

The Purpose of the Blood

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 March 2014

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] My least of the least favorite things is shopping and buying a car. In fact, I dislike car shopping so much that at one time, Beth can attest for this, I actually calculated how many more times I would have to do it in the rest of my life.

You know, because if a car lasts only so long and human beings only last so long, well, there you have it. I've only got to go through this ordeal so many more times and then I'm done. And the thing I think I like, I dislike about car buying so much is the negotiation.

The back and forth, the wheeling and dealing, the proposal and counterproposal, the let me talk to my manager and see what I can do. Are they really talking to their manager to see what they can do?

Now, I understand that negotiation is part of the business. I don't blame dealerships. I don't blame car salesmen. In fact, I kind of admire people that can do this well. But personally, I just wish there was a price and I'd pay it.

I could drive off the lot and we'd be done. Now, of course, people have been negotiating for a long time, right? That's nothing new. As long as people have been buying and selling things, I'm sure there's been negotiation.

[1 : 18] Just like we negotiate over cars, I'm sure they were negotiating over camels back in the day. But have you noticed how recently, today, in our sort of time, it seems like everything is negotiated?

Every interaction, every relationship we have seems to be push and pull, a bargaining process, a drawing up of contracts. You do your part. I do mine.

We seem to approach all of life as consumers trying to get the best deal that we can. Even our friendships have at times been swallowed up by this mentality. I mean, doesn't social media invite us to present a version or image of ourselves that will then convince others to befriend us or accept us?

We, as it is, we enter into the field of relationships ready to negotiate, to bargain, to try to do what it takes to get other people to buy in. We're trying to take what we're selling.

And if it's true of our friendships, it's true of our love lives as well. Sadly, how many marriages seem to end because people think that this wasn't what they bargained for?

[2 : 32] That the relationship doesn't serve them anymore, it doesn't give them the desired outcome. So it would be best if we just renegotiated and looked for someone different. And if it's true of our friendships, and if it's true of our love lives, then friends, hasn't it become true of our spiritual lives as well?

That in our relationship to God, we often come as negotiators. Of course, this takes different forms. One way it comes about is, well, God, if you do this for me, fill in the blank, a job, a spouse, a child, an acceptance letter, then I'll promise to always do this for you.

It's a way of bargaining with God. Or there's the reverse of that. God, I've always served you, and I've always done my best to obey you. So how could you allow this to happen? What kind of deal is that, God?

You see, we come as negotiators. Or another way it happens is like this. God, you could never accept me.

Not after all I've done. Not after all the ways I've ignored you and gone against you. You could never take me. But even this is a negotiating mindset, isn't it?

[3 : 52] We've just decided in advance that the deal will never go through. But friends, what if God isn't in the business of making deals?

What if God isn't a negotiator? What if relating to him isn't a matter of hammering out a contract, but of submitting to his grace?

Our passage this morning is about just that. It's about what God has done to set the terms of our relationship.

So that we can stop bargaining and stop negotiating and start submitting to him. And start loving him. And even to start enjoying him.

Our passage this morning is Hebrews chapter 9, verses 15 through 22. It's page 1006 in the Pew Bible. Let me invite you to turn there with me.

[4 : 53] We've been walking through the book of Hebrews for a number of months now. And in these weeks leading up to Easter, it sort of worked out that we've come to the central chapters of the book. Chapters 9 and 10, where the focus is on the cross of Christ and his sacrifice for sin.

And each week, as we move through this part of the book, we'll see something important and essential about what Christ has achieved through his death for us.

So let's read our text this morning. Hebrews 9, starting with verse 15. Therefore, he, that is Jesus, is the mediator of a new covenant.

So that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. Since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.

[6 : 04] For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop. And sprinkled both the book itself and all the people saying, this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.

And in the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood. And without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

Well, friends, here's the main point of our text this morning. And it's what we have right at the beginning of verse 15. Jesus Christ, through his sacrifice, is the mediator of a new covenant between us and God.

The word therefore, at the beginning of verse 15, points us back to verses 11 through 14 that we considered last week. And there we saw two things about Christ's death on the cross. In verse 12, we saw that it secures an eternal redemption.

That is, at the center of God's eternal plan of redemption, his plan to glorify himself through the recreation of his fallen world.

[7 : 12] And through the rescue of a new humanity from every nation, at the center of that cosmic, eternal plan, stands the cross.

