

Hebrews 8 “Because He Lives ...”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! What happened? How can we know? This is a so what sermon. I'm not going to be talking so much about the what, but the so what.

Because Jesus lives, how is our relationship with God changed forever? What difference does it make? And because of that, because this is more of a so what sermon, I want to say up front that I know that there are many of you here today who may hear that and think, oh, then I'm done listening.

Because I'm stuck back on the what. I'm not even really sure what I think about that. Or maybe I'm sure that I don't think that's true.

I'm still wrestling with the what of the resurrection. So the so what doesn't even matter for me yet, at least. I get that. Let me say to you just a couple of things.

[1 : 28] First, as unbelievable as it sounds, and we've acknowledged that, there are really good reasons to believe that about 2,000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth really did walk out of the grave.

He really did rise from the dead. And we would be happy to talk with you sometime about some of those, if that's where you're wrestling. But secondly, this morning, I would invite you to consider what difference would it make if that were true?

Even if you're still wrestling with if it is, what difference would it make in your life if Jesus rose from the dead? People for centuries have agreed that it would change so much.

All sorts of people agree with that. What would it change for you? Are these changes that you long for, that you would love if it changed that for you?

How would your life be different in any other ways we're going to talk about? Just consider that. I'll be honest with you. I need these changes in my relationship with God desperately.

[2 : 40] So, maybe you will too. We're going to be looking at Hebrews chapter 8 today. We at Southwood have been studying through the book of Hebrews.

And the writer keeps over and over highlighting the greatness of Jesus. What he's just gotten through saying is that Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life.

That he died on the cross to offer a perfect sacrifice so that he could stand as our representative before the throne of God the King and save us completely.

That's an amazing statement. But in fact, he said Jesus lives forever to intercede for us, to pray for us, to represent us to God even today.

Isn't that incredible? That's what it means when it says Jesus is our high priest. That's what it's talking about, our representative before God.

[3 : 40] Now, if you have missed some or all of the first seven chapters and all their talk about Jesus being greater than everything else and every other priest, I've got good news for you this morning.

Chapter 8 is about to review and to tell us the point of the whole thing. So you're going to catch up right now in the next 30 minutes. You're going to get to catch up on the whole thing.

Don't tell the people who've been coming the last few weeks. Don't let them know. They could have just come today. Follow along as I read God's word. And as I ask for his help in understanding what it tells us about how we relate to him.

Isn't it wonderful, by the way, that he wants us to know him and be loved by him? That's why he's given this to us. Hebrews 8 at verse 1.

Now, the point in what we're 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.

[4 : 50] 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, that's the word for tabernacle, the portable temple where God dwell.

When Moses was erecting that tent, he was instructed by God saying, see that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.

But as it is, Christ, Jesus, has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant, that word's going to come up again, just here, relationship.

Covenant means relationship with God. 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.

[6 : 01] For he finds fault with them when he says, and now he quotes from the prophet Jeremiah several hundred years before, 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 one his neighbor and 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 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. Father, please help us this morning.

[7 : 16] We want to see Jesus clearly. Some of this we don't understand. Some of this we struggle to believe. And so would you help us and help us to rejoice in Jesus in a fresh way, that we might know you more.

We ask it in his name. Amen. God's clearly telling us in this passage this morning about old ways and new ways of relating to him.

And what makes the difference in old and new is Jesus. He's abundantly clear. The point is, don't you love it?

Don't you help it? The pastor just said, by the way, here's the point. Listen now. We have such a high priest. Jesus, a representative before God in the very throne room of heaven.

Heaven. We've never been there. We've never seen that. But not the earthly copy. Not a room like this, but in the throne room of heaven. And he explains how Moses made a very careful copy.

[8 : 33] But it was only a shadow of the true tent in heaven. Same with the earthly priests who offered lambs and goats. They're just a picture. Here's the deal.

For centuries, Jewish priests had helped God's people relate to God by offering sacrifices according to the law. Over and over, it's what God directed them.

But see, this way of relating to God had its limits, didn't it? For one, as Jeremiah points out, the people's obedience was very limited.

They often didn't even try to follow God's laws. And when they did, they often fell short. Even when they obeyed the ceremonies and codes he gave them, their external exercises didn't always reflect internal, heart-level, sincere love for God.

And that's what God has wanted in relationship with us from the beginning, right? That's why he made us. We would love him like that mutual love. And even when the people did offer the right sacrifices, the life of the goat or the lamb in their place was only a placeholder.

