

New covenant makes the old obsolete

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I'll be reading from Hebrews chapter 8 from the beginning. So 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, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. 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 to you on the mountain.

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.

[1 : 24] For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would 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 so 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. And they shall not teach each other his neighbor and each other, each one his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

For I will be merciful towards their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.

[2 : 50] And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. To be human is to be made for relationships.

That's very obvious. But we're made for personal, intimate relationships. In which we're loved unconditionally.

I guess every relationship really begins on that basis, doesn't it? Whether we're talking about friendships or marriage or the relationship between parents and children.

That unconditional love is what we long for and crave. But the harsh reality is that even the best and closest of our relationships very easily and often quickly sort of sink back into being transactional.

Not unconditional. And by transactional I mean the relationship goes something like this. I will only do for you certain things when I'm sure that you will respond to me by doing certain things that I want.

[4 : 08] That's a transaction. And when we get to that point we find ourselves in a real tangle. Because I still want and even demand that others, this other significant person, love me unconditionally.

While I'm heavily transactional towards them. It's a very unsatisfying form of love.

I would actually argue that it's a destructive form of love. Now, take another step with me. Because I think the same process can easily happen.

Can easily shape our desire for a personal relationship with God. So, it goes like this. We know our imperfections.

We know our own failure. So, when we think of a relationship with God, we actually want and need God to love us unconditionally. But in response, we so easily become transactional.

[5 : 21] That is, we do things for God and to God that we think will secure the things we want from God. And in the end, we don't actually love God for who he is.

For his own beauty. We love him for what we think we can get from him. And we do acts of love. In inverted commas.

To secure those things that we think we need and want. We can actually read God's word. We can form strong beliefs and emotional commitments about the things we think we need to do to please God and keep him happy.

Even though those things may be completely wrong. And then we get in a tangle with our relationship with God.

If all we do is respond or relate to God according to how we interpret what God says, how we interpret what God says, then we become religious.

[6 : 42] And we'll give expression to our religion either through formal religious rituals like might happen at a church like this on Sunday morning.

going to church, maybe observing Lent, taking the sacraments, whatever it is. Or we might do it through a private system of beliefs and practices.

Often times, something picked up as a child. So we try to be good, believing that we can be good. Good enough for God.

Or when life gets tough, we say our prayers. As if that's the key that will unlock God's blessing for us. And so on and so forth. Once a person is on the religious pathway, then I think meaningful personal relationship with God is lost.

Or at the very least, is substituted for transactions. As I said before, it's a very unsatisfying form of love.

[7 : 51] Dare I even say destructive. Now, hopefully that introduction will help us come into the notions that are in Hebrews chapter 8 this morning, especially the word covenant.

because as we move into the Bible generally, and Hebrews in particular, then I need to say that God hates religion.

His salvation plan has only ever been to have personal, intimate, rich relationship with his people. I'm going to just give you a very potted summary of the Old Testament in the next couple of minutes.

From the very start, from God's creation, the end point of God's creative work was rest. Now, when you dig into what the word rest is, we see it in Genesis chapter 2, it is God's people in God's place enjoying God's special blessing.

The place? Garden of Eden. enjoying personal relationships with God. Enjoying God himself.

Remember, Adam walked with God in the cool of the afternoon or the evening, whatever it was.

[9 : 08] That's a statement of personal relationship. Then Genesis 3, God's people chose to despise that relationship with God and do their own thing.

This fall into sin, as it's called, or rebellion, just messed up everything and destroyed personal relationship with God.

But even as God distanced himself from his rebellious people by removing them from the Garden of Eden, his special place of blessing, even as he was doing that, he promises or covenants.

There's the first mention of that word. He promises or covenants. And that's what a covenant is in the simplest form. It's just a promise. God covenants to do what was needed to restore personal relationship with his people.

And we pick up then the first phrase that said repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, once again, I will be your God and you will be my people and I will deal gently with you and bless you.

