

## **High Priest of a Better Covenant With Better Promises**

God is the ultimate Promise Keeper. One way to describe the Christian life is that we build our lives on the promises of God. We don't just say, "Oh, those are some nice promises... I wonder what they have to do with me in any way real way." Going through life as a Christian without banking on the promises of God is like walking through a bright, sunny day with your eyes closed. CS Lewis once said that he "believed Christianity like he believed the sun had risen, not only because he saw it, but because by it he saw everything else." This is how the work of Christ and the sure promises of God through him are to function in our lives. We are not only to believe them, but also see everything in light of them.

We come to the point in Hebrews where we are introduced to the new covenant. Jesus is the high priest of the new covenant. His high priestly ministry and the covenant he mediates is vastly superior to the former priesthood and the former covenant given through Moses. The covenant given through Moses fell short in a couple of fundamental ways:

**First**, the covenant given through Christ is eternal, whereas one which came through Moses was temporary. It was designed by God with a built-in expiration date. Verse 13 says the new covenant makes the first one obsolete. But also verse 6 tells us that instruction given to Moses for the tabernacle and sacrificial system was a "copy and shadow of heavenly things". So it was not only temporary, but it also pointed to a greater reality, namely the new covenant. The old covenant was provisional. It served God's purpose for a period of time, whereas the new covenant is "the eternal covenant" (Hebrews 13:20).

**Second**, the covenant given through Christ is enacted on better promises. The promises of the new covenant are breathtakingly glorious and since God is the ultimate Promise Keeper, we can take them to the bank.

**I want to answer two questions:** What are these better promises of the new covenant? What does a new covenant person look like?

### **What are the better promises of the new covenant? (FOUR) verses 8-12 (from Jeremiah 31)**

#### **1) *The Promise of inner power for obedience***

*I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.*

The new covenant is not unconcerned about the law of God, and it is not unconcerned about obedience to the moral law of God. The problem with the old covenant is that the law was written on tablets of stone and were externally imposed. Furthermore, God's law was imposed on unregenerate, spiritually dead hearts. The new covenant promise is for the law of God to be put in our minds and written on our hearts, which I think is a way of saying that something radical and supernatural takes place inside us so that we are positively responsive to God and his commands.

What takes place? God does a miracle. He takes a dead heart and raises it to life. That's what happens. In fact, it is described beautifully in Ezekiel 36:26-27, which I think is speaking about the same reality as Jeremiah 31 (Hebrews 8), just using different language:

*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

What does God do? He gives a new heart. He removes the heart of stone - unresponsive, disobedient, dead in sin. And gives a heart of flesh - tender and responsive to God. He puts his very Holy Spirit in a person...and causes them to walk in obedience. In other words, this is the new covenant promise that "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*" The new covenant is not less interested in actual obedience. Here is the difference: God not only lays out the obligations for obedience, he also creates the obedience he requires. He "*causes us to walk in his statutes and be careful to obey his rules.*" By taking out stony heart and putting in a tender heart.

It is in vain that someone try harder to be obedient without receiving life in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It won't work - it can't work! What is needed is not more effort. What is needed is a new heart through hearing and believing the gospel. I believe it was John Bunyan who wrote,

*Run John, run the law commands, but it gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings: it bids us fly and gives us wings.*

The promise is, "I will put my law into their minds and write them on their hearts." God provides the new life and power through his Spirit for obedience to his commands.

## **2) The promise of mutual, personal relationship with God**

*And I will be their God and they shall be my people.*

Revelation 21:3 tells us what life will be like in the new heavens and the new earth:

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*

The joy and glory of the new covenant is that we get to experience this, in part, now. God is not just God. He is your God. What does this mean. What does it mean that "he is our God"? To be sure, we will be discovering the full glory of what this means for all eternity. How unfathomable the promise, "I will be their God." How wonderful for you to say about and to the God of the universe, "He is my God. God, you are my God."

We could never say this in truth, unless he first gave himself to us. Amazingly, he does! Like a husband at the altar saying to his wife, "I and all that I have am yours." If you went and only occupied yourself with this thought and an open bible for a month, you would not exhaust the meaning. You would discover it means he is Father. Yes, a loving and tender Father. He's a shepherd, watching and guarding his flock. He's a friend - one who sticks closer than a brother. He's a rock we can build our house on, a shelter we can seek refuge in. Do you need comfort? This God, your God is "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). Do you need wisdom? This God, your God is the "only wise God" (Romans 16:27) who gives wisdom to all who ask him. An entire solar system of blessings is opened to us in his statement "I will be their God". Charles Spurgeon said "*it comprehends all gracious titles, all blessed promises, and divine privileges.*"

