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The Book of Hebrews
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THE NEW COVENANT: DEFINED AND DEFENDED

The teaching style for this message will be different from the usual expository preaching method of PBCC, which is verse by verse and chapter by chapter. It will be more like assembling the pieces of a puzzle and searching the book of Hebrews for fitting clues. When constructing a puzzle, it is wise to first look for the four predictable corners; eventually the seemingly unrelated pieces will reward you with a beautiful and complete picture. The sermon this morning will follow that pattern.

I think God inspired the authorship of Hebrews with a unique writing technique. God hid truths randomly throughout the book, thereby baiting the complexities of inquisitive Jewish minds. This technique seems to encourage discovering random pieces which, when arranged together, develop into an understandable and relevant theology.

For example, consider this lone, unsupported thought: "And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold" (Heb 9:3-4b). You don't need to be much of a student of the Old Covenant to know that the altar of incense was located in the first Holy Place, together with the lampstand and showbread. Certainly it was not in the second area called the Holy of Holies. Any Jew reading Hebrews 9:3 had a problem right away. Even children knew that Aaron was required to burn incense on the altar of incense every morning and evening. They also knew that, as the High Priest, he was not allowed into the Holy of Holies save for one time each year, therefore he was unable to perform that daily assignment. This is an example of one lone puzzle piece that needs research and careful study to discover what the author intended—and that's the adventure we are going to experience this morning.

Most people take the major divisions of the Bible to be the Old and New Testaments. Theologically, the greater and more accurate division is the Old and New Covenants. Hebrews unveils the New Covenant like no other book. It introduces kernels of truth here and there, some without explanation, and unable to stand alone, until related verses complete the missing pattern. This is the genius of the book of Hebrews. The objective of this lesson is to teach you how to define and defend the New Covenant.

In the thirty countries in which I have been privileged to teach I have been grieved to see how much of the Christian world fails to live and practice the purity of the New Covenant in the manner God intended. It is my objective to make you partners with my concern, and hopefully, agents to bring about change.

God gave two covenants from which our faith receives breath and life, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old does not stand alone as the final authority; it is the colorful and intense introduction to the New. Let's consider the difference between these two covenants. When God gave Moses two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments, he didn't run out of space, forcing him to continue on the second. The two tables represent a conditional covenant. One tablet represented Israel's responsibility to God, and the other tablet represented God's conditional response, "If you will, I will bless. If you don't, I won't."

The New Covenant is radically different. It is a one-person, unconditional last will and testament. The family inherits the legacy of the testator based on their relationship. Only those with an intimate family relationship with the One who gave himself for them qualify to receive his will. And that One is Jesus, who said of himself, "I and the Father God are one and the same."

Let's begin the search for the predictable four corner pieces of this theological puzzle. Better yet, let's upgrade this analogy from puzzle pieces to the four cornerstones of a theological foundation. The four realities we are about to discover are literally the theological cornerstones of the foundation upon which the New Covenant is constructed to be the habitation and reference for our faith and its expression.

The book of Hebrews, addressed to the Jewish mind, opens similarly to the gospel of John, written to the Gentile mind:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son. (Heb 1:1-2a NASB)

having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, "Thou art My Son?" (1:4-5a)

The first cornerstone is this: *Jesus became God's exclusive voice.* Jesus replaced all the Old Covenant fathers and prophets, even angels. Here then is our first application: Don't let anyone become a substitute spokesman for God. What they say must be in agreement with Jesus, because what he says has more authority than anyone else on this planet.

Imagine the impact this revelation had on the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and all who claimed to be God's voice to the common people. Since application is the proof of integrity with God, this put all the spokespeople out of business, stripping them of their importance and prestige.

Next, Hebrews 3:1:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. (3:1)

The second cornerstone in this theological foundation supporting the New Covenant is this: *Jesus became the only High Priest.*

Now, moving to Heb 5:5-6 we read:

So also Jesus did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee, just as He says also in another passage, "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (5:5-6)

The order of the priesthood stretches back to the beginning of Jewish history, when Melchizedek the priest mysteriously appeared to Abraham. Melchizedek was a priest without genealogy, the King of Peace, who offered bread and wine. In my opinion he could be none other than Jesus himself predicting the fulfillment which we read here in Hebrews. Therefore, the priesthood reverted back to the original priesthood of Melchizedek, replacing the lesser and temporary order of Aaron.

