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Sermon Notes

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The Superiority of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:7-13

The Greatest Treasure of the Universe: the Treasures of the New Covenant

This text should make you feel incredibly WEALTHY... rich in blessings, rich in love, rich your position as an adopted child of God

This text should also make you realize how costly are these privileges, since they cost the blood of Jesus Christ:

Luke 22:20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Context:

Overall: What is Hebrews about

Hebrews 8: two major issues...

- 1) The sphere of our High Priest's ministry
- 2) The superior covenant with which it is connected

Key link verse: Hebrews 8:6

Hebrews 8:6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

What are the "better promises" of the New Covenant?

Today's text answers that question better than any other text in the Bible...

Three elements make the New Covenant superior

- 1) Transformed hearts that have God's laws ACTUALLY WRITTEN on them
- 2) Perfect, intimate knowledge with God as His people

3) Actual forgiveness of sins

I will contend that these three things WERE NOT actually achieved in the Old Covenant, but they were laid out before the people externally... the Old Covenant TESTIFIED to them, but could not bring them about in God's people

I. The Need for a New Covenant (vs. 7)

Hebrews 8:7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

A. The Need for a New Covenant Already Established in Hebrews

1. The fact that Jesus is our Great High Priest, and...
2. The fact that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, and...
3. The fact that, under the Old Covenant, no one from the tribe of Judah could serve as High Priest
4. REQUIRED a New Covenant to be established:

Hebrews 7:12 For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.

B. The Same Argument is Made Here as Concerning the Priesthood

1. An Old Testament prophecy is put forth concerning a significant change coming
2. The prophecy proves that the present circumstance is INADEQUATE
3. Therefore a new ministry must be established
4. For the priesthood, the prophecy was

Psalm 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

5. The statement of inadequacy:

Hebrews 7:11 If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come-- one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?

6. Therefore, the establishment of Jesus Christ in a new priesthood:

C. So Also Here... The Prophecy Proves the Inadequacy

1. The prophecy: Jeremiah 31:31-34...
2. The statement of inadequacy:

Hebrews 8:7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

3. Therefore, there must be a NEW COVENANT

D. What is a Covenant?

1. Definition: a covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons
2. Covenants are a huge part of God's dealing with the human race
3. Some theologians have used the covenant as a way of organizing all of redemptive history and God's dealings with humanity... they say God does NOTHING with the human race APART from a covenant

E. What Was the Old Covenant?

1. Many covenants mentioned in the Old Testament
 - a. Covenant with Noah around the time of the flood
 - b. Covenant with Abraham
 - c. Covenant with David
2. The Old Covenant mentioned here: the Mosaic Covenant
 - a. Made at Sinai at the time of the Ten Commandments
 - b. The text mentions the time of the Exodus as the time of the covenant he has in mind
 - c. Specifically: the Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifices, connected with the perfect moral Law established in the Ten Commandments
 - d. So, the moral Law of God stood engraved on tablets of stone requiring them to live morally perfect lives; their sins were addressed by the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifice

F. Nothing WRONG with God's Work in One Sense

1. God didn't make a mistake with the Old Covenant that He then fixed with the new and improved covenant... like the Old Covenant was the PROTOTYPE and then God fixed all the flaws and got it right the second time!!

2. The covenant was perfect because it was God's work

2 Samuel 22:31 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless.

Romans 7:12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

3. BUT something was WRONG with the covenant nonetheless

Hebrews 8:7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

a. Literally "If that first covenant had been FAULTLESS..."

b. The implication is clear: the covenant itself is faulted, inadequate, insufficient to achieve the purpose of salvation from sin

4. Thus the author to the Hebrews makes some strong statements about the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant to which he is referring

Hebrews 7:18-19 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect)

a. Weak and useless show the problem with the Old Covenant

b. It has NO POWER to produce the PERFECTION necessary for the people of God to draw near to God

G. The Problem was with God's People

Hebrews 8:8 But God found fault with the people...

1. The exact same Greek root is used: "find fault"

2. God doesn't really find FAULT with the covenant itself... it was perfect in and of itself; no, the real fault is with the people

3. Paul makes this plain in Romans:

Romans 7:14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.

4. The Law was engraved in stone on the outside of the people's hearts, commanding them to behave perfectly and threatening them with death

5. It had NO POWER to transform us and make us perfect... all it could do was condemn us

II. The Promise of a New Covenant (vs. 8-9)

Hebrews 8:8-9 But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

A. The Prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34

1. The longest quotation of an Old Testament passage in the New Testament
2. Quoted TWICE in Hebrews... here and Hebrews 10:16-17
3. Incredibly important text of Scripture
4. Central promise here: I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT...

