



First Baptist Church Selmer

JESUS IS BETTER • JESUS, OUR PERFECT MEDIATOR • HEBREWS 8:1-13 • 6/25/2023

MAIN POINT

Jesus established a new covenant based upon His substitutionary death on the cross, dying in our place.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever had a great idea for an invention? What was it? What prompted your idea?

What invention has had the greatest impact on your life? Why?

The most significant inventions are those that meet a need and/or enable us to do what we cannot do on our own. God “invented” the new covenant to meet our needs. We are unable to keep the law on our own. Only Christ can remove our sins and transform us. Through faith in Him, we can begin to live a life that demonstrates righteousness.

The old law required perfection which was impossible for humanity. It would, however, be accomplished by one and His name is Jesus. Through Jesus, a new covenant would be established. One that would not require perfection but one that would require someone to 'stand in the gap' in our place.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 8:1-6.

1 "Now the point in what we are saying in this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus, it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. 4 Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. 5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.' 6 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises." (ESV)

Have you ever searched for a product that was touted to be a new and improved version of the product you already had? Can you give an example?

How does the writer of Hebrews highlight the need for a new covenant? Why is this significant?

What does it mean to you that the salvation we have in Christ can never be improved on and doesn't need to be improved?

A new covenant, or agreement, was needed between God and His people because the first covenant at Mount Sinai had failed. Under the old covenant, maintaining a right relationship with God depended on keeping the law.

God knew from the beginning that humanity would require a mediator between humanity and God to maintain a right relationship with Him. He provided a "better covenant" through Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry is superior to human priests. Human priests offered animal sacrifices for people's sins. Christ gave His life on behalf of sinful humanity.

How does a copy or shadow compare to the real thing? Why do you think the writer of Hebrews referred to earthly priests as a "copy and shadow"?

The writer of Hebrews was reminding readers of Jesus' superiority to priests under the old covenant. A shadow represents another object. It is not real; it is only a reflection. Earthly priests were only a shadow or copy of Jesus' truly effective ministry as a priest.

What does the picture of Jesus being seated at the Father's right hand in the throne room of heaven say to you about Jesus' identity?

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 8:7-9.

7 "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8 For he finds fault with them when he says: '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, 9 not like the covenant that I 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 for them, declares the Lord.'" (ESV)

What was the problem with the old covenant?

The old covenant was faulty. The law was not flawed but it did not meet the needs of sinful humans. It could reveal sin but not remove it. People lacked the ability to obey the law or remain in a right relationship with God. The old law could not save people. Only Jesus can.

How does this passage remind you that God keeps His promises?

What promises are you depending on Him to keep?

How has God fulfilled promises in your life?

We can count on God to keep His Word according to His will. He never fails.

Have you ever received a gift that was far beyond what you could have hoped?

How does that help you understand God's gift of the new covenant in Christ?

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 8:10-13.

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 mind, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 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. 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.' 13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (ESV)

How does the new covenant describe the relationship between God and His people?

How have you personally experienced this relationship with God?

The new covenant would produce an intimate relationship between God and His people. The people would live as His people as a result of that relationship and out of gratitude as opposed to out of duty.

The words “minds” and “hearts” (v. 10) reveal this intimacy. These words apply not to just certain physical areas, but to the entire person. The presence of God’s love is experienced in the entire life of a believer.

How does verse 12 speak to God’s forgiveness?

In what situation do you need to remember that God will forgive you completely?

God promised, “I will never again remember their sins.” Unlike humans, God forgives and forgets. God took the initiative to give sinners His grace and mercy. Humans cannot earn God’s forgiveness; it is possible only through Jesus’ death that wiped away our sins.

How has God’s forgiving mercy influenced your walk with Christ?

What does God’s promise of a new covenant say about His love for you?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does God’s forgiveness move you forward in your ability to forgive others?

Is there anyone you are holding that forgiveness from?

How can you remind yourself of the fullness of what He’s already given to you in His new covenant?

PRAYER

Pray that you and your group would seek to take hold of the kind of intimacy God desires with you. Ask Him to help you prioritize your time, resources and thinking around your relationship with Him.

COMMENTARY

| HEBREWS 8:1-13

8:1. Several chapters of Hebrews have been devoted to discussing the work of Christ as our high priest. Now we come to this succinct summary: Christ serves his people before God by offering a sacrifice for sin.

Christ had sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. This repeats a point already established in 1:3 but now with a clear application to the role of Christ as High Priest. The idea that Christ was seated comes from Psalm 110:1. The act of sitting down suggested that Jesus' task was done. He had finished his job. By contrast, the priests of Aaron's line always stood in God's presence without sitting (see Heb. 10:11). Their act of standing suggested an incomplete task. Jesus had accomplished the work whose completion the priests could only anticipate.