[10 : 23] That's a statement of unconditional love. Personal relationship. And ultimately, Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, tells us that God's covenant promise would be delivered by a special descendant of Adam and Eve who would crush Satan and restore God's people to rest.

The crusher would be the one who would come and restore the personal relationship with God that they were created to enjoy. That promised crusher we know as Jesus.

And the single story of the Bible from Genesis 3 to the time of Jesus is built around how God uses nation Israel to deliver his covenant promise.

of renewed relationship in and through Jesus. Every aspect of God's, the life of God's people in the Old Testament was built around God's covenant promise.

And the extent of God's commitment to restoring relationship and fellowship with his people is seen after the Exodus particularly. That becomes, as it were, the touchstone or the go-to passage to understand what it means to say God wants to be back in relationship with his people.

[11 : 48] And the story there is having brought his people to himself, there's the movement, bringing his alienated people to himself from Egypt, he restates his covenant promise in the terms, I will be your God and you will be my people.

loved despite your rebellion, enjoying the good life of fellowship and blessing with him despite your rebellion.

And from there in Exodus and Leviticus, God puts in place all the infrastructure, if you want to call it that, to make sure that that relationship is a reality.

He sends prophets to remind God's people of the promise on offer, the beautiful relationship that he was offering.

He sends leaders, eventually the kings, to model what that good life of blessing looked like and to lead them into it. He said that he would come to his people and live among them and that's the idea of the tent or the tabernacle and then later the temple where God expresses his commitment to his people.

[13 : 08] He comes to them and lives among his dirty, sinful people. A demonstration of personal commitment, sorry, a demonstration of commitment to personal relationship.

And then he said he would set up the sacrificial system and the sacrificial system is my special provision for my dirty people so I can keep on fellowshiping with them as a clean God.

It will remind them of my grace and mercy towards them and remind them that this relationship cannot function until sin has been addressed and dealt with.

And I'll appoint priests, says the Lord, God. And they will bring two alienated parties together, the clean God and his dirty people, highlighting God's grace and mercy to them and allowing animal sacrifices for their sin.

He would spell out in detail, he said, what we call the law. He would spell out in detail how the relationship can thrive. Now we think of law as restrictive and negative but not so.

[14 : 24] God's law was really positive parameters spelled around the relationship. You know, if the relationship is going to continue this is how you need to be acting. This is how I want you to act so that we might continue to enjoy relationship and fellowship together.

I'm your God and you're my people. But, despite all God's wonderful provision to make real his promise or covenant of relationship, there was a massive and ongoing problem that just kept making the whole thing fall over.

The heart of the problem? The problem of the heart. God's people repeatedly forgot what God's provision symbolized or pointed to.

They pointed to God's gracious and merciful efforts to be in personal fellowship with his sinful people. And so, repeatedly through the Old Testament, meaningful relationship with God was lost as they settled into a legalistic or transactional way of responding to God.

In other words, they forgot all of God's commitment, all of God's promise to be in personal relationship with them, all the things that God had put in place to make sure that happened, and they just went back to ticking boxes.

[16 : 07] We need to do this and this and this to unlock the things we want from God. And repeatedly through the Old Testament, God's pinged his people and his priests saying, yeah, there's no doubt you guys are doing all the right things, but it's making me sick because you're doing all the right things with bad attitudes, bad thinking, bad motives.

And in fact, this is my words, not God's words. In effect, God said, I don't do transactional relationship. Now, it's into that massive problem that Hebrews steps and shows us the perfection of Jesus.

And as we see the perfection of Jesus, we have exposed ever so clearly the weakness and, using the language of Hebrews, the shadowy nature of everything that went before him.

See, God sent prophet after prophet prophet with the same promise of relationship. But none of the prophets were able to make God's word penetrate through the minds and into the hearts of God's people.

At times, they chose not to listen. At times, they preferred to protect their own idea, their own belief about what God wanted and act in the light of that.

