

The Gift of the New Covenant

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Hebrews 8:1-13

I think most of you realize as we light our family advent candle this morning that over the next several weeks we are going to spiritually prepare to celebrate Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Christ. It's amazing how in this community many of us will celebrate the birth of Christ at work, at school, and with different families. There will literally be Christmas parties from now until the first of the year. It's absolutely amazing. Now, I still struggle just a little bit because if I am understanding this correctly, Christmas is about the birth of Christ so Christmas parties ought to be about the birthday person, which is Christ. Normally if it's anybody else's birthday and we go to their birthday party, we bring gifts for the birthday person. Does everybody agree? I don't remember being a kid going to somebody else's' birthday party and receiving a gift, and the birthday person receiving nothing. So I still struggle that at the birth of Christ and the celebration of Christmas he doesn't get a present but we get the presents.

Now, I want to be honest with you. I'm getting older but I still like the Christmas tree and I still like when it's full of presents. While the people who are hungry are eating I like to go over there and look around the tree to see if there is one that has my name on it. Then, if I haven't told them what I wanted or needed, I'm wondering during the meal what they got me for Jesus' birthday. Now, I think I get it. Christmas, celebrating the birth of Christ, is actually a gift from God the Father to us. Is that not amazing? So when we celebrate Christmas it's truly about what the Father has given us. We're going to stay in this Jewish preacher's sermon during the Christmas season here at Hardin and we're going to use Hebrews chapters 8, 9, and 10 to spiritually prepare our hearts over the next few weeks to truly celebrate the gift of Christmas.

A certain aspect of Christmas that we're going to look at this morning is the gift of the new covenant. If you have your Bibles, open to Hebrews chapter 8 and we are going to try and preach through all 13 verses but when we

think about what scripture text we are going to read this morning the two verses that I think really capture this passage is Hebrews chapter 8, verses 6–7.

Now, if you don't know why people are laughing at "6 7" then you are old. You are really old. I was out of town a couple of weeks ago and discovered that the word of the year in English in America is "6 7". Now, I had to look up that word in the dictionary so I went to dictionary.com. Do you know how dictionary.com defines "6 7" in meaning? This is a quote, "it means absolutely nothing." How can our favorite English word in 2025 be a word that means absolutely nothing? That piqued my curiosity. Now, I have seen several of our kids do the 6 7 thing. Do you know what dictionary.com believes? While this new word doesn't have a definition, it is now a symbol of belonging. It's almost as if it's being used now by a certain generation of people as their identity marker. Wow. Is God good or is God good? In Hebrews chapter 8, verses 6 and 7, we are going to learn that we belong and have an identity but it's not based on the old covenant of God rather it's based on the new covenant of God so from now on we're just going to say "6 7" as the Church of Jesus Christ and when people ask us why we're doing we can say, "turn your Bible's to Hebrews chapter 8, verses 6 and 7 and see if you belong to the people of God."

Scripture

Hebrews 8:6-7 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. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

The book of Hebrews is not a book and it's not a letter but it's a sermon that was preached by a Jewish believer in Christ to a small Jewish house church in or near the city of Rome. The Roman government was beginning to persecute Christians for being followers of Christ because they declared Him and Him only as their Lord. If you're a Jewish person following God under the law of Moses you were not being persecuted so remember the context of this sermon. These new Jewish believers have been inviting their Jewish friends and family to the church services, they're hearing about Christ, they're coming close, but many of them, because of

persecution, are going to turn back to the law of Moses as their hope of salvation and the preacher is warning them not to. He's sharing with them the consequences of what will happen if they do this.

Now, he's been talking about the person of Christ and how he is superior to the angels and superior to Moses. Now he begins to talk about his priesthood and how he's not from the tribe of Levi so therefore he's not a priest after the order of Aaron but of Melchizedek. And here, as we come to what we call the eighth chapter of the sermon, he stops and to get our attention as listeners says, "Now the point in what we are saying is..." Here is what he's going to do. He's going to make sure that we've been listening. He's going to share with us the bottom line. If we've been adding up everything that he's been saying, this is what we should take away from the message so far. We (talking about the church of Jesus Christ) have (a possessive word that means something belongs to us) at this moment in our possession such a high priest. Wow! Did you catch that? We have a high priest but the adjective he chooses to use to describe him as a high priest is not great, glorious, or brilliant. He uses that word that we use a lot, "such."

