

Title: Last Will and Testament  
Text: Hebrews 9.15-22  
Theme: One more reason to rest your soul on Christ  
Series: Hebrews #24  
Prop Stmtnt Christ is the mediator of the final Covenant

Read Text:

My daughter Rebecca has worked at a retail store at Somerset Mall for a while, but this past week, something happened that she had not experienced before. While she and another worker were folding clothes, they happened to look up and realized that someone had stolen a dress off of the mannequin that was on display in the front window. Apparently someone had figured out that the clothing on the mannequins do not have the anti-theft devices implanted in them, so the dress could be taken out of the store, right past the security bars and not set off any alarms. We live with so much deceit and shoplifting, that we are used to all of the security measures reflected in electronics being protected in plastic packaging that can withstand a nuclear attack and clothing that has these annoying sensors in them that have to be removed by weaponry from the Pentagon. But, have you ever seen what happens when someone actually tries to steal something from a store and they set off the alarm? If someone does go after the person, they say something like, "I'm sorry, it looks as if the cashier failed to remove the security device from your purchase. Let's go take care of that." I wouldn't do well in retail in situations like that. I'd pull a .30-06 from behind the counter, and inform the thief that unless he wanted to talk to Jesus face to face, that he better get his bacon back inside this store and start repenting.

I tell you that for two reasons: 1) I want to point out the absolute absurdity of political correctness. Our culture considers truth-telling to be wrong. "A thief is a misinformed consumer." No! A thief is someone who steals and should be called a thief and treated as such. The Bible is not a politically correct book. Therefore, Christianity is not politically correct. The Bible deals in objective truth. But, we live in a culture that is so immersed in word-smithing, and subjectivism, that we do not consider the objectiveness of the gospel. Here is what I mean. Conversion to Christ has an objective basis, and a subjective application. The objective basis refers to the foundational, binding, unchanging truths of the gospel. Simply put, the objective basis focuses upon the object of the gospel. The subjective aspect refers to what does this mean to me? How does this affect my life? Objective basis speaks of the facts of the gospel. The subjective aspect refers to my conversion experience, that is, when I believed in the gospel. In our culture, we downplay facts and elevate experience. Therefore, when you consider your own conversion, many of you are plagued with doubts because you are not sure that you did it right. (know what I mean?) "What if I didn't pray the prayer, exactly right? What if I left out an important word? What if I was not as sorry as I should have been?" When you think like that, you think that the solution is to go back and repeat (like shampoo - rinse and repeat if necessary) the experience. But that is not the emphasis of the Scriptures. What is the author of Hebrews doing here to encourage these people? He is primarily concerned with taking them back to the objective basis of the gospel and showing them how it fits together, better than the inner workings of the finest Swiss watch. And his appeal is for us to Look at This! Look how incredible this salvation is! Believe it! There is a subjective aspect to our salvation. It is not merely intellectual. But, the objective basis of the gospel is what drives our belief and

enjoyment! This text does not at first read appear to be emotional, personal, experiential and all the things that our culture likes. It is detailed, exacting, historical, and factual. But, dealing with the details of the gospel provides us with the basis for such sure-footedness so that our experience is rooted in Christ, and not rooted in our experience. The second reason I opened with that story is because theft is a sad reality in our world. We are not surprised when people try to steal things, but what really hurts is when family and friends try to steal from each other. So, in order to put security measures in place for that, we have these things called wills and testaments. As long as the person who makes the will is alive, the will is changeable, revocable and alterable. But, once the will-writer dies, the will is set. Death sets the benefits in motion.

In this text, the author of Hebrews is using the language of covenants and wills to show us, yet another reason why the death of Christ secured our pardon and opened the way for us to live with God as his own. Now, I grant you that the argument here is a bit tedious and detailed. Initially, you may be tempted to think, “Look, I got this already! Christ died for our sins. I believe it. Can we move on?” No, not yet at least. And the reason is because God wants us to understand how he thought of everything when he planned our redemption. He went to great pains to set into motion a salvation plan that is so incredible in its scope and remarkably precise in its details. That is why we have been going back and forth from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from Exodus and Leviticus to Hebrews and we keep going, “Ah, now I get it!” Do you see now why this text is here? 1) God wants you to understand how phenomenally great your salvation is. He wants you to see how confident, how secure, how rich, how deep, how expansive and great our salvation is. Every way you examine it, it looks great. There are now flaws, no holes, no cracks. He not only planned it, but 2) He carried it out. He executed his plan. All along while world empires were rising and crashing, while armies and kingdoms were colliding, while nations and philosophies were scattered like particles of dust by the winds of time into the echoes of memory, there was God, personally, carefully, strategically and intentionally carrying out his plan to redeem you. This means that he 3) left nothing to chance. Your salvation is far too precious to God for him to allow it to be vulnerable to shifting sands of an unmanaged universe. Oh no! In these verses we see that God has always been God and has always done everything according to his pleasure. He just doesn’t tell us everything up front. He tells us all that we need to know, but all that we need to know is not all that there is to know. So, when we look back at the tabernacle from the pages of Hebrews, all we can do is just smile because our pleasure goes so far. But, remember this. This salvation that he has guaranteed is why your homecoming is secure. There are more, many, many more “Ah, now I get it” moments yet to come. We are pressing on with the clarity of the cross, but yet, as Paul says, we still see through a mirror dimly, but one day, face to face! So, ultimately, the author of Hebrews is peeling back another layer for us to see how incredible our salvation is, so that we have even more reason to press on as pilgrims and live in view of the day when God restores this entire creation back to Eden. Let’s quickly review the chapter.