We find the third corner piece in 9:11-12a:

But when Christ appeared as a High Priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood.” (9:11-12a)

Jesus became the exclusive sacrifice. What do you think this would this mean for Israel in a practical sense if they had en masse recognized Jesus as their exclusive and everlasting sacrifice? Never again would they be required to sacrifice animals for sin. The shepherds would be out of business. There would be no need for temple sacrifice. No longer would there be a need for herders, transporters and farmers. Israel's life and practices would suddenly be turned on end. Every Hebrew would be looking for a new way to express life. Even the priests would have been reduced to playing solitaire. History tells us this didn't happen that suddenly.

Speaking of this, some years ago, Ray Stedman shared this story with the church staff. He had just returned from meeting with a number of rabbis in New York City. At the end of their meeting, the rabbis asked if Ray had any questions. He paused respectfully, and then said, “Why is it that sacrifice is no longer a part of Judaism?” They had no answer. But we know. It was because Jesus became the satisfying and exclusive sacrifice for eternity.

Now we come to the final cornerstone to the foundation of the New Covenant, found in Hebrews 10:19-20: *Jesus became the torn veil.*

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. (10:19-20)

An aerial view of the Temple Mount as it appears today would allow us to appreciate the layers of history that prompted this archeological wonder. I had the privilege of walking on the Great Wall of China. I also climbed into the pyramids of Egypt. But in my estimation, this archaeological survivor is in a class by itself.

The main structure that dominates this site today is Islam's Dome of the Rock. When I entered that building, I was allowed to descend beneath the floor and embrace the rock below. That rock is the tip of Mt Moriah, where Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac. During the years following, Abraham's relatives made Mt Moriah a memorial place to which they traveled to worship and sacrifice. By the time Abraham's descendants had become a nation, David made this holy place more convenient for the ancestors to worship, by building a parapet wall around Mt Moriah and the surrounding area. Then David filled in this enclosed area to make it more adaptable for the sacrifice of animals. Later, that leveled area surrounding the tip of Mt Moriah became David's choice as the building site for the temple he proposed to God. That temple, which God allowed Solomon to construct, was eventually destroyed. The replacement temple of Jesus' day was credited to Herod the Great. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the next major event on this site was its complete destruction and sacking by Rome, in AD 70. Due to the complexity and scale of this temple, its complete demolition by Rome, when not one stone was left upon another, was almost as remarkable as its construction.

The tabernacle, called Herod's Temple at the time of Jesus, was a mammoth combination of buildings far more complex and massive than God's original wilderness design. Let's take an imaginary tour of the Holy Place, including the Holy of Holies. Beginning at the altar flame where the animals were sacrificed, we continue past the laver of water to the entrance of the Holy Place. In this imaginary tour, remember that you must be a priest to enter. Anyone who was not a priest was forbidden by God's command.

The scale of this temple was gigantic compared to the portable original temple in the wilderness. For example, the curtain that separated the two areas had grown in scale to a woven piece of fabric eight inches thick and 90 feet high. The showbread would be on the right wall and the lampstand on the left wall. However, the largest item in the Holy Place was a huge cluster of grapes above the entrance door. Each cluster was the size of a man, and it was made of solid gold! The lampstand, made of 75 pounds of gold, would be reduced to insignificance in comparison. But get this. This huge artifact was created to represent Israel. The grapes had become their icon to represent themselves. At the entrance to the Holy Place was the symbol of Israel. At the other end was the Holy of Holies, bereft of the presence of God because the ark of the covenant (the icon of God's presence) had been lost in history. What a symbolic statement and sign of their time!

When I discovered this icon of grapes which Israel added, I suddenly thought of John 15:5. I don't think it was a coincidence that Jesus said, “I am the vine, you (Israel) are merely the branches... You can have no life apart from Me!” I suspect when Jesus said that, every Jew, and especially the leadership of Israel, was immediately reminded of that enormous cluster of solid gold grapes hanging in the temple, which was not part of God's original design. But that practice continues today when we try to enhance *our* worth and image rather than the purity of Jesus. I hope this image will come back and cause you to ask yourself, “Whom do I want to project to the world, Jesus or myself?”

We will leave that part of history and return to the original wilderness plan as we familiarize ourselves with each item in that tabernacle. In your imagination, construct a simple plan, looking down on the tabernacle from above, as if you were looking at a plan of your house. Divide it into two rooms, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. We will walk our way through the process, which was intended to lead Israel to worship God, following his design.

