
JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST IS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT

Sermon for Maundy Thursday, 2018

Hebrews 8:6-13

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon tonight is Hebrews 8:6-13: ⁶ **However, now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, to the degree that He is also the Mediator of a better Covenant, which has been enacted on the basis of better promises.** ⁷ **For, if that first Covenant had been without fault, no occasion would be sought for a second Covenant.** ⁸ **For God is finding fault with the people when He says: “Look! The days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I shall establish a new Covenant for the family of Israel and the family of Judah.** ⁹ **It will not be like the Covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by their hands to lead them out the land of Egypt, because they did not abide by My Covenant. So I have disregarded them,’ says the Lord.** ¹⁰ **‘For this is the Covenant that I shall make with the family of Israel after those days,’ says the Lord: ‘I shall put My Laws into their minds and I shall write them on their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they will be My people.** ¹¹ **Each one will certainly not teach his fellow citizen and each one will certainly not teach his brother, saying, “Know the Lord!” For they will all know Me from the least to the greatest of them.** ¹² **For I shall be merciful toward their iniquities and I shall certainly not remember their sins any more.”** ¹³ **By calling the Covenant “new,” He has made the first Covenant “old.” Moreover, what is becoming obsolete and is growing old is at the point of disappearing.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

It is not uncommon to hear manufacturers of products coming onto the market making the claim that their particular product is *better*, *new*, or *improved*. Take mobile phones for instance. It seems that every couple of months, a new model comes out that promises to do more than the old model.

The problem is that the promise that the new product will be better and an improvement over the old one isn't always true in real life.

That isn't the case with the new Covenant that God promised through the prophet Jeremiah to put into effect in the future - the Covenant Jesus spoke of when He instituted His Holy Supper. On this Maundy Thursday, we have another reading that shows us that Jesus is our great High Priest, and it does this by contrasting the Covenant He established - the new Covenant - with the old Covenant, which established the Old Testament priesthood. It is an appropriate reading for this evening when we hear those familiar words our Lord spoke as He instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion: "*This cup is the new Covenant in My blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me!*" (1 Cor. 11:25). When Jesus spoke of a *new* Covenant, He was clearly indicating that there was another Covenant, a Covenant that would supersede the old Covenant. Tonight, as we look at that old Covenant, we will see more clearly what the new Covenant is, and we will appreciate all the more what our Saviour has done when by His suffering and death - when by shedding His blood - He established the new Covenant.

The writer of Hebrews shows us how the new Covenant is an *improvement* over the old Covenant when he writes, "**However, now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, to the degree that He is also the Mediator of a better Covenant, which has been enacted on the basis of better promises.**"

Many years before Jesus walked the earth, God made a Covenant, - or solemn agreement - with the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai. Remember how that Covenant with Israel came about. In the third month, after God had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, He gathered them at the foot of Mount Sinai.¹ There He told them that if they obeyed Him, they would always be His special people and would always live in the Promised Land of Canaan. Through Moses, the mediator of the old Covenant, God told the Israelites the terms of His agreement with them - the Ten Commandments and the civil and ceremonial laws, which would regulate every aspect of their social and religious lives. The Israelites heard the terms and agreed, saying, "*We shall do*

¹ Exodus 19

all that the LORD has spoken, that we may be obedient,” (Ex. 24:7). So, the agreement was made - God laid down the terms, the people agreed, a relationship was established, and then the Covenant was put into effect using blood. Bulls were slaughtered, their blood was gathered, and some of the blood was splashed against the altar of the Lord and the rest was sprinkled on the people. As he sprinkled the blood of the bulls on the people, Moses said, *“Look! The blood of the Covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these Words,”* (24:8). The agreement was sealed, put into effect with blood.

Sadly, within days, the Israelites had broken that Covenant by casting and worshipping a golden calf.² The author of Hebrews quotes from Jeremiah 31 where the LORD says, **“they did not abide by My Covenant.”** Yet God did not simply wipe out His Covenant with Israel. What the LORD did do is this: through Jeremiah, He promised that He would make and put into effect a new Covenant. This new Covenant would be different from the old Covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Our reading quotes again from Jeremiah 31: **“⁹ It will not be like the Covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by their hands to lead them out the land of Egypt.”** The new Covenant would be different - indeed, it would be superior to the old because this new Covenant would be **enacted on the basis of better promises.**

