

A Better & Final Covenant (Hebrews 8:1-13)

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[0 : 00] In case you haven't picked up on this, as we've been looking through the book of Hebrews, Hebrews is probably, I'll go ahead and say it is the most Old Testament book of the New Testament.

It refers back to many people in the Old Testament. It refers back to the temple, to the sacrificial system, the promises made by God. It has large portions of the Old Testament quoted right there in it.

In fact, half of chapter 8 is essentially a quotation of Jeremiah 31 that Sean read for us earlier. So many things that are happening in the book of Hebrews are a continuation of the Old Testament, of looking at it like that.

But at the same time, the book of Hebrews explains something new in greater detail than most of the places in the New Testament as well. It explains in great detail this new covenant.

Now, I want us to be careful as we look at this today. In no way, shape, or form are we suggesting that we do away with the Old Testament or unhitching ourselves from it or whatever you may say.

[1 : 12] But to do so would not only be irresponsible, it would be unlike Christ. Because if you remember from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. And so as we mentioned at the beginning of our study of the book of Hebrews, as we think about the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see it much like a two-act play.

You have Act 1 and you have Act 2. The Old Testament is Act 1. New Testament is Act 2. And if you only have the Old Testament, you have the beginning of the story without the resolution.

If you only have the New Testament, you have the resolution without the setup, without understanding where this is going. And so if you go to see a play and you leave before the final act, you're probably going to be pretty disappointed.

In fact, you can't give a review on the play if you don't see the whole thing. You can't say, oh, well, this is a bad play or a good play if you don't see the whole thing. Because it helps to make the whole play make sense when we see it together.

[2 : 19] Not because there's anything wrong with the first few Acts, but because the play wasn't finished. And so we have to see it as a whole. Michael Kruger, reflecting on the Old Testament, he describes it this way.

He says, it is a single coherent story that ends on a cliffhanger. A story that needs an ending. God spoke to his people. And the cliffhanger is that he promised to send a redeemer for them.

And when Jesus came, he resolved that cliffhanger. Cliffhanger. Alistair Begg. And I have to make sure that I enunciate this. Because Clay, last time I said Alistair Begg, he thought I said Alex Trebek.

And so it is not Alex Trebek. But Alistair Begg, he was making a statement recalling his Sunday school teacher when he was growing up.

How his Sunday school teacher explained the metanarrative of scripture, the continuation of scripture to him as he was growing up. Now, before I get into this explanation, I just want to take this as an encouragement.

[3 : 23] To you Sunday school teachers, to you parents who are training up your kids, what you tell your kids matters. What our Sunday school teachers are teaching them matters because they listen.

And so this great preacher who has become incredibly influential over his life, who has PhDs, who is able to explain scripture in great detail in many ways, he still refers back to what his childhood

Sunday school teacher told him about how to understand the story of scripture.

And so he explains it this way. He says, if you want to see the kind of the picture of the whole story, as you think of it like this. He says, you think of it as the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, Jesus is predicted.

In the Gospels, Jesus is revealed. In the Acts, Jesus is preached. In the epistles, which Hebrews falls under, Jesus is explained.

And then in Revelation, Jesus is expected. And so you have Jesus predicted. You have Jesus revealed. You have Jesus preached. You have Jesus explained.

[4 : 30] And you have Jesus expected. You see, the Bible is not a series of disconnected stories. It is one story that has Jesus at the center from beginning to end.

And our passage today helps highlight this in great detail. And so if you have a copy of God's Word, I want you to invite you to open with me to Hebrews chapter 8.

And we're going to read all of chapter 8, the 13 verses here in chapter 8. It says this. Now the point in what we are saying is this. We have such a high priest.

One who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven. A minister in the holy places. In the true tent that the Lord set up. Not man.

For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. Thus, it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all.

[5 : 32] Since the priests who offer gifts according to the law, they serve a copy and a 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 to you on the mountain.

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

For if the first covenant had been faultless, there would not have been, there have been no occasion to look for a second. 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, 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 I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

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. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

[6 : 48] And they shall not teach each one his neighbor and each other his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

For I was merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. 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.

And so from this passage, there are two truths and a great promise that I want us to bring our attention to today. Two truths and a great promise. To begin with, I want us to clearly see that we have a better high priest.