Have you ever tried to describe the character of something and when describing the character of something you put "such" in front of whatever you were talking about? Yesterday was such a great game between Vanderbilt and Tennessee. Oh, but I'm sorry if you're a Tennessee fan because that was not such a good game. Louisville fans, wow, you believe that was such a good game yesterday but not if you're a Kentucky fan. Have you ever wanted to go somewhere but didn't really know if you wanted to go because it was such a long trip to get there? This word, "such" is describing the character, the nature, of the noun which is Jesus as our high priest. Now he's going to tell us why he's putting this little word "such" in front of high priest. Why is he such a high priest? Because he is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven. He is a minister in the holy places, in the true tent made by God's hands, not man. Our high priest is seated. He's not standing. He's in heaven, not on Earth. And he's in the true tent, not the tent that is a copy and a shadow and a model of the true tent. Did you catch that?

See, there is a group of people wanting to go back and the preacher is saying if they go back their high priest never sits down in the presence of God. Why? Because his work is never finished. But what did Christ Jesus do when he got back to Heaven? He took a seat. Why? Because he made a once and for all sacrifice of himself that dealt with your sin once and for all and you've now been made right with God based on what He did for you. It's finished and therefore he's seated. On Earth? No, in Heaven. Where in Heaven? At the right hand of the throne of the Majesty. He's talking about God, right?

Can I just say this if this won't offend anybody? Jesus is God's right-hand man. Have any of you ever had a right-hand man? That is who Jesus is to God and do you know what he's doing? He's sitting in God's presence and he's ministering. This word "minister" is where we get the English word that we don't use at Hardin, "liturgical" from. No one has ever said that I am very liturgical. Nobody ever says that about me. Nobody ever asks about our liturgy here when they come to worship because we know that word literally means an ordered service. It has some formality to it and we don't have much of that here in the country at Hardin. This word is basically describing Jesus as a minister, Jesus as a servant. He has a specific ministry right now sitting at the right hand of God in the holy places.

Now, I'm not going to go into this much because Kory is going to talk about this next Sunday when we get to Hebrews chapter 9 but you know that the tabernacle was divided into two parts- they holy place and the Holy of Holies. Now the preacher uses that same language, holy places, because very Jew knew that he could not go into the most holy place unless he was from the tribe of Levi and specifically of the family of Aaron. When someone went into the holy place they were in God's holy place to make a sacrifice for their sins. Now he says Jesus is sitting there, not standing but sitting. Hang on to that. He's in the very presence of God, not the glory cloud of God, but God himself, the true tent.

Now true here doesn't mean it's the opposite of false. It is not saying that the tabernacle that Moses set up, the temple of Solomon, the temple of Zerubbabel, or Herod's tent are false. True is used here opposite of copy, shadow, or pattern. It's the true tent. Where is the true tent of God? It's in

heaven. And who set it up? God, not man. This is important. When it said the Lord made, the Lord set up, it literally means the Lord fastened the pegs. It's a camping term. Today most of us who camp have a motor home, an RV, a travel trailer, or a pop-up if we're really roughing it but do any of you remember the day when you didn't have those things and you just threw a tent in your jon boat, went down Kentucky Lake, picked a spot, stopped there, and then your dad would set the tent up and drove the pegs in the ground to set the tent up? That is the picture. Where Jesus is, is the place God made with his own hands. The true tent. We have such a high priest, seated in heaven, in the true tent.

Then the writer says in verses 3–5 that every priest has to offer a sacrifice so this priest also, Jesus, must have something to offer. He's talking about his present ministry. What is Jesus, right now in the presence of God, offering and who is he offering it to? He's already offered his blood and he's made you and I right with him and when he offered his blood to make us right with him he took his people out of sin so he's not in heaven right now to take us out of sin. He's done that. Do you know what he's doing right now? He's trying to get sin out of us. He took me out of sin. He paid my debt. Now he's sitting at the Father's right hand side. He hasn't had a day off since he's been there. He's serving us so that we can come to Him and when we come to him, what has the writer already told us he has available to give us? He's going to give us mercy and grace. Mercy is the ability to get over what we did 20 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years ago, last weekend, or last night. It's not just mercy, the ability to get over it, but he also gives us grace. The ability to now get on with our life. God's enabling power. God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can now do what he did, live the victorious Christian life.

Here is what he tells us- if he was still on the Earth he wouldn't even be a priest because he's in the wrong tribe. He wasn't from Levi. He's from Judah, the king tribe, but we know he's after the order of Melchizedek, a king priest so that is why he's in heaven and not on earth. Then he tells us this and I want you to get this. He's telling us this because there is a group that is wanting to go back instead of staying in the church because if they stayed in the church it could cost them everything. If they went back to Judaism they had it made. The Roman government wasn't going to bother you yet so there was a temptation to go back. He tells us this- everything

those priests do is a copy and a shadow of the true tabernacle. Then he talks about when Moses built the tabernacle he built it after the model that God showed him. In other words, it's a model.

