

December 1/2, 2018

Something Better
Christ is Enough Series
Hebrews 8:1-13
Pastor Bryan Clark

Probably like many of us, I've grown up hearing about the Grand Canyon—seeing pictures of the Grand Canyon. To be honest with you, I was always kind of like, *whatever*. This past summer Patty and I decided to take a little vacation and go spend a few days at the Grand Canyon, and I have to tell you, I found it absolutely mesmerizing! I'm not talking about just going up and catching a glimpse. You have to see it in the sunrise; you have to see it in the sunset; you have to see it through the day as the sun goes over. It just keeps changing; it's astonishing! It was mesmerizing, and I realized there's just no way, once you've experienced that, you would ever settle for just a picture. That's exactly the point the writer of Hebrews is trying to make. Once you've experienced the real thing, you'd never settle for a picture again. That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews, Chapter 8, continuing our study through a very complex part of the book of Hebrews. We pick it up in chapter 8, verse 1:

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,
(*NASB, Hebrews 8:1)

So, he says this is **the main point: we have such a high priest**. Now that word **such** is basically referring to everything we've already learned about the high priest in Hebrews. We've learned that the high priest is the ultimate high priest king, who has made the ultimate sacrifice for sin, offering Himself to make propitiation for sins, and when He completed the offering, He sat down, indicating that the work was done. The long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world had come!

What are His qualifications? He is qualified because He has an indestructible life. He is the high priest forever. God promises. As long as this priest is the high priest, His offering for sin remains valid. Therefore, if He is the high priest forever, then His offering for sin is valid forever. And He gives Himself as the guarantee that this is true. Since we have such a high priest, verse 2:

...a minister (which is a typical word for a priest, one who serves) in the sanctuary, the holy place, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

So, what is the **tabernacle**? The tabernacle was a tent, a version of the temple in the Old Testament. When the nation of Israel was moving from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land, God gave very clear, very precise, detailed instructions about erecting a tent, which basically would be a mobile temple that would reflect God's presence in the center of the nation of Israel. The tabernacle then gave way to the temple. What the text is telling us is that even though the tabernacle represented the dwelling place of God, it was just a replica; it was a shadow. It was a

picture of the ultimate dwelling place of God, which is pitched or erected in the heavens. When the text says **the true tabernacle**, it's not saying *true* as in the other was *false*, but true as in that one was a replica. But the dwelling place of God in the heavens is the true dwelling place of God with all of its glory. Verse 3:

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer.

The verb tenses, which aren't all that obvious in the English, are important in the original language. When he's talking about the priests making offering—the present tense verbs—basically the writer of Hebrews is saying this is currently still going on in Jerusalem, as the priests are continuing to make their offerings. This is one of many comments that helps us date the book of Hebrews. So that would mean it would have to be pre-70 AD because that's when the temple was destroyed, so probably late '60s. But his point is that while the priests continue to make offerings in Jerusalem, this ultimate high priest that now dwells in the heavenlies, it was **necessary**—the language could be *it is necessary* or *was necessary*—for Him to make an offering. The verse is a bit of a teaser because the writer doesn't come back to what that offering was until the following chapter. We just kind of file that away for now. Verse 4:

Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy (The Greek word there is the word from which we get the English word *type*. I've used that term several times in the last couple of weeks—a type, a copy, a shadow.) and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN TO YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN. (Vs. 4-5)

What's he saying there? He is saying this ultimate high priest who came, made the ultimate offering for sin and now dwells at the right hand of the Father in the true tabernacle, the true dwelling place of God. But if that priest were to come to earth and go to Jerusalem, He would not be allowed to function as a priest in that temple.

Now he's not criticizing so much as he is pointing out that the old covenant was designed in such a way there were very clear guidelines and restrictions on who could be a priest in the temple and how everything functioned. But it was actually designed in such a way that the ultimate high priest—God Himself in the flesh—could not fit in the old covenant. In other words, the purpose was not for Jesus to just slide in and blend into the old covenant. It was actually purposefully designed in such a way that was not possible. Rather the old covenant had to come to an end in order that this ultimate high priest would usher in something new...and something better!

One of the big problems was that the Judaizers and even potentially these Jewish Christians, were tempted to just blend Jesus into the old system. "Let's just kind of add Him in there." This continues to be a huge problem today.