You see, that was the problem with the Covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. The Covenant contained promises - promises that Israel would always live in Canaan and would always be God’s special people - but those promises were *conditional*. Those promises required obedience from the Israelites. God said, **“If you strictly obey Me and keep My Covenant, then out of all the nations you will be a special treasure to Me,”** (Ex. 19:5). But the Israelites couldn’t do it. They were sinful people; they broke God’s Covenant by their sins. So God promised to put into effect a new Covenant - new in the sense that it was different. It would be a different kind of Covenant than God had made with Israel - it would have better promises - *unconditional promises*. What are those unconditional promises? God said through Jeremiah: **“For I**

² Exodus 32

shall be merciful toward their iniquities and I shall certainly not remember their sins any more.” That’s what makes the new Covenant better than the old one - it is based on **better promises**; sins are forgiven and forgotten for Christ’s sake without condition.

However, wasn’t there forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament? Yes, through faith in the promises first given to Adam and Eve and then repeated to Abraham there surely was forgiveness. As we look at the Covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, we must never lose sight of the promise of a Saviour given in the Garden of Eden - the Offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head,³ and repeated to Abraham - that in his *Descendant all the nations of the earth will be blessed*, (Gen. 22:18). We need to remember that the Covenant, which God made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai does not replace that earlier Covenant, but it was added as a *temporary measure* in support of the promises of the Saviour given previously. It had an important role to play in keeping Israel together as a nation until the Saviour was born, and in reminding the people of how much they needed that Saviour. The old Covenant also contained instructions for the priesthood and sacrifices that foreshadowed the ministry of Christ, but the Old Testament believers had only shadows of the Saviour, promises that payment would be made for sin, and prophecies of Christ’s saving work.

We New Testament Christians have the reality. Tonight, we see how God put His new Covenant into effect. As Jesus took the cup of wine and gave it to His disciples, He said, “*This cup is the new Covenant in My blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me!*” (1 Cor. 11:25). Jesus became **the Mediator of a better Covenant**, the new Covenant of forgiveness of sins, by offering Himself on the cross for the sins of the world. By His blood, He has removed the sins that has separated us from God. The Saviour we saw struggling in Gethsemane rose from His prayer and suffered and died on the cross. Because He died bearing the sins of the whole world, God can unconditionally promise the whole world of sinners, “***Your sins are forgiven. My Son has paid your debt and removed your guilt.***” God brought us into that Covenant when He brought us to faith through Baptism, and He remains

³ Genesis 3:15

faithful to us like a loving husband to his bride. Unfortunately, we are not always faithful to Him. Like the Israelites of old, often, we find ourselves worshipping other gods; we forget His goodness and grumble against Him. In mercy, God shows us our sins, brings us to repentance and faith, and restores our blessed Covenant relationship, and each time we partake of the Lord's Supper, receiving Christ's body and blood under the bread and wine, He reassures us that we are still His dearly loved children. Isn't it interesting that as we hear Jesus say, "*Do this in remembrance of Me,*" we are reminded of this great promise: "**I shall be merciful toward their iniquities and I shall certainly not remember their sins any more.**" Yes, Christ is the Mediator of a new and **better Covenant**, one based on superior promises - the unconditional promise that all our sins are forgiven and forgotten through the blood of Christ.

Our reading also leads us to see that Christ is the Mediator of the new Covenant, which is stronger than the old.

Regarding the new Covenant, God said through Jeremiah, and repeated by our writer, "**I shall put My Laws into their minds and I shall write them on their hearts.**" The contrast here is between the Laws God wrote on tablets of stone at Mount Sinai and the way He would inscribe His will on the hearts of His people in the New Testament. Remember that the nation of Israel whom God had gathered at Mount Sinai was a mixed nation. Not all the Israelites believed God's promise to send a Saviour. Many of them grumbled about being led by God in the desert and some of them even wanted to go back to Egypt.⁴ They were stiff-necked and stubborn. When God wrote His commands on stone tablets, those commands came as a heavy burden placed on the people from the outside. They had no love for God and no desire to do what He said. The only reason they obeyed - if they did - was out of fear of God's wrath and punishment. They considered God's holy will for them to be a heavy burden.