We have a better high priest. Last week, the author showed us in great detail that Jesus is a high priest after a different order. He's a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

And as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, he is both a priest and a king. That was the point of what we were sharing last week. And this week, he begins to explain what he means by that.

[7 : 57] He begins to explain this, and he does so in great detail in the first five verses. But I want us to read those first two again, just to bring our attention back to this. So after he's talked about who Melchizedek is and how Jesus is a high priest after this order, he says, And it tells us he's appointed to this.

You see, this passage gives us at least a couple of reasons why Jesus is better. Why he is a better high priest. And to begin with, we see that Jesus makes a better offering.

Verse 3 tells us that Jesus is a better high priest because he offers a better offering. His sacrifice, the sacrifice that he gave his life for to pay our sin debt, Jesus, we are told, is appointed to this role. He's appointed to this role as a high priest. Now, kids, I want you to answer a question for me today. This is for the kids. This isn't for the adults. So, kids, think about it this way.

Okay, if a person is appointed to the position of a firefighter or a fireman, what would you expect them to do? Okay, maybe we do need some adult help.

[9 : 32] Fight fires. Yes, exactly. You would expect them to fight fires. If someone is appointed to the position or role of a police officer, what would you expect them to do?

You would expect them to keep us safe. If someone was appointed to the role of a second grade teacher, you would expect them to teach children how to read, how to write, how to do those things to set them up for success.

And so, when the author says that Jesus was appointed to the role of high priest, it would have triggered something in the reader's minds. It would have triggered for them that Jesus is appointed for the purpose of making a sacrifice.

And this is exactly what he did. Except his sacrifice was better than the Levitical priesthood sacrifice. Remember, he's after a different order.

He's after the order of Melchizedek. And so, his sacrifice is better because his sacrifice was lasting. Because he laid down his own life for this sacrifice, making this sacrifice final and complete.

[10 : 39] So, I want you to put yourself into the shoes of these first century Jewish Christians that would have heard these words. What this is saying is that Jesus has achieved what all of Israel have been longing for throughout the generations.

The real, full, and final forgiveness of sins. And it's really easy for us to miss this in our reading today if we don't have an understanding of how Act 1 paints the picture for Act 2.

If we don't understand how the Old Testament is paving the way for this, it's really easy to miss this part where it says that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

You see, in the Old Testament, while the priests were doing their work, when they were doing things, they never completed their work. They never sat down. In fact, when you look at all the furnishings that were to be put into the tabernacle and into the temple, you had all of these great things that were supposed to go into the temple, into the tabernacle.

You had these lamp sands. You had these basins that were all made out of fine metals and precious gold and different things. You had different furnishings. You had altars. You had the Ark of the Covenant.

[11 : 56] You had curtains. You had all of these things that were meticulously laid out that were supposed to be in the tabernacle and the tent. But there was something that wasn't mentioned that wasn't in there.

There's something that isn't mentioned because it wasn't supposed to be in there. And that's a chair for the high priest to have a seat in. And it was intentional that this isn't in there because in the Old Testament, the work of the high priest is never done.

It's never complete. There's no need to put a chair in there because they can't sit down because they're always working. They're always trying to figure out, to try to follow the pattern, to pay for these sins.

Because their work was never done. Peter O'Brien notes, he says, that Christ sat down as a priest after his work of making purification for sins shows that his work was finished.

Do you know what finished means? It means it's done. It means it's complete. The atonement for sin is done and it is complete.

[13 : 01] If something is finished, that means there's nothing you and I can do to add to it or to take away from it. If you are saved, then your sins, past, present, and future, are paid for because Jesus' work is finished.

Jesus makes a better offering. But what we also see in this passage is that he's a better high priest because he serves in a better place.

Verses 1 and 2 tell us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of majesty in heaven. A minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

See, one of the ways that we see that we have a better high priest is because Jesus serves from a better place. He serves from a better place, from heaven in the true tent.

Some of your translations right here may use the word tabernacle instead of tent. And I actually kind of like that translation a little better here. But on a very basic level, tabernacle is the same as tent.

[14 : 07] But more specifically, tabernacle refers to the tent where God met with his people after the exodus from Egypt. You see, the people needed a tabernacle or they needed a tent because

they were wandering around in the wilderness.

