

Sunday morning April 22nd 2018 at CBC

Sermon outline: HEBREWS 8 - A superior covenant

There is one group of people for whom the matter of becoming a Christian was/is especially tricky.

These are people who have previously been worshipping the one true God, the only God there is, according to the principles and instructions that He himself has laid down in the past. The Christian message calls such people to continue to worship exactly the same God – for there is only the One – but under new arrangements.

[1] AN IMPORTANT ASSERTION ABOUT A HIGH PRIEST

The writer has been describing the kind of priest that is really needed and to which the old covenant pointed.

[a] Jesus has finished his ministry

The idea of a priest sitting down would have been unthinkable. They served at the sanctuary, their ministry was effectively continuous. Their work was never done because sacrifices were always needed.

But Jesus *'sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.'* Notice the reverence here for God, whose presence is described obliquely.

There is no more work that Jesus needs to do. His death on the cross satisfied the requirements of God for the forgiveness of his people once and for all.

[b] Jesus continues his ministry

But if he has finished his ministry, why are we also told that *'he serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle...'* [8.2] ?

Surely because his 'service' is his very presence - permanently because he lives for ever - in the presence of God, in the ultimate, the real, holy of holies. By being where he is now, he serves permanently as the high priest. His work is finished, so he sat down. But his finished work remains in the presence of God. The Lord's people – those who have trusted in Christ – can always be sure that they can approach the Lord on his throne (in faith) knowing that they will be received not because of what they have done, but because the Lord Jesus's finished work constantly provides their right of access.

[2] A VITAL CONCLUSION ABOUT AN OLD COVENANT

Something was wrong with the old covenant ...

More accurately, the problem was not with the covenant, but with the people – verse 8. *'God found fault with the people'*.

Hebrews 8:9

... 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 first covenant was broken by the people

The first covenant failed because the people did not keep their side of the arrangement. The Lord, in responding by turning away, kept his side all the time. It was the people who caused the agreement to fail and this eventually led to their exile in two stages, under the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

[b] the first covenant is rendered obsolete by the establishment of the new covenant

He says that it is obsolete, outdated, and will soon disappear. In which case, the new covenant would have to be good

[3] A WONDERFUL PROMISE OF NEW A COVENANT

And indeed it was, and is.

[a] it is an expression of God's great mercy

If fallen human beings had broken the first covenant, why should the Lord make another one with them? He had turned away, 8.9, why should he turn back?

The only answer is that He is gracious and merciful. Which of us would be here if he were not?

[b] it is founded on better promises

The first covenant required God to keep his word and the people to keep theirs. God kept his, the people broke theirs.

The new covenant has a different arrangement. God, of course, continues to keep his word. That has never been in doubt. But the difference is on the other side. Who is on the other side?

There is a real sense in which the answer is ... God.
How so?

Instead of giving his people his word in an external form (originally represented by the 10 commandments supernaturally written on tablets of stone) which they were to obey, under the new covenant the Lord writes his law upon

their minds and hearts. His Holy Spirit engages with the minds and spirits of those who turn to him and actively works in them so that they seek to obey his word and ways.

More specifically:

[i] The Lord will personally engage with his people such that they will engage with him

This is what we have just noted. He will be their God, they will be his people. All Christians have this relationship; God is their God, they are his people.

[ii] The Lord will engage equally with all of his people

The point of verse 11 is that under the old covenant, the Lord did not speak equally to all his people. But under the new covenant the Lord deals in the same way with all his people. His Spirit is present in each believer. That is one of the major changes between the two covenants.

[iii] The Lord will forgive and forget the sins of his people

We have all heard the advice that we should 'forgive and forget'. But isn't that sometime extraordinarily difficult to do? Forgiving can be hard enough, let alone forgetting.

But now the Lord makes a remarkable promise about the new covenant that comes through the ministry of Jesus Christ. Where people enter into that covenant, the Lord promises to forgive and then to forget the sins of the people He has forgiven.

That is certainly a better covenant than the old one!