

# A New Covenant

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning we come again to the Lord's table. Earlier this morning we learned about the tabernacle in Alive with our kids.

And I wanted to just run over some of those things again this morning with us adults. Because it really is amazing. It really sheds a lot of light on what this table, the Lord's table, is all about.

First, let's remember what Jesus said at the Last Supper on the eve of his crucifixion. You can probably complete the sentence from memory.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you. New covenant.

In Alive we've been talking about the old covenant. I'm going to use some of our visuals from this morning. The old covenant was the covenant that God made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

[ 1 : 04 ] God wrote down the commands, the laws, the decrees that the people were to follow in order to be his chosen, special, holy people. It says that God etched those things onto the tablets of stone with his finger and gave them to Moses.

And this is what God said to Moses and the people on that occasion. From Exodus chapter 19 verses 5 and 6. He said, God instructed Moses and the people to build a spectacular ark for this covenant.

A wooden box that was overlaid with gold and crafted beautifully. On top was a cover called the mercy seat or the atonement cover.

It had two cherubim on the top made of solid gold. And this was a very special thing. It was the place where the covenant was kept.

The agreement. The stone tablets were put right into the ark. And this was how they were carried around with the people. But not only that, this ark was the very place that God chose to be present among his people.

[ 2 : 39 ] It says that God caused his glory to appear, to shine above the atonement cover, right in the midst of the wings of those two cherubim.

If we take a step back, you'll notice the rings and the poles. The obvious purpose was so that the people could carry the ark around from place to place as they traveled.

But a closer look tells us another aspect of the story. The poles themselves were overlaid with gold. Even the wooden implements used to carry God's special ark were to be overlaid with gold.

It speaks of God's matchless worth. His splendor. His royalty. But there was another reason for the poles. It was so that the ark could be moved without any need for the people to touch it.

It was kind of like Mount Sinai. God was present there at Mount Sinai. And so the place where he was became holy. It became special. And the people, because they were sinful, were not permitted to come close.

[ 3 : 50 ] They erected barriers. They were not permitted to touch the mountain, the place where God was. Otherwise, it's said that God would break out against them.

His perfect goodness and justice would strike out against them if they touched the mountain. Giving them the punishment that they deserved for their sins.

The poles were kind of like that. They were a way for God's holy ark. The place where he was present to remain separate from the touch of sinful man. And this separation, this whole idea of God being holy, special, distinct from us sinful human beings, this reality that distance must be maintained between God and us, it's written all over the way that the tabernacle was arranged.

The tabernacle had a system of curtains that would be set up around its outer border, forming a courtyard inside, separating the holy from the common.

The place where God was from the place where the people were camped. And then inside this courtyard was the tent of meeting.

[ 5 : 06 ] It was covered with a number of different things to protect it from the elements. It was covered completely at the sides and the rear. And the entrance was curtained off.

Another form of separation. The worshipers could come into the courtyard when they were ceremonially clean. But only the priests were allowed to enter the tent of meeting.

And then inside the tent of meeting, there was a back room, which was also curtained off. It was called the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place.

It was the place where God's Ark of the Covenant was kept. The very room in which God appeared above the mercy seat of the Ark. By God's decree, only the high priest was permitted to enter into that room.

And only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when he did the priestly work of making atonement for the sins of the people. So this was the old covenant.

[ 6 : 17 ] The old terms. The old agreement. Animal sacrifices were to be offered regularly on the bronze altar. In the courtyard.

And only by the priests. And hands and feet were to be washed with water from the bronze basin. Before doing the work of the priest. The punishment for a priest failing to wash his hands before entering the tent of meeting.

To touch or handle the things in there. Was death. And we might think at first, Wow. Isn't that harsh?

Why would God kill someone for forgetting to wash their hands? But the lesson here is not that God is harsh. It's that God is holy.

It's that God is worthy. God is holy. Also inside the tent of meeting. There was a lampstand. That needed to be kept lit. There was a table that was to have fresh bread kept on it.

[ 7 : 22 ] Changed weekly. One loaf for each tribe of Israel. There was an incense altar. That was to be stoked with a fresh batch of incense in the morning. and at sundown.

