

Heb 8:1-13 Jesus is the High Priest of a Better Covenant (part 2 – Better Promises)

As we've seen, we have a great high priest, one who is not of the order of the Levitical Priesthood. He is altogether different, from the order of Melchizedek. And, his priesthood begins an altogether different covenant. And as Christians, we are under a different covenant than that covenant under which the Law of Moses resided. From before the foundations of the world this covenant was in the mind and plan of God. And this New Covenant was prophesied in the OT. Our text today comes from Jeremiah 31, as our author is showing. Look at vv. 8-9: **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern from them declares the Lord.”**

And this New Covenant would only come in the fullness of time when God sent forth his Son to be our high priest. Look at v. 7: **“For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.”** And as we saw last week, this new covenant is established upon a BETTER PLACE and a BETTER PERSON. The priests of the OC could only go into the earthly holy of holies. But, our Lord has entered the real holy of holies, the throne room of God. The priests of the OC offered animals that could not cover completely the sins of the people. This is why they repeated those sacrifices year after year. And since those priests were sinners, they could not offer themselves. But, Jesus, the real high priest was holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners. And as the perfect sacrifice, He offered himself. Today, we come to the 3rd truth about this new covenant. It is established on the basis of BETTER promises. So, as we take the Lord's Supper today and repeat Jesus' words: **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,”** we remember the person and work of our great high priest, particularly the beauty of God's promises in this New Covenant. I have 3 Better promises in our text. 1) In the NC, God transforms the whole person; 2) In the NC all covenant members will know the Lord; and 3) In the NC, sins are forgiven fully and definitely.

1. In the New Covenant, God Transforms the Whole Person. Look at v. 10: **“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts . . .”** Here we see a complete transformation of the person that is promised in the New Covenant. To speak of both the mind and the heart is to emphasize the entire person. The New Covenant in Christ is powerful to change us so that all our mind our soul our being, ALL THAT WE ARE is changed. If we go back to Israel in the OT and look at their history, what do we find? As a whole, we find constant disobedience and rebellion against God's commands. As a whole, we see a people who find the commands of God burdensome. And if we go back to God's covenant with Abraham, those promises could never become a reality if his physical descendants continue disobey God's commands. And when we get to the Moses and the Law given to Him, we see VERY CLEARLY this principle: **“Obey my commands and you will be blessed. But, if you do not obey my commands, you will be cursed.”** And we see this happen throughout their history as the Northern Kingdom falls to the Assyrians in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom of Judah falls to the

Babylonians in 586 BC. And Yes, they are brought back to the land, and there are times of obedience.

But, as a whole, they continue to disobey, even as they attempted to obey the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant. Even during Jesus' day, when there was probably the best "OUTWARD" obedience to the Law of Moses, Jesus still pronounces all kinds of "woes" against the Pharisees and religious leaders who thought they were keeping the law. He says, **"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God."** And, **"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."** And, **"Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed."** And **"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."** (Luke 11). In these woes, Jesus addresses more than outward obedience. He addresses the heart.

The heart is central to all Jesus' teaching. Why do you think your little one year old, whom you've never taught to say "no" to your commands or showed them how to "throw" a tantrum (out of nowhere), shows such disregard to your commands? It is because . . . as a parent, you do not command the heart, or even the little mind of such a child. As a rudder is turned to steer the ship, you are not the rudder. In one sense you are steering the ship and you are turning the wheel with your commands, but your little one has his/her own rudder. Parents, our commands are necessary. And they are good. But, at the end of the day, we have no power to cause in our children a transformation of the heart and of the mind, in such a way that will cause them to delight in us and in our instructions. In essence, this is the beauty of the New Covenant in Christ. The Old Covenant could not reach down to the depths of the heart and transform the entire person. And this truth brings out the beauty of Matt. 5:17 as Christ says, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** And the New Covenant we have in Christ was prophesied over and over in the OT. I think of Deut. 30:6: **"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."**

With the coming of Christ, we see a difference in the nature of the new covenant. The first one was powerless to bring about the obedience of ALL covenant members. This is why Jesus eventually preaches to the heart. If you get to the "heart" obedience ALWAYS follows. And this is the powerful PROMISE of the New Covenant. This is why Paul can say, in 2 Cor. 5:17: **"If any man be in Christ, He is a new creation . . ."** And it isn't merely the heart, but the mind as well. They go together. And often the "heart" includes both mind and will and affections, the whole person. When Christ came to me, when I heard the words of the gospel, my mind said, *"That is true. Jesus died for my sins."* And at the same time, my heart said, *"I love him. I delight in him. He is my love."* If this is not your experience, then the promise of the New Covenant has not yet come to you.

This morning, can you say with David, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God?” (Ps. 42:1). Can you say, “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness?” (Ps. 84:10). If this kind of delight is found in you, then you understand the words of Jesus, “**This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.**”

At the end of the day, it will be the love of Christ in the New Covenant that compels us to do what is right. And this is the difference between a real Christian and a “Pharisee.” This is why merely preaching “good works” of the “law” does not work. At the end of the day, if we are not transformed, we are self-righteous, just like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. “**The Law came through Moses, Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**” (John 1:17). In the New Covenant we celebrate the most blessed truth, that in Christ, we really can “**love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength.**” We really can keep the first commandment, and all the others for that regard . . . in both heart and deed.