[17 : 58] The prophets were weak in that sense. God sent leader after leader, king after king, but each king showed that they were unable to subdue God's unruly people because their unruly hearts were just too tough to crack.

They were unable, therefore, to lead them into God's place of rest or relationship. Endless priests offered endless sacrifices in a physically impressive temple, but it only made God angry because in God's eyes, their religious practices were just a performance.

a pretense. Jeremiah and other prophets actually called them that, a pretense of valuing relationship with God while their hearts were far from loving him.

In other words, they loved what they thought they would get from God, but they didn't love God himself. That's transactional. And it's horrible.

Now, listen carefully here because the problem was not in the things God put in place. The problem was the heart, in the hearts, of God's people who were unable and unwilling to engage with those structures that God put in place that was meant to point them to Jesus, point them to the Lord, and point them to grace and mercy.

[19 : 47] they couldn't use those structures as they were intended, as reminders of God's commitment to do for his people what they could never do for themselves.

And against that is the perfection of Jesus. Jesus. he is what all the Old Testament structures were shadows of.

In a sense, the law was the shadow which Jesus was the reality of. The temple was the shadow Jesus was the reality of.

The prophets, priests, and kings, they were the shadow of which Jesus was the reality. He is the reality that all those things pointed to. He is God's perfect prophet, perfect king, and perfect priest. He is God's temple. He is the place we meet God. He is the perfect sacrifice that covers all sins.

[21 : 02] We saw that last week in chapter 7. He is the one who, therefore, by covering all our sins, allows personal relationship with God to thrive.

He is the perfect forever priest. We saw that in earlier chapters. Unique, purpose-built to bring us close to God in relationship.

The one who prays for us constantly as we struggle to serve the Lord faithfully with glad hearts. God's He is God's perfect king who rescues us, subdues our unruly hearts, and delivers us into rest or perfect relationship with God.

The good life of restored relationship, life of blessing and security, and forever fellowship with God. the perfection of Jesus exposes the weakness of everything that went before Him, and by definition, therefore, supersedes it or renders it obsolete.

I was going to bring in my electric typewriter this morning that I purchased when I first started work back in 1986, and it was state of the art. I was so impressed with it because it could memorize, it could hold in its memory 28 letter characters, which doesn't sound much, but it was good for me because my speed of typing was slower than that.

[22 : 46] Now, that was state of the art. Last year, the end of last year, the church bought me a new laptop. Now, they both do the same job, especially, I mean, I just use my laptop almost like a glorified typewriter.

It's word processing. So, I've been thinking about just going back to my old typewriter. Both do words processing.

You type the same keyboard. It's more like that for me. End up with a document at the end. It's absurd, isn't it?

The modern laptop in just a few, well, I don't know, probably years, I suppose, the modern laptop computer just made electric typewriters obsolete. You'd be crazy to go back to a typewriter, wouldn't you?

By the way, if anybody wants to buy one, I still have it in my room. I can negotiate a really good price. It's only had one owner. Very, very good, very fast. Hands down, it'll beat your laptop, so come and talk to me afterwards.

[23 : 57] It's absurd, isn't it? The perfection of Jesus exposes the weakness of everything that comes before him, but more than that, in chapter eight, the son's perfect work in an ongoing sense, in heaven, is everything needed to maintain vibrant relationship with God.

See, all those former things, those shadowy things, really needed and demanded the perfection of Jesus, because in a sense, they knew within themselves their imperfection, their weakness. So those things all looked forward to the perfection of Jesus. And in verse one of chapter eight, we get this summary statement which is summarizing the argument, how far back probably the whole argument of Hebrews, essentially the writer saying this, look, okay, all that's been said thus far amounts to this.

Let me summarize it in one pithy little statement. We have the high priest, we have the one who has created and will sustain forever relationship with God, unconditional loving relationship with God. Jesus is everything needed and Jesus does everything required to maintain that relationship. [25 : 42] And we're introduced to him again in the early verses of chapter eight with another extravagant description of who Jesus is.

