

A better covenant

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 8 verses 1 to 13. 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 you on the mountain.

[1 : 02] 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. For he finds fault with them, and 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 on 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 one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, I know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

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

[2 : 28] And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Good morning. Do keep Hebrews chapter 8 open. We're carrying on our series, looking at the book of Hebrews.

My name is Andy. I'm the assistant pastor here. It's great to see you. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We pray now it would be a light to our path.

Amen. Amen. Imagine you went to bed tonight and you woke up tomorrow and it was the year 1825.

You've just gone back in time 200 years. There's no cars, no electricity, no central heating, no running water. If you want to travel, you've got to go through a horse-drawn carriage.

A simple journey from London to Manchester could take days. If you wanted to communicate with someone far away, you'd have to write a letter. Imagine those days. Write a letter and wait for a reply.

[3 : 31] If you became ill, there was no antibiotics, no NHS, no modern hospitals. Surgery was done, often without anaesthetic, with people biting down on pieces of wood. Many diseases that are treated today were fatal.

Jobs were back-breaking. You beat down the coal mine, the factories, the farms. Long hours, long hours, exhausting labour. Education was a privilege for the few, the wealthy.

And it had limited opportunities to improve their lives, most people. Now contrast that with 2025, 200 years later than that. With just a few taps on your phone, you can message someone the other side of the world.

You can get in a car and a train and travel hundreds of miles in just a few hours. If you fall ill, you can see a doctor, get medication and recover reasonably quickly.

Education is widely available. And modern technology has made life more comfortable and full of opportunities. Now whilst this era is far from perfect, isn't it?

[4 : 40] The world is still broken, we know that, just as it was 200 years ago. Plenty of things we wished weren't readily available. But on the whole, would you want to stay in 1825?

Or would you want to come back and live in 2025? Would you want to willingly trade in the privilege of living in this era rather than the last?

Probably not, is my guess for all of us here. Probably not. We'd probably prefer to live now than 200 years ago. Well, the rite of Hebrews wants to convince us that the same principle applies to our spiritual lives.

Because Hebrews chapter 8 in the argument of the letter is all about the privilege of a new covenant in Christ. A new relationship with God.

And that what we have now is so much better than what was in place before Jesus. That's the big point. Yet, I'm guessing that being a Christian for most of us here doesn't always feel like a privilege, does it?

[5 : 55] Perhaps you're in the minority at school, in your class, or in your workplace, or in your wider family. It doesn't feel like being a privilege, being a Christian.

And it brings hardships. Perhaps it's the struggle with temptation, battling and losing. Or the struggle of having an invisible faith.

We thought about that last week, didn't we? Having an invisible Jesus that we can't see. Who's made us promises that we can't see. Or maybe it's just we're weary.

And it's still February. And it's still winter. And when our names came up on the rotor that was just sent round earlier this week, we didn't leap for joy. We didn't see it as a privilege.

Well, that's not far off the first readers of Hebrews of this letter. They were enduring suffering for their faith, battling temptation, following an invisible Jesus, whilst looking over their shoulder to the impressive, visual, tangible religion that was on offer in Judaism down the road.

[7 : 05] But just as people in 2025 enjoy privilege the past generations could only dream of, the writer of Hebrews wants to convince them then and us now that as believers, as Christians, we live in the greatest spiritual era in history.

A deep relationship with God. An internal security that isn't based on human effort. Perhaps you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus.

You wouldn't call yourself a Christian. We're so glad you're here. Maybe that's something you've not really thought of. The privilege of being a Christian. The privilege of being part of God's people.

Maybe from the outside it looks like a bit of a burden, to be honest. Lots of things you just have to do. And it's just one big guilt trip. Well, actually, Hebrews 8 wants to convince us that it is the greatest privilege possible.

Knowing God personally, we can have changed lives, being transformed by God. And have no uncertainty about the future in eternity. That is why we live in the greatest spiritual era in history.

[8 : 24] Well, there's an outline on your service sheet, on the back of the service sheet. It's going to come on the screen. Two big points this morning. The first one is this. Jesus has a far better priestly ministry.

So in Hebrews chapter 7, we looked at last week, we saw that Jesus is a better priest than those old priests they had in the Old Testament. Because Jesus doesn't have to offer sacrifices for his own sin.

And because he lives forever. And last week we saw that comparison, didn't we? How why Jesus is better. But whilst they might prove that Jesus is better, they don't actually prove that he's a priest.

