

Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant

Sermon Series on Hebrews

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

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TEXT: *Hebrews 8:1-13*

We continue this morning in our spring New Testament series on Hebrews. If you are just joining us, the letter or sermon given to the Hebrews has some uncertainties about it. Scholars



are unsure of the author; they don't know the location; and yet what is absolutely certain about Hebrews is that the writer has a breathtaking view of Jesus Christ. This series throughout the spring has been a summons for us to fix our eyes on Jesus, and when we do so, we find extraordinary things. We began with the very first sentence of

Hebrews—a long sentence that describes the glory of Christ, unique in all the earth. We saw that Jesus is God's one and only Son; that Jesus represents the true humanity; that He is the one that gives us everlasting rest; that He is the source of eternal salvation. Last week, we looked at how Jesus is our permanent high priest and that He serves forever. This morning, we turn in Hebrews 8 to one of the greatest promises that God makes in Scripture, and that is the promise of a new covenant with His people. We see that Jesus is the mediator of this covenant. This promise shapes our identity; it binds us to God our heavenly Father in a relationship of steadfast love forever. Hebrews 8 is our topic this morning, and we want to devote our attention to this glorious passage where we see the work of Christ making a new covenant in His own shed blood and drawing us to Him who says: “I will make all things new.”

I want to begin in Hebrews 8 as in the very opening sentence, the writer says:

“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.”

This is summarizing what we talked about last week: that Jesus is our permanent High Priest; that He will never be replaced; that Jesus is enthroned as King; and He serves as Priest interceding for you and for me. Jesus is alive! Do you really believe that? Do you believe that He is active in the world today? Do you believe that? I really believe that. I was told by a dear

friend of Jesus' work in a different corner of the world yesterday. A friend of mine works at a refugee center in Europe, and a woman coming from an Iranian background was coming daily to the refugee center. She was a grumpy person; she had been through a lot; she was hard to work with and a little irritable and irritating. She came with this scowl daily to the refugee center, and then on Friday, her countenance was totally different. He said, "Tell me what happened." She said, "Well, every day I've come to the refugee center trying to find food and blankets and all of these things, and yesterday when I came to refugee center, I was greeted by a man in white and he said, 'The door is open.'" She said. "I have never be greeted like that, and so I came the next day, and as I came to the refugee center, again I saw this man, radiant in white, greeting me and saying, 'The door is open.'" She said, "Who are you, Lord?" and He said, "I am the door," and she came into the refugee center was connected with a Christian worker who opened the Bible to John 10 and read for her the passage where Jesus says: "*I am the door, anyone who comes through Me will find life,*" and she gave her life to Christ. That's who we are in the presence of this morning. That is just one mosaic tile of the work of Christ daily in the earth. So come with me into this glorious passage and we will consider His work from all eternity.

Hebrews wants us to know that Jesus is our High Priest and that He is not only priest forever, He is seated on the throne of heaven now. If He is seated, that means He is running the universe, now, this morning, and that includes you and me. The writer wants us to know that as High Priest, like every high priest, He has something to offer, and the offering of Christ, we will discover, will be the offering of Himself. We will talk more about that next Sunday and the following. The writer wants us to know that all who serve in an earthly sanctuary, whether tabernacle, temple, or church, serve a copy, if you will, or a shadow, of the reality. Many of us are so embedded in a secular mindset that we don't even imagine that the universe actually has two stories; that this world is not all there is; that God's creation in Genesis 1:1 is heaven and earth, and we are told this morning that Jesus serves in the reality of realities, and that reality is God enthroned in heavenly glory, that He is there as our King and High Priest forever. This morning, the writer draws us to consider that Jesus' ministry in Hebrews 8:6 is surpassingly excellent; it is of a glory that God promised from ancient times; His ministry is the very ministry of the promised New Covenant of which Jesus is the mediator; and this covenant is enacted on God's greatest promises of all. Many of you know I have a PhD in New Testament and my wife has a PhD in Old Testament. I think it works out well that she learns three quarters of the Bible and I just get to do the great ending. I mentioned my love for the New Testament, and in truth, anyone who loves the New Testament must love the Old because one out of 10 verses in the New Testament is a quotation or allusion from the Old. The New Testament writers think and speak and call us into a story that begins in Genesis, and the rest of Hebrews 8 is a joy for a New Testament person like myself who really does love the Old Testament because the rest of