Now you think about all the different religions and denominations of the world—many of them are just simply trying to blend Jesus into their religious system. They may have a high view of

Jesus, but they're just trying to blend Him in with the other religious activity. This is Paul's concern in writing to the Galatians—you can't blend Jesus in! He is very clear that if you add one single work to the gospel of grace, it ceases to be a gospel of grace. There's no blend. It's either Jesus or it's a religion of works. There's no combining the two.

The point the writer is making is the old covenant was actually designed in such a way that if the ultimate high priest were to come to earth, He couldn't function in that system. That system would have to end, and there would have to be the launching of a new system, or a new covenant. Verse 6:

But now (Here's the contrast.) **But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry** (So something has changed.) **by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.**

This whole idea of *mediation* has always been the problem. All the way back to Genesis chapter three, the question has been, "How does a holy God have a relationship with sinful men and women?" The whole idea of the old covenant system—the tabernacle, the temple, the priestly system, the sacrificial system—all of that was meant to be a type or a shadow of this layer of mediation. How do sinful men and women have a relationship with a holy God? Answer is, "They had to go through this level of mediation somehow to make it possible."

Now it's important to understand that that could not save them. The Scriptures are very clear that people in the old covenant could be saved, but it wasn't on the basis of that religious activity, but on the basis of their belief, by faith, that God made a promise that one day He would send a Savior who would die for their sins. In essence, people in the old covenant were saved by faith—kind of on credit—looking forward to the belief that one day God would keep that promise.

It would be right to say that if Jesus had never come, none of those people could have been saved. It was all on credit, hanging on their belief that one day the Savior would come. So their entering into the system was basically an act of faith, that this middle layer of mediation is somehow a shadow or a picture of God's ultimate fulfillment of the promise. That's what he's talking about in verse six, that there is now a **better covenant** that is built on **better promises**, and we learned a couple of weeks ago that includes a **better hope**.

Think of it this way: Let's imagine that I convince you to go see the Grand Canyon. You drive to the Grand Canyon and you stay in Grand Canyon National Park. You stay in the lodge, but you never leave the lodge. You just stay in the lodge and look at the pictures all day long. You go down to the gift shop and you look at the postcards, which are pictures of the Grand Canyon. And the writer of Hebrews is trying to convince you, "*Hey, you're so close! But you have to put down the pictures and go to the rim and see the breathtaking view for yourself!*"

What he's saying is Jesus could never fit in the old covenant. The old covenant was just a picture, and the picture has to come to an end. He's ushering in something new, which is *something better* because it's built on *better promises*. Verse 7:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

Let's back up a little bit and explain this old covenant/new covenant thing. The story of redemption starts in Genesis chapter three. God makes a promise that through the seed of a woman He would send one who would bring life back out of death. It's developed in different ways. You have a covenant made to Abraham, for example, and the promise is that that promised seed would come through Abraham's line, and God would make Abraham a great nation. Then you go from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, to Joseph, which gets them into Egypt. God blesses the nation of Israel and they become a nation—well over a million people strong—when God raises up Moses to lead the nation out of Egypt and into the land of promise. En route God appears to Moses on Mt. Sinai and gives him what we call the old covenant. It was the Laws; it was the blueprint for the tabernacle and the temple and all the furniture. It was the priesthood; it was all of that.

And all of that was meant to be a shadow, or a picture of God's ultimate fulfillment of the promise going all the way back to Genesis chapter three. You get into the Gospels, and it's really important to remember the Gospels are still under the old covenant. The Gospels are not new covenant theology; it's old covenant theology. The new covenant is not ushered in until the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Himself in the upper room, the night He was to be arrested, took the elements of Passover and said, "This is the beginning of the new covenant." His broken body and His shed blood—so clearly He indicated that it was still yet to come. His death, burial and resurrection would usher in *this new covenant, a better covenant, built on better promises*. That's what we're talking about.

