

The Mediator's Blood

Hebrews 9:15-28

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Good morning. For those of you who don't know, my name is Tobias.

I'm the Associate Pastor here at Christ the King, and it's my privilege once again to get to open up God's Word for us as we continue to look at this book, the book of Hebrews, and I'm glad too to have my folks up here from Florida, John and Kathy. It's going to be a fun visit this week. If you were with us last week, then you'll know that we looked at the first 14 verses of chapter 9 in the book of Hebrews, and we heard the author compare the earthly tabernacle and its priestly service with the heavenly service of Jesus, and he did this so that we might grasp the eternal significance of what Jesus has accomplished, and that it's only through faith in him that our sins have been forgiven and that we've been made fit to enter into the presence of Almighty God, unimpeded by veils, to know and to enjoy him forever.

And as we saw as well, his point was to explain why he'd said, rather abruptly, that the old Mosaic covenant had been made obsolete by the new. And yet, even before he'd made that statement, earlier in chapter 8 in verse 6, although at that point he didn't elaborate, he'd called Jesus the mediator of the covenant. And what we're going to see the author do in our passage this morning is pick up this idea of Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant, and he's going to link it with his high priestly role, which he's just talked about in verses 1-14, and he's going to explain how Jesus's mediatorship is related to his death, and why the new covenant is better than the old.

So I invite you, if you haven't already, to turn your copy of God's Word to Hebrews chapter 9, and we're going to be looking at verses 15-28. This is what it says:

“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the

ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray.

O gracious and mighty God, we bow before you. You are worthy of our praise. You are worthy of our allegiance. We are so thankful for your grace, for your steadfast love, for your mercy. We thank you for the faithfulness of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, faithfulness unto death, who spilled his blood on our behalf, that he might bring us into fellowship with you. O Father, help us to see by your Spirit this morning the incredible grace displayed in the death of Jesus. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Well, some of you know that I like to dabble in woodworking. Some of you know this, and there are a lot of other folks in this congregation that like to do the same thing. And when I was a younger, less experienced woodworker, and you have to keep that in mind as I go on. In order to get rid of sawdust, I decided to use a vacuum attachment on my electric router. And if you don't know what a router is, a router is this electric tool that spins a cutter at a frightening speed in order to get rid of wood quickly and precisely. Well, as I began using my router, a tool I'd used countless times before, but never with this new, clear vacuum attachment that covered the cutter, I noticed immediately that something was wrong. I couldn't see what I was doing. I couldn't see the groove I was making or my pencil marks. And of course, with hindsight, I know now that that was because a thin film of sawdust had begun to stick to the clear plastic cover as the vacuum tried to suck the sawdust up through a hose.

But in the moment, none of this registered. And so with my left hand, I reached toward the obstruction to wipe the sawdust away. And when I did this, I felt an odd jolt. And my first thought was, well, that's odd. Did I just hit an embedded nail or something? And it was at that moment that I saw it. Blood. My blood splattered on the wood. And I knew at once that I hadn't plowed through a nail. No, I plowed through my own thumb. And then I have to say, with the calm and clarity of a surgeon, and with the wisdom born from two full years of marriage to my dear wife, who, believe you me, is no fan of blood, I walked to the house. I opened the door and I said to her, “Ellie, I'm okay, but...” And then about to faint, I collapsed to the floor. Now everything turned out okay. She took me to the ER. They stitched up my thumb and it works just fine. But notice the point.

It was the sight of blood. Something I didn't want or expect to see when I knew something had gone terribly wrong. It wasn't cause for joy. No. In that moment, it was cause for alarm. And I'm sure in a room this size, we could spend hours sharing with one another story after story of similar and probably worse experiences of the sight of blood. No, we don't like to see blood, do we? In fact, we don't even like to talk about it. And you know, as Christians, I think that's interesting thing for us to consider, especially in light of the author of Hebrews' seeming fascination with it. You might have noticed that he's mentioned blood a lot in these last two passages. In fact, he uses the word 12 times in the whole chapter of chapter 9, and 7 of those happen in our passage this morning. And what's striking to me is that unlike us, he

doesn't show a hint of distaste for it. No, instead he extols the merits of it. Well, at least he extols the merits of Christ's blood. I mean, think about it. Just last week, we heard him say that Christ, by his own blood, has "secured an eternal redemption" for us and "purified our consciences from dead works to serve the living God."

You see, for the author of Hebrews, the blood of Christ isn't something repulsive or alarming. It's marvelous. And what we're going to see him do in our passage this morning is continue to extol the merits of Christ's blood as he explores the mediatorship of Jesus. And he's going to do this first in verses 15 through 22 by showing us how Christ's role as the mediator of the new covenant is related to his death and blood. And then in verses 23 to 28, he's going to show us why the new covenant is better than the old. So let's go ahead and take a look at the first section, verses 15 through 22.