Application: God must change the heart. In fact, ONLY God can change the heart.

Application: Only the Gospel of Christ has such power. “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of salvation for all who believe . . .** (Rom. 1:16).

Application: Pray such prayers: “*God change my heart!*” “*God, keep my heart.*” “*God, do not let my heart love the idols of this world.*” Brothers and sisters, if we pray such prayers, God will work greatly in our hearts. And then, what will happen? We will follow the commands of Christ, out of LOVE, not duty. And we will not find the commands of God burdensome.

2. In the New Covenant, All Covenant Members Will Know the Lord. Look at v. 11: “**And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.**” In the New Covenant, there will not be a mixed group as there was in Israel, but one group. And as we’ve seen, every single person of this group will be recipients of this New Covenant. Every single one of them . . . IN CHRIST will be transformed. Think back to the Israel of the Old Covenant. Throughout the majority of their history, they were a mixed community (those with faith and those without faith). Yes, all of them were “Israelites.” All of them were “circumcised.” All of them were a part of that nation. They were a theocracy, separate from the Gentile nations as the “people of God.” But, for the most part of their history, only a small part truly had faith. As we’ve seen, most of them were disobedient. And most of them only gave lip service to faith in God. Under the Old Covenant, most were unregenerate. But, in this New Covenant, “**from the least of them to the greatest of them**” will “know the Lord.”

A good example may be a modern Christian family. Let’s say there are two parents who know the Lord and they have 6 children. And they teach their kids to know the Lord and they pray for God to change the heart. But, after many years and the kids grow up, maybe two of those kids still do not believe the gospel. Well, they are all still part of the family, but as regards faith, they are not. Those unbelieving kids are still in the family. They are still the children of their parents, even if they do not believe. Well, in under the Old Covenant, there was the political nation of Israel as the “people of Jehovah God.” But, as regards faith, only a small part, a remnant had

faith. BUT, under the New Covenant the political dimension falls away. In other words, the CHURCH isn't a theocratic entity like Israel. We are not "church and state together" (Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 253). Today, the church consists of believers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. This means that ALL believers together throughout the world make up the Church. And ALL of them know the Lord. He is the God. They are his people. And ALL those of this New Covenant are regenerate, new creations in Christ.

Did you know, that this principle is really what separates Presbyterians and Baptists. This is why we baptize ONLY believers. It is based upon this principle. This is why we believe that each local church is made up of real believers. This is why we believe as elders that the best way to guard the sheep is to make sure that those who come in are really believers. This is why we only allow those who are baptized to take the Lord's Supper. This is why I believe in the Book of Hebrews, he is speaking to New Covenant members and that NONE of them will apostatize. As we read in 1 John 2:19: **"They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us."**

Implication: The Church is the new Israel. Look at v. 8. He addresses the house of Israel and Judah with the promise of this New Covenant. Jesus was a Jew from the Jewish nation, to whom are given the promises and the law, and with whom God made all his covenants. Salvation belongs to the Jews (says Paul). And here we are today . . . Gentiles, worshipping almighty God. How? We have been "grafted in," we have become part of the "tree" of the house of Israel and Judah as Paul says in Rom. 11:19. The church does not replace Israel. In Christ, and this New Covenant, we are the fulfillment of God's promise we've just seen. **"For they shall ALL know me, from the least of them to the greatest."** Today, there is only ONE family of faith. Together, both Jew and Gentile, those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, are ONE. There is no distinction today. Those who are in Christ are "children of Abraham." And this is the church today.

3. In the New Covenant, Sins Are Forgiven Fully and Definitely. Look at v. 12: **"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."** Brothers and sisters, in Christ, who is the mediator of a "better" covenant, our sins are forgiven fully and definitely. Under the Old Covenant and particularly with Mosaic Law, those sacrifices could not full and definitely cover our sins. They could not bring genuine and lasting forgiveness. But, in Christ, who is our great high priest, who is the author of a "better" covenant, our sins are forgiven. Today, we remember Jesus' words, *"This is my body broken for you."* The blood of bulls and goats could never cover, or atone, for our sins. In the Old Covenant, even from the Garden of Eden, sinners were always offering up sacrifices to God. Adam and Eve began with fig leaves, trying to cover themselves. But, God Himself provided the skins of animals that had been sacrificed for their covering. And at the time of Jesus, that sacrificial system under the Levitical priesthood continued day after day, week after week, year after year.

But today, we have a great high priest, who, in ONE sacrifice covers our sins fully and definitely. Look over at 1:3: **"After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."** And 2:9: **"But we see him who for a little while was made**

lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” And 2:17:

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” And 7:27: **“He has no need like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily first for his own sins, and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”** Brothers and sisters, today, Christ died for our sins. And if you are in Christ, your sins are covered fully and definitely. (Gospel)

What beautiful promises we have in the New Covenant! 1) In Christ, we are a new creation, fully transformed; 2) In Christ, All of us know Him; and 3) In Christ, our sins are forgiven fully and definitely. And this is what we remember today as Jesus says, “This is my body broken for you.” And, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.” As the church of Christ, we say with great assurance, “Jesus died for my sins.”