Majesty is a reverent reference to God the Father. The word showed that Christ had assumed a position of dignity, power, and excellence as a result of his faithful work.

8:2. Christ was a priest who served in the true tabernacle, set up by the Lord, not by man. Christ had a real and spiritual ministry in God's presence. Aaron's priests could only go through the motions of pursuing a symbolic ministry in an earthly tabernacle. The work of Christ was successful where it really counted. The Lord himself had established the work of Christ.

The ministry of priests in the earthly tabernacle presented pictures and symbols of the forgiveness of sin. Christ came actually to accomplish the job. He did not deal with pictures and symbols but with reality. He obtained forgiveness by offering himself in God's presence. Believers can find hope by living in the light of the fulfillment Jesus made available.

Christ's ministry for believers in heaven does not consist of his offering his sacrifice for sin. He has already completed that (see John 19:30). His sacrificial ministry reached

completion when he offered himself on the cross. The present ministry of Christ is to pray for his people before God.

The true tabernacle in which Christ carries on his service for sinners is located in heaven. Verse 1 assumes that Christ is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. The same point appears in 1:3. The heavenly location means God is the source of strength to support and enable Christ's work. This certifies that Christ will be successful and effective in his heavenly labors.

8:3. Earthly priests came to present offerings for human sinfulness. This is a reminder of the ritual of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Our High Priest Jesus also came with an offering for sin. Jesus offered himself for sin in a single, effective act. This theme will be treated in greater detail in chapter 9.

The offering of the earthly priests was expressed in a present tense which focused on the continual nature of their offering. They kept on offering sacrifices for sins. Jesus, our High Priest, offered a single sacrifice, an event expressed in a tense which suggests a single act in the past. Jesus' single offering never needed repetition.

8:4. Christ's ministry is more effective both because of who he is and what he does. Verse 4 emphasizes his effective work as a priest. Jesus' effective work as a priest did not occur on earth. According to the Mosaic Law, Jesus was not descended from the proper tribe for serving as an earthly priest (see 7:14). Jesus would find no place for serving as a priest on earth. but he serves effectively as a priest in heaven. His effective ministry on earth was his offering up of himself as a sacrifice for sins.

The ministry he exercised on earth was a preparation for his ministry in heaven. Jesus' heavenly high priesthood depended on the offering of a perfect earthly sacrifice followed by his ascension to be seated before God in heaven. In heaven Jesus carried on a far greater priestly ministry than any earthly priest enjoyed.

8:5. This verse makes two emphases about the ministry on earth by Levitical priests. First, the priestly ministry on earth represented only a shadow of the truly effective priestly ministry Jesus performed in heaven. A shadow is a reflection of another object. It resembles the other object, but it contains some distortion. A copy of a work of art only gives a general idea of what the original work is like. The earthly ministry of Jesus served only as a shadow and copy of his real priestly ministry in heaven. The work of the Levitical priests only served as a preview of the atoning work of Christ.

Second, even though the earthly ministry was only a copy of the heavenly reality, God had still designed this earthly priestly ministry in detail. Quoting Exodus 25:40, the author reminds his readers that God had provided precise instructions about the details of the tabernacle. Even the small details of the earthly tabernacle were in God's hands. If this were true, then the heavenly sanctuary in which Jesus served with such effectiveness must be more glorious and significant.

Do these verses suggest that heaven contained a literal counterpart of the earthly tabernacle? The Jews often discussed this subject, but it is important for us to avoid making our view of a heavenly temple too materialistic. The priestly activity on earth pointed not to a physical temple in heaven but to the cross of Christ. It was on the cross that Jesus accomplished the real activity which affected our relationship with God.

8:6. Jesus' ministry was more effective in its service than the work of the descendants of Aaron because God had established Jesus' ministry on better promises. What these better promises involve will be explained in verses 10–12. Better promises produce a better covenant.

Christ was the mediator of the new covenant. We will see a more complete explanation of this idea in 9:15–22. The mediator had the job of keeping two parties linked in fellowship. As mediator, Christ rescued the perishing and flawlessly carried out God's will (John 17:4).

8:7. The failure of the first covenant at Sinai demanded the institution of a second covenant. This did not suggest that the Law itself had flaws, but that the experience of human beings under the Law was faulty. The Law had not met the needs of sinful human beings. The Law could reveal sin, but it could not remove it. It could not justify or save sinners. The problem was with the people who lacked the power to obey the Law (see Rom. 7:7–12).

Therefore, God introduced a new agreement or covenant. This statement became the signal for the author of Hebrews to use Jeremiah (ch. 31) to explain the new covenant which God had begun.