And then it goes on to tell us what Jesus has done and is doing. Who Jesus is as God's son is the ultimate, unique, purpose-built prophet, priest, and king.

All the knowledge of God's word, all the power and authority needed to guarantee the delivery of God's promise or covenant. to restore forever fellowship with his sinful people.

That's his qualification. That's his credential. He's now in heaven, which is described here as the true temple. If the temple was the place where you meet with God or where God met with his people, then obviously heaven is the reality of that.

The ultimate forever sanctification sanctuary, called here in Hebrews 8 verse 2 as a tent, to make the connection back to the Old Testament.

[27 : 00] But it's got that personal touch to it, hasn't it? When you're camping with somebody and you're in a two-man tent, you think, I don't know what size these men were that this was built for, but this is very cozy.

heaven is cozy because of the perfection of Jesus.

Jesus is always on the job, thinking now what Jesus does and has done. He's always on the job doing his priestly work, described here in Hebrews 8 as ministry.

That is the actual activity of what a priest does. He ministers to and for God's needy people. We saw that in chapter 7 verse 27.

He presents himself as the perfect sacrifice. That's what a priest did. He needed to deal with the sins of his people. people. Jesus said, well, here I am.

[28 : 11] I'll deal with them in my own person. And in doing that, he completely removed the barrier of sin, the barrier to relationship and fellowship with God, and opened up that reality of forever relationship with God.

God verse 4 and 5. I pondered a lot over what these verses actually meant, but I think it goes like this.

Here on earth, Jesus wouldn't have been a priest. I think what that means is that there's a contrast there. I think, look, while on earth, the Jewish religious authorities wouldn't have looked twice at Jesus except when they wanted to kill him.

They didn't value him. They couldn't see past their legalistic thinking of, well, Jesus couldn't be a priest. He couldn't be a king because he doesn't fit the criteria. He doesn't fit what we expect God would do and how we expect God would act.

So he was just sidelined. But here, the writer's saying, Jesus is highly valued in heaven. The Father sees Jesus for all he's worth and all he's done.

[29 : 27] all he's done. he's honored by the Father as the perfect mediator or guarantor of God's covenant promise because he's brought the two disconnected parties together.

He's brought sinful people close to the holy God. But he's a perfect mediator because he's been able to do that while preserving the interests of both parties.

Jesus was totally committed to ensuring God's holiness and justice and righteousness is not tarnished or minimized in any way.

That required a person to die for the sins of people. Jesus stepped into that breach.

God's justice was satisfied and the door opened for God to show mercy. But at the same time he was totally committed to redeeming or making safe his dirty people and bringing them close to God in perfect relationship.

[30 : 58] And that meant a work on their behalf. The perfect mediator. In the second half of chapter eight the father promises our covenant everything needed for perfect forever relationship with him.

God's God's God's God's words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. And he uses that to prove God's commitment to his promise to restore forever relationship with his sinful people despite their ongoing sin.

God's word and all that he promises here would be delivered again through Jesus the perfection of Jesus.

But there's another thing that happens here through these words. It's not to the forefront but I'm going to mention anyway at least I think that's happening here. God's word as he quotes God's word through the prophet Isaiah God's word also did I say Isaiah?

Well that's obviously wrong isn't it? Jeremiah is the one I should have said. God's word also exposes the misguided Jewish mindset held with a passionate emotional commitment to the belief that the Jews could secure relationship and fellowship with God by going through the motions of religious rituals.

[32 : 42] Jeremiah and the other prophets are scathing. You guys just every day you're offering sacrifices you're saying your prayers and you're doing this and you're doing that and it's all wasted because it's just transactional.

You don't love the Lord. God's promise through Jeremiah is used here as proof of God's commitment to dealing with the problem of the heart which as I said earlier was the heart of the problem.

