

# Jesus Is the Mediator of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-13

Maundy Thursday

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Pastor Hanneman

Advertisers love to use words like *better*, *new*, or *improved* to entice people into purchasing and using the products they market. The problem is that the promise that the new product will be better and an improvement over the old one doesn't always come 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 Holy Communion.

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: ***“Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”*** (Mt 26:27,28). When Jesus spoke of a *new* covenant, he was clearly indicating that there was another covenant, a covenant that would supersede the old covenant. And 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 Savior did when by his suffering and death—when by shedding his blood—he established the new covenant.

**Jesus our Great High Priest is the mediator of a new covenant**, a covenant that is better, stronger, and smarter, than the old covenant.

The writer of Hebrews shows us how the new covenant is an improvement over the old covenant when he writes, ***“The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.”***

When our author mentions the old covenant, he is taking us back to Mount Sinai, where God made a covenant—or solemn agreement—with the nation of Israel. 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 will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey”*** (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, ***“This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words”*** (24:8). The agreement was sealed, put into effect with blood.

But within days, the Israelites had broken that covenant by casting and worshipping a golden calf. The author of Hebrews quotes from Jeremiah 31 where the Lord says, ***“They did not remain faithful to 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: ***“It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt”*** (vs. 32). The new covenant would be different—indeed, it would be superior to the old because this new covenant would be based on 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 obey me you will be my people and live in Canaan forever.”***

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 says through Jeremiah: ***“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”*** (31:34). 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.

But 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 Savior given in the Garden of Eden—the offspring of

the woman who would crush the serpent's head and repeated to Abraham—that all nations of the earth would be blessed through one of his descendants.

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 Savior given previously. It had an important role to play in keeping Israel together as a nation until the Savior was born and in reminding the people of how much they needed that Savior. 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 Savior, 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 is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*** Jesus became the mediator of the 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 separated us from God.

Yes, Christ is the mediator of a new and better covenant, one based on superior promises—the unconditional promises that our sins are forgiven and forgotten through the blood of Christ.

Regarding the new covenant, God said through Jeremiah, ***"I will put my laws in their minds and 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.

Jesus had this in mind when he said to his disciples, ***"A new command I give you: Love one another"*** (Jn 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, ***"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again"*** (2 Co 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.

Jeremiah also says that 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. Jeremiah says it this way: ***"No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."***

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 emphasizes 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 Savior whom God gave 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 is glorified, and God is glorified in him"*** (Jn 13:31).

It is God's greatest glory to be the Savior of sinners, to reveal his amazing grace as he offers his Son as the substitute for sinners. Now let us strive to grow in this knowledge of Christ as did Paul the great apostle who wrote, ***"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead"*** (Php 3:10,11).

And 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, ***"Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"*** (1 Co 11:26).

Tonight, we hear Jesus say, ***"This is my blood of the new covenant."*** Now you know 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.