Hebrews 8 is the longest quotation from the Old Testament in the New. This passage is so important for us to understand who Jesus is, what He has accomplished, and who we are as a result. We have the sacred privilege this morning of following Hebrews 8 into the prophet Jeremiah. The rest of Hebrews 8 takes us into an extended quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. When you read Jeremiah 31 in an English Bible, you will discover that it is translated directly from the Hebrew. Hebrew's citation of Jeremiah is translated from the Greek translation of the Hebrew, so there are some slight variances in wording and expression like with any translation. Those will not detain us, but we want to go into Jeremiah's life and ministry to understand what it is that has been promised in this New Covenant and what this means for us today. I promise you that it has tremendous relevance and impact to shape our lives. So, will you come with me as we journey back to understand who Jesus is?

Let's go to Jeremiah. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry began in 626 BC, 2600 years ago, when as a young man he was called by God. God spoke to him these stirring words in Jeremiah 1:5. He said:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Notice that the Bible sees life in the womb. Many in our student ministries this morning might think: "I'm too young to receive a great and glorious calling of God upon my life," and yet the Lord says to Jeremiah 1:7-8:

"Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD."

When God calls you when you're young, that just means that you get to serve Him with your whole lifetime. Jeremiah was called as a young man. The Lord said: "Don't say I'm only a youth. Don't be afraid for I am with you," and the Lord put out His hand touched Jeremiah's mouth and said in Jeremiah 1:9:

"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."

Jeremiah's calling in Jeremiah 1:10 is around this cluster of verbs. The Lord says:

*"See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."*

Jeremiah's ministry has a ministry of warning; it is a ministry that is speaking a word of judgment. God's word plucks up, breaks down, destroys, overthrows, and yet the ending of

Jeremiah's ministry is also a glorious one, of building and planting. Jeremiah was opposed by many of his contemporaries, and yet his closest companion was his faithful scribe, Baruch, who wrote down Jeremiah's words as he prophesied. A few years ago, a clay bulla was found in a burnt house in Jerusalem. Because of a destruction layer, this piece of clay was hardened forever, and as scholars translated the Paleo-Hebrew script of this seal, this seal says on it that this belongs to a Baruch, son of Neriyahu, the scribe. This is Baruch's seal impression, and he is the one responsible for recording Jeremiah's words and arranging them. A second bulla was found in a similar area, and the second bulla, the one that is on the image here, had the same inscription. The only thing that was different was that it actually had Baruch's fingerprint on the top layer. God's Word is real; it happened in real time, through real people, and this Word we need to hear clearly to understand who Jesus is and who we are in Him.



Jeremiah's ministry is a ministry that goes forth as a prophetic critique of the people. The Word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah, and in Jeremiah 2:1 He says:

“Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.’”

God speaks to His people with tender affection and says: “I remember how you loved Me at the beginning of our covenant relationship when God brought His people out from Egypt with a mighty outstretched arm and entered into covenant with them.” The tragedy of Jeremiah's life and ministry is that he is addressing a people who have spurned God's covenant and who are not walking in His ways. In Jeremiah 5:1, the Lord tells him:

“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.”

The rejection and rebellion of God's people against Him is provoking God's wrath, and Jeremiah runs through the city searching for one who walks in God's ways and cannot find one. He goes to the poor, thinking that maybe they are walking in God's ways, and yet he says in Jeremiah 5:4:

“They have no sense; for they do not know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God.”

In Jeremiah 5:5, he says:

“I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God.’ But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds.”

This is breaking of covenant relationship. In Jeremiah 6:13, he says this is society-wide, and he uses the expression of called a *merism* meaning both ends of the spectrum and all in between:

“For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.”

Can you imagine a society like that? From prophet to priest, everyone is dealing falsely. The Lord tells Jeremiah with great intensity to stand by the road and ask if people know the path—the ancient way of God's Word, and no one seems to know it. He tells Jeremiah to stand in the gate of the city and address those coming to worship whose hearts are far from the Lord. In Jeremiah 9:3, the sin of the people is documented vividly. The Lord says:

“They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me, declares the LORD.”

The people do not know the Lord. If you walk in untruth, if you are greedy for gain, if you seek to exploit the people around you, the Lord God Almighty says you don't know Him. Jeremiah 9:13-14 says:

“They have forsaken My law that I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts.”

This is a devastating thing and that is why we need the text of Scripture, because we hear a thousand times a year that if you want truth, if you want to walk in a good way, just ‘follow your heart.’ Jeremiah would say: “No, that’s the last thing you should do! Don’t follow your heart.” In Jeremiah 17:1, the Lord says:

“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart.”