- 9.1-10 - Review of the Tabernacle and a review of the Day of Atonement ritual.
- 9.11-14 - How Christ is the greatest High Priest - ever! (in contrast to the Old Testament High Priest)
- 9.15 Summary and Presentation of his main point - Christ, as the greatest high priest ever, is the Mediator of the New Covenant.
- 9.16-17 - General Background on Covenants - so we understand what God was doing.

9.18-22 – Specific background of Sinai to Christ - so we see even more evidence of God's detailed plan.

9.23-28 - How Christ is the greatest Sacrifice (in contrast to the Day of Atonement sacrifices)

### 1. Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant – (15)

“Therefore” (because Christ secured an eternal redemption (v.12) that purifies our consciences – not just ceremonially purifies our bodies) Christ is the mediator of a new covenant. Here, the focus of the language begins to look toward the future and not just the present. Verses 11-14 fill our hearts with joy as we learn of all that we have right now in Christ. But now the language starts to speak of what is yet to come. This new covenant, in speaking of the nature of the relationship between God and his children, carries with it some guarantees that are truly glorious.

Guarantees. We like guarantees. But, a guarantee is only as good as the person who makes it is able to follow through. Do you remember a couple of years ago when the Lions quarterback (I am not going to use his name because I really liked the guy) guaranteed that the Lions were going to the playoffs? I admire his enthusiasm. I applaud his desire to go out on a limb and attempt to motivate his team. But, even though he was the quarterback, he could not guarantee a single victory (as we were painfully made aware of) much less going to the playoffs. The truth is, we cannot guarantee anything unless God has first made the promise. That is why, when we make promises, we should do so upon the promises of God.

When I told my children that I would be at a game or concert or some event, I would do everything that I could to be there. Sometimes there were circumstances that prevented me from being there, but that is never the case with God. He never double books himself, gets caught by a train, loses track of time, forgets, or has to take care of an emergency. But because God is absolutely dependable, I wanted to be a taste of that to my children by always (if at all possible) keeping my commitments to them. So, the point that the author of Hebrews makes here is that as the mediator of the New Covenant, the eternal inheritance that is promised to us is guaranteed.

The reason for the guarantee is because “a death has occurred.” The end of verse 15 finishes up a loose end that I left hanging in the sermon last Sunday. I explained that the Old Testament sacrifices were like paying interest on a debt, but that the death of Christ paid off the actual debt itself. If that is the case, then how can those who died back in the Old Testament have any hope of eternal life when their debt was not paid? They were forgiven and declared righteous on the same basis as us, except that, when they by faith looked to the sacrifices that God provided as the means for their pardon, they were looking at and believing in the promises of God that were fulfilled in Christ. By obeying from the heart, they were exercising a faith-driven obedience that looked forward to an ultimate sacrifice that would fulfill the picture of the Old Testament sacrifices. Today, we look back to Christ with clarity, where as they believed by looking forward with admittedly less understanding. But, the end of verse 15 points out that when Jesus died, the effects of his death were retroactive back to the Old Testament believers so that they too were included in the cross. Now, here is why this is so dependable.

## **2. A Covenant (like a will) becomes operational at the point of death.** – (16-17)

In order for a will to be read and for the estate to be transferred, there must be a certificate of death, which is a legal document by which a proper authority (often a coroner) certifies that the person in question has indeed died. That is the point of verse 16. But, there is a bit of a twist here. You see, the principle that is established here in verses 16-17 is helping us understand why God set up the Mosaic Covenant the way he did (18-22). When God established the covenant with the children of Israel at Sinai, it was not simply a will (as we know it), it was a covenant. God, as the King, was informing his citizens of the nature of the relationship that existed between them. We have already seen how the book of Hebrews reminds us that if you break a covenant, you die. That is why blood is used in the establishment of a covenant because it helps you understand the seriousness of it.

But there is more. The shedding of blood not only tells you how serious this oath is, but the death that occurs sets in motion the benefits of the covenant, like the benefits of a will are set into motion at the point of death. When you look back at the opening phrase of verse 15, you see what the author of Hebrews is getting at. Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. The new covenant, therefore, came into operation at the moment that Christ died which rendered the Old Covenant obsolete and guaranteed the benefits of the New Covenant. Now, he goes back and revisits the Old Covenant to show how even the ratification of that covenant was all done as a preview of Christ.

## **3. The Mosaic Covenant was ratified by a sacrificial death.** (18-22)

If the death of animals ratifies the Mosaic Covenant, how much greater is the New Covenant because it is ratified by the death of Christ?

This chapter goes back and focuses upon two events from the Old Testament. 1) The annual Day of Atonement ritual and 2) The ratification of the Old Covenant, which we covered in our Exodus study. But, let's review that anyway. Let's look at Exodus 24. God is establishing a covenant with the children of Israel. God called them, rescued them, redeemed them (Passover) and is now laying out the terms of the relationship. The terms of the relationship are pretty involved. This covenant is more than a king and his subjects. This King is the Holy, infinitely Righteous Judge and Creator who is seeking to relate to his own creation that has rebelled against him. How can a Holy God relate to such sinful people? The terms of the covenant deal with that and the answer is very clear: It is only through the sacrificial death of an innocent substitute that can pay for sin. So, not only is the Old Covenant full of laws about what sacrifices have to be offered because of the sins of the people, but the Old Covenant itself is established on the basis of sacrifice. Here's why: The covenant is not contract negotiations, it is the statement of the conquering King, who in this case is the Sovereign and Gracious Lord of the Universe! As God, his word is supreme. If his law is broken, then the severest consequences will occur. Therefore, the covenant is ratified by a sacrificial death. When Moses read to the people the covenant (God defined the terms of the relationship), the people agreed to this, animals were slain, and half of the blood collected was thrown against the altar and the other half was sprinkled on the people. At that moment the blood sealed them and bound them in this covenant relationship. The message is very, very clear. If this law is broken, then a sacrificial death will have to occur as payment for breaking God's law. Of course, his people break the law. So, the

Day of Atonement was built in to the Old Covenant as the annual event in which a sacrificial death (goat) would be offered for the sins of the people. As part of that ceremony, the high priest had to consecrate the altar with blood, just like Moses did it on the day that the Old Covenant was ratified. The Day of Atonement seems to be an annual renewal of the covenant on the part of the people. But, even this was not sufficient to keep the people from rebelling.

The rest of the Old Testament (Old Covenant) is the sad story of the repeated failures of God's people who over and over and over keep breaking the covenant. In spite of God's patience and warning and sending prophets to tell them to turn back to God, they don't. Even in calling them to repent, the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) speak of the day in the future, when God will establish a New Covenant. But for now the people will face the consequences of their rebellion. For the most part, the warnings go unheeded. The people persist in covenant breaking, therefore, a sacrificial death has to occur. So, when we open the pages of the New Testament, we have the yet to be carried out consequential sacrificial death of violating the Mosaic Covenant and the unfulfilled promise of the New Covenant, all of which raises an enormous tension. How can God establish a New Covenant with the people who kept breaking the first one? If the consequence of covenant breaking is death, and they broke the first covenant, then wouldn't they all die? And if they all die, then how can God make a New Covenant when there would be no one left to make that with?

God never misses a thing. When the first covenant was established, God promised on the basis of the sacrificial death, that if the covenant was broken then the people who broke the covenant, would have to die as a consequence. What no one ever expected was for God himself to become one of his own people, and to be credited with their sin, in order to be identified as the law breaker and then die in their place in order to completely satisfy the terms of the Old Covenant. He bound himself to his people on the basis of blood. At the same time, when Christ died, he ratified the New Covenant. He was the sacrificial death that occurred that made the benefits of the New Covenant operative. That means that when Christ died: He fulfilled the Passover Lamb offering, he fulfilled the sacrificial death that ratified the first Covenant, he fulfilled the Day of Atonement offering, he fulfilled the sin offering, guilt offering, and daily sacrifice and at the same time ratified the New Covenant. His wisdom planned every detail. His Sovereign control executed the plan flawlessly. His glorious grace and love was the motivation that carried it through.

Conclusion:

- Our salvation is so precious to God that he left nothing to chance.
- Our salvation is so great, he ordained history around it.
- Our salvation is so complete, that he established a relationship with an entire nation to serve as a limited preview of what he is going to do with people like you from all over this world.

The Old Covenant is very clear: Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. But the New Covenant is even better: With the shedding of the blood of Christ, there is forgiveness of sin, there is the cleansing of our consciences, there is the declaration of righteousness, there is the new, final, forever people of God, there is a payment made, so full and

so free, there is nothing left for me to pay, it is mine for the believing. And because this Covenant was made on the basis of Christ, it can never be broken. I am his because He is mine!