Only then could God be their God and enjoy them as his people. Verse 10 I'm going to run through this very quickly because we'll be saying more about each of these things next week in chapter 9. God would deliver new hearts. In other words if the problem was the heart God's commitment to relationship said okay I will reformat you from the inside out.

I'll give you new desires new thinking new attitudes so you'll see me for who I am and love me for what I am unconditionally.

[34 : 12] Verse 11 God would deliver new transformational understanding the prophets of old constantly chastised God's people for not knowing him even though they had a lifetime of observing his character.

That was picked up in chapter 3 of Hebrews. 40 years in the wilderness and yet you didn't even know me. You'd seen all my works yet you didn't even know me.

In other words they knew of God but it wasn't a knowledge that transformed them and transformed their actions. They just interpreted God's activity to suit their own convenient beliefs.

And the same prophets pursued God's people to see that true understanding of God recognises his holiness and then overflows in response of obedience love and delight.

God says I'm going to give you that sort of knowledge to produce that sort of response. It's the only way it's going to happen. So the ultimate blessing built into God's covenant promise is that God's people would know and love him as he knows and loves them.

[35 : 36] third verse 12 God would deliver perfection.

I said last week that Jesus is perfection. Well God's ultimate promise is that he would deliver perfection because only the perfection of Jesus applied to his dirty sinful people would enable that fellowship for every relationship to go by definition forever.

God's promise to engage with his people in grace and mercy acting to remove the guilt of their sin and nothing shows God's heart more clearly than this promise to his people.

It shows his desire to pardon. It shows his unwillingness to pour out his anger. It shows his delight and loving kindness. And the prophets Micah and the rest of them they're full of that sort of stuff.

It's just that God's people couldn't hear it or didn't want to hear it. They preferred being transactional. All of that is God's commitment to freeing his people to true worship.

[36 : 56] As Jesus said recorded in John's gospel worship in spirit and in truth. God's God's covenant promise has always been the same.

I get a little bit uncomfortable with the discontinuity between the idea of old and new. There is a continuity. In one sense God's covenant has always been the same.

But when you look at how it failed because of the weakness of the human heart and how it was then achieved through the perfection of Jesus, yeah it can probably be described as something brand new.

So what's the takeaway from all of this? Well I want to push you in two directions. Be careful not to prefer or be satisfied with a copy, a shadow, an imitation of real relationship and blessing with God.

We sort of read Hebrews and think well we would never do what those Hebrew Christians were doing. I think I'm going back to the old way of doing things. Well you're in a dangerous position my friend if you think you can't do that in some shape or form.

[38 : 24] could be a matter of putting your confidence for acceptance with God in institutional religion if I can put it like that.

In other words the things that go with being part of a church family like this. Rituals. In some situations it could be bells and smells.

Doing religious things as though somehow or other it will make you more secure. more acceptable to God and that will somehow or other please God in and of itself. It could be through backing your own emotional commitment to the belief that well I'm a basic basically I'm a good person and that my good intentions and good living will win acceptance with God.

And especially when I add into that I go to church and I say my prayers daily and I read my Bible and do my little daily devotional and we start to pile up a series of transactions that expect God to deliver his part.

So common. Even as Christians Tim Keller says we can slide into that and slide away from the gospel. don't be happily transactional in your relationship with God.

[40 : 09] Jesus is God's perfection. perfection is everything needed, is established and maintained forever relationship with God.

God's love. And it's very logical then. If he is perfection then there is no better place to rest that is to find assurance of salvation than in perfection.

It doesn't need to be updated like Gareth's passport or his hairstyle. It can't be improved. You'll never get an email saying this ran out of debts two years ago and you weren't even aware of it.

Sorry. Passport to heaven cancelled. Love him. Enjoy him.

Trust him. Love him unconditionally. as he loves you unconditionally. Then we start to show the perfection of Jesus.

[41 : 25] Thank you for listening.