Jeremiah 17:9 says:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Jeremiah saw a society that was boasting in all the wrong things, and he spoke to his people in his moment in history, with the Word of the Lord in Jeremiah 9:23-24:

“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Jeremiah speaks to his world and to us echoing down through the ages, and the Lord says that

He will bring judgment against the people who have broken His covenant. He will bring destruction; He will bring judgment; He will even use a pagan idolatrous nation like the Babylonians to come and bring judgment, a judgment of discipline and correction; and He will allow His own house to be torn down and His people to be banished into exile. In Jeremiah 22:8-9, the prophet says:

“Many nations will pass by this city, and every man will say to his neighbor, ‘Why has the LORD dealt thus with this great city?’ And they will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and worshiped other gods and served them.’”

This really happened, this divine discipline. God's presence left the city and temple and God's house was torn down. The city was devastatingly destroyed with fire.

I don't know what you have in your pocket, but this morning I have this. This is a piece of a storage jar. It is 2600 years old and it is from Jerusalem. As you look at it closely, you can see the layers of ash on the top of this broken storage vessel. The Lord brought a judgment of destruction and Jeremiah's call to speak, to uproot, to overthrow, to speak a word of judgment, it happened. If that were the end of the Bible, we wouldn't be here. If that were the end of Jeremiah's calling, the book would end in Jeremiah 22. But, that's not the end of God's saving purpose. God says that His divine discipline will come down, but that He will then act again, and everything we have this morning is predicated on this action; everything we have in Christ is predicated on God's resolve to save, to act again, to do something that will bring about a transformation and a change in you and me. God's people did not walk in His ways, and it provoked His wrath and judgment, and God promises through Jeremiah that He will do a new thing. And listen to this, this is really absolutely thrilling. Remember, the heart that was deceptive and sick, the sin engraved upon it? The Lord says in Jeremiah 24:7:

“I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be My people and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.”

We are going to get a new heart. We are going to get a new heart to know God, and then the Lord says: *“They will be My people and I will be their God, and they will return to Me with their whole heart.”* God is going to act in such a way that you and I get a new heart, and that new heart is going to beat and it is going to run to our heavenly Father with repentance and reconciliation. We will go there, and God will be waiting for us with that covenant formula: *They will be My people and I will be their God.* The Lord has plans and purposes for something new. It involves a new heart. In Jeremiah 29, the Lord says He is doing something after the exile that will give you a new future and a new hope. In Jeremiah 29:11, the Lord says:

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

The Lord was addressing the exiles, and He says He has plans for shalom, plans for welfare, and not for evil, and His plans are giving you a future and a hope. God is not done with you. In Jeremiah 31, the Lord says that this new thing He will do the earth will be the result of His everlasting love, and there will be a new experience of His unbroken faithfulness towards you and me. The Lord says in Jeremiah 31:2-3:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued My faithfulness to you.”

Where can you find that? Where else can you find that? *“I have loved you with an everlasting love,”* the Lord says. *“I have continued My faithfulness to you.”* The Lord said that He will fulfill those last words of Jeremiah's call. The Lord says: *“I will build you; I will plant to you; there will be a new joy, a new song.”* *“Sing aloud with gladness,”* the Lord says. He says: *“I will lead you back. There will be a new way of walking.”* The Lord says: *“I will make you walk in a straight path and you will no longer stumble. There will be new comfort.”* The Lord says: *“I will turn their mourning into joy, and I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow.”* Why? Because, Jeremiah says, the Lord speaks through him, that the Lord will create a new thing in the earth. This new thing, this new heart, this new walk, this new future, comes to climactic description in the description of the New Covenant. In Jeremiah 31:31, the Lord says:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,”

Notice that the New Covenant does not involve a new God! It does not involve a new covenant partner. The Lord says in Jeremiah 31:32 that the New Covenant will not be:

“. . . not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their Husband, declares the LORD.”

