

Title: The New Covenant – pt.2
Text: Hebrews 8.1-13
Theme: The Superiority of Christ
Series: Hebrews #21
Prop Stmt The New Covenant is greater than all of the others because it secures what the others cannot.

Read Text:

Relationships develop their own social patterns that follow the same ones from previous generations, but use different labels. For example, when a boy is interested in a girl, one of the first things that he does is get her cell #. (Suggestion: girls, give him your dad's # - clearly that is my idea, perhaps a view not shared by my own daughters.) The purpose of getting the cell# is so he can arrange a time to "hang out." Hanging out is a term that defies parameters, which of course is the intent. If a guy is hanging out with a girl, and every one agrees that they are hanging out, then she can say to her friends, "hey, I'm hanging out with Andy" while at the same time she can say to her parents, "hey, we're just hanging out." But after a while of "hanging out" then comes along "the talk." Do you know what I mean by that? "The talk" is when we "define the relationship." If you don't have "the talk" then after a while, no one is really certain what you mean by "hanging out." (not that anyone knew anyway) For example, if a girl is hanging out with Andy and smooth Eddy comes along, and she starts hanging out with Eddy, what is Andy supposed to think? He might say, "Hey, I thought we were hanging out!" to which she says, "Well yea, we were just hanging out." That brings up another word, "awkward." So, in order to avoid "awkward" you have to "define the relationship." That is another reason why it makes sense to me for the girl to give out her dad's cell# so that he can "define the relationship." That takes care of "awkward". (Which of course may explain why my daughters have never had a serious boyfriend.)

But that "defining of relationship" thing? The Bible is full of that concept. It is called a covenant. In fact the unfolding story of the Bible is based on a series of covenants that build upon each other in which God defines the relationship. What we see in each covenant is: 1) A statement by God (announcing the relationship) 2) A revelation of the terms of the relationship. God says what he is going to do and what he expects of the people. 3) A sacrifice that ratifies and seals the covenant and 4) a sign that reminds both parties of the covenant. Let's see how this is reflected in the covenants.

Noahic Covenant

1. Statement – "Behold I establish my covenant with you..." (Genesis 9.8)
2. Terms – "never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" "be fruitful and multiply" (and whoever kills someone, shall pay with his life).
3. Sacrifice – "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD" (Genesis 8.20)
4. Sign – Rainbow

Abrahamic Covenant (revealed in 2 phases)

1. Statement – "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring...for an everlasting covenant."

2. Terms – “You shall keep my covenant” I will give you this land and your offspring and I will be their God.
3. Sacrifice – Genesis 15.17
4. Sign – Circumcision

Mosaic Covenant

1. Statement – “Israel is my firstborn son” (Ex. 4.22)
2. Terms – Here are my laws, I demand obedience (and worship and love)
3. Sacrifice – Exodus 24.5-8
4. Sign – Sabbath – Exodus 31.12-17

Davidic Covenant

1. Statement – “I will establish the throne of his (your son) kingdom forever.” 2 Samuel 7.13
2. Terms – “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (7.14)
3. Sacrifice –
4. Sign - throne

A few observations: 1) God initiated and defined the relationship. The heart of each covenant is this idea: I am your God, you are my people. This rather short statement (sprinkled throughout the Scriptures, repeated in various ways) is loaded, making a clear distinction between the Creator and the creation, but also showing a strong bond of ownership, deep affection and personal attention between God and his own.

2) God usually established a covenant after he performed a great rescue operation. Noah was rescued from the flood, Abraham from a life of pagan idolatry in Ur, Moses and the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and David from the least in his house to being the King. Every covenant that God made was established on the basis of his grace.

3) God did more than what people could imagine. God gave Abraham a land and made him the father of a nation. God told David that he would have a son who would reign forever and ever.

4) Each covenant increased in revelation, responsibility, relationship and joy. Therefore, each covenant pointed forward to a greater covenant and ultimately to Christ.

5) The problem is that the people decided that they did not want to be God’s people. They wanted to be their own God. The people that came after Noah decided to build the Tower of Babel in order to make a name for themselves (that would replace God’s name). We see this repeatedly with the Mosaic Covenant. The problem with the covenants was never God, it was always the people. Do you remember when God was revealing the terms of his covenant with Israel to Moses on Mt. Sinai? What were the people doing down at the base of the mountain? They were worshiping a golden calf. Moses came down and did what with the law? He broke it! That scene captures the Mosaic Covenant. It was busted before it was even ratified. It would never work because the people would not follow it. But, God’s promises are not wiped out. Instead he establishes another covenant that enables him to fulfill the promises that he made in the other covenants. This is the covenant that God told Jeremiah about as the armies of the Babylonians were about to

destroy Jerusalem. God was saying, my plan will go on. This is the covenant that God told Ezekiel about when he said that there is coming a day when he will replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. Christ is the basis of the new covenant because Christ is the only one who could offer a better sacrifice, when he offered himself. Therefore, run to Christ, lean upon Christ, rest in Christ, trust only in Christ. The terms are clear, faith alone in Christ alone. Press on Pilgrim because

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

The new covenant (v.6) is based on better promises. Its ineffectiveness made room for a new covenant. So, even during the days of the Mosaic Covenant (old covenant), God promised that a new one was coming. 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. And yet, the Mosaic Covenant was designed by God to be a tutor to lead them to see how much they needed a Savior. The Savior has come and he is the means by which the new, the better, and the final covenant that was promised is now here. The people to whom Hebrews was written were followers of Christ who were being pressured to return to Judaism. Their lives as believers were hard and they were discouraged and if they succumbed to the peer pressure to go back to the Mosaic Covenant, then it would at least relieve them of some of the heat they were facing. The author of Hebrews is saying that you can't go back. It did not work in the first place. Besides if you really understood the purpose and meaning of the Old Covenant you would not only realize that it points to the New Covenant (Christ), but even the Old Covenant itself spoke of the New Covenant that was coming and it would be better because of the better promises such as:

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

God says 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, certain individuals were given a new heart by faith, but this was never true of the entire group. If you were born into Israel you were in the covenant by birth (physical). Now you are in the covenant by the new birth (spiritual). This promise means that people of God are marked on the inside not just the outside.

