

Hebrews 8:6-9:14

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Preacher: David Helm

- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's wonderful to have you here today. We're glad that you've come. My name is Dave Helm. If you're visiting, I'm one of the pastors of this congregation now going on 19 years, and we start a new fall year together.
- Just a couple of brief announcements before I move on from the reading of the word to the preaching of the same. I would be remiss if I did not mention that Nicoletto Salvatore Zagnoli is in the house for the first time, a baby boy born to Charlie and Amanda.
- Do we know how to name children around here or what?
- I absolutely love it. The other brief announcement that I'll make known to you is the offerings. We are running some \$40,000 behind budget year, which in normal years we just cash flow pick up along the way.
- [1 : 1 4] But this is no ordinary year. Our vision campaign concluded. The reserves are depleted. I prayerfully am going to ask the Lord that our giving moves from 78% to 100% within the next week or two's time.
- So that just means that we need to pay for things along the way and eliminate the need to restrict things that would move us forward. Don't normally make those mentions if you're new and you've never come to church for a long time and you're afraid that the pastors always talk about money.
- Well, your worst fears are now confirmed. Hebrews. One of the more confounding questions that swirl around the book of Hebrews is the consideration of the author.
- There is no name expressly mentioned in the manuscript declaring for us through whom it came.
- As such, the identity of the writer has been a matter of conjecture for centuries. That said, and I do feel confident of this, had the University of Chicago been around at the time of the writing and had the author decided to submit his manuscript to the Div School, to the school's committee on degrees, I believe his dissertation would have been awarded PhD, Old Testament Studies.
- [2 : 5 0] I say this because the University of Chicago's Divinity School guidelines on the committee for degrees has a section on a dissertation proposal that requires, in part, this, and I quote, a brief discussion of the importance of the dissertation as an original contribution to knowledge, whether theoretical or practical.
- In submitting the proposal, a student attests that it is based upon a thorough investigation that has convinced her or him that the thesis has not been previously argued in the manner proposed.
- End quote. Take note, any budding scholar in our midst, if you want to enter the ancient guild of scholars, back to the time of Greece, at least, you must provide an original contribution to knowledge, theoretical or practical, and one that has not been previously argued in the manner proposed.

I've been in Hebrews for a year. I'm convinced he has succeeded in giving us that. Not only has this writer, although we do not know who he is, has given us something entirely original, something with both theoretical and practical value, but also by means of an argument, I think, so sweeping in nature that it entirely upended the way the Hebrew Scriptures would be read forever.

An interesting note given today being the first day of the Jewish calendar, Rosh Hashanah, and the celebration of the Day of Atonement in ten days' time.

[4 : 45] How did he do it? In two ways. The first of which we saw last spring. Put your eyes on the text, back to chapter 5, verse 7.

He introduced there two small strokes from Psalm 95 that read, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. And from that simple text, he assembled a stunning argument on a great high priest that carried him from chapters 5 through 7.

And by the time he was done, he had completely obliterated any conventional reading or expectation of what Israel had for Aaron. Let me tell you this way, the theoretical value of his argument in chapters 5 to 7 is this, Israel should never have been looking for a Savior to come from Aaron's line in the first place, but that of Melchizedek instead.

And for us, we saw last spring the practical implication. It was pressed home. You and I know, according to the writer, that Jesus is God's promised great high priest.

Not because he was a greater Aaron, but more to the point, precisely because he didn't come from Aaron's line at all. He came from an unknown line, a mediator from on high, without beginning or end.

[6 : 15] Genealogy. What a stunning, original, intricately argued moment.

With today's text, turn back to 8, the writer now turns to advance a second line of original reasoning. In Jesus, in other words, not only do we have a better high priest, chapters 5 through 7, not only do we have one, thank God, who isn't here on earth, but carrying out his work for us from a better place, chapter 8, 1 to 6, but now, with a second bit of original exegetical work, you are going to see that Jesus, in Jesus, we get both a better ministry, and it's built on a better promise.

No one argued it like this before he wrote it down. Get this, by the time the argument finishes on the backside of chapter 10, for you will see, even in chapter 10, he's still referring to this promise in Jeremiah 31, by the time we get to the backside of chapter 10, the writer will have reversed all prior conventional readings and understandings of how to read the Old Testament.

All the Hebrew scriptures fundamentally shift under the weight of a writer, along with a band of a few other apostolic in the clan who put forward works that push the limits of all things.

I don't know if you can emotionally get a hold of it, but this writer and those who comprise the New Testament writings, it is as if they walked into the Jewish synagogue, unhooked the chain that held the scrolls, took them under their arms, and said, these find their fulfillment in Christ.