But even though the cross is as big as the world, at the same time, it's as deep and as personal as your own soul.

In verse 14, we read that through the cross, Christ doesn't just execute the great plan of God, but he also purifies our conscience. The troubled soul can find rest in him.

And the ones who feel dirty and guilty before God can finally be made clean. And because of all that, verse 15 says, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant.

And I want us to simply look at three things concerning this new covenant that we see in the text of Hebrews. First, what it is. Second, where it's taking us. And third, how it came to be.

[8 : 22] Three very simple points. So first, what is this new covenant? Covenant language might be totally foreign to some of you, and that's completely understandable.

But, you know, when you take a step back and look at the whole Bible, what you see is that the Bible is not primarily a book of rules to follow. Or a book of heroes to emulate.

It's actually a sweeping narrative. It's really the story of God, who is the one true king.

And how God, in love, creates a world to display the beauty of his reign, of his kingdom. You see, the Bible is the story of the kingdom of God.

But quickly we see that this kingdom God is bringing about is administered through covenants.

[9 : 21] And covenants are binding commitments that God makes with his people, whereby he enters into a relationship with them.

Today we still speak of marriage sometimes as a covenant, right? As a binding promise and commitment to another. But that's a horizontal covenant between two humans. Those are two mutual parties coming together. You see, it's a bit different with God's covenants. When God makes a covenant, it's vertical. He sets the terms. So when God made a covenant with the first humans, with Adam and Eve in the garden, the terms were basically this. Eat from every tree that you see. Enjoy my presence. Know fullness of life. Be my image bearer in creation. But don't eat from that tree. Eat from that one. And the penalty will be death. Death. Those were the stipulations. That was the arrangement. The binding commitment. The covenant that God made with humanity. Life. [10:22] Death. And of course, Adam failed. And he fell. And we all fell with him. And sin and death have plagued humanity and the world ever since.

But here's a surprising thing about the biblical narrative and about the kingdom of God. You see, Adam's fall doesn't stop our king from making covenants. It could have. He could have let the penalty of eternal death fall right there and then. And our Bible would be about three chapters long. But in his grace, God continued to make covenants with his people.

With Noah and with Abraham and with Israel and with David. And he moves his kingdom forward. And as it unfolds, we find that the story is not a pretty one.

Because it seems like the people will never stop turning away from God and choosing death. But then, the prophets start to speak of a new covenant.

[11:40] Of a whole new arrangement between God and his people. And in Hebrews 8, just back one page, the author quotes Jeremiah 31, 31-34.

The passage that Ivor read for us earlier in the service. And if you turn back there, just turn back one page to Hebrews 8. You see that the terms of this covenant are cast completely in the form of a promise.

God says over and over again, not you must, but I will. And we see that this covenant involves three things. First, it involves a new heart for God.

If you're looking at Hebrews 8, verse 10, in the middle. I will write my law on their hearts. This means that an interchange takes place. No longer are our hearts cold and hard toward God, but soft and open.

Our hearts become like flowers opening up to the rays of the sun. I'm no longer shut closed in the darkness, but responsive to the light and reflecting his glory to the world.

[12:50] This new heart for God means we have a new relish for God's word. And we actually begin to want to follow him. And to trust him.

And to obey him. But the new covenant isn't just about a new heart for God. It's also a new intimacy with God. I will be their God and they shall be my people.

And then he goes on in verse 11 to show that it's not just some people, but all of them. Everyone who enters into this covenant will be intimately connected and related to me.

From the least of them to the greatest. There are no second class citizens in the new covenant. And this is the essence of the whole covenant idea in the Bible.

That we would be in relationship with God. That he would be our God and we would be his people. And this relationship would be one where we belong to him in love. Friends, how humbling it is that the king and God of the universe would stoop to relate to us in such an intimate way.

[13:57] And not just as creatures, but as creatures who've rebelled against him. And gone our own way. The new covenant means that rebels are now drawn into intimacy with God.

But third, it's not just a new heart for God or a new intimacy with God. It's also a new record before God. Look at verse 12. I will remember their sins no more. Friends, here's the greatest surprise and privilege of the new covenant.

That our sins are forgiven and they are forgotten. That the slate is wiped clean. Not just of past sins, but of past and present and even future sins.

That a total forgiveness is granted. That rebels of the king are given complete and total pardon.

Now friends, as we review this new covenant.

Stop and consider. Who could mediate such a thing? Can you imagine? Where rebels deserving death because of their treason are freely granted a new record before their king?

