

17. The new and better covenant

April 12, 2015

If you have a chance to visit the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, I am sure that you would like to see the infamous painting, Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci which was painted around the 16th-century. Since then, there were countless copies of Mona Lisa produced. One of the most famous copies of Mona Lisa was believed to have been made by an apprentice of da Vinci, at the same time as the original. You can tell the difference due to the hues of the paintings.

Guinness World Records lists the Mona Lisa as having the highest insurance value for a painting in history. On permanent display at that museum, the Mona Lisa was assessed at US \$100 million on December 14, 1962. Taking inflation into account, the 1962 value would be around US \$780 million in 2015.

Yes, the copy of Mona Lisa was done in imitation of the original, but the value of the copy was not as high as the original. To be honest with you, I don't think that da Vinci's Mona Lisa is a masterpiece like many other people do. To me, it is just another portrait. Obviously, I don't have the class like some of you guys.

In chapter 8 of the Book of Hebrews, we will learn that the tabernacle which the ancient Israelites carried around in the wilderness was a copy of the original one in heaven. Why did they need a copy of the heavenly tabernacle? Because they needed it according to God's commands to sacrifice animals to cover their sins. And they had to make all those sacrifices within the outer court of the tabernacle according to the OT Covenant which was given to them by the Lord.

While the recipients of this Book of Hebrews were living in Israel during the first century as the followers of Jesus Christ, they encountered and saw the daily sacrifices in the temple as the vast majority of the Jewish people followed their rituals of the OT covenant. These Christians were belittled, persecuted, and ostracized from their society, synagogue, and even from their own families because of their new-found faith in Christ.

The author of this Book is assuring them that they are following the right Messiah and the better covenant. He even went further to explain to them that the Old Covenant they were in is now obsolete and ready to vanish away. I am sure that it was a shocking statement to them who lived and breathed in the Old Covenant.

A. THE CHIEF HIGH PRIEST AND TRUE TABERNACLE

Hebrews 8:1-2 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

The Chief High Priest, Jesus should never minister on the basis of the Old Covenant which was made with the human priests in mind and could not provide what Jesus can do fully. It is far worse than Daniel Barenboim, the great classical pianist and conductor of our time should not play Beethoven's 5th Piano Concerto 'Emperor' on a half broken piano, because the broken piano cannot give the full capacity to the pianist.

Let me explain it further. Though the OT tabernacle and the temple had beautiful settings and furnishings, there was no place for the priest to sit down because their work was never finished due to the limitation of the sacrifices which only covered their sins on a temporary basis. However, as we just read the work of Jesus, our Chief High Priest was finished and He is seated in heaven.

The Chief High Priest, Jesus represents us in heaven before the very throne of God. If we have a new divine High Priest who is superior to the OT human counterparts, it is a good reason for us to have a New Covenant that fits for the divine High Priest.

By the way, some Bible students insist that the true tabernacle is the church or Jesus's earthly body. No, that would be a wrong interpretation that used an allegorical method. Once a person starts to make such plain word, "tabernacle" mean something else, there is no end to how we might interpret the Bible.

B. THE BETTER SACRIFICE AND TEMPLE

Hebrews 8:3-5 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. 4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

Every Jewish high priest offered both gifts and sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of himself and the people whom he represented. Sacrifices for sin are essential to the concept of priesthood. But these sacrifices and offerings could be offered anywhere the priests wanted, rather only in the tabernacle that the Lord designated.

But for Jesus, since He is in heaven, His sanctuary must be in heaven. The tabernacle on the earth was a copy of the superior heavenly counterpart. When I traveled to the Senior Pastors Conference in Southern California, I had photos of my wife Karen in my phone. They were copies of her to remind me of her love for me and my love for her. When I returned home, I didn't look at her photos and converse with the photos, rather I talked with Karen. Just like that the earthly tabernacle and temple were a mere representation of what is in heaven.

The Solomon's temple and Herod's temple were great and spectacular architectural achievements according to the historians. However, they were made by men, especially Herod temple was done by Herod the Great, a corrupt, murderous, and ungodly man. These cannot be compared to the glory of the heavenly temple that Jesus serves in.

C. THE BETTER COVENANT

Hebrews 8:6-9 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. 7 For if that first Covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 9 not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord."

