

Hebrews 8:6-13 Jesus Is the Mediator of a New Covenant March 29, 2018 Maundy Thursday

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God's grace and peace under God's new covenant belong to all who believe in Christ Jesus, the Savior.

We read from the letter to the Hebrews 8:6-13

Through Your Word help us grow knowing Your love and grace in Your new covenant. Your Word is truth!

Dear people under God's new covenant,

Advertisers often use words like *new* or *improved* to get people to buy their products. The problem is that sometimes the new product isn't better. But when God promised to make a new covenant it was better. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus connected that new covenant to the Lord's Supper. "*He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'*" (Luke 22:20) Tonight, as we compare the old covenant with the new we will appreciate all the more what our Savior did.

Jesus is the Mediator of a New Covenant.

How is the new covenant better than the old? Hebrews states: "*The covenant is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is founded on better promises.*" (v. 6) The old covenant refers back to Moses who gave the Law. After God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt, He gathered them at Mount Sinai and told them that if they obeyed Him, they would be His people. Here were the terms: they were to obey the Ten Commandments and other laws which regulated how they would live and worship. The people heard the terms and said: "*We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.*" (Exodus 24:7) The covenant was put into effect by sprinkling the blood of animals on an altar and on the people. Moses said, "*This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.*" (Exodus 24:8)

Within days, the Israelites broke their promise and worshiped a golden calf. Hebrews quotes Jeremiah where the Lord says, "*They did not remain faithful to my covenant.*" (v.9) God should have rejected Israel. But, instead He sent many warnings through His prophets to encourage them to return. The old covenant was conditional and depended on their response to be blessed. Hebrews states of the new covenant, "*It will not be like the [old] covenant I made with their ancestors.*" (v. 9) The new one did not depend on people's actions. It was based on God's promise alone: "*I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*" (v.12) The fact that it doesn't depend on us makes the new covenant better than the old. It is based on God's forgiving and forgetting our sins for Christ's sake alone.

But didn't God offer forgiveness in the Old Testament? Yes. He pictured the coming Savior's forgiveness with the sacrifices and cleansing ceremonies. Also, God's promise to save came before the old covenant was given. In the Garden of Eden He promised a Savior: the *offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent's head* and He repeated to Abraham: *all nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendent.*" The covenant of the law at Mount Sinai was added as a temporary measure to show people the need of a Savior. The old covenant kept Israel together as a nation until Jesus came. It provided clues of what was to come. You know the game: name that tune? I give you a note of a song and you guess what it is. (Amazing Grace) Each note was like a prophecy under the old covenant giving more details of the Savior.

But, under the new covenant we don't need clues. God tells us that His Son took on flesh and gave His life, pouring out His blood to forgive us. The Lord's Supper was a sign of that new covenant where Jesus offers the forgiveness He won. Matthew states: Jesus took the cup and said, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*" (Matthew 26:26) Through this Holy Supper, God promises "I have removed the guilt of your sins." God brought us into that covenant when He called us by the gospel by Word and Sacraments to believe and He remains faithful. Sadly, we are not always faithful. Like the Israelites of old, we make people or pleasure or money our idols or we forget

God's goodness and grumble against Him. In mercy, God shows us our sins, calls us to repent and believe, and restores to us the blessings of the new covenant in Christ. Each time we receive the Lord's Supper with Jesus' body and blood and the bread and wine, God assures us that we are forgiven. Jesus said, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" What are we to remember? God's one-sided promise, "*I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*" This is the better covenant with God that Christ put into effect.

Second, with Christ, the new covenant is stronger than the old. Hebrews quotes Jeremiah, "*I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.*" (v.10) This is in contrast to the laws of God written on tablets of stone at Mount Sinai. With the old covenant, not all the people at Mount Sinai believed God's promise. As stubborn unbelievers, many of them grumbled about God. Moses figuratively hit them over the head with those tablets. But, many Jews died in the wilderness in unbelief. They didn't love God and had no desire to do His will. The reason they obeyed at all was out of fear of punishment.

However, some people believed in God under the old covenant and knew their need for a Savior. As believers, they wanted to follow God's law. We, the people who live under the new covenant, are part of the Holy Christian Church called to follow God's will from the heart. Jeremiah predicted that all believers in the new covenant would want to do God's will. Peter described it in 1 Peter 2:9: "*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God....*" What were they to do as God's people? Jesus said, "*A new command I give you: Love one another.*" (John 13:34) Jesus' love gave them a motive.

The promises made to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, and to David, have been fulfilled in Christ. He has opened our eyes to see God's grace by faith. In the Lord's Supper, His body and blood are like a receipt of the payment for sin Jesus made in full. Such love inspires us. Paul wrote, "*Christ's love compels us He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.*" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15) That's the power of the stronger new covenant in Christ!

Third, Christ's new covenant is clearer than the old. Jeremiah wrote that when God put this new covenant into effect, people would know Him better. It states, "*No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*" (v.11) The word that Jeremiah used for God was "LORD." It is the name that emphasizes God's grace, mercy, and love. Many of the Old Testament believers had experienced His mercy in Egypt and in the wilderness. They had glimpses of the coming Savior, but the full revelation of the "LORD" they did not see.

Jesus said that God's glory would be revealed in Him. Before He went to the cross He said, "*Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.*" (John 13:31) It is to God's greatest glory that Jesus was the Savior of sinners. In Jesus we see clearly the love of God for us! How blessed we are to clearly see God's forgiveness in Christ! This is what we proclaim at each Lord's Supper. Paul wrote, "*Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Tonight we hear Jesus say, "*This is my blood of the new covenant.*" It's not like the ads on TV for a new and improved product. This is Jesus' last will and testament promised from the beginning and fulfilled by His life and death. We thank God that by His grace, He has called us to be in that saving covenant by faith in Him. Amen.