And the tabernacle provided a mobile place to meet with God. But Hebrews tells us that Christ fulfills his ministry in a tabernacle that the Lord set up.

It's not a tent on earth. It's a superior tabernacle in heaven. The tabernacle on earth was real, but it wasn't the place where salvation was finalized, was finished, was won.

Full salvation takes place in the true tabernacle in heaven. Man does not make this tabernacle, only the Lord does. You see, the original is always better than the substitute.

The real thing is better than a shadow as it describes it here. The original is always better than the substitute. As I was thinking about this week, I was reminded of two vacations that I went on when I was growing up.

[15:15] I can remember the first vacation that really just stands out to me and really made a big impact in my life and probably was one of my favorite vacations ever growing up was when I was in sixth or seventh grade, our family went to Yellowstone National Park.

And we saw some different things around there, but we went to Yellowstone National Park and I just remember it was an eye-opening experience. Because we get there and all of a sudden I'm seeing mountains bigger than any mountains that I've ever seen before.

I'm seeing wildlife that you don't have around here. I'm seeing all kinds of things. I'm seeing lakes that are so big that you can barely see to the other side.

Canyons, you're seeing these geysers that erupt almost like clockwork. And so it was just this amazing thing and it really began, my love for Yellowstone began there and really was one of the reasons that I wanted to go back when I was in college to serve with Baptist Collegiate Ministries as a missionary in Yellowstone.

And so all of those things were impactful about that. But one of the things that I remember from that is one of the places that we stayed. We stayed in the Old Faithful Inn.

[16:25] Anybody ever been to the Old Faithful Inn? Okay, a handful of you in here have been to the Old Faithful Inn. It's amazing. It was built around 1900 or so. And so it's a very old lodge, a very old inn.

And so it was made with a lot of the trees that were from the air, these lodgepole pines and it has exposed beams everywhere. You walk into this foyer that you just see multiple levels going up. And so as soon as you walk in, your eyes immediately start looking at me like, wow, this place is massive. It's huge. And each floor that it goes up, it has an area there where you can, a little lobby on each floor where you can go out at night, enjoy cookies, enjoy somebody playing on a piano that just fills up the whole lobby of this giant inn.

And it's really, it's something that you should look up sometimes. If you've never seen it, you should look it up. Now, not right now. Don't get your phone out now. But later, look it up and see this because it really is an amazing thing.

They have this observation deck where you can go out and look at Old Faithful as it erupts on the hour almost. And so it's an amazing place. It truly is an amazing building.

[17:39] It is beautiful and elegant and rustic all at the same time. But the other vacation that I can remember very well was a year or two after this vacation.

And it was when our family went to Disney World. I think I was in the eighth grade or so. And we stayed at the Wilderness Lodge. Anybody ever seen Wilderness Lodge? Okay, a few more of you have seen the Wilderness Lodge than this.

Some of you may have stayed there, but it was a really beautiful, nice hotel. But much of it seems to be based on the Old Faithful Inn. And so that was something we noticed immediately as we walked in.

Like so much of this, it seems to be based on the Old Faithful Inn. It was a nice place. We enjoyed our stay. It had a great pool. But the whole time, we kept comparing the Wilderness Lodge to the Old Faithful Inn.

We kept saying, well, this is great, but remember the Old Faithful Inn. You know, this is really neat that they're trying to make it look like this, but remember the Old Faithful Inn. And because as nice as the copy was, it was not as impressive as the original.

[18:43] What the author is telling us here is that Jesus is mediating, he's ministering from heaven in a far superior place. Using the language of the author, he's not ministering from a copy or a shadow, but he's ministering from the real thing.

You see, we may run the risk of thinking that because Jesus ascended to heaven, that he left earth, that he is somehow less effective because he is in heaven and not on earth.

What the author is communicating here, what the author is telling us is that nothing could be further from the truth. He is more effective because he is ministering from a far superior place.

He lives to make intercession for us forever. He's ministering from the original, not a copy, not a shadow, but from the real thing. So we see a better sacrifice.

We see he's serving from a better place. And hopefully we can clearly see that we have a better high priest, which leads us to understanding this next truth.