After all, Jesus never looked like a priest, did he? There are only a few occasions where he entered the temple. And there's no indication he got beyond the outer courtyard.

If Jesus was a true priest, then he has to enter a holy place and offer a sacrifice. And that's exactly what the writer says. Have you look at verse 1.

[9 : 30] 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.

So it's true that Jesus never looked like a priest when he was on earth. He never wore the priestly garments that they had to wear. But Jesus is a priest in heaven, serving a holy place in heaven.

And that meant that he's actually the real deal. He is the real McCoy, the real thing. Because this earthly holy place that they had in the Old Testament and the temple and the tabernacle, that was just a copy.

That was a shadow of the reality of heaven. That's his point in verse 5 if you look down. 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 you on the mountain. Now I don't know if you are into historical battle reenactments.

[10:40] If you've ever been to one or seen some jousting at a castle or something they put on for kids. Maybe you've seen a big battle like the Battle of Hastings or Waterloo reenact it.

People wear the period accurate uniforms. They use replica weapons. They follow the scripted strategies to recreate history. It kind of looks real.

But it's not really, is it? It's not the actual battle of Hastings. It's not the battle of Waterloo. Actually, my son's in year two.

They had a class assembly a couple of weeks ago reenacting the Battle of Hastings, which was very bold, I thought, on the teacher's part. But it wasn't the real thing. It wasn't the real thing.

It looked not really real at all. It wasn't the real thing. You know, the swords are blunt. The gunpowder is a show.

[11:41] That's not in the school assembly. That was in other things. No one actually got wounded. It's just a representation. It is a shadow of the reality.

And that is what Hebrews 8 is saying about the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament. The priests, sacrifices, rituals. They were like a reenactment of a greater reality.

But whilst battle reenactments point backwards, the earthly tabernacle and then the temple after it were pointing forwards and upwards.

To a time when our great high priest would arrive and would present a sacrifice in the holy place of heaven itself. The true dwelling place of God.

Not with the blood of an animal, but his own blood. Well, why does this all matter? Well, the first readers had an invisible Jesus.

[12:45] They had invisible priestly work based on invisible promises. It all seems so bare and unreal in comparison to the impressive visual Judaism on their doorstep.

But the writer is saying that is just like a class assembly. That is a reenactment. You have the real thing. You have a far better priest than those sinful, mortal priests they had.

You have the Son himself, the Son of God. Ascended into the real holy place of heaven. To offer the full and final sacrifice through his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

And Jesus is still ministering now as he intercedes for us. As he prays for us, we thought about that last week. Assuring us of our salvation.

As he applies that completed work on the cross to our needs. The point being, we are to realise the privilege of living in this spiritual era.

[13:59] And not trade in Jesus for anything else. That's his point. He is much better than any copy. Any reenactment. He is the reality. Don't go back to the shadows.

Don't lose the Son of God and your eternal place in that eternal throne room of heaven. In exchange for anything else. Any other kind of visual religion that looks like it trying to do the same thing.

Because Jesus is far better and he's real. And one that is actually effective. Jesus has a far better priestly ministry.

Well, not only that. Jesus has a far better priestly ministry in a far better covenant. Again, let's just recognise that nostalgia is very powerful, isn't it?

Perhaps like me, you find yourself wishing it was the 90s again. Or the 80s. Girl power and all that. And then business and Hollywood.

[14:59] Well, they really trade in on nostalgia, don't they? So many sequels. So many remakes. I read this week that they're making a sequel to the Goonies.

They tap into that nostalgia. We just want to go back. We want to live like we were when we were 20. Or say. Well, the writer again to the Hebrews is writing to convince us that spiritually speaking, don't be nostalgic.

Don't go back. Don't look back at the Judaism that you came from and think, that was so much better. He's saying you are in a better position spiritually because of the coming of Jesus. Because you have a new covenant. Have a look at verse 6. 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. Now just for a refresher on covenants.

[16:12] A covenant is a special kind of legal contract that creates a new relationship. A good kind of obvious contemporary example is a marriage covenant. On the morning of my wedding day, I was a single man.

By the end of it, I was a married man. It's a new relationship. A legally binding relationship. And in the Bible, God related to his people through covenants.

Through these special promises. And the heart of God's covenant each time is verse 10. I will be their God and they shall be my people.