B. Focus: God's Sovereign Activity

1. God takes divine initiative in dealing with human sin
2. "I will make... I will put... I will write... I will be... I will forgive... I will remember..."

C. The Need for the New Covenant Established in the History of Israel

Hebrews 8:9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

1. God reminds us of the circumstances of the Old Covenant... the Exodus from Egypt
2. Notice the powerful divine activity then:

"I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt"

Deuteronomy 1:31 There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place

3. God established His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai

- a. He descended on the Mountain in a cloud and in fire; the earth trembled; God spoke in an awesome voice, and gave His people the Ten Commandments
- b. The people, all of them, trembled with fear at the awesome power of God
- 4. BUT God's people did not remain faithful to His covenant... they broke it immediately, and then repeatedly thereafter
 - a. They fashioned a golden calf and bowed down to it in worship
 - b. Then, after entering the Promised Land, they repeatedly broke God's laws and provoked Him to anger with their idols, with what their hands had made
 - c. Finally God evicted them from the Promised Land; they went into exile in Babylon for seventy years
 - d. In the sovereign grace of God, they were allowed to return to Palestine, and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and reestablish the temple worship
 - e. BUT they immediately began sinning again, intermarrying with the pagan peoples and following their ways
- 5. The Old Covenant had NO POWER to change this relentless bent toward evil, this irresistible pull toward wickedness and sins

D. The Tragic Result: God Turned Away from Them

Hebrews 8:9 I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

- 1. The word literally means that God paid no attention to them
- 2. God refused to help them defeat their enemies when they sinfully and arrogantly went out to fight but not in His name... He gave them over to their ways and allowed them to die

E. The Darkest Moment: Jeremiah's Day

- 1. God was about to destroy Jerusalem and slaughter most of His people by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar
- 2. Jeremiah had been the quintessential prophet of doom who had stood at the gates of the Temple and warned the people of the impending destruction under the Babylonian army... he had been the most universally HATED and abused prophet of the Old Testament
- 3. He was also called the weeping prophet... after Jerusalem was destroyed and left completely desolate, he would write the Book of Lamentations

4. But in the midst of his tragic ministry, when Israel's rebellion and judgment from God was at its darkest hour, God gave to Jeremiah this marvelous prophecy

Hebrews 8:8-12 "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

F. The New Covenant will NOT BE LIKE that First Covenant!!!!

1. The prophecy establishes that the New Covenant will succeed precisely where the Old Covenant had failed
2. The essential difference: where the Old Covenant pointed the way EXTERNALLY to all these things, the New Covenant ESTABLISHED THEM INTERNALLY in the hearts of God's people... it actually brought about what had to happen
3. It had POWER to change God's people themselves and fit them for heaven!!

G. With Whom is the New Covenant Made?

Hebrews 8:8 "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

Hebrews 8:10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

1. The "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah"
 - a. These were the two nations of the Jews
 - b. Tragically divided because of Solomon's sins... his foreign wives had led him astray to worship false gods
 - c. God tore away from the house of Judah the ten tribes... the northern kingdom of Israel
 - d. From them on, the Jews themselves lived in hostility with each other as though they were enemies

2. BUT in the New Covenant, the term “Israel” is used of God’s people generally, the “church of Jesus Christ”

Galatians 6:16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

3. The most significant barrier of the Old Covenant: Jew and Gentile
 - a. By the Old Covenant, the Gentiles were excluded, on the outside, foreigners to the covenants of the promise
 - b. But the New Covenant is made with ALL who trust in Jesus Christ

Ephesians 2:12-14 remember that at that time you [Gentiles] were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility

H. The Promise is UNIVERSAL... EVERYONE of God’s People

Hebrews 8:11 hey will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

1. This is the essence of the difference between the Old Covenant era and the New... the widespread and universal effects of the Spirit of God
2. The Spirit would occasionally come on SOME PEOPLE in the Old Testament era—a prophet here, a king there, a judge—but most of God’s people never once experienced the Spirit’s direct ministry
3. The “least to the greatest” means a universal blessing given to ALL of God’s people... this is not just for certain key members of society... Jew and Gentile alike, from low to high, get these three blessings
 - **God’s Laws Implanted in their Hearts**
 - **Intimate Relationship with God**
 - **Actual Forgiveness of Sin**

III. The Superior Elements of the New Covenant

A. God’s Laws Implanted in Hearts

Hebrews 8:10 I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.