However, even in the Old Testament there were also those who were the believing people of God, who knew their sins and their need for a Saviour. They knew God's promise of a Saviour and gladly carried out His will. They

⁴ Exodus 16

had God's Law written in their hearts. It did not come to them from the outside as a burdensome demand, but they were inspired by God's love to obey Him from within. The author of the longest Psalm in the Bible, Psalm 119, was such an Old Testament believer, for he wrote: "*I shall run in the path of Your Commandments. For You will enlarge my heart,*" (v. 32). By this he meant that the heart is opened by insight, freed from the weight of guilt, and able to trust in the path marked by God. Jeremiah also says that when God establishes His new Covenant, all who are brought into the new Covenant relationship with God by faith will be like that. They will obey God from the heart. Those who have seen the true glory of God in His forgiving love - those He has made His people by faith, will be God's people, and He shall be their God, and He **shall put (His) Laws into their minds and shall write them on their hearts**. They will do God's will gladly. Inspired by God's love, they will in turn love God and their fellow man.

Jesus had this in mind when He said to His disciples, "*I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another,*" (John 13:34). That command isn't new in itself. God had commanded that in the Old Testament. What would be new was the *motive* for loving others. Jesus said, "*.... as I have loved you.*" God, in His love, has established His new Covenant. The promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled in Christ, who in His great love, goes to the cross to bear our sins in His body and cleanse us from them by His blood. He has brought us into that Covenant by faith. He's opened our eyes to see the glory of His grace, which freely, fully, and finally forgives us our sins. In the Lord's Supper, He gives us His body and blood as a precious receipt that payment for sin has been made, and now, with hearts warmed by His love, we strive to live lives of love for God and for our fellow men. It is with us as it was with St. Paul, who, in trying to explain his great zeal for the work of the Gospel, wrote, "¹⁴ *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One has died for all. Therefore all have died.* ¹⁵ *He has died for all, so that those who live may no longer live for themselves, but for Him, who has died for them and has been raised,*" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). That's the power of the new Covenant - the power of God's forgiving love in Christ! That's what makes the new Covenant stronger than the old one.

Finally, when God puts this new Covenant into effect, people will know God better than they did before - they will have a clearer picture of what He is like. Our text says it this way: “¹¹ **Each one will certainly not teach his fellow citizen and each one will certainly not teach his brother, saying, “Know the Lord!” For they will all know Me from the least to the greatest of them.**” It is important to note that Jeremiah says that no one will have to say, “**Know the LORD.**” “**The LORD**” is God’s Covenant name. It is the name that emphasises His grace, mercy, and forgiving love. Now of course, the Old Testament believers knew that name of God; they knew their God as the LORD. Indeed, they had experienced His grace and mercy. The promise of a Saviour whom God had given to Israel and His selection of Israel as His own special people - all of this was evidence of God’s love for Israel. But the full glory of God’s love, the full revelation of the name, “The LORD” - Israel in the Old Testament did not get.

That revelation would only come with God’s sacrifice of His Son on the cross. That offering, God’s offering of His Son unto death on the cross in the place of a world of sinners, fully and truly reveals the glory of God. Jesus understood that. He understood that God’s glory would be revealed most clearly in His crucifixion. That’s why He said in the shadow of the cross, “*Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him,*” (John 13:31). It is God’s greatest glory to be the Saviour of sinners, to reveal His amazing grace as He offers His Son as the Substitute for sinners. Jesus once said to His disciples, “*Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you see!*” ²⁴ *For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you are seeing but have not seen them, and to hear the things that you are hearing but have not heard them,*” (Luke 10:23-24). How blessed we are - far beyond the revelation of God’s love that the faithful had in the days of the Old Testament - with the full revelation of God’s forgiving love! Let us now strive to grow in this knowledge of Christ as did Paul the great apostle who wrote, “¹⁰ *I want to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, and fellowship in His sufferings, as I am conformed to His death,*” ¹¹ *if somehow I shall attain to the resurrection from the dead,*” (Phil. 3:10-11).

May we devote ourselves to making known to others the knowledge of our

glorious Lord! We do this in a variety of ways - through personal witness and prayers and with the offerings we bring our Lord to support the work of His Gospel ministry. We also do it each time we partake of the Lord's Supper, as Paul said, "²⁶ For, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death, until He comes," (1 Cor. 11:26).

We hear Jesus say, "*This cup is the new Covenant in My blood.*" Now you know that that means that Jesus, our great High Priest, is the Mediator of a Covenant that is superior, stronger, and smarter than the old Covenant. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for Your goodness and loving kindness in sending to this needy world Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven. We praise You that you have enabled us to know You through Him.

Open our eyes that we may see ourselves as we really are in the mirror of Your holy Word, and grant us a sincere repentance. Nothing is hidden from You. You know our secret sins. Therefore we cast ourselves down before You, trust in Your mercy, and cling only to this, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin. Forgive us our many transgressions. Grant that by faith we may grasp what Christ has done for us, and rejoice in the perfect peace of His pardon. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from us, but continue to make us glad that You have saved us. Satisfy our souls with the bread of life, and grant that through faith in Him we may never hunger again. Do not cast us from Your presence because of our faithlessness, but through Christ keep us for Your eternal kingdom. Help us to overcome pride and self-will, which disregard Jesus' example of humble service. Give us a ready mind and a pure heart to follow in His steps.