[8 : 22] These are ours. Stunning. And only that accounts for the great collision in those early centuries.

Let me put it a little differently. What took place when God came down and made a covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai at the time of the Exodus where we spent our whole summer?

We'll look in comparison to what took place when Jesus went up into the presence of God from a small mount outside of Jerusalem. As if it is old, antiquated, and vanishing.

If you argue with it, you're not arguing with me. You're arguing with the text, verse 13, which says very clearly the first one is obsolete, and what is becoming obsolete is growing old and ready to vanish away.

Let me put it this way. Just as this writer superseded the Exodus texts related to Aaron and saw in them a better priest according to Melchizedek as the psalmist had said was coming, so too now he takes all of the Exodus texts in Exodus 19-31, the giving of the law, the rules, the pattern for the sacrificial system that will follow of the same, and with one quotation from a psalm will indicate that the first was completely temporal in nature and has now been completed and fulfilled, and therefore we relate to God on an entirely different terms.

[10 : 08] you can see the change coming. Look at chapter 8, verses 6 and 7. I mean, he is writing with such force that any reader of this text would have been enamored and waiting for a conversation.

He writes, but as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better since it is enacted on better promises.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. And then, notice what happens beginning in verse 8 with one deft quotation from Jeremiah.

You can see it in your own text, offset in tight print. He is ready to pronounce the implications of his findings. He moves from what was given to Israel at Exodus to that which is obsolete and vanishing and now gone away on the weight of a citation in Jeremiah that says, this was from the beginning.

Temporal. Temporary. Of use for a time. But only so that you would recognize the real fulfillment of it when it came along.

[11 : 28] I have been astounded this year in reading this letter. Look at it. That quote, in the small space of five verses, the writer has put his teeth into a text that promises to supplant all that was given on the mountain at the time of Israel's Exodus.

And with it, Israel's way of relating to God and the world's way of coming to God through Israel forever shifted.

redirected. For centuries, Jews of old believed, as well as outsiders who would join them, that they would be saved from humanity's universal fallenness through their covenantal relationship to God, through which came the law, the rules, the blood sacrifice found in the regulations of worship that came along with all the attending accoutrements of lampstands and table and bread of presents and golden altar of incense and the Ark of the Covenant which was covered not only with gold but with blood for the sacrifices offered.

That God's electing power of the nation was regulated through the religious, cultic worship practices and that the world which would join themselves to it would then enter into a right relationship with God.

Not so, says the writer to Hebrews. I mean, the submission of this on the desk of his instructors was a bombshell waiting for publication that today is still being read.

[13 : 26] This is not some dissertation that maybe got filed by some academic journal and is stuffed in some library that nobody's checked out in three quarters of a century.

This dissertation was one of the unique ones that had theoretical value, that interested the guild and it had appeal to all the masses and we are still reading it today. He says that Jeremiah spoke of coming days.

Look at those texts. verse 8, Behold, the days are coming when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

Look at verse 10, For this covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. There's a new thing coming, says Jeremiah. And this writer unrolled that scroll and when he did his original research and he found that text, believe me, he grabbed hold of it, checked it out, wouldn't let anybody else have it, and he went home and meditated on it until he knew how to think his way clear.

the new replaced the old.

[14 : 45] And for him, it becomes a better ministry because it's built on a better promise. And it's a better promise according to Jeremiah for three reasons.

Look at verse 10, it's an internal change that takes place, not external. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days.

I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts. That which was written down on scrolls or originally came on a tablet of stone is now internalized.

It's a better covenant. God is now at work on the inside of people rather than merely presenting them something one degree of separation on the outside.

Not only is it better because it's internal but verse 11 because it's universal. It says, 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 to the greatest.

[15 : 46] Paraphrase, it isn't as if some get it and some don't and some got to be transferred around. This is going to be a universal thing. That the way God's going to deal with people is going to be in a sense open to everyone for their own exploration, their own consideration, democratized out, internal, universal, and then verse 12, eternal.

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. The writer of the Hebrews says that the ministry that Jesus performed in fulfillment of all the Old Testament scriptures is superior to the ministry that came on the mountain at the time of Moses in three ways.

What Moses offered the people was merely something external. It did not have the power to change an internal heart. What Moses offered the people related specifically to Israel and the nation, this one relates in a universal way that didn't require anyone else to get between it, and it's better because it's not temporal, it's eternal, and it deals with the very forgiveness of your sins, which no longer have to be recast weekly through religious cultic worship, but praise God, are gone forever.