[9 : 47] They had to keep making those sacrifices over and over because it wasn't a perfect person. Humanity had rebelled. Humanity must die.

These animals only stood in and pointed to the need for another unblemished sacrifice. Well, then Jesus comes as our priest.

Now Jesus is the one standing in between helping us relate to God. And so as priest, he had to offer something too, right? What did he offer?

Verse 3 asks that question. Chapter 7 already told us. Jesus offered up himself. Now no priest had ever done that before.

Finally, a perfect person who dies in the place of imperfect people. So listen to verse 6. As it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old.

[10:51] As the covenant he mediates is better since it's enacted on better promises. If that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. See, that's talking about our relationship with God, right?

That covenant. How does this work? The terms of the relationship. And it's not saying it was bad or wrong. It came from God.

But that old system pointed to Jesus so that people were saved still by hoping in his coming sacrifice. The same way they were saved.

But God had more in mind than that. God wanted a different way. A better way of relating to him. So he sent Jesus to this world, to the cross, and then miraculously back from the grave where he now lives forever in the throne room of God, representing us as our great high priest.

Something is different. God says that is what changes everything. He wants to explain everything. It changes. Because Jesus is alive.

[12:02] Because he lives. Because we have a great high priest. The way we relate to God has changed forever. For all of us.

Changed for the better, by the way. See, we no longer relate to God in the same ways that we used to. There's a new way. A better way. The way of Jesus.

Yes. And so what he's going to do is he's going to contrast the old ways with the new in three specific ways in this passage that are just, they're wonderfully good news for us.

Each of them. Maybe different ones will be for you in different ways. But if what you're thinking right now is, well, I've never done much of that animal sacrifice in pastor. That's not, this is not going to change anything for me.

Well, it's not just that. I want to try to help us see how we often relate to God in the old ways, even when we don't realize it. And to see how what he's saying should change everything for us because Jesus is alive.

[13:08] Out with the old. In with the new. He's going to say that three times, okay? And he's going to do it by quoting about the new covenant, this new way of relating to God from Jeremiah 31.

You don't need to know everything about Jeremiah to understand. Just know this was a low point for God's people. And at that low point, God is promising to change the relationship.

Now, Hebrews says, he's changed it by sending Jesus. Jesus provides some things that God's people have never experienced in this same way.

He starts with the fruit and then he works to the root. So we're actually going to go in reverse this morning. Just going to look at these three things in verses 10 through 12. The first thing Jesus provides in this new relationship with God is full forgiveness.

Look at verse 12. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. Most of us, even if we're not all that sure what we think about God, are pretty sure he has something to do with good versus evil, right?

[14:23] That if I'm going to be on his team, if I'm going to make it to heaven, he's keeping score and I better be more on the good side than the other one, right?

That's really important. Or maybe, maybe one day he'll just forgive my sin and let me into heaven by the skin of my teeth, but he's still got me on probation right now for how mean I used to be to other people.

For the lying and cheating that I did early in my career to get ahead. For the divorce I went through that makes me feel like, just marks me as a divorced Christian and I feel that every day.

So maybe I'm always having to work it off, to balance the books, to get back on God's good side.

Maybe, like the way the people felt when every time they sinned, it was back to the priest, right?

Another animal. Oh, this year again, another goat being sent away to keep God happy. We feel the guilt of our bad choices, don't we?

[15:41] Our sin has only been provisionally dealt with. It's still kind of hanging over us. Like the prodigal son, we're just hoping to make it up to God eventually. Hey, let me work it off.

If you can relate to any of that, if you've ever felt that way in relationship to God, please don't miss this. I want to show you how God feels towards you because that's not how he relates to you. Jesus lives to change that framework entirely. To get rid of that old way. Out with the old. Jesus actually handled the punishment, do your sin once and for all on the cross so that all of your sins, past, present, and future, have been covered completely. He said on the cross, it is finished. And then he sat down. He sat down as your representative in the throne of God, having finished his work. No other priest ever sat down. There was always something else to do. Another sacrifice to make. Jesus has paid for all your sins. So God says, I will remember their sins no more. [16:56] Y'all, it doesn't mean that God just can't recall things well and he can't come up with what is it that you've done. It means that he no longer associates you with your sins.

Like in our judicial system, sometimes you receive a guilty verdict. You've really done something wrong. But depending on the age, the crime, the circumstances, you can eventually, sometimes, have it expunged from the record.

Right? In other words, in the eyes of the court, your thievery, for example, is no longer associated with you. Someone goes to look up your record and it's not there.