In verse seven, this is the same argument he made in chapter seven last week: that if the old covenant was faultless—in other words had the ability to save us—there would have been no need for a change. The message is not, "Try harder." The message is not, "Let's give it one more go." The message is not, "Let's tweak it to kind of blend Jesus into it." The message is, "It didn't work!" He told us last week it was weak and useless in terms of its ability to save. But what he's saying here is the fault wasn't with the covenant; the fault was with the people and their inability to keep the covenant. So, he says,

For finding fault with them, He says,

**"BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD,
WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT..." (Vs. 8a)**

Now he's quoting from Jeremiah chapter 31. Jeremiah was an Old Testament prophet. The nation of Israel was divided between the North and the South. The North was Israel; the South was Judah. The North, Israel, has already been taken away into captivity; Judah, the South, is getting close to being taken away into captivity, and Jeremiah is writing this prophecy to them. There is a clear sense in which we as a people, fail to keep the covenant. The promise of Jeremiah's prophecy is God is going to usher in a new covenant that will deal with people's inability to keep the covenant—in other words, to make some way of salvation possible.

...I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; (And of course we learn that we as Gentiles also are a part of this covenant.)

NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS (because that one didn't work) **ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT;** (he's talking about Sinai) **BUT THEY DID NOT CONTINUE** (they didn't obey my covenant) **AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.** (Vs. 8b- 9)

In other words, they didn't obey, so God didn't get to bless them. God's heart is to bless His people but He can't do that when they are full of sin and disobedience. So what are the better promises in this better covenant? He starts then in verse 10:

“FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: (Promise number one:) I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS.

The first promise is the new covenant would be an internal covenant, not an external covenant, not written on tablets of stone, but written on the human heart. 2 Corinthians 3, which is the other extensive discussion on this, talks about the fact that the change would be that now the message, the law, would be written in the hearts of the people rather than on tablets of stone. It would be internal rather than external. Until the price was paid for sin, it was an external covenant. It was about laws; it was about rules; it was about a standard. It was about, “Obey and you're blessed; disobey and you'll experience the consequence of that.” But it was external, with all of the religious activity. The radical change in the new covenant is this would actually come from within. The language of the new covenant is radical. It's not a tweaking; it's not a try-harder theology. It's language like, *“You will be born again. You will become a new creation in Christ. You'll be transformed—literally metamorphized—you're a caterpillar; you will become a butterfly. You actually will become a partaker of the divine nature,”* according to Peter.

Paul says that *your old self will actually die with Christ, and a new self will be resurrected in Christ.* All of that is significant, in my opinion, for the defense of this idea of eternal security. You hear people talk about losing their salvation, and going *back*, to which I would say, “You can't go back! There is no back. Back is gone!” The Scriptures are clear. There is no back. You've been radically changed and transformed. The old you doesn't exist anymore; you can't go back. You didn't receive a ticket to heaven. You didn't receive just a remodeling job. It's a complete, total, radical transformation from the inside out, to such a degree that you actually have the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Himself now within you that empowers you to walk in obedience and live out this new life in Christ in a way that people in the old covenant couldn't have imagined!

Think of it like this: I think all of us in the room would agree that I should remain faithful to my wife. I don't think anybody disagrees with that. In the old covenant, why? Because it's the law; because it's the rule; because if I don't, there will be consequences to that. Therefore, I seek to abide by the rule. But in the new covenant, it's different. I actually have the nature of Christ. I

actually stand in the righteousness of Christ. So why do I remain faithful to my wife? Because I want to, because it's intrinsically motivated, because my heart is for righteousness. It doesn't have anything to do with whether or not there's a rule or law; it doesn't have anything to do with whether somebody catches me or sees me...doesn't have anything to do with that. It has to do with the fact I've been radically changed from the inside out and my heart is for righteousness. It's my passion; it's how I want to live.

In the old covenant, which continues to be true today for those that are stuck in legalism, they want everything black and white, and the reason they want it black and white is because they want to be able to get as close to the line as possible without going over it. "Give me real clear lines so I can come up to the line, but I don't want to step over the line."

The new covenant is radically different from that. I don't really care where the lines are. I'm not trying to see how close I can get to the line; I'm full speed the other direction. My heart is for righteousness. I want to do the right thing; I want to please God. It's the motivation of my heart. You say, "Is that because you're such a really good guy?" "It's because I've been radically changed by the power of Jesus. I actually have a new self. I'm a new creation. There's a new me, and through the power of the Spirit in me, my life is headed a different direction, and that's what I want! That's what I'm passionate about!" It's an intrinsic motivation that is radically different than the external motivation of the old covenant—a *better covenant built on better promises!* The second promise is in the latter part of verse 10:

...AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

Now first of all, that language was in the old covenant, but it had great limitations. God dwelt in the center of the camp, in the Holy of Holies, in the tabernacle, and to get to God, you went through the mediation, the priestly system. It was true they had a relationship, but not a relationship like we have today as the people of God.