And I want you to notice what he says in verse 15, since it sets up the rest of this section and really the rest of the passage. He says, "therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant." Now in this verse, I think the author brings three important ideas together. He tells us that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. He tells us that his mediatorship has a goal, which is that the called might receive the promised eternal inheritance. And he tells us that the new covenant and Jesus's mediatorship are based on his redeeming death.

Now we're going to see the author develop the idea of inheritance more fully in the second half of the passage. But in the remaining verses of this section, he's going to focus his attention on the concept of covenant. And he's going to do this so that he can address a fundamental question raised by what he just said in verse 15. And that's this. Why is the new covenant and Jesus's mediatorship based on his death? Now before we dive into the author's answer, there's something we need to understand about the language he uses in this section. And it's a bit technical, but I think it's important for me to mention so you can track with where I'm going. So bear with me. You'll notice in verses 15, 18, and 20, the author mentions the word covenant four times. And in verses 16 and 17, he mentions the word will two times. What we need to understand is that all six of these words are actually just the same Greek word, repeated. And it's a word which in various contexts can mean either covenant or will, like a will in testament. Now its meaning as covenant in verses 15, 18, and 20, it's not an issue. That's crystal clear from the context. But it's highly questionable whether this word should be translated as will in verses 16 and 17, which is what the ESV translation that we're using does. And I'm sure you've guessed, since I gave you a little bonus insert in the bulletin this morning, that I don't think it should be translated this way. And I've got lots of reasons that I'm not going to go into. Instead, I just want to give you the gist of my reasoning and what I think is a better translation before we move on. And so if I don't answer some of the questions you have, just pull me aside and we can talk about it after the service.

But for now, this is what I want to say. I think that the ESV and other English translations that use will in verses 16 and 17, they resort to a wordplay between covenant and will that's unnecessary to understand the author's point. That's poorly supported by what's actually written in Greek. And in the end, it's just confusing to me. Okay. You see, we have to keep in mind that the author introduced this section by talking about covenant and Jesus's mediatorship of it. And he's clearly going to continue to do this after verses 16 and 17. So what does a will have to do with these? Why would he shift his focus off of the concept of covenant and introduce a new concept? Well, you might argue that since he mentioned

inheritance in verse 15, his mind has naturally gone to the idea of will and the necessary death of the one who makes a will in order for the inheritance to be distributed. But friends, that's really just a super, in my view, that's a superficial connection. But more importantly, it's unnecessary. You see, inheritance from a biblical perspective is tied to covenant, not to Greco-Roman legal practice. And so I think there's a better way. I think there's a better way for us to read these verses that does justice to what the author's trying to say into the language itself. And I won't inflict my own translation on you. I thought I'd give you the New Testament scholar Sigurd Grindheim's version. I think he nails it. And this is what he says. Listen carefully. "For where there is a covenant, it is necessary that the death of the one making it be represented. For a covenant is made legally firm on the basis of dead victims, since it is not valid while the one making it is alive." Now, in the bulletin, I gave you one that's paraphrased, and I'm going to read that. Let me read that. "For where there is a covenant, it is necessary that the death of the one making it be represented. How? By sacrificial animals. For a covenant is made legally firm on the basis of a ritual involving dead victims, since it is not valid while the one making it is alive. That is, it's not valid unless one's death is symbolized by sacrificial animals."

Now, given that I think this is what the author actually says in these verses, what's he trying to communicate? Because that's what's important. Well, once again, we have to keep in mind that he's trying to answer the question of why the new covenant and Jesus's mediatorship are founded upon his death. And his answer is quite simple. In fact, it's grounded in what his readers themselves would have understood from the Old Testament story, and that's this. God's covenants with his people required death when they were made. And I'll give you a classic example to illustrate. Remember in Genesis 15, when God first covenanted with Abraham, he had him sacrifice animals, divide these animals in half, and then line their split carcasses up in order to form a sort of path. And this was probably, this is probably why the actual language of covenant making in the Old Testament is to cut a covenant. Now, generally this path was intended for both parties making the covenant. And so the ritual was that the parties of the covenant would walk through this bloody path of animals, animals which were meant to represent their own lives. And in doing so, they would be at one and the same time declaring their commitment to the covenant arrangement and also calling down the curses of the covenant were they ever to break it. Almost as if they were saying, let what's happened to these animals happen to me if I fail to live up to the bargain. And of course, what's striking in Genesis 15 is that Abraham doesn't walk this path, does he? He's asleep.