Now, I'll never forget this. I'm sorry, but I think I'm a humble guy. Do you all agree that most of the time I'm a humble guy? One time I really got built up when I was at Owens Chapel preaching a sermon. I was preaching a sermon and the sermon was so good that afterwards this lady went out the door, shook my hand, and said to me, "Brother Ricky, you are a model preacher." I was 21 years old and I was a model preacher. I couldn't wait for everybody to get gone so that Celisa and I could get in that vehicle and I could tell her. I just said to Celisa while we were driving away from Owens Chapel, "Guess what so-and-so said about me? She said your husband was a model preacher." Celisa didn't say a word. She didn't say amen. She didn't say oh me. She didn't do anything and that is unusual for her. She held her tongue and didn't say a word. It was three days later and she came back to me and said, "I need to respond to what that lady said to you so that you make sure you understand what she was saying to you." I said, "Okay, I'm ready. She said I was a model preacher." Celisa said, "Have you ever looked up the word 'model' in a dictionary? I did and here I what it says, 'model, and imitation of the real thing.'" You don't want to be the model. You don't want to be the copy. You don't want to be the shadow. No, you want to be in the true tent. That is where Jesus is and he's ministering in the very presence of God for you and for me.

Now we get to verses 6 and 7, "But as it is, Christ..." He talks about Christ. He doesn't call him Jesus. He calls him Christ, Messiah. "...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." So here is what we need to know- Jesus has a better ministry as the high priest because his ministry is built on a new covenant that he mediates because it has better promises. Then, look at verse 7, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second."

You realize this, right? The first covenant, the Mosaic law, wasn't faultless. It had problems. It couldn't do what it was supposed to do. If the first covenant had done what it was supposed to do would we need a second covenant? No! See, here is what the writer is trying to say. If you go back

to the law, if you go back to a Jewish sacrifice made by a priest with the blood of a bull or goat, you're going back to something that can't do what you think it's going to do. It can't make you right with God. It has the power to reveal to you what is right and what is wrong but it does not have the power to enable you to do what is right and not do what is wrong.

The gift of the new covenant is better! Jesus, our high priest, mediates a better ministry. Now, what was the problem? The problem wasn't with the law, the problem was with the people who were trying to keep the law. They couldn't do it. Paul takes this argument in Romans chapter 7. Now I know some of you don't like my interpretation of Romans chapter 7 but I like it really well, and Paul clearly says the problem he has is not with the law because the law is holy, just, and good—the problem he has is with himself. Do you know what he said about himself? He's carnal, sold under sin. Do you know what that term means? He is a slave to sin. In Romans chapter 6, Paul says if you know Christ and have been baptized into Christ then you've been set free from sin and can't be a sin to slave anymore. But in chapter 7, he says he's a slave to sin. How can he say you can't be one in chapter 6 and then say he is in chapter 7? Because he is trying to illustrate this truth—the law cannot set us free from the sin. Why? Because we're sinners and we are enslaved to it. And here is what sin does. It's used by God to get us to understand that we are sinners and can't be saved by keeping the law. We can only be saved by trusting in Christ. So in Romans chapter 7 he is looking back at his life as a Pharisee who is trying to be redeemed by keeping the law and he came to realize the problem wasn't the law. The problem was with himself. So why was the first covenant not faultless? Why did it have fault? Because it couldn't empower or enable people to keep it.

I love to go back and read Exodus chapters 19 through 24 sometimes where God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. He brings them to Mount Sinai and he tells them if you keep my commands and follow my rules you will become my people. Then God tells Moses to tell the people that if they keep these laws they will become his people. Do you know what they say in verse 8 of Exodus chapter 19?... *Moses, tell God everything he says for us to do we will do.* Then he goes back up on the mountain and God gives him the ten and the others and there are 613 total

laws that God gives to Moses. He tells all 613 laws to the children of Israel and do you know what they say?... *We'll keep every single one of them.* Boy, it's a good thing I wasn't there that day because I want to believe that when everybody else was saying yes, I would have wanted to raise my hand and say... *God, they might but I can't. There is no hope for me if the only way I can become your child is by keeping all 613 of those laws because you tell me if I break one of them then I'm guilty of all of them.* The fault is with man not with God's law. So when God knew and saw that the fault was within us he told Jeremiah to tell his people he was going to establish a new covenant and it wasn't going to be like the first covenant.

Now, you need to realize that in the Bible there are two Greek words for "new." One means new in time and the other means new in kind. Let me illustrate this. If you know my wife then you know she loves animals. She loves big animals and she loves little animals. There was a time when her favorite dog was a breed called a min pin. Have any of you ever saw a min pin? They are about a foot tall. They are miniature Doberman pinschers. We live on a farm and we got our first one and it accidentally got kicked by a cow and we had to put him down. She went and got another one so this was our second min pin. This little fellow thought he would take on the mailman and got ran over so we buried our second min pin. She went and got our third min pin. It was a little bitty thing. I'll never forget this. She was going to go pick up her niece, Chaney, at school when Chaney was little. Celisa had her little min pin with her. Chaney got in the car. The min pin's name was Mary Kate and it jumps on Chaney. Chaney picks up the dog, is holding the dog and she turns to Celisa and says, "you get the same dog every time."

The new covenant is not the same covenant. The emphasis here is not new as in time but new as in kind. The first covenant was based on obedience. Was Israel ever obedient to the covenant? No. So here is what he says... *Israel didn't obey so I have no concern for them...* Let those words sink in. Israel had a covenant with God that was based on their obedience to him and therefore for him to be there God so when Israel refused to obey the law God says he has no more concern for them. So he is going to establish a new covenant and the new covenant is different. Can I tell you the main difference? The old covenant was based on

meeting conditions. The new covenant is unconditional because it's not based on the faithfulness of people. It's based on the faithfulness of God.

The word, covenant, means a cutting. Literally, if you cut a covenant with someone in those days, if you made an agreement you didn't sign on the bottom line. You and that person got together and cut a big animal in half after killing it. You would put one part on one side and the other part on the other side. Then you'd kill a medium sized animal and put one part on one side and the other part on the other side. Then you'd kill a smaller animal and put one part on one side and the other part on the other side. It would be bloody in the middle and then you would walk through the animals and then the other person would walk through the animals. By doing this you are saying if you don't keep your part of the covenant the other person can do to you what you both just did to those animals. You didn't put your car on the line, your job on the line, or your farm on the line. You put your life on the line. God is making a new cutting except this cutting is not going to be based on us. It's going to be based totally on Him. There is not going to be any language like "if you, then I." It is all "I will."

Jesus' ministry- in heaven right now at the right hand throne of God sitting because he already got you out of sin and he's now trying to get sin out of you- can accomplish this because of this unconditional covenant. The first thing he says to us is this... *I'm going to put my laws not on tablets of stone but I'm going to put them in your mind and I'm going to write them on your heart...* Woah.

I know I shouldn't do this but I'm going to. God wrote out those laws and he gave them to Moses and Moses like some of us who have the Ten Commandments framed and who want them on courthouse steps and hanging on the walls of our schools, comes down off the mountain and all of the people who said they'd do everything God said weren't doing everything God said so what did Moses do? He threw them on the ground and broke them. Have you ever got so aggravated at your kids because they aren't keeping the Ten Commandments that you just want to take that little picture off the wall and slam it on the ground and stomp on it? That's what Moses did. Do any of you really believe putting ten commandments on a wall somewhere is going to change somebody's life?

If it would change people's lives then we don't need a new covenant. I'm just telling you what the preacher is saying here in modern context. God doesn't want his laws external because he doesn't believe in outside in change. He believes in inside out change. The new covenant doesn't have the laws on the outside trying to change your inside. No, behavior doesn't change identity. Behavior doesn't cause identity. God puts his law in your mind and in your heart. He changes your identity. He gives you a new nature and then that new nature inside works its way out so that on the outside you match who you are on the inside.

This who we are! Let's be honest here...when was the last time you had to open your Bible to find out what you should or should not do? You haven't done that in a long time. I'm not saying you shouldn't read your Bible. We should read our Bibles, but don't you know what you shouldn't do? When you get ready to do something you know if you should or shouldn't do it. Why? Because you've got God's law and you have his new nature in you. It's in your mind. You know what is right and you know what is wrong. It's in your heart. The heart is not the seat of emotion. In the biblical world the heart was the seat of personality. It was the will. You have the drive, the desire not to disobey but to obey God and to do what's right and stay away from what's wrong. Why? Because the new covenant is different. It's not outside in; it's inside out.