Even the wick trimmers for the lamp, God said they were to be made of gold. It's like, don't even think of using just an iron pair of wick trimmers on my lampstand.

I, the Lord Almighty, I'm in the next room just beyond the curtain above the mercy seat of the ark and you must show me the reverence and honor that I am due or else be guilty of profaning my holy name and bear the only fitting consequences.

Through all of this, God was helping us understand the truth of who he is in relation to us. He is the glorious, exalted, perfectly good and just creator.

Choosing to live among a bent, stubborn and sinful people. This tabernacle was the way for God to be among his people and for his people to be near him.

[ 8 : 43 ] There had to be separation between the common and the holy, the clean and the unclean, the righteous and the guilty. We talked about the high priest's outfit this morning.

It was to have little golden bells around the bottom hem. You can barely see them in this picture. And they would tie a rope around his ankle before he went into the most holy place on the day of atonement into the very presence of God.

The bells served to help the regular priests know that the high priest was still alive while he was in there. And the rope around his ankle was to pull him out in case he did something and the Lord struck him dead.

Can you imagine the fear and trembling of the high priest on that one day a year when it came time to enter into the very presence of Yahweh, the creator?

The one who knew every sinful thought, desire, word spoken, deed he had ever done. This whole idea of God's holiness is difficult to understand.

[ 10 : 04 ] But that's why the tabernacle was the way that it was. It was to help people, to help us see the invisible reality of how things are between God and us, creator and creature, the righteous one and sinners.

I find what Paul said in his letter to Timothy quite helpful in reflecting on this. 2 Timothy 2, verse 20. Paul says there, In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are for special purposes and some for common use.

Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy. Useful to the master and prepared to do any good work.

Now Paul has his main point here and I'm not going to get into that. It's a whole separate discussion. But his illustration is helpful, at least to me. He points out how we all understand the way that it works in a house.

[11:12] There are both articles for special purposes and there are those that are for common purposes or we might say lower purposes. And there's something right about maintaining that separation, that distinction.

We save the best dishes, the china, the silverware, the best towels for those special occasions and to honor those special guests.

That's what holiness is all about. It's about that separation. Some occasions are set apart and special and so we honor that guest or that life event or that milestone by bringing out the best articles of the house, putting on the best meal that we can.

It would be wrong in those special moments to use the chamber pot or the toilet brush or a dirty old rag to give that honored guest the towel that's half ripped apart, shredded and stained to wash their face.

Who of us doesn't at least understand that natural impulse to tidy and clean before company comes over? Not to impress others or to put on airs but simply to bless and honor and show love to our guests.

[12:31] So now we take that and we apply it to God. What should we do for Him? What is fitting? What is right if He was to come live with us, among us, in the camp where we are?

He is absolutely worthy of the very best, the gold wick trimmers, the washing of our hands before handling His stuff in the place of meeting.

I wonder, could it be that we've lost a sense of the holiness of God? Or could it be that we are so bent by sin that we have never appreciated it as fully as we should?

And yet, even though there is much here to make us tremble and wonder at God's holiness, do you see the other reality here? also. God could have destroyed them all at Mount Sinai if He wanted to.

In fact, it's a wonder that He didn't after they made the golden calf blatantly disobeying His command only weeks after He gave it to them. God could have simply just cleansed the earth of their presence, but He didn't.

[13:53] He gave all these instructions to Moses about the tabernacle and the ark. Why? Because He loved these people. Bent and sinful though they were, He desired to live among them and to be with them.

He wanted a loaf of bread representing each one of the tribes of Israel in His presence at all times. Bread is food and it speaks of fellowship.

He wanted that reminder in His presence of each one of the sons of Jacob and their children. And then there was the high priest's uniform.

God wanted it crafted in a certain way and a part of the design was to have this breastplate over the chest with precious gemstones in it.

a unique gemstone, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Was it only a reminder to the high priest that He served on behalf of all the tribes of Israel?

[15:02] Or was it also a kind of memorial before God that each son of Jacob was uniquely precious to Him and all their children after them?