Psalms 103 says, God removes our sins from us. Not just some of them in the right circumstances. All of them. As far as the east is from the west, the prophet Micah says, God casts them into the depths of the sea.

Verse 12 here gives an emphatic negation. God will most certainly not remember. In no way will God remember your sins anymore.

[18:16] He won't hold them against you ever. He relates to you with full forgiveness because the perfect sacrifice has finally been accepted.

Not only taking your death. So what happened? Your sins were associated with whom? With Jesus. But now he's sitting alive before the throne of heaven, assuring that the payment for your sins has been accepted once for all.

Friends, in the eyes of God, your divorce is no longer associated with you. In the eyes of God, your lying and cheating is no longer associated with you.

In the eyes of God, your drunkenness, your gambling, your wild living is no longer associated with you. Jesus has taken it to the cross and it is expunged from the record forever because he lives. Because there was a sacrifice that didn't stay dead but was accepted. In fact, that full forgiveness that was tasted for the first time with Jesus' death actually means even more than that.

[19:26] It means that the judge in that criminal courtroom who expunges from the record what you've done actually steps down from the desk and he comes down and he takes you by the hand and he walks you down the hall to family court and he says, I want to adopt this one.

I want to adopt her, him. And you say, oh, you can't do that. You're the judge. And remember me, I'm a fraud. I'm a fool.

I'm a failure. And he says, hold on, hold on, let me check the record. That's a good point. No. No, you're not. None of that is here.

God says, I'm adopting you. And you say, no, let me make it up to you first. And God says, that's not how this works. Jesus paid it all.

My son is home again. We're celebrating. The adoption is finalized and you can't stop it. You're my child forever because Jesus lives. Amen.

[20:30] That's who you've become. That's how you now can relate to God that you never could have before. Full forgiveness. You relate to God now as his child.

It's actually the basis for the next thing that Jesus provides. Unlimited access. Many of you have told me that for much of your life, it was kind of the way Ben described part of his early life earlier. That God was very formal. Very impersonal. Disconnected from much of your life. Maybe you had a relative or someone, a friend, who took you to church services one day, most weeks.

But that was really all it was. There were rituals that you went through there. There were things you said. There were, maybe there were prayers that you prayed.

But for you, God seemed very distant most of the time, right? Didn't have anything to do with my real life. He was more like a concept than a personal reality for you.

[21:43] In fact, most of you that felt that way would tell me if there was anything personal about God. If you got really close to him, it was scary, not comforting. Maybe the priest or some of the

holy people at that church, maybe they knew God had some of this relationship thing, but not you. You were keeping a safe distance. You think some of God's people in the Old Covenant could relate to those feelings? Think about it. Not only were the priests the only ones who could get near God's holy place in the inner sanctum, one priest, once a year.

That was it. But actually, the whole temple complex had levels of access. The outermost court welcomed Gentiles.

Anyone could come. They could come in that outer court, but that was as close as they could get. The next level, a little bit closer to where God was in the center, it allowed Jewish women to come there, but then they stopped.

Jewish men could go closer in. But then only the priests at the next step, and then that really interplated only the high priest. So most people were feeling what?

[23 : 01] Distant. Lots of religious ritual. Little close contact. Listen to what Jesus changes.

I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Hear the warmth there, verse 11. And they shall not teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

They'll all have this relationship where they can come into my presence. See, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, the curtain that kept you out of that holy place in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

It was a picture of the access that Jesus had won for all who trust in him. Right into God's presence. This new relationship that God wants to have with you from the least to the greatest. No longer are you kept at a distance because you didn't have enough Bible knowledge.

[24 : 02] No longer is there a separate place where your ethnicity or your gender makes you less close to God or less connected to him. A second-class Christian.

No. No longer are you distant from God or else. No. What does God say? God says, come near. Hebrews 4.

Because our high priest, Jesus, is living today in the throne room of heaven, we draw near with confidence to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace.

Listen, do we need it? A hundred percent. Do we come on our own merits because God just doesn't care about sin anymore? No. We come near to him because God cares so much about sin that he dealt with it in Jesus and he welcomes us in.

He says, draw near. Or did we forget? That he's adopted us as his children. Had you forgotten?

Some of you are laughing because I've used this picture every week for 25 weeks in a row.

[25 : 07] Not quite. But you remember this access to the most powerful seat in the world? What's a kid doing in the Oval Office underneath the Resolute Desk?

You know what he's doing? He's the president's son, right? JFK Jr. He can come anytime. He lives there under that desk.

He's got under the desk access. Backstage pass, if you will. That takes some rewiring for us.