We saw last week how the old covenant God made with Moses on Mount Sinai was, after coming out of Egypt, was an interim solution. It was the kind of pumping up of the tyres on a slow puncture. And to show us how the new covenant really is better, the writer of the Hebrews turns to the prophet Jeremiah. He tells us what was wrong with the old covenant.

[17:19] And actually the fault wasn't with God, but the people. Have a look at verse 8. In the old covenant, God promised blessing.

If the people obeyed. And curses if the people disobeyed. And by the time that Jeremiah was speaking and preaching, the people had experienced firsthand the covenant curses. Because of long-term disobedience. And they're about to head into exile. But God points forward to a day when he makes this new covenant. Where things will change in a decisive way. And with the coming of the Lord Jesus, that day arrived. By his incarnation, becoming man. His death. His resurrection and ascension.

Jesus pressed play on this new covenant reality. A reality. A reality that we have the privilege of possessing today if we trust in Jesus.

[18:48] And so for our remaining time together, let's just dwell on three privileges of this new covenant that are in this from the prophet Jeremiah. Firstly, God's law is written on our hearts and minds.

Have a look at verse 10. 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. When God gave his covenant to Moses at Mount Sinai, he wrote the law on tablets of stone.

But Moses discovered that whilst he's up the mountain, meeting with the Lord, the people had been engaged in idolatry and sin below. Now they had been breaking the second commandment before Moses even had the time to deliver the commandments to them.

And as things began, so they continued throughout the whole Old Testament. Do you only have to skim read the Old Testament to see it's basically a story of habitual disobedience.

[19:58] With the people utterly incapable of responding to God's covenant with obedience. It's like the tragic stories that we know and hear about the addict who cannot break free of substance abuse.

Despite their sincere desire to stop. Despite the sincere things to live for. Family. Career. Well, Israel, the God's people in the Old Testament, were addicted to sin.

Addicted to disbelieving the word of God. Addicted to disobeying the law of God. Their behavior was compulsive, self-destructed, and really tragic.

And so verse 10 is an amazing hope-filled promise, isn't it? I will put my law into their minds and write them on their hearts. In this new covenant reality, God doesn't bring another set of stone tablets to put before us.

Like the class rules that you might have up. That didn't work then. That's not going to work now. Instead, he would write his law on our hearts.

[21:10] Giving us a new desire for obedience, holiness, and service. A desire that could not be achieved under the old covenant.

Now suppose, if you've got children here, suppose your son hits his sister. I know. Well, will that ever happen? I don't know. So you tell him to say sorry. But he does it in a whiny tone.

Has he obeyed you? Not really. There's no regret. There's no remorse. But you can't create a law to impose remorse.

According to the letter of your law, he's done the right thing. He said the word sorry. But it's empty obedience. But Hebrews 8 is saying there's a new reality.

God's law, when we become a Christian, is written on our hearts. Means we obey from the heart. If we're honest with ourselves, though, if we're even at least a little bit self-aware, we're constantly aware of our sin.

[22 : 23] And we fall short of God's perfect standing in countless ways each day. That's why we confess our sins at church each week. And we should do each day. That's true of me.

And that's true of each one of us this side of heaven. And when we consider that reality, it's possible to get very discouraged. But as we confess our sin, we need to remember and rejoice that if we belong to Jesus, God has changed our heart.

He really has changed our heart. He has put his spirit to live within us. He's written his truth inside us. And he is at work within us, making us want to obey, showing us how to obey, giving us strength to obey.

So it really is possible to change. It really is possible to live God's way and obey him. And that is a privilege that we are to give thanks for and to keep praying for.

So the new covenant is better because God writes his laws on our hearts, giving us a new motivation for obedience. Yet the privilege of the new covenant goes much deeper and much further.

[23 : 34] So secondly, we are able to know God personally. Look down at verse 11. The point here is not that we can't benefit from preachers or we learn from one another.

The point is here, we don't need other people to mediate for us. We can all know God for ourselves in a relational sense.

We can all know God personally as father. The problem before, of course, was that sin meant there could be no closeness in the relationship.

God was always distant because sin kept him at arm's length. But now, in this new covenant reality, since the coming of Jesus, as we've been hearing in this letter, we can draw near to God.

As our heavenly father. Jesus calls us his very brothers and sisters. We have been drawn into the family.

[24 : 48] That's not just for some of us, not just for the elite few. But for all of us, every single one of us is able to know God in this personal way that is not available beforehand.