Bless Your Church, O Father. May all Your people be nourished by the true manna, which has come down from heaven, and given them the vision and strength to do Your will. Help Your Church to appreciate and use Your Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, through which Your Spirit brings salvation to all people.

May Your blessing rest on all who feel the burden of a guilty conscience, the pain of sickness, the ache of sorrow, the sadness of separation, and the sting of death. Give to all who seek Your gracious help the assurance of Your love and comforting presence, and, at the end, entrance into Your eternal glory.

As now we proclaim our Lord's passion and death in the communion between bread and Jesus' body and wine and Jesus' blood at His Table, unite us with Him and with each other in faith and fellowship. For there we are one body in Him. Assure us again of Your presence and Your mercy. Increase our joy and hope of heaven. Let Your Word and the Lord's Supper continually strengthen us during our pilgrimage on earth, until we finally share in the marriage supper of the Lamb for ever. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, whose saving death is our peace and hope until He comes. Amen.

Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14

¹ The LORD told Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² "This month shall be the first month for you, the first month of your year! ³ Tell the whole congregation of Israel, 'On the tenth day of this month each man shall take a lamb or kid for himself, according to the household of his father, one lamb for each household! ⁴ However, if any household is too small for one lamb or one kid, he and the neighbour next to his house shall take one between them, depending on the number of people! You shall determine your count for the lamb by how much each person eats! ⁵ The lamb or kid shall be a one-

year-old male without defect! You may take it from the sheep or the goats. ⁶ Take care of it until the fourteenth day of this month! Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight! ⁷ They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two sides and the tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs! ⁸ That same night they shall eat the meat roasted on a fire! They shall eat it together with bread made without yeast and with bitter herbs! ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water but roasted on a fire, with its head, legs and internal organs! ¹⁰ You shall not leave any of it until the next morning but burn up

whatever remains of it until morning! ¹¹ This is how you shall eat it: You shall have your cloaks tucked into your belts, your sandals on your feet and your staffs in your hands! You shall eat it quickly! It is the Passover of the LORD. ¹² On that night I shall pass through Egypt and strike down every first-born in Egypt, both human beings and animals. I shall bring judgment against all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I shall pass over you. The plague will not strike you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.’

¹⁴ “You shall commemorate this day! You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD throughout your generations! You and your descendants shall celebrate it as a festival by a permanent Statute!

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

²³ For I received from the Lord what I have also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when He was being betrayed, took bread. ²⁴ When He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me!” ²⁵ In the same way He also took the cup

after the meal. He said, “This cup is the new Covenant in My blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me!” ²⁶ For, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord’s death, until He comes.

²⁷ Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ However, let a person examine himself and so let him eat from the bread and drink from the cup! ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks without recognising the Lord’s body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

³⁰ For this reason, many among you are sick and ailing, and a number have fallen asleep. ³¹ However, if we were carefully judging ourselves, we should not be under judgment. ³² When the Lord judges us, we are being disciplined, that we may not be condemned with the world.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹ Before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and go to the Father. He had loved His own who were in the world and loved them completely. ² The evening meal

was being served, and the Devil had already put the idea of betraying Jesus into the mind of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into His hands and that He had come from God and was going back to God. ⁴ Jesus rose from the meal, laid aside His outer garments, took a towel and tied it around His waist. ⁵ Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel that He had wrapped around Him. ⁶ When He came to Simon Peter, Peter asked Him, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus answered him, "You do not understand now what I am doing but later you will know."

⁸ Peter told Him. "You will assuredly never wash my feet."

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

⁹ Simon Peter told Him, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!"

¹⁰ Jesus told him, "The person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet. He is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you."

¹¹ For He knew who would betray

Him. That was why He said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After He had washed their feet and put on His outer garments, He reclined at the table again. He asked them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because I am. ¹⁴ Therefore, if I, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet! ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I tell you, a slave is not greater than his master is, and one who is sent is not greater than the one who has sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them! ...

³¹b "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him. ³² If God has been glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself and will glorify Him immediately.

³³ "Little children, I shall be with you a little longer yet. You will look for Me, but, as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴ I am giving you a new Commandment, that you love one another. You also love one another, as I have

loved you! ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”