But then there is the next phrase, "*And they shall be my people.*" This is not talking about raw possession. God owns everything on planet earth and every person by rights of his creation and sovereignty over them (Psalm 24:1). But this is a promise that God will look upon his people and guard his people and love his people as His *treasured* possession. Paul prays in Ephesians 1 that they would know "*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*" (Ephesians 1:18). God's inheritance in his redemptive purposes is the saints, which Christ purchased with his blood. *Those he saves are his delight. The new covenant assures us that we are precious in his holy sight.*

Speaking to the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6, God says, "*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*" Peter applied this to the new covenant people of God when he said,

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness in his marvelous light.*

The new covenant is enacted with this promise: "*I will be their God and they shall be my people.*"

### **3) The promise of intimate knowledge**

*And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one is brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall each know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

They all know the Lord, from the least to the greatest. The "all" here is speaking of types of people - not every person without exception. All those truly united to Christ by faith know the Lord. Of course, not exhaustively.

It is not like, we get an immediate 1 TB download of information about God. No doubt, when we are first born again, we may know very little about the Lord. But we "*know the Lord*". When a baby is first born, in one sense, she knows very little about her mother. And in another sense, she knows her mother through and

through. When one is born of God, they know the Lord. What is probably in view here in particular is a saving knowledge of the Lord. Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:4, “*God our Savior desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*” A deep, profound, and immediate saving knowledge of the truth. In a moment, a born again babe can have more true knowledge of the Lord than the most learned, but unregenerate seminary professor.

Think about the understanding and knowledge God has given to man to compass the earth. To measure the sun, moon, stars, universe. It's amazing! We are learning about the planets in our solar system... it is astounding the knowledge and understanding God has given us. But all of these things are mere created things. The marvel that the infinite God has given us a knowledge of him! A little now, full-orbed then, in part now, perfectly then. This is the promise of the new covenant...

#### **4) *The promise of total forgiveness***

*For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.*

Jesus' offering of himself brings total forgiveness. Under the old covenant, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) would come around every year and Hebrews 10:3 said, it was just a reminder of sin every year. A public notice before God and humanity that people were still sinners. Through Christ, however sin is actually removed. The promise of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus is that he took all of our sins - every last one of them, even the ones you are most ashamed of - on his shoulders to the cross. And then he took them to the grave. They are gone! And they are gone forever!

And therefore, when you hear the gospel with faith, you should hear the sound of your sins vanishing. The sound of your sins rushing away from you as far as the east is from the west. When you hear with faith that Jesus actually took our sins away, the sound that you should hear is that of your sins leaving, sinking to the bottomless ocean.

And it is because the promise of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus is that God “*remembers our sins no more.*” He remembers them no more. Astounding! How can this be? Well, it is not as though God suffers from amnesia. This has to do with judgment. Our sins will not be brought up in judgment against us ever. Ever, ever, ever! He remembers them no more! And so are you in Christ? Is your hope in the blood of Jesus? Then where are your sins? They are gone. Not just out of sight - like swept under a cosmic rug. Christ took them when he was treated like a sinner on the cross. You are free. The new covenant is enacted on the promise of total forgiveness.

## **What do new covenant people look like?**

When we build our lives on these promises, what does our life look like? What effects should it have on our life? And I would say, incomplete perhaps, but real and growing effects.

### **1) Obedience - a life marked by humble obedience to God**

Grace does not make us unconcerned for obedience. God forbid! We are not antinomians (lawless) people. We work out what God works in. Philippians 2:12-13

### **2) Faith - a life marked by faith, not fear**

Your faith should be governed by faith in God and all that he is for you in Christ. Full of faith, not fear. Isaiah 41:10: "*Fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your God...*" Is your life

### **3) Faithful - a life marked by covenantal commitment to others**

When you believe the gospel and really understand the covenantal commitment of God to you, it will give you the resolve to be faithful and committed to others.

### **4) People of the book - a life marked by love for the word**

Know the Lord. When we are initiated into the family of God, we begin a lifelong journey of knowing God. God has given us a book.

### **5) Free and happy about it - a life marked by the freedom of forgiveness**

Forgiven people are free, carefree (not careless), and happy. John 8:32: "*He who the son sets free is free indeed.*"

## **IN THE BLOOD**

While establishing the Lord's Supper, Jesus passed the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood". The new covenant is "in the blood of Jesus. The new covenant is established and inaugurated in the blood of Jesus - or in the death of Christ.

And all of the promises are purchased and secured in the blood of Jesus, including the gift of faith and the obedience God requires, are in the blood of Jesus. So what must you do today? Believe! Because all of the promises of God find their yes "in Christ". So look to him and believe. Let's pray.