After we identify each item we will also consider what is said about Jesus in relation to each identified part of the tabernacle. Your focused attention will result in the most unbelievable reward. Each physical item in the wilderness tabernacle represents the purity of the Old Covenant. Following each item, a Biblical reference reveals how Jesus became the living fulfillment of each and the ultimate purity of a New Covenant. We will alternate between the original portable tabernacle parts and the literal fulfillment of each item by Jesus.

In the court, before the entrance to the tabernacle, stood the first and most important item—the altar of sacrifice. Every worshiper had to bring an animal to be slain. Sin had to be put to death, and the blood of an animal was the substitute for the sinner himself.

Hebrews 7:27 documented for every Jew and for the rest of the world that Jesus offered up himself as the ultimate and permanent Sacrifice, putting an end to the sacrifice of animals. Theologically and literally, *Jesus became the ultimate Sacrifice.*

The second item outside the tabernacle is the laver of water for cleanliness.

John 7:38: To the woman at the well, Jesus described himself as the source of living water, if not living water himself. Thus, *Jesus became the Living Water.*

The third item is the entrance to the Holy Place, or the way.

In John 14:6, Jesus stated that he is the Way. Therefore, *Jesus became the Living Way.*

The fourth item, located on the right wall of the tabernacle, is the showbread, with 12 loaves of unleavened bread representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Unleavened bread was eaten hurriedly as the Jews were

being delivered from slavery in Egypt. So this bread was a reminder to God's people of their deliverance from slavery.

In John 6:51, Jesus said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." Therefore, *Jesus became the Living Bread*.

Now the fifth item. Originally, this was described by God as the lampstand, which was made of solid gold. Later in history, Israel began referring to this lampstand as "their" Menorah. Do you see what had happened? Begin with God's original plan, then apply some years of tradition and you can change the focus from God to yourself. Sadly, today the Menorah is more a symbol of Israel than the intended light of God.

In John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." *Jesus became the Light of the world*.

For the moment we will skip by the Altar of Incense. The next item was the woven curtain or veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. You may have overlooked this miracle which happened to the temple veil when Jesus uttered his final words from the cross, "It is finished!" At that instant, the veil of one woven piece approximately eight inches thick and 90 feet high ripped from top to bottom (from heaven to earth). This was the last living miracle that Jesus performed, the one that was most profound and had the most impact. At that moment, Jesus replaced that temple veil by *becoming the torn veil*.

Finally, the last tabernacle icon changed for eternity when *Jesus became the ultimate and exclusive High Priest*, terminating forever the human order of Aaron. That is affirmed in Hebrews 5:5-6 where God the Father said of Jesus, "Thou art My Son... Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Now we return to the mystery which introduced this study, documented in Hebrews 9:3-4: "And behind the second veil there was a tabernacle called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold." What seemed impossible and unexplained, cloaked in mystery at the beginning of this lesson, is now clearly understood. The Altar of Incense was the only item in the Tabernacle that represented God's people and their personal prayers and intimate conversations with their God. By becoming the torn veil, Jesus swept the altar of incense into the Holy of Holies as the ultimate display of our intimacy with him. What an incredible and powerful display of love by our Lord, to sweep us into his presence here on earth and for all eternity!

Second Corinthians 3:7-11 is one of the pivotal references in Ray Stedman's classic book *Authentic Christianity*, a best-selling commentary about the New Covenant: "But if the ministry of death (the Old Covenant), in letters engraved on stones, came with glory... how shall the ministry of the Spirit (the New Covenant) fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory." Try to absorb the theological weight of this documentation. It cannot be said any better how much more glorious the tabernacle can be with Jesus becoming every part and function. Nor can it be said any more gloriously that Jesus has swept us into his bosom to be embraced in his arms of security and love.

However, one very important issue of history has not been addressed. Only priests could enter the tabernacle. How can we be allowed in this new temple of Jesus himself? The apostle Peter has a word for us here: 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His

marvelous light." Don't overlook the purpose: "that you (as priests in the priesthood of God) may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." God did not intend for us to be sponges, but heralds, trumpeting the good news to anyone who listens.

Once a puzzle is complete, the admiration begins. Similarly, when theology is complete, the applications begin. However, before discussing applications I want to introduce a warning.