[15:10] A new intimacy with their king? A new heart for their king? Who could broker such an arrangement like that? Who could mediate between these estranged parties in such a way that the king would grant us such rich and lavish privileges and gifts?

Who could stand between them and change the heart of the king in such a way that enemies would not just be granted amnesty from punishment, but an inheritance in the kingdom?

Friends, who else but Jesus Christ? This is what our text is telling us today.

He is the mediator of the new covenant. The one who is fully God and fully man. The son sent by the father in love.

Who shared our flesh and blood to bring us to God. The Lord Jesus Christ. Now before we consider just how Christ brings this about.

[16:15] How he inaugurates and mediates and what he does to bring the new covenant into being. Look at the next line of verse 15 in chapter 9. This tells us where this new covenant is taking us.

What its purpose is. What its goal is. The verse continues. He's the mediator of the new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

Why does Christ mediate this covenant for us, friends? So that when you begin, you will persevere to the end.

So that when you begin, you'll persevere to the end. The twin poles of Christian experience are right here in this little phrase you see. Calling and inheritance.

The beginning of our life in Christ. Our call and our glorious destination. The goal. Our inheritance.

We begin when God effectually calls us through his spirit by the preaching of the gospel.

[17:20] And we respond to Christ in repentance and faith. This is what it means to be called, biblically speaking. For some of us, God called us through the public preaching of the word. For others, it happened through a friend who patiently shared the gospel with you over time.

And for others, it happened through parents who faithfully spoke to you of Christ as you grew up. But whenever God did it, and whoever God used, Hebrews wants us to see that because of the new covenant, those who are genuinely called by God will receive the promised eternal inheritance. He will finish what he started, friends. I wonder if you sometimes wonder how things will end for you.

Do you doubt at times whether God will carry you through to the end? Perhaps even now in your life, you're experiencing some hardship or some trial or some hurt or some disappointment.

And you're doubting God's care for you. And in that disappointment, in that doubt, you want to come back to the table and start negotiating with God and start re-bargaining the terms.

[18:42] But friends, if you've placed your trust in Christ, if God has called you to himself, then your inheritance is secure.

Now, Hebrews talks about the Christian hope in multiple ways.

Here he calls it an eternal inheritance. An inheritance that doesn't run out and doesn't grow old and doesn't depreciate because of inflation.

Elsewhere, he calls it the city to come. In another place, he describes it as a festival of Sabbath rest. And friend, no matter what image you look through or if you take them all together, you begin to see that what God has in store for believers, what he's guaranteed for us in the new covenant, will far outstrip any hardship of this life.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

[20:09] God will finish what he started. And the goal towards which he is taking you, the internal inheritance will make any hardship, any trial, any difficulty that we face, supremely worth it in the end.

Indeed, as Paul says, they will seem light and momentary in comparison to that eternal weight of glory, our internal inheritance.

And friends, if that is the case, why would we ever bargain with God? Why not trust him instead? Why not rest in his hands?

Why not trust the one who's made you a rebel, an heir? Why not trust the one who will preserve you to the end? Why not trust the one who's given you a new heart and a new intimacy and a new record through a new covenant mediated by Jesus Christ himself?

Friends, why not stop bargaining and begin trusting this one who's lavished such things upon you? And this brings us to our third and last point this morning, which is how Christ establishes this new covenant.

[21 : 32] How does Jesus bring it about? How has he mediated such terms for us? Look with me at the rest of verse 15. He says that all this is true since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Of course, it goes without saying that a new covenant presupposes an old one, right? And the first covenant that Hebrews is talking about here is the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai, the Mosaic covenant.

And like the covenant with Adam in the garden, the terms of the Mosaic covenant were basically the same. Do this and you'll live. Don't do this and you'll die. The first covenant, the covenant at Sinai promised death to covenant breakers.

It was a covenant with conditions. And as we read on in the Old Testament, again, just like Adam in the garden, Israel in the promised land breaks the covenant. And the penalty for such transgressions was death.

And they were expelled from the land, just like Adam was expelled from the garden. And so you see, what is God teaching us? What was Israel teaching us?

[22 : 46] As we see in Israel the story of all of us. Teaching us that we humans need more than just a second chance. We need a redeemer.

Our sins have accrued the just penalty of death. And under the first covenant, those sins pile higher and higher and higher until the penalty of death is like a great, unstoppable wave ready to crash down at any moment.