So yes, there is holiness, fear, trembling, reverence, and awe. But there is also deep mercy, kindness, patience, love, the desire for relationship.

God knew that the people would continue to sin, to continue to give in to that inward sinful nature. And for that, there was mercy.

There was a way to make atonement with sacrifices to turn away God's punishment. And for the time, God was willing to take the life of an animal belonging to the guilty person in the stead of the life of the guilty person.

This was the old covenant, the old terms, the old agreement. But now let's turn our gaze again to Jesus.

[16:20] What did He say? This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.

Do you hear this? Jesus says there's going to be a new arrangement between God and you. A new deal with new terms.

And I will be the sacrifice that establishes this new covenant, says Jesus. My blood will be poured out for you. That's what the cross is all about.

A new covenant with God. I'm going to read now three chapters from Hebrews. And I want you to let these words soak in just how wonderful this new covenant that Christ brought really is compared to the old one.

The first bit is from chapter 4 and then we'll skip to chapter 7. chapter 5. Verse 6. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

[ 17 : 46 ] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet he did not sin.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Over to chapter 7 verse 11. If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood, why was there still need for another priest to come?

One in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron. For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar for it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah. In regard to that tribe, Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

[ 19 : 08 ] For it is declared, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless for the law made nothing perfect.

and a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath. Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.

You are a priest forever. Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office.

But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

[ 20 : 26 ] Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness, but the oath which came after the law appointed the Son who has been made perfect forever.

Now the main point of what we're saying is this. We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer.

If he were on earth, he would not be a priest for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

[ 21 : 40 ] This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle see to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. But in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one since the new covenant is established on better promises.

If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. but God found fault with the people and said, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt because they did not remain faithful to my covenant and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

this is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God and they will be my people. 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 for I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.

[ 23 : 15 ] By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear. Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

A tabernacle was set up in its first room where the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread this is called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant.

This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the glory overshadowing the atonement cover but we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

When everything had been arranged like this the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry but only the high priest entered the inner room and that only once a year and never without blood which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.

[ 24 : 37 ] This is an illustration for the present time indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.

They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings external regulations applying until the time of the new order. But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands that is to say it is not part of this creation.

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood thus obtaining eternal redemption.

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

How much more than will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

[ 26 : 01 ] For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

In the case of a will it's necessary to prove the death of the one who made it because a will is in force only when somebody has died. It never takes effect while the one who made it is living.

This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people he took the blood of calves together with water scarlet wool and branches of hyssop and sprinkled the scroll and all the people.

He said this is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep. In the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.

In fact the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. It was necessary then for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices.

[ 27 : 19 ] but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one.

He entered heaven itself now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the most holy place every year with blood that is not his own.

Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. And he will appear a second time not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year make perfect those who draw near to worship.

[ 28 : 47 ] Otherwise would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins.

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. therefore when Christ came into the world he said sacrifice and offering you did not desire but a body you prepared for me. With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said here I am it is written about me in the scroll I have come to do your will my God.

First he said sacrifices and offerings burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire nor were you pleased with them though they were offered in accordance with the law.

Then he said here I am I have come to do your will. He sets aside the first to establish the second and by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[ 30 : 11 ] Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins but when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says this is the covenant I will make with them after that time says the Lord I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds then he adds their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

And where these have been forgiven sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with the sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful a new covenant a better covenant better promises established by a greater high priest who offered the greatest of sacrifices once for all time in the greater and more perfect tabernacle of heaven thus obtaining eternal redemption everlasting forgiveness and free access to the holiest place to God himself this is what we mark with bread and cup this morning not just that Jesus died on the cross but that

Jesus has done all this for us by his death because of his love a new covenant everlasting forgiveness and life what an amazing gift of grace Jesus is to us if you believe in your heart that Jesus has done all this for you please join with us in eating and drinking from this table in a moment Dave will come up and pass out the elements and after a couple of minutes of quiet prayer and reflection we'll partake together we'll wait until everybody has been served and then we'll partake together