[19 : 46] We have a better covenant. We have a better covenant. We get this from verses 6 through 13, where it says, but as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is far more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on a better promise.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. Then in verses 8 through 12, the author quotes Jeremiah 31, highlighting the need and promise of a new covenant, followed by verse 13 that says this, 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. Now, as we begin our discussion of this better covenant, I believe Kruger provides some helpful guardrails for us as we think about this and making this comparison between the old and the new covenants.

He says, As we enter into this comparison between the old and new covenants, we need to begin by remembering the contrast between them is not absolute. We must be careful not to overstate the differences in a way that caricatures the old covenant as harsh, cold, legalistic, and only concerned with externals, nor should we present the new covenant as unconcerned with the law or with obedience.

As we shall see, the differences between the covenants are often a matter of degree. And so with this in mind, let's look at some of these differences.

[21 : 24] You see, Christ's work allows us to directly and confidently enjoy God's presence. We no longer have to come before God in a tabernacle made by human hands because Christ has fulfilled the tabernacle's purpose.

We can draw near to the very throne of God and we can do this boldly and confidently knowing that Christ, our great high priest, has made a way for us.

We can do this boldly. Al Mohler, he says, this great truth permeates the pages of the Old Testament. The king who ransoms his people from their iniquities and brings them to peace with God has ushered in the new covenant by his blood.

And the old covenant is of far greater excellence than the first. And so in this passage, it tells us the old covenant had a fault.

Now, when he says it had a fault, don't think of it like a machine having a fault. Or your computer showing up with this error message that something went wrong with it. Or your check engine light coming on your car and you're needing to take it into a mechanic for a repair.

[22 : 36] Don't think of it as a fault like that. But its faultiness was rooted in its incompleteness. Its faultiness was rooted in its incompleteness.

The old covenant was faulty because it was not final. If it were the final covenant, there would have been no need for a better covenant that is talked about here.

You see, the new covenant is better because it makes the full and final atonement for our sins. No longer an endless cycle that makes, and this is what makes Christ's statement on the cross all the more amazing.

When he says, it is finished. When Christ says it is finished on the cross, he was announcing that the wrath of God toward the sin of his people was finally paid for in full.

Never again would there need to be an animal sacrifice because Jesus paid it all. When you look at the Jeremiah passage quoted, there's a promise of a relationship here.

[23 : 36] A promise of not only forgiveness, but remembering the sin no more. What you see is a fulfillment of the promise the angels made of the shepherds at the birth of Jesus.

You remember when the angels were there at the birth and announcing this birth, and they said, a heavenly host praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, what?

Peace. Peace among those with whom he is pleased. Peace among those with whom he is pleased. Ephesians 2 reminds us that because of sin, it's impossible to please God.

In fact, we follow the ways of this world, the sons of disobedience, and we're by nature objects of wrath like the rest of mankind. There is a condition that we have no hope of peace outside of the only begotten son coming to the earth and accomplishing what we could never hope to accomplish on our own.

But in the new covenant, we get to experience new peace. Peace that is final and complete. And what does all of this talk about? A better high priest and a better covenant actually change about our lives today.

[24 : 50] Well, this passage and especially the last couple of chapters that we've looked at in the book of Hebrews are some pretty difficult chapters to understand.

In fact, if you're just trying to read through for completion the Bible, you might get to these passages and you're like, you know what? I don't really have time to think about this. I don't really have time to dive into what this means.

And so I'm just going to read over this quickly and then get to some other places. But in doing so, we miss some great promises that we have in this. We miss some great truths that bring about this great promise.

There are passages that are difficult, that are hard to study, but really what we are doing is we're growing in our understanding of the gospel in this. We're not growing past the gospel.

We're not checking a box and going past this. We're growing deeper when we study this in a greater detail. In this passage, we are not growing past the gospel, but simply growing deeper into it.

[25 : 50] The more that we dive into it, the more we clearly see God. And what we must understand is the true knowledge of God always leads us to action. True knowledge and understanding of God is always going to lead us to serving Him in greater ways.

And so it's my hope and prayer that these truths will help us to see this final promise, a promise that declares we have a better way of experiencing God.

We have a better way of experiencing God. In other words, what does this new covenant change about us? This new covenant changes the way we approach God. To begin with, our better high priest and better covenant changes the way that we approach Scripture.

We read the Bible as new covenant Christians, which means that we distinguish the Old Testament and our Scripture as our Scripture, but not as our covenant.

All the Bible is true from Genesis to Revelation. All the Bible is our Scripture. All the Bible is profitable for us. All the Bible should be known, but the Old Covenant is not our covenant.

[26 : 57] The Old Testament is vital to understanding our new covenant. Act 2 cannot be understood without Act 1. We should read it. We should study it. We should memorize it.

We should apply it. In fact, I would say that without it, it's impossible to understand the New Testament. But the Old Covenant is not our covenant. And so as we read the Bible as new covenant Christians, we take the commands of Christ as given to us.

The final command that Christ gives before He ascends to heaven, the Great Commission of going and making disciples, this is for us. Piper uses this to help us to see another difference in these covenants.

He says, the Old Testament was more come and see. The New Testament is go and tell. The Old Covenant at its core was ethnic and tribal.

There were provisions for outsiders to come into the covenant, but by and large, it was something that you were born into. The New Covenant is not tribal and ethnically centered.

[28 : 03] You see, Jew is an ethnicity. Christian is not. It is not primarily a come and see religion. It is a go and tell religion. It is a personal relationship that you enter into.

This is why we practice believer's baptism. It's not infant baptism because it's not a religion that you are born into. It's a relationship that you are reborn into.

A relationship that has new birth, one that requires you to be born again. One of the, our better high priests and better covenant changed the way that we pray.

When you look at the Lord's Prayer, or as I like to call it, the Disciples Prayer, Jesus begins this prayer in a radical way. Again, without knowing the Old Testament, this will be very easy to miss. But the prayer that Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, the model prayer that He models for them, saying you need to pray like this, He begins with a very bold statement. He says, when you pray, pray like this, Our Father, Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name.

[29 : 11] By addressing God as Father, He gets everyone's attention. Kent Hughes made the observation, He says, You can search from Genesis to Malachi, and you will not find one individual speaking of God as Father.

The New Covenant allows us to go from God's enemies to God's children. Pray as a New Covenant believer. Pray as addressing God as Father, and end by doing so in Jesus' name.

Our better high priest and better covenant change our relationship with God and others. We now have a relationship with God, not an impersonal relationship of knowing that somewhere, somehow, there probably is a God, but we can actually have a relationship with this God.

By placing our faith and our trust in Jesus, we can go from death to life. We can go from enemies to His children. We get to have a personal relationship with God.

And so whether you are a believer or not, I hope and pray that all of this covenant talk that we've talked about this morning helps us to see the gift we have in Christ, to experience a relationship with God that because of Jesus is final and it is complete.

[30 : 32] Heavenly Father, I thank You so very much for Your Word. I thank You for what it teaches us about You. I thank You that we can look at it and study passages like this in the book of Hebrews that can be difficult to understand, that can be difficult to wrap our minds around, but Lord, what a privilege, what an incredible knowledge that we get when we take the time to dig into Your Word, to understand what You are communicating to us by understanding the Old Testament, by understanding this, it paves the way for us to be able to more clearly see who You are and what You've done for us.

So Lord, I pray that today that we see You in greater ways, that we see You more clearly and by doing so that we trust You in a greater way.

So Lord, I pray that there's someone here today that needs to know You as their Lord and Savior, that needs to go from death to life, that You would give them the boldness to step forward and say, God, I'm ready to follow You.

I'm ready to place my faith and trust in You. I'm ready to stop trying to do this on my own, stop trying to do this cycle of doing enough good, being good enough to finally earn something, but realizing that I can't and that when You said on the cross, it is finished, that can be applied to me.

And so Lord, I pray that there's someone that needs to experience Your saving grace. You would give them the boldness to do so today. But Lord, I pray that for the rest of us who have placed our faith and our trust in You, that we would see You more clearly, that we would see the gift You've given us to live as new covenant believers, understanding what You accomplished on the cross is final, it's complete, it's done.

[32 : 27] And so Lord, help us to live in light of that each and every day. And we ask all these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen. I'm going to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation.

The Lord is speaking this morning. And I want you to respond as we stand together and sing. Amen.