And so we need someone to liberate us from that awful fate by paying the penalty for us. That's what the word redeem means.

To purchase another's freedom. To pay the price for their liberty. And that is exactly what Christ has done.

His death redeems us. Though Christ knew no sin, on the cross he stood in the place of sinners, bearing the penalty of death that sin deserves.

[24 : 00] And after dying on the cross, three days later, God raises him from the dead, demonstrating that the sacrifice was complete and accepted, and raising him from the dead, God enthrones Christ as king over all, such that everyone, even now, who repent of their sin and believe in him can be set free from the penalty of sin and death and know the blessings of the new covenant.

Friends, this is the gospel. Whereas the old covenant said, do this and live. The new covenant, the gospel says, trust in the one who's done it for you.

But a question remains, doesn't it? Isn't there a question lingering under all of this, for all of us?

And the question is, why should his death redeem me? How can one man's death 2,000 years ago have any impact on me today?

And to answer that, Hebrews gives us a threefold answer in verses 16 through 22. And the first point he makes is an illustration from everyday life.

[25 : 21] In verses 16 through 17, he talks about a will. And what we don't immediately see in our English translations is that the word for will and the word for covenant are the same word in Greek. I think your ESV probably gives you a little footnote telling you that.

So our author is engaging in a bit of wordplay. He says, think of a last will and testament. When the person who sets up their will dies, the will goes into effect and lots of people benefit.

The will is read and the inheritance is distributed. And it's not like you do anything beforehand to merit the inheritance. You simply receive it. It's granted to you.

And Hebrews is telling us, friends, it's just like that with Christ. When he dies, the blessings of the new covenant or the new testament, if you will, come issuing forth.

And like in everyday will, these benefits are unleashed and come to us by sheer grace. So we can see in our everyday experience how one person's death ends up benefiting many by way of illustration, by analogy.

[26 : 33] But then he pushes us a little deeper. And the second point in verses 18 through 22 points us not to an everyday illustration or analogy, but to a deep biblical pattern, to something that God has written into the pages of redemptive history.

And in these verses, verses 18 through 22, Hebrews is referring to an episode in Exodus 24, 3 through 8. This is when God through Moses first ratified the covenant with Israel at Sinai. And Moses read the law to the people. And the people said, we'll do the whole thing. We'll keep it. We'll obey. And then Moses made sacrifices and sprinkled the altar and sprinkled the people with blood.

And of course, that seems incredibly strange to us. If that doesn't seem a little strange to you, you've probably been hanging out in church too long. Sprinkling people with blood.

And a lot of it. And of course, even though this strikes us as odd, or as we sort of condescendingly look at the past as primitive, you know, in the ancient world it would have made complete sense.

[27 : 45] Because whenever a king made a covenant with a lesser people or a lesser king, they would set up an agreement and make a sacrifice. And the sacrifice was essentially a way of saying, if either one of us breaks this agreement, may I be like that animal.

May I be put to death. It made a treaty or a covenant a binding oath. You see, so the ritual happening in Exodus 24 wasn't really a mystical one.

It wasn't even a very religious one. In fact, what God's doing here is actually more at home in the sphere of politics and treaties. God's saying, I'm the king and you're my people and here's the deal. The great king was cutting a covenant with his people and they were agreeing that if they didn't uphold their part of the bargain, they'd be just like the animals. But of course, the thing is, Israel was already sinful.

They already deserve death. So the sprinkling of the blood wasn't just a sign of what might happen if they broke the law.

[29 : 03] Friends, it was a sign that these animals were already dying instead of them. You see, for a sinful people to enter into a relationship with a holy God, something has to be done about sin.

sin deserves death. And the animal sacrifices were a gracious provision of a substitute from God. The animals represented the people and died in their place. The whole scene is reminiscent of the first Passover in Egypt, isn't it? When the people sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. The lamb, you see, functions as a substitute for the Israelites' firstborn son.

The lamb dies so that when God's judgment comes, the firstborn doesn't have to. He passes over them. So God was teaching his people an important lesson and pattern from the very start that he would provide a substitute to bear the penalty of their sins.

And of course, the animal sacrifices were simply a foreshadowing of something greater to come. Just a pointer and a picture of the true sin-bearing substitute who is ultimately God himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 29] Because Jesus is fully human, he can represent humanity. He can represent you and I because he's one of us. And because he's fully God, his death is of infinite value to cover worlds upon worlds of sin.