That was an incredible promise in Jeremiah's day. He knew firsthand the misery of a broken covenant and the distance they had between them and God because of their sin.

And what was for them a far off promise is our privilege now. Our reality now, if we are trusting in Jesus. So every sermon, every Bible study, every word of encouragement is part of that process of God writing his law on our hearts.

But far more than receiving information, we're coming to know God in a personal way. At driving our deepening desire to obey him.

So again, if you're not a Christian here today, then here again is a great privilege of being a follower of Jesus. You can know God personally.

[25 : 54] And have a personal relationship with him as your father. He can change you. He can change your life. Well, the third privilege is there.

Our sin is remembered no more. I think my memory is getting worse as I get older. Perhaps I'm not just the only one here. Maybe it's not just me who walks into a room and can't remember why.

I went in there. What about God's memory? Surely God doesn't forget. Well, no, he doesn't. God knows all things. He is the creator and sustainer of everything.

And yet, verse 12 tells us there is something God does not remember. Our sins. So verse 12, you see it there.

For I will be merciful towards their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. In the Bible, remembering is really another way of talking about keeping covenant promises.

[26 : 57] To remember a promise is to keep a promise. When God says he remembers something, it means he remembers his promise to do something or not do something. And so God no longer remembers our sin because he's promised to be merciful to us.

Our sin has been dealt with when we trust in Jesus because Jesus died on the cross for us. Under the old covenant, there were provisions for dealing with sin through various animal sacrifices. But as we've been hearing through Hebrews, they're just placeholders. They're the interim solution. They acted as signs that the Lord was willing to forgive sin and that he would forgive sin.

And now at the heart of this new covenant is the reality that those sacrifices pointed to. The self-offering of our great high priest on our behalf.

A self-offering that would finally deal with the problem of sin. An offering which the seemingly endless cycle of sin would end. Now I don't know what memories of sin we carry each day and today.

[28 : 11] Memories of sin weighing us down. But if we are Christian and feeling guilty, then we are to know this. We are better at remembering our sins than God is.

God is keeping his promise. And has chosen not to remember our sin. He no longer factors our sins into the way he treats us. As we sang earlier, as far as east is from the west, our sins are cast away.

Jesus ministers in a better covenant, three privileges. And notice that they are all down to God. Verse 10. 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. Verse 12. I will be merciful towards their iniquities. I will remember their sins no more. It's all down to God.

This is God's work. This is what God is doing in his people. So then for the struggling Hebrew Christians of the day back then, enduring persecution, they're tempted to turn back from Jesus.

[29 : 23] Tempted to drift away from him. The reminder reminds them of the privilege of the new covenant era they live in. So don't turn back. That would be like spiritually going back to living in 1825.

An old era. And it's the same for us now. Whether we suffer shame for being a Christian when we struggle to keep going with Jesus.

When it's still winter and everything feels a slog. We are to read Hebrews out and rejoice. Rejoice that this is the spiritual era we live in.

The spiritual realities that are our realities. We can rejoice that we have God's law and his truth written inside us. Enabled to know God personally as our father.

And with Jesus as our brother. With God remembering our sin no more. Completely forgiven when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus. That is the spiritual era we live in.

[30 : 28] And so we're not to go back to living under old conditions. Now religion that is like that. That is at least part based in what I do.

Can feel more real. Can't it? I can see what I've done. I can tick the box. Off the to-do list. And that can make me feel more secure. That kind of religion is actually more socially acceptable as well. Because religion like that is more about us. And less about God. But Hebrews wants us to see the opposite is true.

We are totally secure in the new covenant through our trust in Jesus. Because of the promises that God makes. I will. I will.

I will. I will. I will. And nothing that we do to earn it. Now we are privileged to live in 2025 on the whole. With all the advancement it has brought us.

[31 : 31] But even better than that. We are privileged to live in the greatest spiritual era in history. The age of the new covenant in Christ. A new relationship with God through him.

Where we enjoy the freedom, joy, confidence. That comes through the reality of Jesus being the better high priest for us.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we thank you for the Lord Jesus. That he is the mediator of a new covenant. A better covenant. That through him we can know you as father.

Remember we can have our sins. Remember our sins are remembered no more. Please help us to see the privilege of being one of your people.

And when we are struggling to feel the privilege of being a Christian. Please really help us to remember these truths. We thank you that we have your truth written on our hearts.

[32 : 34] Please help us to obey you out of joy. And our freedom that comes with living in this new relationship with you. Amen.