Every mention of "church" in the Bible describes God's people, not a building or denomination. Years of history have changed that intended purity into diversities. This reopens the grief that I shared in my introduction, the grief I experience overseas, compounded by the same grief experienced in my homeland. By that I refer to tradition-driven practices of illegitimate covenants, i.e. Christian leaders who insist that "their" followers practice a covenant without a Father. When leaders take parts and practices of the Old Covenant and mix them with parts and practices of the New Covenant, the result is a covenant without a Father. God inscribed the Old Covenant with his finger on tablets of stone. Jesus gave life to every icon in the tabernacle to become the Living Tabernacle of the New Covenant. And because he gave his life we can inherit his will. Any distortion or admixture apart from the purity of the Old or New is a covenant without a Father—an illegitimate covenant!

Having been declared royal priests, we qualify to be with and to be fused to *the High Priest* in his tabernacle—and priests with a purpose: "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." That should be our first expression of application. Now for some other applications related to this New Covenant.

During Jesus' earthly ministry he was repeatedly approached by his disciples, who wanted to become the greatest in heaven. Jesus' response must have blown their circuits and expectations here and into eternity. Mark 10:42-44 records his revolutionary model for Christian leadership. "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."

Imagine a pyramid shape representing authority in our world. A base of many leaders occupies the bottom, with fewer on the level above, and fewer still as it near the top. At the top sits "The Leader," superior to all subordinates below. The higher you ascend, the more lording-over is exercised on those below. The closer to the top of the pyramid, the more animalistic behavior and ambition become. This is the only model the world has for authority. It probably reminds you of your workplace.

In the most radical contrast, Jesus unveils his revolutionary alternative (the standard for New Covenant authority). It's a flat line, with every Christian at the same level and of equal worth. Every follower of Jesus is a servant/slave. Servant authority can be stated like this: Jesus is Number 1; we all are number 2's. There are no number 3's in the family of God. Of course there are differences of responsibilities, spiritual gifts, experiences, denominations, etc., but the Bible affirms, "There is neither Jew nor Greek... slave nor free... male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

Everyone in the international Body of Christ is a priest and at the same time a servant of equal worth. Commissioned as a priest, you cannot get higher. Commissioned as a servant, you can't get lower. Welcome to God's classless society.

The Radical Revolutionary New Covenant — Jesus



OLD COVENANT

Mutual Agreement between two parties
conditional
LAW – DEATH

According to Moses

- communicated by fathers & prophets
- ministering angels
- required/traditional animal sacrifices
- traditional High Priests
- according to the order of Aaron
- the tabernacle/temple veils
- the house of Moses - a tabernacle
- traditional Sabbath was a physical event

was never completely realized
a law of death – dependent on me
man erected them temporarily
the pattern was to affirm group loyalty
conditional – physical prosperity
one limited to stand in the Holy of Holies
reenacting a daily substitute on earth
conditioned on animal sacrifice
the inheritance was property you could lose
their promised land was earthly; Israel
faith did not guarantee their objective
the blood of Abel
earthly & vulnerable; Jerusalem

NEW COVENANT

Last Will & Testament by one person
unconditional
SPIRIT – LIFE

According to Jesus

References from Hebrews

- God's communicator
- God's ministering servant
- Sin payment – sinner & sacrifice
- Spiritual intercessor
- Credentials
- God's boundary
- God's dwelling place
- God's provision for rest

- communicated by Son-language; 1:1-2
- ministering Son superior; 1:3-14
- the final sacrifice; 2:9
- everlasting High Priest; 2:17-3:2
- the order of Melchizedek; 5 & 7 *
- He became the torn veil; 10:19-20
- we are the house of God; 3:6
- spiritual Sabbath is a perpetual state; 4:9

as a result of Jesus we have...
[all ref. are from Hebrews]

better hope 7:19
better covenant 7:22
better tabernacle 8:2
better ministry 8:6
better promises 8:6
better intimacy 9:4
better sacrifice 9:23
better access 10:19
better possession 10:34
better homeland 11:16
better provision 11:40
better accomplishment 12:24
better city 13:14

is perfect, complete and guaranteed
a Spirit of life – guaranteed by Jesus
He became it, then we become the tabernacle
the pattern is for individual character
unconditional – for spiritual prosperity
swept into the Holy of Holies and seated
a permanent reality in heaven
we enter by the blood of Jesus
we are joint heirs – which we cannot lose
our homeland is heaven
faith guarantees completion
the blood of Jesus offered joyfully
the everlasting heavenly city

* Melchizedek the King of Salem - peace, bread & wine
Gen. 14:18-20, Psalm 110:4, Heb. 5:5-6

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