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. Sleeping in your garage does not make you a care anymore than simply attending church makes you a Christian.

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

I mentioned earlier that this expression is the heart of all of the covenants. This statement is made in Leviticus, reiterated and promised again in Ezekiel, and fulfilled in Revelation. Now, the meaning of this is finally being understood. And because of Christ, we will one day, experience the full reality of this relationship. And in the new covenant, this promise is for Jews and for Gentiles, from every tribe, language, people and nation.

3. 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 on an earthly priest, but comes to God through Christ. Members of the new covenant know God personally and directly, from the least to the greatest. And, we will know him personally and intimately forever and ever because he will dwell with us and we will dwell with him.

4. 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.

We have several members of our church who have been diagnosed with cancer. When adversity hits us, we tend to respond like Job’s friends and wonder, what did I do to deserve this? We hear the claims and promises of some preachers for health and wealth. They seem to have Bible verses to back it up. But, here is where it is so important for you to understand the entire story line of Scripture. If you notice you will see how often they quote passages from the old covenant and take them out of the story line. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the nation of Israel was promised health, security and prosperity if they lived in obedience to God’s law. The promises of health, security and prosperity were tied directly to the land of Israel that was promised to them. Now, listen carefully. We have a better covenant now based on better promises. But, what can be better than health, security and prosperity? It is Christ!! Of course! The old covenant made way for the new covenant. Even the health that the nation experienced was temporary, for every person got old and died. The security and the prosperity did not hold out because they were unfaithful. But, in the new covenant, we have Christ who is eternally faithful. Christ is more precious than health and more secure than security and more valuable than riches and he will never let you go. The health and wealth advocates are making promises that they cannot deliver because they are making promises from a covenant that is now obsolete. Not only that, but they want you to treat Christ as if he is the ticket to a better life, when in reality he is the better life. They believe that Christ is only worth believing

in because of health, wealth and security. God promised good things to the people under the old covenant if they would follow him. But we are under the new covenant. God has written his word in our hearts. We do not need temporary incentives to love Christ when he is already, altogether lovely and we know it. They are attempting to get you to long for something that is inferior to Christ. They are attempting to take you backwards. Christ is more precious than health, security and possessions because He is the only means by which we can be reconciled to God. Christ is not the means to a “good life” now. He is the means to real life now and forever. Now, God may choose to bring healing now. But if he does, he does it as a foretaste of the perfect healing that we will experience one day in glory. If he does not, it is because he is going to allow us to experience that sweet reality sooner. And the journey of cancer, poverty, struggle, disappointment, depression, bankruptcy is not only a reminder that we are not home yet, but personally teaches us that health now and wealth now and security now are nothing compared with Christ forever.

But, because we have Christ, we are guaranteed that one day as part of our dwelling with God (and he with us), that the old order of death will be gone (that means cancer will be no more). So, already (right now) we are in the new covenant, but not yet do we experience all of its benefits. Someday we will. Right now, we are living in Christ knowing that one day we will live with Christ. But (don't miss this now), living in Christ now, is eternally more important than living with temporary health, security and prosperity. Christ is not the means to temporary health, security and prosperity. Christ is the means to himself. Christ is the means to forgiveness, full and free, to being declared righteous, to being made new, and to life forever. The old covenant focused on life here. The new covenant prepares us for life hereafter.

So, you have cancer. If you don't have Christ, your greatest enemy is not cancer; it is sin and eternal death. You need a Savior! But if you are in Christ, your biggest enemy is still not the cancer. Your fight is with the lies that are easy to believe such as: God does not love me. God is getting even with me. God is punishing me. God is not fair. Fight those lies with the gospel-truth of the new covenant. God loves you so much, he gave you Christ. And Christ is a far greater good than cancer is a bad. There is nothing for God to get even about because Christ has already paid for all of your sin. That means that there is nothing left for me to pay. Christ paid it all by his death on the cross. God exhausted his storehouse of wrath upon his son, there is no punishment left for you. But I grant you the last one. God is not fair. He isn't. He is gracious! “I will remember their sins no more.” Is that fair to Christ? No, but Christ chose the cross, so that God could be unfairly gracious to you.

Hebrews 11.13 – “These” inheritors of old covenants believed and persevered, even though the terms of their covenants were not all realized in their lives. They pressed on knowing that the fulfillment was guaranteed, even if it wasn't in their life. That is our legacy! This is our passion! And this is our goal. We live in faith and greet the promises from afar and let cancer remind us that we are strangers and exiles on earth. But one day, one day, in the New Jerusalem, “a loud voice from the throne [will say]...”Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their

eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain anymore (that means no more cancer) for the former things have passed away¹.”

¹ Revelation 21.3-4