Then he says in verse 10, "and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It's not *if you*, it's *you shall*. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Our behavior doesn't cause us to have a relationship with God. We have a relationship with God because of what he did in His Son, Jesus Christ when he was on the cross. As the mediator he took the hand of man and became sin and he took the hand of God and bore God's wrath and faced our eternal separation on that cross so that God would be our God and we would be his people. It's not based on what we do for him. It's based on what he's done for us. That is the true gift of Christmas, the gift of the new covenant.

Then he says this and I love this. This will hurt a little bit and I'm going to offend some people. I'm sorry. I don't mean to, I really don't. He says...*guess what? We're not going to be teaching people to know the Lord. You're not going to teach your brother and you're not going to teach*

your neighbor because they're all going to know the Lord from the least to the greatest... Woah. You understand what this is talking about, right? See, to become part of the nation of Israel you had to have that thing happen to you when you were a child and as long as you could trace your ancestry back to a man named Abraham you were part of the house of Israel and a part of the house of Judah but not everybody who had that done to them was right with God. Do you know what Israel had to do? They had to teach and teach and teach and teach to know the Lord because the house of Israel has never been a fully redeemed people. Never. Israel is not the people of God today, the church is the people of God. Jews and Gentiles come to the cross alike and God has broken down that middle wall to create a new body and that new body is the church. He doesn't want one nation that the whole world goes to; He wants his people in every nation on the planet. Everybody who is in the church knows the Lord. If you don't know the Lord then you're not in the church. If you don't know the Lord even though you're in this worship service you are not in the church. If you don't know the Lord and you have your name written on a roll somewhere you are not in the church. The church is regenerate not non-regenerate. We don't bring our children into the church through an act of water and then when they get a certain age we teach and train them so that they come know the Lord. No, children who do not know the Lord are not a part of the church. You do not become part of the church until you are old enough to understand that you must repent of sin and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ so the true church of God is a regenerate people. We don't teach church people to know the Lord. I don't teach Celisa how to know Christ, she knows Christ. Now, we teach people who don't know Christ how to know Christ because they're not part of the church but hear this- under the new covenant we're all equal. From the least to the greatest, we all know the Lord and we all have the same relationship with him. He is our Father. I am his son. You are his daughter or son.

Lastly, verse 12 says this, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." I'm getting to that age now where I forget things from time to time. That has never happened to me in my whole life. Celisa is reminding me now that I'm just where some of you have lived your whole life and I don't like that. Now, I want to make sure we're clear on this. God didn't say he would forget your sins. Forgetting isn't good. It means we're slipping. It means we're not perfect. God says

he will *not remember*. Here is the difference—God doesn't just accidentally because he's too busy not remember what you did. God knows everything you've done. He knows everything that has been done to you. Do you know what he says? He chooses not to remember his children's sin anymore. Wow. How can he do that? Because he chooses to remember what His Son did in our place on that cross. And because he remembers what His Son did right, he chooses to not remember what we did wrong that separated us from him because he dealt with what was wrong with us at the cross. He chooses not to remember.

Are you ready for this? I need to choose not to remember what I did 20 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years ago, and 2 weeks ago. If my God can choose to not remember then I don't need to remember. How is this possible? I come to my high priest and I receive mercy and I receive grace. He didn't just deal with what I did wrong on the cross but he dealt with what everybody did wrong on the cross. Some of what he dealt with in other people's lives are things they did to me. So do you know what I have to do? I have to deal with what others did to me at the same place where I dealt with what I did wrong and that is at the cross. Then my outside begins to match my inside. I'm a child of God.

In closing, verse 13 says the old is obsolete and what is becoming old and obsolete is ready to vanish away. In a few years Rome is going to come down, they're going to destroy Jerusalem, the temple is going to be ransacked, and there will be no more sacrificial place for the children of Israel to offer sacrifices. Why would God let Rome do that? Because he has enacted a better covenant and the old covenant is obsolete and has no purpose. It's old. There are two words for old. One is old in point of time and that is where we get our word archaeology from but we have another word that we don't use in Western Kentucky a lot and it's called paleontology. Archaeology deals with things that are old. Paleontology deals with things that are old, worn out, useless, or obsolete. So here is what he says. The old covenant isn't old in point of time. It's old in the fact that it's obsolete, worn out, and has no purpose. I am old but I'm not the word that we get paleontology from. I'm just old in time. I still have a use. Now, watch this. The law has went the way of paleontology. It's obsolete. It's worn out. Don't go back to it. Don't try to use it to set yourself free. Don't believe God is going to redeem somebody else through it. He isn't

going to redeem anybody through it. People are going to be redeemed through the cross. Thank you, God for the gift of the new covenant because it has my name on it and it has your name on it. Would you open the gift of Christmas?

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