For those of us who think God's distant and he doesn't have anything to do with our career, our family, or our weekdays, or our struggles. That's a different experience.

By the way, it also takes some rewiring for those of us who we feel like we're close to God, but we think that's because of our race or our gender or our denomination or our social status.

[26 : 10] Of course God likes me. They shall all know me. From the least to the greatest.

Biblical Christianity says your closeness to God comes not from your theological knowledge, not from your family pedigree, not from your age, your gender, your race, not your class.

Your closeness to God comes from one person, Jesus, your Savior, and he brings you close. And that's the only way you get there. He has bought you unlimited access.

You live under that desk. That's your new home close to God. See, he's alive, so he's there. And this is like your buddy inviting you over to his house. He belongs there, and if you're with him, you belong there.

So you draw near to God over and over. Not to check boxes. No, you don't have to check boxes anymore. You draw near to God to delight your soul because you love him.

[27 : 18] In fact, the drawing near is not all on you. God has come near himself to you in Jesus so that you're never alone.

You relate to God not because you have to go through some motions each week. That's the old way of relating to God. But because you get to go through some emotions in this life, and you go

through them with the one who made you and made your heart to feel those and knows how you hurt and longs to hear his child ask for help.

That's the new relationship. You're that close. Unlimited access to the God of the universe. Full forgiveness, which yields unlimited access.

You'll notice all the fours in here. Those produce purposeful rest. If you haven't recognized in yourself the other old ways of relating to God, you might recognize this one.

I am very familiar with it, even though I was never taught this. It's the idea that Christianity is, at its essence, a list of rules.

[28 : 34] It's a long list. Lots of things to do, right? Maybe, in your experience, even more things on the list not to do. You know, don't drink, smoke, chew, or go with girls who do.

That's a version of it. Kids, I want to update that expression for you. It's not a bad one. Many of us grew up with it. But maybe for you, it's don't watch the wrong shows.

Don't use the wrong apps. Be nice enough to everybody. Be the good kid. And there's a lot of things you've got to do to be that.

And so we get in that mindset of relating to God based on lists of rules, and it just keeps going. Some of you have lived this.

Stay pure till marriage. Find a godly spouse. Treat them well and have children who are parented to live the same way. To be good kids.

[29 : 33] At least to be nice enough in public or especially at church so you don't embarrass me. So that I look like a good parent. Give enough. Serve enough.

Lead enough. Don't rest. Even in retirement, there's good stuff to do for Jesus. That's true. But it is a terrible way of relating to God based on what can I do for Him.

It's the basis of our relationship. It produces workaholic pastors. Y'all know I needed my heart reset. Hard reset.

During sabbatical a few years ago. It can produce exhausted volunteers. It can produce prideful church members. Who hope and think that they're doing enough.

And they're better than the people who aren't. But they're not ever really sure. Sometimes you can't even go to sleep. Maybe you've had this experience because you lie down and your mind is just racing.

[30 : 39] With the things that for the next day that you need to accomplish or control or contribute. Can you take a deep breath with me for a second?

Listen. Listen to the new terms of relationship with God. They're very different from what can I do for Him. Verse 10. This is the covenant.

Here it is. God's laying it out. Here's how it works to relate to me. That I'll 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. Do you hear it? The covenant I, God, will make. I will put.

I will write. I will be their God. See when the old system wasn't working well enough. Not enough heart driven obedience there.

[31 : 34] God said, I'll do it. I'll see to it that they can do what they couldn't do on their own. With just 10 laws written on stone tablets.

And can they do enough of those? No. God says, I'll write them on their hearts. I'm going to actually shape their hearts to my law so that it fits.

And they love this and long for this. God will provide and produce the obedience that He requires.

Amazing. He's going to do it. This is what Jesus means when He offers weary and burdened people to come to Him and find rest for our souls.

It's not a rest of inactivity, is it? No. This is a rest. You live under the desk near to your loving Father.

A rest with a heart renewed in love for God and His ways. A rest where you can sleep because Jesus is alive and He's seated at the throne of power controlling everything for my good.

[32 : 41] It's an eternal rest. A secure hope because Jesus lives. I don't ever have to wonder if I've done enough. If I've kept enough of the rules to land on the good side. And it's a purposeful rest.

That sets God's children free from having to earn His love. To control our world. To do enough.

So that now our hearts loving Him increasingly match the shape of His law. And so what kinds of things do we do? Eagerly. With joy from our hearts.