When Jesus died on the cross, when His death completed payment for salvation, miraculously in the temple, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the holy place split in two—miraculously by itself! The message was that that limited access to God through the system of mediation is now over, and we now as the people of God, having been made right by the ultimate offering, by the ultimate High Priest, have direct access into the presence of God ourselves. We are God's people, and He is our God, in a way that people in the old covenant could never have imagined. The New Testament says we call God, "Abba, Father"...Papa, daddy. That's language in the old covenant that was unimaginable to those people! Hebrews has already told us we come boldly into the presence of God. They couldn't have imagined that in the old covenant. But now: *better covenant, better promises.* The third is kind of similar to that. Verse 11:

**“AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN,
AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’
FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME,
FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM.**

Now you say, “What does that mean?” Basically it’s capturing this idea that in the old covenant people had to go through the mediation level to get to God. And so the mediation level, the priests, basically taught the people and directed the people, and to get to God you went through them. But as a result of a better covenant with better promises, that mediation level is gone. That mediation level was meant to be a picture of the Savior to come. Jesus is the fulfillment. Paul tells Timothy there is no mediator between a holy God and sinful men and women other than Christ Himself. There is no clergy class; there is no priestly class; there is no pastor; there’s no denomination; there’s no church; there’s no person you have to go through. You have direct access into the presence of God in a way people in the old covenant could never have imagined.

God does not live in a building. God is not housed in some sort of a sanctuary. You don’t go to a building to visit God. In my opinion, there’s a lot of confusion around that today. There’s no building that’s any more sacred than you walking through a city park, because you have become the temple of God. You have become the dwelling place of God. You have an intimate access to God that was unimaginable in the old covenant. The text even says it doesn’t matter if you’re the greatest; it doesn’t matter if you’re the least. That wasn’t true in the old covenant. So, many people felt no possibility of access to a holy God. Whether you are the greatest or the least, God has opened up direct access into His presence. *Better covenant, better promises*, and all of it is built on the fourth promise, verse 12:

**“FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES,
AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”**

That word **FOR**—Greek word *gar*—we call it an *explanatory gar*. I know you’re thrilled to know that...but mention that to somebody at work tomorrow. The idea of the *explanatory gar* is that verse twelve explains the basis for the other promises. In other words, lose verse twelve, and nothing else we’ve talked about is possible. “How is all this possible?” Answer: “Because God has forgiven our sins in Jesus. The ultimate high priest has sacrificed Himself to make payment for sin, the propitiation for sin in order that we as sinful men and women can stand right before a holy God. Offered once for all, He is seated at the right hand, and as long as the ultimate high priest lives, that sacrifice for sin remains valid. Therefore, because we stand forgiven, the other promises are true as well. *Better covenant, better hope, built on better promises*.”

Now that is the longest quote of an Old Testament passage without interruption in the entire New Testament. You would think at the end of that there would be a significant amount of conversation. But it’s actually quite limited. Verse 13:

When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first covenant obsolete. (It feels like what he is saying in verse thirteen is when He said **a new covenant**, He meant a new covenant...which means the old one is old; the old one is obsolete; the old one is done. He has made the first obsolete.) **But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.**

A lot of scholars think that was kind of prophetic, hinting toward the destruction of the temple in AD 70. It’s kind of the idea that if they’re not going to stop, God will allow it to be destroyed in order to stop it. It wasn’t long after verse thirteen that the temple was actually destroyed. But

the greater argument is because there is a new one, the old is obsolete. Therefore, the old has to go...be done...replaced by the new.

Over the years it is just curious, concerning how many Christians seem unwilling or unable to let go of the old covenant. The old covenant is gone. Read 2 Corinthians, chapter three. It's the most comprehensive discussion on this. It is faded away; it's gone! It was a picture, but once you've experienced the true, you would never settle for a picture again.