And it is for us as our God-appointed substitute, sufficient for all who take him in faith. But often it's at this point that some people ask, and I think it makes sense.

all this talk of death and blood and penalty and sacrifice, why can't God just forgive? I wonder if you've ever asked a question like that.

I know I have. And to answer that question, our passage ends his sort of three-fold answer by pointing us to perhaps the deepest reality you all.

He says, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Now, of course, legally and ritually that was the case under the Mosaic law. That's how God set it up.

[31 : 46] But the law, you see, was expressing an even deeper principle. That forgiveness is always costly. The answer to the question, why can't God just forgive, is twofold.

First, God is utterly and completely good and just in his perfect righteousness. God cannot simply overlook or ignore sin. That would be to contradict his character. And it's simply the one thing that God cannot do is not be himself.

But second, when we ask, why can't God just forgive? We forget that no one just forgives. We seem to be forgetting that forgiveness is always costly.

Think of it on a small scale. If I throw a rock through your window because I'm angry, you have one of two options. You can either make me pay or you can absorb the cost yourself by choosing to forgive.

The damage is done and someone's going to bear the cost. Of course, for more serious offenses, the cost of forgiveness is greater and harder to bear.

[32 : 58] If someone mars your character in public, if someone does you physical harm, the path of forgiveness means to bear the suffering of that wrongdoing in yourself and refuse to harm the other person in return, even though you have every right to do so.

So you see, no one just forgives. There's always a cost. And when Christ died on the cross, he was satisfying the divine justice against sin and bearing the suffering of wrongdoing in order to forgive. As we sang just a moment ago, what a love, what a cost. we stand forgiven at the cross. And this brings us full circle.

Christ's death redeems us, frees us, liberates us from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. Because his blood was shed, forgiveness has been issued.

Like a will being read, the blessings flow forth. death. And this is how and why Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. His death does exactly what the new covenant promises.

[34 : 15] It does away with sin. It pays their penalty. Because of the cross, those who trust in him have a whole new record before God. And thus a whole new intimacy with God. And thus a brand new heart for God.

So friends, the God of the universe doesn't stoop to bargain with us. He doesn't negotiate. And I hope now you see that this is good news.

Because the terms that God has established in Christ are better than any we could have ever dreamed of asking for. And when we stand in the new covenant through faith in Christ, do you see how that begins to change how you negotiate your other relationships?

For a new covenant believer, friends are no longer people we have to win through effective social media marketing and self-imaging. In fact, we no longer need the approval and buy-in of our peers to feel secure. We don't need to posture anymore.

Not only do we have the favor of the king of the universe and the assurance that we are his heirs and that he'll preserve us to the end, but friends, we have a place in the people of the king. because this new covenant creates a new community of people who love one another because of the love that they've been shown at the cross.

[35 : 42] And friends, this means that in the church, in the local church, in our church, people who would never be real friends, people who would never even be Facebook friends, suddenly find themselves in meaningful relationships, loving one another, serving one another, getting involved in each other's lives, taking interest in their stories, rejoicing with them, bearing burdens with them.

The new covenant creates a whole new dynamic in our relationships, you see. And what's more, the new covenant creates a community not only where people love one another and sacrificially and inconveniently so, but it creates a community where people forgive one another.

Because we've all been forgiven through the work of Christ, because all of us stand equal before the cross, equally condemned, equally forgiven.

Friends, the local church, this assembly of believers, bound together in membership, is to be the place above all where forgiveness is extended and received.

where we keep short accounts, where we delight to forbear with one another's faults. Friends, in our world of negotiations, I don't think people would know what to do with us if they saw a community like that, of love and of forgiveness.

[37 : 19] forgiveness. Where the bargaining has ceased. Where the negotiations have ended. So how about it, friends?

In light of the new covenant and Jesus, our mediator, how will you love? How will you forgive? How will you forgive? May it be so by his spirit.

Let's pray. God, in your covenant, we are secure because we have an utterly perfect mediator.

Lord, I pray for us as a church that we would grasp the hope that we have in deep and real ways. us. And Lord, as we come to enjoy the new covenant that we have, that you have given to us, God, would you make us loving and would you make us forgiving?

And God, for those who are here, who don't yet know Christ, who don't yet know the glory of being a part of this new covenant, God, I pray that you would begin to call them, that you would call them forth to repentance and faith in your son.

[38 : 58] God, we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen.