

Title: The New Covenant
Text: Hebrews 8.1-13
Theme: The Superiority of the New Covenant
Series: Hebrews #20
Prop Stmt Christ is a superior priest because he functions within the new covenant.

I was about ten year's old and was in the front yard of my next door neighbor. It was a warm summer evening. Most of the neighborhood kids had gathered for a giant game of "kick-the-can" and it was a blast. Moments like this are just splendid for a ten-year old boy. And I remember thinking, "I wish that I could stay like this forever." As far as I knew, life could not get any better. That was forty years ago. Have I ever wished that I could go back to that time? Not for a second! I had no idea then that the best was yet to come. How could I, at the time that was all that I knew.

This morning, we are continuing our study in the book of Hebrews; a book that received its name because it is a pastoral letter to a group of believers (ethnically Jewish) who needed to be reminded of the superiority and finality of Christ in contrast to Judaism. There are three main arguments that the author makes. 1) Christ offers a better priesthood than what they had under the Levitical system (term refers to the OT priests who came from one of the 12 tribes of Israel; the tribe of Levi). We have been looking at this first point, but there is more. 2) Christ offers a better sacrifice. Our text this morning mentions this, but expands on it in chapter 9. 3) Christ offers a better covenant, which we will examine this morning. You can probably tell that the real theme of this book is Christ! Actually, the hero of the entire Bible is Christ! And I want you to not only know that, I want you to taste for yourself and see that the true joy of your life now and forever is Christ! Christ provides for you what no one else and nothing else can.

Read Text:

If you are fairly new, you have probably noticed what many here have become accustomed to, and that is, the introduction portion of many of my sermons are almost as long as the rest of the sermon. They have grown through the years in direct relationship to my desire to help all of you see how all of the Scriptures fit together in one unified system of truth, in one sovereignly-designed, universally and intricately executed plan and in a way that engages your heart and beautifully explains your life. I want you to see it all so you can believe it all and enjoy it all the way God intended it for you.

The original audience of this letter was Jewish believers. In order for some of the arguments to make sense, we need to understand their history. Their history as a people begins with a man named Abraham, who lived in the city of Ur (map). Abraham, like most of the people in his world, worshipped idols. But, God appeared to him and called him to follow him to a land that he would give to his descendants. Abraham did. God revealed to Abraham that he was making a covenant with him. Now, let's stop for a second and make certain that we all understand what a covenant is. A covenant is NOT a contract. A contract is something that is enacted between two equals. A covenant, however, is a binding oath established by a king with his subjects. A covenant is a one-

sided agreement in which the king, the superior party, makes promises, places the subjects under obligation, is ratified by sacrifice and broken only by and punishable by death and is marked by a sign. Examples of this are seen in the covenant that God established with Noah (rainbow), with Abraham (circumcision), with Moses (Sabbath) and with David (throne/dynasty). These covenants all built upon the other. With each covenant, there was both continuity and discontinuity. For example, in God's covenant with Noah, he promised that he would never flood the earth again and that the rainbow would be an everlasting sign of his promise. I believe that aspect of his covenant is still in place. In God's covenant with Abraham, he promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites. I believe that aspect of that covenant is still in place. In God's covenant with David, he promised that David would have a descendent who would reign on his throne forever and ever. I believe that aspect of the covenant is still in place, even though with each successive covenant, some things were replaced by something that was better. The movement was always forward. In your hand is a Bible that has two divisions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former covenant was comprised by a series of covenants that built upon each other. Before we studied Hebrews, we studied Exodus because I wanted you to understand some of this. In Exodus, we see that God called his people out of the land of Egypt (like he had called Abraham out of the land of Ur hundreds of years before). After delivering them from the Pharaoh, he revealed himself to them and told them that he was making a promise to them. He was their King (God) and they were his people. He promised them a land, security, health and they were obligated to follow his laws because they were under his rule. The Mosaic covenant was ratified by a sacrifice. The people received the land. As long as they lived according to the terms of the covenant they experienced security and prosperity, but as you know, their history is marked by repeated failures to live by the terms of the covenant.

Over and over God would send prophets to his people to remind them of the terms of the covenant and call them to repent and to live under his reign. One of those prophets was a man named Jeremiah. During his life, the dreaded Assyrian empire that had destroyed the Northern Kingdom because of their unbelief was itself overthrown by the Babylonians. The Babylonians were the punishment of God that he employed on Judah because they too failed to believe and follow God. So, the massive army of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, tore down the wall, razed the temple and deported thousands of Jews to Babylon. God had already revealed this to Jeremiah, who warned his people of the coming judgment if they refused to follow the covenant. As the destruction-laden armies of Babylon closed in, Jeremiah watched with deep heaviness his prophecies of warning being fulfilled, spelling the end of the nation of Judah as it had been known. But then, the word of the Lord came again to Jeremiah (Jer. 31). God told him of the day when God would establish a new covenant with his people. It would have some similarities to the old covenant, but this one would be better. Instead of giving his people a law that was written on stone tablets, this time God was going to write his law on their hearts. If the word of God was on the inside, then they would obey from the inside. If he had them by the heart, they would forever and always be his people. With the Word of God on the inside, now those who are his is evidenced by an internal faith that drives an external obedience. The old covenant was broken by disobedience. The new covenant would not be broken because it was written on hearts that God had changed. But, since every

covenant that God established was ratified by a sacrifice, what kind of a sacrifice would be necessary to ratify this new, this ultimate covenant? The answer to that was given by Christ in the upper room when, on the night before he died, he was observing the Passover with his disciples, (in obedience to the law of the old covenant) and he took the cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Christ was the ultimate sacrifice that ratified the ultimate covenant that God established to create a permanent, unbreakable, and eternal people for himself. But this new people (called the church) are not from one nation, but from all over the world. Although this book was written to Jewish believers, this new covenant is our covenant that we enjoy with them. We are bound together, forever by Christ and by this oath that he has made to us, the terms of which are written in his Word AND in our hearts, sealed in place by the Spirit.

So, when the AH is warning these people (these Jewish followers of Christ) he is warning us as well. Don’t walk away from this. If you walk out on the excellencies of God revealed in Christ, there is nowhere else to go but to absolute darkness¹. This is no game! These people needed to understand that the Old Covenant was no longer in effect (v.13). And every one of you must understand that being rescued from your sin is only through Christ. If you have not acknowledged that and personally embraced that, you need to deal with that first. But also keep in mind that when the AH is encouraging these people (these Jewish followers of Christ) to press on and be faithful, he is also encouraging us, because now, in Christ, their story is our story because we all share in the same Lord, the same Savior, the same Priest, the same cross, the same Sacrifice, the same Covenant, the same Spirit, the same faith, the same Kingdom, so we share in the same eternity – forever. This is so much better than what they had before because:

1. **Christ is our High Priest in a Better Place** (1-6)

These six verses bring us to the next argument in this book. You read it and know that some sort of a transition is being made in his argument. The AH has been arguing that Christ is superior because of who he is (his person) and now he is going to explain that Christ is superior because his ministry (that is, what he has done) is superior. In fact, we are about to enter into the main point of this entire book, which serves as the basis and ultimate reason for us to trust and remain faithful to Christ. The call of this book is to “Press on Pilgrim.” The reason for this is now exposed in all its glorious power and beauty. Christ is not the greatest high priest just because of who he is, but, because Christ offered himself, he is the greatest sacrifice. The greatest priest, offered the greatest sacrifice in your place. You were disqualified from making the offering, so he did it for you. Neither did you have an offering that would ever work, so he offered himself in your place. He takes 2.5 chapters to explain this and we need every bit of that, because we are so prone to want to attempt to save ourselves somehow, some way.

But, before he does that, he stops for a second so that we can take a breather and assimilate what he has been saying. He reminds us (1) of his main point: We, right now,

¹ Stuart Olyott said something to this effect in his work, “I Wish Someone Would Explain Hebrews To Me!” p. 90.

have an extraordinary high priest who is ALL that we need him to be. Now, he turns our attention to what he is doing. These verses (1-6) can be summed up with the following: 1) Jesus is a high priest in heaven 2) Jesus could not serve as a priest on earth under the old covenant (therefore) 3) Jesus is a better high priest because he is in a better place operating according to a better covenant. Let's see how this is unpacked for us.

a. **We have a high priest in heaven right now!** (1)

The benefits of this are obvious. All other priests served on earth, while this is one who serves in heaven. Can you improve on that? NO!

b. **Christ serves in the sanctuary made by God.** (2)

He expands on this a bit in verse 5, but the point is clear. The tabernacle (temple) was constructed by people, while the sanctuary that Christ serves in, was made by God. Christ is our high priest in a better place.

c. **The High Priest has to offer a sacrifice.** (3)

Right here, the AH is simply listing the reasons why Christ is a superior priest and why the New Covenant is a superior covenant. Later he will come back to this statement and lay it all out, since this is the heart of the argument of the entire book. He has already mentioned this in 7.27, "when he (Christ) offered up himself."

d. **The Old Covenant would prevent Christ from being a priest.** (4)

"Now if he (Christ) were on earth" (under the terms of the Old Covenant), he would not even be a priest, much less a high priest. The Old Covenant had rituals that pointed to Christ. When Christ came, many people would not let go of the rituals and as a result they rejected the real thing that the rituals pointed to. (v.13)

Genuine Christianity (unlike OT religious life and other popular expressions of religion) is not built on elaborate rituals and ceremonies. That is a stumbling block for some. In the Old Covenant, the priest would offer a sacrifice for a person. In the New Covenant, the sacrifice has already been made. The ingredients of our "service" are not so much on what we do, but acknowledging and responding to what Christ has already done. Baptism is re-enacting what Christ has done and will do. Therefore, we do not have elaborate ceremonies. Christ has fulfilled the ceremonies through his life and death. But, if you were raised on ceremonies, it is easy to find comfort and security in those traditions. There is comfort in participation in traditions when your world is full of so much insecurity. But, is our security really in the fact that we attend church, or is our security in Christ?

e. **The tabernacle is a copy of the real thing.** (5)

In the book of Exodus, Moses was given detailed instructions about the construction of the tabernacle. This was a tent that housed the glory of God, in the midst of his people. The tabernacle was a small scale model of 1) the tabernacle that existed in heaven (as seen here in), 2) the Garden of Eden where God lived perfectly with his people and 3) it represented the fact that one day all of the earth would be his tabernacle, a perfect garden of delight where God would once more live with his people. The tabernacle was fascinating, but Christ is better than the tabernacle.

f. **Christ's ministry is better because of the New Covenant.** (6)

The ministry of Christ, which is what the New Covenant is based on, is more excellent than the Old Covenant because, it is based on better promises (as we will see in the next section), but also because it is mediated by Christ. To mediate means to function as an arbitrator or an intermediary in helping two sides solve a dispute. Beloved, this is glorious, but you need to think through this with me. Who mediated the Old Covenant? It was Moses. Do you remember in our study of the book of Exodus, how many times Moses had to go up and down the mountain as he attempted to mediate between God's demands and the responses of the people? Christ, in contrast to Moses, perfectly bridges that gap because of his death on the cross for us. He, by his death, reconciled us to God, once and for all! No more running up and down the mountain. Not only did he mediate a better covenant, but because he is the basis of the new covenant, he is the guarantor of it (7.22). How do I know that I can press on? How can I know that I will finish the race? Christ will not let you go! In fact, the new covenant has better promises!

I know that working our way through Hebrews has been a challenge for some of you. There are some detailed arguments that sound intricate. Some of you have not been raised on or exposed to dealing with the Scriptures like this. If you are used to going to church and simply going through the motions, then you don't have to think; you only have to do. It is monotonous, routine, empty and woefully unsatisfying. Christ did not come to this earth and live a perfect life and die in your place so that you could go through some religious motions once in a while. Christ is the exact representation of the Father. He revealed the Father's plan to us and his death on the cross secured it forever. So, yes, some of this is deep and mind-blowing, but that is what God does. He amazes us with Himself, which is why we worship Him so passionately.

2. **Christ is our High Priest in a Better Covenant** (7-13)

The old covenant had problems (v.7). Its ineffectiveness made room for a new covenant. The old covenant did not stop the people from rejecting God. (7) Isn't that obvious from Jeremiah's day? So, even during the days of the old covenant, God promised that a new one was coming. The reason that a new one was needed was because (8) God found fault with the people of the old covenant. Besides, the old covenant was designed to make people aware of their need of a Savior. The tension (for the readers) came from people who wanted to follow the Old Covenant and were threatened by the New Covenant. They were used to the way things were done under the Old Covenant. But, if they really understood the purpose and meaning of the Old Covenant they would not only realize

that it points to the New Covenant (Christ), but that even the Old Covenant itself spoke of the New Covenant that was coming and it would be better because:

A. God will write His laws on their hearts. (10a)

Actually God says that he “will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.” This refers to the reality that the people of the new covenant will be people who love God from their hearts and obey him, not out of external threat but because of internal desire. In the old covenant, disobedience resulted in loss of crops, health, and national security and obedience is rewarded with prosperity, health and protection. In the new covenant, our obedience is not secured because of the goodies that we are promised but because we actually love God.

When attempting to teach our children the benefits of obedience, we look for ways to encourage and reward good behavior. But when they grow up, we are grieved if we have to pay them or reward them to pay attention to us. We desire love from their hearts, not actions that demand a reward. A true understanding of the new covenant exposes the immaturity and self-centeredness of the health and wealth gospel that some still preach. In the new covenant, we love God because he has given us a new heart. When God gives us a new heart, (that is regeneration), we love him, we trust him and we do not have to be constantly told that we have to! The reason that some of you are so disobedient to God’s word, is simply because you are not a believer.

B. I will be their God and they will be my people (10b)

“my people” – what a beautiful expression. Unlike some of the people in the old covenant who refused to live as God’s people, the people of the new covenant will forever be his people. (see the end of verse 9)

C. They shall all know me (11)

To know God is to trust him, to love him and to follow him. In the new covenant, every single believer has direct access to God through Christ. The believer is not dependent upon a priest, but comes to God through Christ. Members of the new covenant know God personally and directly, from the least to the greatest.

D. I will remember their sins no more (12)

The word, “for” sits at the beginning of this, because this is the basis of the promises. All of these things can take place because this covenant is based on God’s mercy that is seen in his providing a sacrifice so great and so complete that he would not remember our sins anymore. Unlike the sacrifices and rituals that had to be repeated because people keep sinning, Christ’s sacrifice was so complete, there is nothing left for me to pay and therefore, there is nothing left for God to remember.

What do you really trust in? Earlier in the message I said that the tabernacle was fascinating, but that Christ is even more. God's way of working and our way of working are usually quite a bit different. God focuses on the heart, we tend to focus on actions. God works on the inside, we look at the outside. That is why so much religious life focuses upon how hard we try, whereas genuine Christianity starts with Christ who does the transforming. Instead of us doing the acting, it is God who acts upon us.