When it says that he throws your sins as far as the east is from the west, it's simply a poetic way of saying you can't get to your sins anymore. He won't get to your sins anymore.

He says, I will remember them no more. It doesn't mean that he forgets, it doesn't mean that he had a memory lapse, it means I won't count them against you. Think of it.

[17 : 24] Think of it. Truth be told. Our conscience is never clean for long. Might be clean when you recite the creed in the morning.

But come down to lay your head down at night, you're wondering how did I recite that in the morning? How is it that I was so, so involved in the joy of the forgiveness of my sins and by the time I go to bed I'm laying down in them again?

Our conscience is never clean for long. Two pictures to see how easily we move from here through verse 14. All you've got to know is the end of verse 5.

Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. I won't hold you long on these pictures. But each of these pictures, verses 1 through 10 and 11 to 14 simply apply the truths of Jeremiah's prophecy.

They are two portraits. The first portrait that hangs on the wall in 9, 1 to 10 is the imperfection of the old covenant.

[18 : 38] And the portrait that hangs across from it, staring it down from the other side of the room are the perfections of the new. Indeed, these portraits parallel one another internally and intentionally.

What are the imperfections of the old? Verses 1 through 5 in chapter 9, one of the imperfections is where that covenant was ratified. It was ratified here on earth, in this place, in this age.

Verse 1, they had regulations. Verse 2, for a tent was prepared. That tent, in a sense, is right here on the earth. It's an earthly tent.

It's a covenant that God came down and did something here. In contrast to the second portrait, chapter 10, verse 11, but when Christ appeared as high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, he entered.

Do you see the contrast of the portraits? The old covenant, God's got to come down, do something earthly, which by nature then is temporal.

[19 : 56] In the new covenant, you've got a different kind of tent entirely. It's what Jesus does going up. The second way that these portraits play off each other, verses 6 to 8 of chapter 9, the frequency, these preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section performing their duties, but into the second only the high priest goes and he once a year, not without taking blood.

This is going to happen in our community in 10 days time and across the country, the day of atonement. For yet to this day we are refrequenting the celebrations of the covenant made with Israel on Sinai at the time of the Exodus.

It's repeated. it's annual. Because why? Because our conscience is not clean for long.

So on one day a year you take stock, you make your covenantal promises again, you come under the mercies of God and you look for him to cover or absolve you and you do so by the bringing of your own oblations but not so.

The second one, look at verse 12, the second portrait. He entered once for all into the holy places, not by the means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood.

[21 : 40] He entered once for all. Do you see how the two portraits hanging in the hall are playing off one another? Cultic religious worship requires the worshiper to continue to come day after day, month after month, year after year, because you know your conscience is not clean, but he entered once for all.

I mean, is there a more sufficient sacrifice for sins than what you read in the scriptures concerning the death of Jesus, the Nazarene?

the third way that they play off each other. Not only the place of the second is better to the place of the first, a heavenly tent versus an earthly tent, not only the frequency and the sufficiency of the second far exceeds the first, for he does one time what there is needing to be repeated, but verses 8 through 10 of the first portrait, you see the effect.

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered, here it is, that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings and regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

what he says is, what you do down here on earth, when you offer your religious worship to God through sacrifices that you hope will somehow mediate that relationship on your behalf, and you do it repeatedly, it doesn't actually complete the conscience of the worshiper.

[23 : 35] contrast the effect found in the other portrait, verses 13 and 14. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the sprinkling of deviled persons with ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, the external things, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

There the contrast is complete. You are in the portrait gallery of the writer to the Hebrews, and on the basis of Jeremiah, he says, all that took place at Exodus is now superseded, and if you want to know how it superseded, look at this portrait of an earthly place and repeated sacrifices and ineffectual ability, and look at Jesus, who's in the heavens, itself, before the presence of God, one time walked in that you might sit down for him forever, eternally redemption.

It doesn't get any better than that. Let me put it to you this way, this text is the death knell to all religion as we know it.

John Chapman, friend of mine, now passed on, once said, what do you do with your guilt?

What do I do with my guilt? I knew exactly what we do with our guilt. some of us bury it, some of us suppress it, some of us ignore it, some of us get angry at others as a displacement method for it, some of us decide the greatest need is to forgive ourselves for it, and some of us with tender conscience hope that religious practices will absolve us from the penalty.

[26 : 00] In other words, like Israel of old, we offer oblations to God here, and we do it over and over again, believing, hoping, hoping more than believing that God will look down upon those religious acts of service and clear both our record and our conscience.