Again, let's imagine that I convince you to leave the lodge at the Grand Canyon and go to the rim...and see this absolutely breathtaking site! I find you at the rim of the Grand Canyon, but you're looking at the Grand Canyon like this (looking also at the postcards in your hand), and while you're getting a glimpse of it, you still have the picture in the way of seeing the whole thing. I say to you, "Put the picture down! We're done with the picture. Enter into the breathtaking view of the real thing!"

You say, "What exactly are you talking about?" Well, things like this: People have trouble letting go of the Sabbath. People have trouble letting go of the dietary laws. People have trouble letting go of some of the feasts and festivals. People have trouble letting go of the Ten Commandments. You hear all these evangelicals talking about wanting the Ten Commandments in the schools and the courthouses. You do understand that the Ten Commandments are old covenant, don't you? What would be the biblical basis by which you choose ten commandments and move them forward and ignore over six hundred other commandments? What is the biblical basis by which we have permission to do that?

But it's even other practical things—ways we use the old covenant to reinforce our opinion. Somebody comes along and says, "I don't think you should have a tattoo." You say, "Why is that?" "Because that's what the Bible says," to which we say, "Where does the Bible say that?" "Well, there's a verse in Leviticus." "You mean the same verse that says you shouldn't shave your sideburns or cut your hair or your beard? Is that the verse you're referring to?" What is the permission to cherry-pick certain laws from the old covenant to reinforce our opinion? What is the biblical basis by which we do that? You understand: "The old is old!"

Where I hear it most commonly today, is around this whole conversation around immigration and refugees and all of that. Now people have strong opinions—that's fine. But what's not fine is so many Christians reach back into the Old Testament—to the old covenant—and cherry-pick verses and laws that reinforce their opinion as their way of saying, "God's on my side," to which I would say, "Wait a minute. What is the biblical basis by which you can cherry-pick one verse, one law, and ignore the other six hundred-plus? You can't just go back and cherry-pick what you want out of the old covenant. The old covenant is old; it's obsolete. There is a new covenant. It's a *better covenant, with better hope, built on better promises*. You're never really going to get a breath-taking view of the new covenant until you put down the pictures and realize this is something *different*, and something *so much better!*

It's the whole message of Christmas. ***For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, and it is Christ the Lord!*** Blend Him into the system? That's not what it says. It was the beginning of something radical—the transition from the picture to the reality—*better*

covenant, better hope, built on better promises. Not Jesus plus anything else. It's built on Christ, and Christ alone. The new covenant theology is Christ is enough!

Our Father, we are reminded this morning of the importance of entering into the fullness and the wonder of the new covenant. Lord, we can't keep the covenant any better than the nation of Israel did. Without a new covenant, we would be lost forever. But the new covenant, built on new promises, gives us a new hope, because we find our life in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and Jesus alone! Lord, that's what we celebrate, and it's in whose name we pray, Amen.

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December 1/2, 2018

Something Better

Christ is Enough

Hebrews 8:1-13

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Can you think of an example like Bryan's of the Grand Canyon where you first were exposed to the copy, picture, or replica, then got to see or experience the original? After seeing the true, how did the other compare?
2. What causes people to cling to what is clearly not working rather than considering the possibility of something new?

Bible Study

1. Read Hebrews 8:1-6. The phrase "such a High Priest" refers to all we've learned about Jesus as the High Priest in Hebrews. Review what we've learned about Jesus as the High Priest.
2. What is the writer's point in telling us that if Jesus, the ultimate High Priest, were to return to earth He would not be allowed to serve as priest in the temple? Imagine if Jesus were to return to earth today, where would He fit and not fit in today's various religions and churches? Would Jesus be welcome in all churches today that fall under the banner of Christian churches? Why or why not?
3. According to verse 6, what makes the New Covenant better? When did the New Covenant begin (see Matt. 26:27, 28)?
4. Read Hebrews 8:7-12. Why was a New Covenant necessary? (see 7:18, 19).
5. What are the better promises Jeremiah writes about in verses 8-12? What's been your own personal experience with each of these promises?
6. Read Hebrews 8:13 and II Corinthians 3. What is the role of the Old Covenant today? What does this mean for us? Is it correct to just randomly pick verses out of the Old Testament to apply to situations today? Give some examples.