We love our neighbors. Care for the poor. Live faithfully with our spouses. Honor our parents. Share the hope of Jesus. Speak the truth in love. Show tenderness and patience toward our children. Display generosity with our resources. Speak up for and defend the lives of the voiceless and marginalized who are made valuable in God's image. Now I'm doing all these things from a new heart and a new relationship that's directed with new power because it's not all my strength.

[33 : 48] That's purposeful rest. God insists that you can live with Him like this. Even when you fall short, you still rest in His arms.

That's the life, that's the relationship that He offers in Jesus. As we wrap up this morning, I want to say to you if, like me, religion for you has meant any of those old ways of relating to God. Easter is offering you the end of religion like that. That it becomes obsolete and vanishes. It's over. However, Jesus offers you something new and better. A relationship. Think of the difference that makes.

For Him to be alive and offering you a relationship with God like that. See, if we don't have such a high priest as Jesus.

[34 : 59] If Jesus was just a man or a teacher or a revolutionary 2,000 years ago. But He's not alive in the throne room of heaven right now. The guilt and shame that haunt your life are feelings that you're likely stuck with.

Even if maybe you can lessen them or numb them a little with some good behavior here and there. Because there's no full forgiveness to expunge them forever without a crucified and risen Savior. The loneliness and the distance from God that are the things you know so well. They're actually the best you can hope for.

Because if God's even really there. If you get too close, He's going to see through your religious box checking, isn't He? If He's real, you can be sure you won't fool Him.

There's no unlimited access to God as a Father without His perfect Son. Maybe for you it's anxiety and exhaustion that feel characteristic of day in and day out.

[36 : 08] If Jesus is not alive, they'll never be far away. You're always going to be grasping for control.

You're always going to be uncertain if you've been good enough. There's no real rest without Jesus finishing the work on your behalf. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, Paul says, we are still in our sins.

We are wasting our lives trying hard. Stop. We're spreading false hope to ourselves and our neighbors. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.

We do have such a high priest, don't we? That's the good news. We have this high priest. We have this relationship. He's saying, consider Jesus.

You have Him. He's yours. Think of the way Hebrews, just in its words, describes Jesus as your high priest. What's He like as priest representing you to God?

[37 : 14] Because He lives right now on the throne of heaven. He's a great high priest. Seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven. By the power of an indestructible life, He's high priest forever.

Appointed by God. The Son of God. Like us in every respect. Tempted in every way as we are. Merciful. Faithful. Without sin.

Holy. Innocent. Unstained. Separated from sinners. Exalted above the heavens. And what's He doing there? He sympathizes with our weaknesses.

Helps those who are being tempted. Goes behind the curtain ahead of us to minister in the true tent. Where He makes purification for sins to provide our eternal salvation.

And where He then lives forever to make intercession for us. We have such a high priest. Y'all, Jesus is the point of everything He's saying.

[38 : 19] He wants you to know you're not on your own. You don't stand before God on your own merits. You have His. You have Him. Because He lives.

It changed everything for Ben. Ben realized and told us this morning that he realized God was there holding on to him. Even when he was struggling to hold on to God.

I talked to a young man this week who he was saying the more he thinks about how Jesus lives for him. That reality gives him hope when he feels inadequate at work or as a dad.

That he's not alone. That there's someone who's helping him love his neighbor and love his kids. It makes a difference for all of your life.

Talked to an older woman in our congregation this week at her bedside. She's been told, You just have a few days to live. You think about getting to that point where doctor says, Hey, you may be feeling pretty good right now.

[39 : 27] You may be thinking clearly. But you're told this may be your last day. Or when you fall asleep, you may not wake up here. And you don't know and you don't control it.

And I talked to her and I cried a lot. And she couldn't stop smiling. There was this palpable joy written over her face because she kept talking about seeing Jesus.

And I'm going to, I'm pretty soon, I don't know when, but pretty soon I'm going to be face to face with him. And there's a joy in that. There's things she's sad about, but man, is she looking forward to what's next.

Jesus lives and that changes everything. Because he lives, I can face any and every tomorrow without fear.

With great hope. Great joy. Let's pray. Jesus thanks that you do live. And that does give us hope.

[40 : 35] There's so much that we face and struggle with here. We're so discouraged often, sometimes with ourselves. We hardly feel like we could have a relationship with God some days.

What would it look like for us to be good enough for that? And you're telling us that you are. And you're bringing us in and you're inviting us home. Thank you.

Would that truth, the reality of you living right now, come home to our hearts and be life-changing today and tomorrow and for eternity. We ask it in your name.

Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.