1. This is the incredible promise of the New Covenant: a transformed heart to LOVE and OBEY God and His laws

2. The Old Covenant law was written on tablets of stone... cold, dead, unfeeling, condemning
3. The New Covenant has as its essence the ability to TRANSFORM US from within... to make us delight in God and love Him with a burning passion; to make us yearn to obey, to make us burn with a passion to fulfill God's laws
 - a. The "mind" = understanding... the people of God will understand God's laws
 - b. The "heart" = affection, desire, yearning... the people of God will LOVE God's Laws
4. The glorious promise of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

5. This is specifically done by the power of the Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

6. Hebrews has already warned us of the dangers of a hardened heart that turns away from the living God; the power of the Spirit is the remedy to the hardening of the heart that leads to rebellion
7. The essence of the New Covenant: God's direct work on the twisted, dark, evil human heart... the "heart of stone", that will NOT yield to God, but which continually goes its own way
8. The Old Covenant had NO SUCH power over the human heart; the Law was in stone on the outside, preaching and condemning, preaching and condemning
9. The New Covenant is God's Holy Spirit from within, making God's Laws come alive in our lives
10. What "Laws"??
 - a. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength
 - b. Love your neighbor as yourself
11. By the power of the Holy Spirit, these things become "fully met in us"

Romans 8:4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

B. Intimate Knowledge of God

Hebrews 8:10-11 I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

1. Throughout the Old Testament, this was the special promise of God toward Israel... it is stated again and again as God's deepest desire... intimacy with God in personal fellowship
2. God created us original for this fellowship... this has been God's desire all along
3. The promise focuses on KNOWLEDGE of God...
 - a. It speaks of a man who might desire to teach his neighbor or another man his brother saying "Know the Lord"
 - b. The response would be given: "Dear friend, we ALREADY know Him!"
4. This is the very definition of eternal life:

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

5. This was the very center of Paul's life ambition

Philippians 3:7-11 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

6. The New Covenant promises an intimate, experiential knowledge of God that is infinitely more satisfying than anything else in the universe
 - a. By the Spirit, it gives us a deep yearning for this knowledge, and then satisfies it with daily insights from God's word, daily experiences in God's world

- b. And EVERYONE of God's people will have this... from the least of us to the greatest
 - i) This special love is not reserved for some of God's people but withheld from others
 - ii) Gnostics taught that there were special circles of knowledge given only to the spiritual pure who proved their worthiness; keys of knowledge that would unlock ever higher circles of insight until at last you reach a kind of enlightenment... oneness with the divine
 - iii) But intimate perfect knowledge of God is given from the least of us to the greatest
7. I believe the essence of this relational knowledge is our adoption as sons and daughters of the living God AND our role as the bride of Christ
- a. These close intimate relationships are the most precious in human experience
 - b. We are the adopted sons and daughters of the living God... God knows us as His children, by the Spirit we cry out to Him "Abba, Father"
 - c. We are the beloved bride of Jesus Christ... He loves us with an intensity no husband has ever felt for his bride, and by the Spirit we love Him too... we "know" him in the perfectly holy intimate love of a spiritual marriage

C. Actual Forgiveness of Sins

Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

1. "For": this is the fundamental issue; without this act of grace on God's part, none of the other blessings could ever come to pass
2. "Forgive" in NIV; literally "I will be merciful to"...
 - a. God does not give us what our sins and wickedness deserves
 - b. God lavishes us with mercy
3. Our sins: both the tree and its fruit
 - a. A tree of wickedness... a heart of rebellion against the God of the universe; a mind at enmity with God, seething with resentments, restless to do evil, yearning for freedom to do whatever it wants
 - b. Fruit of actual sins: God's laws violated... God's standards not met

4. On what basis does God show us this mercy? Only by the blood of the New Covenant... the sacrifice of Jesus
 - a. This is the essential SUPERIORITY of the New Covenant to the Old... under the Old Covenant, there was absolutely no ACTUAL PROVISION for the removal of sin
 - b. The blood of animals—of bulls, sheep, goats—could never atone for our sins
 - c. This is why those animal sacrifices were offered continually... they had no real efficacy to remove sin

Hebrews 10:4 it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

- d. Jesus is the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”
- e. This is the superiority of the New Covenant: ACTUAL FORGIVENESS of sins

5. God’s forgiveness is COMPLETE and TOTAL

Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more

Psalms 103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Micah 7:19 you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

6. God swears here to remember our sins NO MORE... though His omniscience will never fade and He will always have in His omniscient mind a perfect record of every sin ever committed, what He is pledging here is that the sin will never again block fellowship with Him... we are at NO RELATIONAL DISADVANTAGE; He will not bring up our sins in such a way as to hurt us

See then the total supremacy of the New Covenant to the Old

It is the ONLY WAY ANY SINNER HAS EVER BEEN SAVED!!!