Instead, God alone in the form of a smoking pot and flaming torch walks the path, making a divine commitment unto death. And friends, it's this sort of covenant making procedure that I think the author is rehearsing in verses 16 and 17. And in this light, it makes sense why the author then draws the conclusion in verse 18 that the first covenant, that is the old Mosaic covenant, was inaugurated with blood. You see, he was drawing on a shared understanding with his readers that God's covenants are founded upon death. They're inaugurated by a bloody ritual. And although the details of animal sacrifice and ritual purification that the author goes into in verses 19 through 21, which are loosely based on Exodus 24, although these details are somewhat different than what we've just recounted in Genesis 15, the author's fundamental point is that the gist was really no different when the first covenant was made between God and his people. The shedding of blood was necessary as a symbol of the Israelites' solemn commitment to God, a commitment they were entering into upon pain of death in order for the first covenant to be established. But more than this, the author's larger point, as I've already mentioned, has been to provide an answer for why the new covenant

and Jesus's mediatorship are based on his death. Why did he have to die? And to make this point, what he's done in this first section is basically argue by analogy.

Just as a death and blood were necessary when the first covenant was made with Moses as its mediator, so too death and blood were required when the new covenant was made with Jesus as its mediator. In other words, to put it bluntly, this new covenant was cut by the death and blood, not of animals, but of Jesus. And friends, the author needed his readers to grasp this fundamental truth so that he could move on to share with them in more detail why the new covenant inaugurated in Jesus's blood is better than the old. And this is exactly what he goes on to do in verses 23 to 28. And so in the time we have remaining, go ahead and look at these verses. And as you do so, I want you to notice that the author, just like we saw him do in verses 1 through 14, he draws on similarities between the old covenant and the new. And so he says that both the copies of the heavenly things, that is the tabernacle and all its vessels of worship he just mentioned, these and the heavenly things themselves were purified by sacrifice. And he says that Christ, like the Old Testament high priest, entered into the presence of God. And he says too that Christ again, like the Old Testament high priest, he brought an offering of sacrifice. And lastly, he says that just like the high priest, and in fact all human beings must die, so too Christ had to die. And yet just like we saw last week, these similarities don't account for why the new covenant and Jesus's mediatorship of it are better than the old. No, once again, it's the differences that make all the difference.

You see, unlike Moses, who purified the mere copies with the blood of animals, blood that couldn't ultimately wash away the people's uncleanness, but instead could only temporarily and externally cleanse them while the veil between God and his people remained. Jesus purified the heavenly things themselves, which I think is just the author's metaphorical way of saying that Jesus, by his sacrifice, has made the pathway into God's presence now and forever ready, clean, as it were, for his people. And there's no longer any impediment to our fellowship with the Lord because of our uncleanness. And unlike the high priest who entered the earthly most holy place once a year, every year with offerings of animal blood for himself and the people, offerings that couldn't ultimately pay for their sins, but instead could only temporarily cover over them while they served as a constant reminder of their remaining sinfulness and the need for a better lasting sacrifice. Jesus, as our perfect high priest, having once and for all time made a perfect offering to put away our sins when he shed his own dear unblemished blood on the cross, he has now and forever entered into the true presence of God on our behalf. Friends, he is there even now. That's what the author tells us in verse 24. And like John says in 1 John 2, 1 and 2, we who have trusted in him, even now we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

And friends, unlike the high priest and all human beings who because of the sin that is common to us all must die, not in the hope of coming back to life, no, but instead in the sure reality of facing the judgment of a holy and just God. Jesus, unstained by sin, willingly submitted himself to the cruelest, most unjust death in all of human history as a substitutionary offering so that he might bear our sins as a suffering servant, conquer death through his resurrection from the dead, and return gloriously to earth. Not to deal with sin again, no, he's already done that, but instead to bring to fulfillment the perfect and eternal salvation of all who are eagerly waiting for him. Friends, for all of these reasons the author of Hebrews knew that the new covenant, this covenant cut in the blood of Jesus, was a better covenant. And he knew that all of the longed-for blessings, the blessings of a guilty conscience cleansed and sins forgiven, the blessings of true and free fellowship with the Lord

and life in his coming glorious kingdom, he knew that all of these blessings are a divine inheritance promised to those called by his grace. He knew that they are an eternal inheritance received not by turning back to the shadows, to the rituals of the old covenant, nor by any other means we moderns could ever think of, but only by turning in faith to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.

So friends, as we close let me ask you this, what do you think of the mediator's blood? Is it off-putting or perhaps even repulsive to you? Is it simply proof as the sight of blood so often is that something dreadfully wrong happened in a far-off place 2,000 years ago but nothing more? Are you so shocked by the gruesome realities of Jesus's death that you just avoid the very thought of it? Friends, have you caught the message of the author of Hebrews this morning and come to see that there is nothing more precious in all the world than this blood? You see, the apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:18 - 21, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who brought him, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." Friends, we have been ransomed by nothing but the precious blood of Jesus and it is the foundation of our hope. There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. Dear dying lamb, your precious blood shall never lose its power until all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more. Let's pray.

Oh Father, we bow once again before you. We are so thankful for your kindness, your mercy, your steadfast love for sinners, just like me, just like us. And we thank you, Lord, for the faithfulness of our Savior. We thank you for his shed blood. There is nothing more precious. Oh Father, teach us that. Teach us that. May we know that and cling to it as we look to our Savior. We pray all this in his precious name. Amen.