And the writer of the Hebrews says, I've got a better priest who dwells in a better place, who can perform for you a better ministry because it's secured on a better promise, and if you repent and believe that his work is sufficient for your sin, he's going to take you home, not only take you home, look at the way verse 14 ends, he's going to equip you to serve the living God.

What are the benefits of becoming a Christian today if you've never become one? Two. For the first day in your life, you're going to have a clear conscience. Not because your conscience should be clear, but because that sacrifice done by Christ clears your name.

What he did one time is sufficient for everything you've done and will do. I mean, I'm telling you, you need to become a Christian today.

the other implication is not only the purity of your conscience, but the ability then to live your life as a life of service.

[27 : 50] Not offering sacrifices in an effort to appease God, but living confidently in service that you might be a three dimensional living expression of the grace of God.

God. Let me close. If you've been here a while now, you're probably aware that come the fall, I have taken to reciting the same illustration.

I don't do that very often. I think if you've listened to me over 30 years, you probably realize, well, he doesn't have a lot of things he does every week. but this I do.

There was a first year university student at Cambridge back in the 18th century by the name of Charles Simeon. When he arrived on campus as a first year student, he was told in that day that he had to prepare himself for the celebration of the Holy Sacrament, the Lord's Supper.

He was a first year student. Saying, what is this? Every student has to take the Lord's Supper? It scared him to death. He didn't know what to do, but he knew that come Easter, he was going to have to be ready.

[29 : 24] His biographer, or one of them, Hugh Evan Hopkins, tells the story this way. Charles had been three days in residence when he and his fellow King's scholars received the customary note from the provost requiring their attendance at chapel.

At that time, it would have been in three weeks' time. He was never to forget the date, February 2nd, 1779, when the porter brought him this devastating piece of news.

I love the way that's put. Take that? He had only just come up. He'd been busying himself with the mundane matters as getting his room in order, stocking his locker, his furniture had to be sorted out.

How many of you have rearranged your beds? Altogether, a busy time. His first reaction was to try to dodge the issue, to get out of it, for he was far from feeling in the mood for such a serious activity as going to Holy Communion.

Satan himself was as fit to attend as I, was how he put it years later. He spent hours trying to reconcile his guilt with the mystery of the sacrifice of Christ as portrayed in the communion service of 1662.

[30 : 48] He had no evangelical training to throw light on the subject. There was no one he knew to whom he could turn. The skies seemed brazen overhead, and when he looked down, it was only to see his horrific reflection as a sinner beyond hope.

In this frame of mind, he suddenly came upon a phrase to the effect, quote, the Jews knew what to do when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering. Like a flash, it came to him, quote, I can transfer all my guilt to another?

I will not bear them on my soul a moment longer. Looking back in happy retrospect over the years he recorded later, quote, accordingly, I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.

And on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy. On the Thursday, that hope increased. On the Friday and Saturday, it became more strong. And on Sunday morning, Easter day, April 4th, I woke up early with those words upon my heart and lips, Jesus Christ is risen today.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. This is a first-year student. And then from that hour, he says, peace flowed into rich abundance in my soul.

[32 : 06] And at the Lord's table in our chapel, I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior. This is what the Christian gospel offers to you today. An eternal remission of sins through the single sacrifice of Jesus who has entered in his flesh into the presence of God.

That all mud-like men and women who trust in him will come in on his coattails. I would say to you today, as we prepare for the Lord's Supper, you don't offer anything new to God.

This meal is simply a reminder of the one thing he has done for you. The questions that ought to govern your conversations in the week with one another in community groups and around lunch tables.

What do we do with our guilt? How do you try to absolve it? Why did the pastor say that religion is insufficient for it?

remind me of what Christ offers other than it? open by saying that this letter was somewhat of a dissertation proposal that I think would have met with great acclaim in his own day.

[34 : 19] But it's an exhortation. it's one of the rare works in literature that belongs among the writings of the highest guild and should be trafficked among the readers of the lowest street corners.

believers I offer you today nothing less than the Lord Jesus Christ as sufficient for your problem with guilt and for all those who confess him you are welcome at the Lord's table.

But if you are here today and you're saying I'm not ready for this then keep coming back week by week and may in God's gracious providence may the truths of the scripture grab you the way they grabbed Simeon over his weeks of reflection until you like he enter here and say Jesus Christ is risen today.

Hallelujah. Our heavenly father we come now to partake of the table not as an act of oblation not as something that we are sacrificing rather we come simply to remember to remember the death of our Lord and to be strengthened in what he has done on our behalf.

I pray that all who take it by faith would indeed be strengthened for the old is passing away. thank God the new shall remain.

[36 : 12] In Jesus name Amen.