There was no forgiveness in the Old Covenant sacrificial system... therefore it had no power to write God’s laws on our hearts or put us into a perfectly reconciled relationship with a loving heavenly Father

BUT NOW, because of Christ’s blood shed on the cross, the blood of the New Covenant, we have these three infinitely precious treasures:

- **God’s Laws Implanted in their Hearts**

- **Intimate Relationship with God**
- **Actual Forgiveness of Sin**

IV. Therefore, The Old Covenant is Obsolete

Hebrews 8:13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

A. The New One Takes the Place of the Old

1. The author presses home the point... we don't need TWO COVENANTS addressing our relationship to God
2. It's similar to a will... two wills makes the settlement of the estate vastly more complicated...
3. The estate lawyers have to labor to prove which one is NEWER and thus supersedes the OLD
4. God has made it very plain... this new covenant makes the old one OBSOLETE

B. Explosive Implications

1. The Old Covenant was obsolete the moment Jesus Christ died on the cross; at that moment, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom
2. The priests could have immediately and innocently dropped their work and walked away from the temple forever and God would have been pleased with their faith in Christ
3. Indeed, in the book of Acts, it says

Acts 6:7 a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

- a. I can't help but think, since the chapter is the same as that of Stephen's arguing that the temple was finished as a sacred space for God that these priests did in fact OBEY the gospel and STOP offering animals that very day
- b. The temple was obsolete
- c. The Levitical priesthood was obsolete
- d. The ceremonial law of Moses was obsolete

C. What is Obsolete and Aging will SOON DISAPPEAR

1. This is a clear indication that the Temple was still standing when the book of Hebrews was written
2. AND that God's judgment of wrath was SOON to fall on the temple and all Jerusalem
3. God acted in A.D. 70 to put an end to the temple sacrifices by means of the Roman army... the smoldering ruins of "Herod's Temple" were a clear testimony to this one fact: In Jesus the age of the New Covenant has come and will endure forever!!!

V. New Covenant is Already and Not Yet Fulfilled in Us

A. Already:

1. God's Laws Are Implanted on our Hearts, But...
 - a. We still forget those laws, and
 - b. We don't love those laws as we should, and
 - c. We still have another law of sin battling within us

Romans 7:21-23 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

2. We Are Adopted Children of God and Know Him, But...
 - a. We see as in a mirror, partly, imperfectly
 - b. Like Paul, we yearn to know more and more,
 - c. We still need teachers of the word of God to show us more of God
 - d. We still prize our knowledge of God far too little
3. Are Sins Are Completely Forgiven, But...
 - a. We are still conscious of sinning daily
 - b. We still need to confess our sins daily
 - c. We still need God's forgiveness daily
 - d. We still need to ask each other for forgiveness daily
 - e. Our conscience still smites us daily

B. Not Yet:

1. True Fulfillment Awaits Us in Heaven!
2. Our Hearts Will Be Perfectly Whole in Heaven
 - a. We will love God perfectly
 - b. We will delight in God's law perfectly
 - c. Our battle with indwelling sin will be gone forever
3. Our Intimate Knowledge of God Will Be Perfect in Heaven
 - a. We will know God fully as we have been fully known
 - b. We will be constantly discovering Christ's glory in new and every more radiant ways
 - c. We will walk through the streets of the New Jerusalem and see the majesty of that perfect city, shining radiantly with the glory of Christ
 - d. This verse will be perfected:

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 22:3-4 The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

4. Our Sins Will Be Completely Gone in Heaven
 - a. No indwelling sin
 - b. Nothing in the world to tempt us
 - c. The devil and his angels in torment in the Lake of Fire
 - d. Sin totally forgiven and forgotten

VI. Applications

- A. Come to Christ!!
- B. Delight in the Glories of the New Covenant
- C. Meditate Deeply on Each Treasure Mentioned Here

1. God's laws are written in your minds and on your hearts
2. You are God's people, adopted into His family
3. Your sins are completely forgiven and effectively forgotten

D. Meditate on the Blood of the New Covenant: Jesus' Blood

1. Understand that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin
2. BUT the blood of Jesus HAS taken away your sin
3. Especially meditate on this cost the next time we celebrate the Lord's Supper

E. Improve on Each of these New Covenant Blessings

1. Since God's laws are written in your mind and on your heart, study God's word more than ever before; meditate on it, memorize it, pray it back to God, swim in it
2. Since you are God's possession, part of God's chosen family, live like God in this world; "Be holy" because He is holy; immerse yourself in the work the Father is doing in the world; know Him more and more; like Paul, seek to know Christ more and more; desire to know Christ in your sufferings as Paul did
3. Since your sins and wickedness God has forgiven and remembered them no more, then make it your desire to hate sin and fight it and crush it more than ever before

F. Forgive Each Other, Just as God Has Forgiven You

1. "I will remember no more"...
2. Peacemaker: "Good thought, hurt you not, gossip never, friends forever."