in the life to come.

For a sports fan, the phrase **contract renegotiation** kind of sends chills down your spine as you think about holdouts and ugly debates in the media and lost games. But for us as Christians, it is the best news we could ever hear. We fell far short of the terms of the old contract and the perfectly fair thing for God to do would have been to send us all to hell for our disobedience. But in his love and mercy, God chose to do something else. He renegotiated our contract, based it on the life and death of our Savior Jesus Christ, and sealed it with his blood. Rejoice in your new contract, because it makes you God's own child, freely and fully forgiven, and an heir of eternal life. And never let anything lead you into doubting that until we see God face to face in heaven. And we can be sure that is in our future, because we have a contract. Amen.

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