8:8. The new covenant promises new moral power, personal knowledge, and forgiveness of sin. This verse begins a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31–34. It explicitly identifies Jeremiah's words as God's Word to establish that divine authority lay behind his quote. God had spoken something, and this verse makes his message clear.

Jeremiah had spoken these words as God was restoring the Jews after the captivity. The new experience of return demanded a new approach in God's dealing with his people. The demands of the time called for a new covenant.

Centuries passed after Jeremiah's words before God inaugurated the new covenant with the coming of the Messiah. Jeremiah's words referred ultimately to the coming of Jesus and to his provision for helping sinners.

Jeremiah lived at a time when a separation had occurred between Israel and Judah. The proclamation of the covenant involved healing the breach which had occurred between these tribes of God's people. The promise of healing the breach between rival groups of Jews symbolized the reconciliation of all nations and people in Christ. Through Christ God accomplished the reconciliation of the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

8:9. This verse contrasts the old covenant with the new by describing the historical circumstances in which God had begun the old. God had initiated the first covenant in sovereignly leading his people from captivity in Egypt. God's people were helpless until God took the initiative. Even though God took the initiative, the covenant did not last. God's people failed. The covenant became invalidated. The Jews broke the conditions of the covenant.

In response to this disobedience, God ceased to pay attention to them. God was not acting recklessly in turning away from his people. His response was to be expected after his people turned their backs on him. He had provided for their needs, but they had rejected his provision. God's turning away from them was an act of judgment.

The word of hope was that God had promised a new covenant. It would not do to patch up the old covenant. God established an entirely new covenant with new benefits for his people, benefits discussed in the following verse.

8:10. Three features stand out in this verse. First, the covenant applied to the house of Israel. This expression included the entire people of God. Although Jeremiah had spoken of a covenant which had applied to ethnic Jews, this verse focuses on all of God's people, both Jews and Gentiles. This statement is in line with Paul's observations in Galatians 3:29 that all believers "are Abraham's seed."

Second, the covenant would be inward. God would write its content in the minds and hearts of his people. The old covenant could reveal the paths of good and evil, but it could not supply the power to walk in righteousness. The power which enabled believers to

follow these laws was none other than the power of the Holy Spirit, who frees believers from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2-3). The words mind and heart apply to the whole person. The entire life of the believer experienced the effects of the presence of God's laws.

Third, the new covenant would produce intimacy, creating a relationship in which Israel's God would become the God of his followers, and they would become his people. We will read more about this intimacy and closeness with God in the next verse. God had promised his Old Testament people that he would guard and love them (Exod. 6:7). His actions for believers through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus meant that God had acted even more vigorously to redeem his people.

8:11. Fellowship with God would be direct and immediate. God would not appoint any privileged class of priests to teach others, but all would know him. All distinctions of rank and importance in the new community would disappear. The knowledge of God would be spread from the least of them to the greatest. The Holy Spirit, who teaches all things, will introduce all believers to a close walk with God (John 14:26). God would not confine the knowledge of him to a privileged few. All those under the new covenant would enjoy a walk of deep fellowship with God.

8:12. God had promised new power to fulfill his laws and a new closeness to know and understand him. His third promise offered forgiveness to sinners. A literal translation of verse 12 has God promising, "I will be merciful to their deeds of unrighteousness." God had always been merciful. The new covenant gave more open expression to God's mercy.

The parallel statement that God would remember their sins no more reassured sinners that God's forgiveness was complete. God, unlike human beings, does not say, "I will forgive, but I will not forget." God promises to forget our sins.

The ground of forgiveness was not human repentance but Jesus' sacrificial death. Only the death of Jesus could provide full assurance that God has wiped away sins and made believers righteous in his sight. God took the initiative to give sinners his grace and mercy. Because God really dealt with sins, the blessings of knowing him and serving him with power become possible.

8:13. People are born, grow, age, and die. Life is transient. Jeremiah had announced the demise of the old covenant six hundred years earlier, but its death took time. When these words in Hebrews were written, the Jerusalem Temple was likely still standing. Day after

day its priests offered sacrifices, but it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:4).

The old covenant came, served the purpose of informing sinners of their need, grew old, and died. It was viewed as already obsolete. The old covenant had done its job. It had pointed to, prepared the way for, and was now giving way to the new covenant. The new covenant offered such superior benefits to needy sinners that the old gave way to it.

The new covenant promised inward power, an intimate knowledge of God, and forgiveness of sin. Nothing in the past could equal the provisions of this new covenant. We who live today as believers can rejoice in God's lavish provisions for our spiritual needs.

Thomas D. Lea, Hebrews, James, vol. 10, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 152-157.