This portion of the Scriptures is not saying that the OT Covenant was sinful and has short comings. It was given by God, so it is good and it reflects the righteousness of God, but it was insufficient in producing righteousness in the believers' life. It was designed by the Lord that way so that He could bring the New Covenant that is better.

I was going over the Books of Leviticus and Numbers in the last few days. The procedures of the sacrifices that the ancient Israelis had to follow would blow anyone's mind. I am so glad that I was not born as a Jew at that time and I am so glad that the Lord Jesus saved me with His grace.

If the OT laws were not difficult enough to follow all the things those people had to do, the Pharisees had developed and added 613 laws – 365 negative commands and 248 positive ones. By the time Christ came it had produced a heartless, cold, and arrogant brand of righteousness that pretty much ignored the Laws of God through Moses.

The grace through Jesus Christ was not ignoring men's sins or diluting the righteousness and holiness of God, rather it lavishly displays the boundless love of God to the sinful, depraved humans that they may have eternal life at the cost of Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

Some believers think that what the author of the Book of Hebrews was quoting from Jeremiah 31 was pointing to the church instead of literal people of Israel and Judah. It is known as the Replacement Theology. Even very respected theologians and Bible scholars are embracing this wrong theology. Don't go there.

D. WHAT MERCY AND GRACE OF GOD

Hebrews 8:10-13 For this is the Covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 13 In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Since the author of Hebrews was still quoting Jeremiah 31, some people may wonder, "Does this New Covenant only apply to the Jewish people?" No, it applies to all the followers of Jesus Christ. In the OT, the Lord spoke to the nation of Israel and made a covenant with them as a whole, but the blessings of the New Covenant are applied to individuals. Besides, the New Covenant definitely started with Israel, but it was never intended to end with Israel.

The Laws of God were external and were written on tablets of stone. But the New Covenant is written on the hearts of believers of Jesus. God's grace makes possible an internal transformation that makes a surrendered believer more and more like Jesus Christ.

If we were living in Israel during the ancient time as the Jews, when we present our sacrifices to the Lord, our sins were not forgiven, but merely covered by the blood of the innocent animals. In other words, our sins were NOT FORGIVEN. You may say,

"Where do you find that idea?" Thank you for asking.

Hebrews 10:3-4 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

In other words, the OT sacrifices brought a remembrance of sins, not a remission of sins.

By reading v11, in heaven, we will all know the Lord and there won't be Bible teachers. I will be out of my job.

I just love what v12 says. If you are in a prison of guilt and shame for what you have done, remember this verse. Your confessed sins were forgiven at the cross. And the best part of this is that the Lord does not remember them. How wonderful is that!!!

Here are some quick references that show the differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant:

1) They were instituted in different times and the locations.

- The Old Covenant around 1446 B.C. at Mount Sinai.
- The New Covenant around A.D. 33 at Mount Zion.

2) They were spoken in different ways.

- The Old Covenant was thundered with fear and dread at Mount Sinai. – Exodus 19:17-24
- Jesus Christ, God the Son, declared the New Covenant with love and grace.

3) They have different mediators.

- Moses mediated the Old Covenant.
- Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant.

4) They are different in their subject matter.

- The Old Covenant demanded a covenant of works.
- The New Covenant fulfills the covenant of works through the completed work of Jesus.

5) They are different in how they were dedicated.

- The Old Covenant was dedicated with the blood of animals sprinkled on the people. – Exodus 24:5-8
- The New Covenant was dedicated with Jesus' blood – signifying His sacrificial death – spiritually applied to His people.

6) They are different in their priests.

- The Old Covenant is represented by the priesthood of the Law of Moses and high priests descended from Aaron.
- The New Covenant has a priesthood of all believers and a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

7) They are different in their sacrifices.

- The Old Covenant demanded an endless repetition of imperfect sacrifices.
- The New Covenant provides a once and for all, perfect sacrifice of the Son of God Himself.

Until A.D. 70, the Old Covenant was still governing the nation of Israel at the time this letter to the Hebrews was written. But when the Roman soldiers destroyed

Jerusalem and the temple, the Jews lost the place to offer up sacrifice to the Lord, the priests were gone as well.

E. REMINDERS

1) The OT Law functions as a mirror to reveal our sins and condemns them. It cannot cleanse us. But Jesus' blood can wash away our sins and gives us His perfect righteousness. That's grace, amazing grace of God.

2) Our confessed sin is no longer in the remembrance of God. Don't remind Him and don't hover over it in guilt and don't repeat it.