The Lord said that this New Covenant will be gloriously different in this singular way. Look at the glory of the New Covenant God said He would make with the house of Israel after those days. This is it. Even if these words are familiar to you, let them come into you afresh right now. The Lord says in Jeremiah 31:33, in the new day, the new thing:

“I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

When you look within you, if you're in the New Covenant, you are not going to find your sin written on the tablets of your heart. You are going to find God's Word written there. You are going to find a heart that is new, a heart that has God's Word internalized, known. What is this imagery? No longer will God's will just be recorded on tablets of stone. God's Word, His will, is going to be in you. If it is in you, really in you, and I'm not just talking about Scripture memory

but about people who have God's Word taken in and known. The imagery of God's Word written on the heart translates vividly into the concrete picture of Jeremiah 31:34:

“And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”

The new covenant imagery is a breathtaking vision of total renewal for you and me: no longer hardened; no longer greedy for gain; no longer a people going after their own desires, but a people going hard after God. You may ask how in the world could such a transformation take place. Where do I find a new heart, new resolve, real power to know God and walk in His ways? Jeremiah promises that this will come about through God's provision of everlasting forgiveness in Jeremiah 31:34b, the very last clause:

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

There will be an offering for sin provided once for all time, and this we will consider in detail next Sunday. But for this moment now, we must know that this promise of total renewal hangs like a glorious hope before God's people for 600 years—600 years of waiting. The next time we hear the language of the New Covenant is in the Upper Room. The next time we hear the language of the New Covenant is when our Lord Jesus is gathered with His disciples celebrating the Passover: that covenant when I brought you out of Egypt with a mighty outstretched arm. As Jesus celebrated that meal with His disciples, He took bread and broke it. He said: *“This is My body given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me,”* and then He took the cup, and He said something that no one had said for 600 years. He said something that must have caused the disciples' hearts to explode with joy. He took the cup, and He says: *“This cup, this is it. This is the New Covenant in my blood poured out for you. I am making everything new.”*

I don't know what expectations of God you brought into the sanctuary this morning, but I want to tell you from Jeremiah that they were too low. I don't know how content you have been or how accustomed you have grown to following your own heart, but I want to offer you a new and living way. When we fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, we come to the One who has made the New Covenant in His blood, and just as He is our everlasting King, no place on earth is outside the scope of His dominion. Just as He is our everlasting High Priest, He will never be replaced; He will never leave His office; He will never be unavailable to intercede for you. So He is the mediator of the everlasting covenant. Jeremiah 50:5 ends with the hope and prayer:

“Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.”

I don't know where else you can find such strong reasons for hope and encouragement. Susan Rice came to see me unexpectedly this week and she burst in right as I was hanging on the edge

of exegetical euphoria over this. She said, "What are you doing?" I said I was looking at the glory of the New Covenant. Without missing a beat, she said: "Where else in the world can you go where you can fail miserably and then be given something better?" This is the God we meet in the Bible.

I want us as a church family this morning to trust Jesus like never before. I want you to have a holy discontentment with where you are in following Christ and say: "Lord Jesus, if You have made a New Covenant, would you really renew me on the inside?" Can we raise the expectation of the transformation? You see, we are the only ones who have answers to the biggest questions: Where can I find forgiveness? How can I really know God? How can I be assured of everlasting life? Can I really know God's plans and purposes for me? How can I be made new and become the person that deep down I'm longing to be? However you might express these questions, we are going to be going out this week and asking people all around town: "What are your biggest questions?" We are going to be doing this in conjunction with the Veritas Forum talk on the campus at UC. I want to encourage you to write down some of your own questions in the back. I want to encourage you to take one of these invitations and find a conspicuous place, like a coffee shop or a community board at your work. It's a courageous conversation, and put it up somewhere where people will see it.

But this morning, we want to turn our attention away from outreach for a minute and think long and hard about what has really happened here at here. What has really happened at this table that Hebrews 8 tells us has taken place is that the New Covenant is available for all who believe. This is not the table of Kenwood Baptist Church. It is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ who in that Upper Room with His disciples explained that His death, once for all time, would provide the promised forgiveness and make us new. We often come to this table with gratitude, and I want to encourage you this morning to come to this table if you have trusted Christ with renewed expectation of what He will do in you. He wants to make us new, and He has made provision for that. Would you prepare your heart with me to come to His table?

Lord Jesus, we love You. We thank You for Your steadfast love. We thank You that You have loved us with an everlasting love, that You have invited us into an eternal, unbreakable bond with You, and that You have made provision for forgiveness. Lord, we pray now that all of the imagery of Jeremiah and Hebrews would come to pass in our lives. Write Your words on our hearts. Fill us with the presence and power of the Spirit that we might know You and walk in Your ways. Father, we delight in You and Your great plans for us. Prepare our hearts now, we pray, to celebrate.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.