

Sermon 26: Hebrews 9:15-22: 'This is My Blood of the Covenant'

OUTLINE

What Christ's death accomplishes
Why Christ's death was necessary

INTRODUCTION

Not too long ago my dad told me that I might be in for a huge inheritance. It turns out that he was approached by some lawyers who specialize in unclaimed inheritances. There is 1-1.5 Billion pounds bound up in unclaimed estates. There are about 5000-9000 unclaimed estates. So you could imagine the excitement. My Dad's uncle died unmarried and leaving no will. My father was speaking about the possibility of inheriting a castle or a large estate, and of course, you do what anyone would do. You start planning how you are going to spend the millions of pounds that are going to come your way. It turned out that my father got about 400 pounds. Today we want to talk about another death, and another inheritance. This inheritance though is greater than you can conceive; and there will be no benefactor that will be left poor or left out.

We are in a section in Hebrews 9:11-10:18 that is talking about the superior sacrifice of Christ. Last time as we looked at 11-14 we saw that a greater redemption was bought through a greater blood offered. We are considering to look at the death/blood of Jesus Christ and the benefits that are ours due to His death. The logic of the portion before us is very simple, picking up on the idea that Christ has died, and by His death has redeemed us and cleansed our conscience from sin, this section goes on to argue that the death of Christ, something very surprising to the Jew, was absolutely necessary and the key to the fulfilling of God's promises. So the first point in v15 is showing what the death of Christ secures. The second section from v16-22 is a sustained argument for why death was necessary. So our two points are what Christ's death accomplishes; and secondly, why Christ's death was necessary.

What Christ's death accomplishes

V15, '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.' A key connection to remember as we move through this section is the connection between blood and death. We saw last time that blood has a prominent place because it represents the life of the one given. The author of Hebrews is leaning into this connection and adding some nuances we may not have appreciated. Not only does the death of Christ pay for our sin debt, redeeming us and make a final full payment for sin, the emphasis of v11-14; the death of Christ also inaugurates a new legal state of affairs, a new covenant. This is why our verse begins with 'therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant.' God had made promises to Abraham of land, offspring and blessing to the nations. The Mosaic covenant or the first covenant as it is called here could not secure these promises. These promises were pointing to new creation realities of a new heavens and earth; a people from all nations; and the blessing of salvation in Christ. The mosaic covenant could not deliver on these promises. The priesthood; the sacrifices; the tabernacle; and the nature of the covenant as conditional only acted to highlight our sinfulness, our inability to save ourselves

and our need for the promised child of Eve; the Son of David to come and realize these promises. Jesus is this one.

Notice firstly, that He is called a mediator. What is a mediator and what does it imply? A mediator is a go between and one who reconciles and negotiates a peace. If you have a husband and a wife who are struggling in their marriage, and they are at a stale mate and unable to resolve the issue, a third party is called in to act as a mediator to work towards reconciliation. Greater than a marriage break up, humanity is at enmity with God. We have turned against Him, we have sinned, we have brought His justice upon our own heads. But Christ, sent from the Father, is sent as a go between, to secure peace between God and sinful humanity. Better than an experienced marriage counsellor, He is both God and man, able to represent both sides perfectly; better than any marriage counsellor He can truly solve the problem causing the rift; He can even change the hearts of the unwilling party.

He has come to bring us into a new covenant. He has not come so that we stand before God on the basis of our works or our performance; but on the basis of what He has done. He has not come with a covenant that commands us to do God's will and promises punishment if we do not. No, He comes to effectually call us into a covenant where He has already fulfilled all the conditional requirements, paid all the legal penalties, and even puts His Spirit within us to make us willing to do God's will, but from salvation not for it. He has not brought us into a covenant that needs an endless stream of sacrificial blood; layers of veils and curtains to keep God's glory from us; and mediators to represent us to God; but a new covenant that has made these things redundant as He has fulfilled them all. He has not brought us into a covenant that deals with external cleanness leaving us in a deep uncertainty about our forgiveness, but cleanses our very consciences from dead works.

Look at what our author highlights as a benefit of Christ as the mediator of a new covenant, 'so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.' The word 'called' here is alluding to the effectual call of God. You will remember where Jesus talks about His sheep hearing His voice; they will come to Him, no one will be able to snatch them out of His hands, and He will raise them up on the last day. The author of Hebrews is putting this superior element of the new covenant in the foreground. You see in the Old Covenant there were many who were called to exit Egypt who did not inherit the land; this is not the case with the NC. Paul said all those who are called will be justified and will be glorified, this is the equivalent of that. God finishes what He starts. He does not cast out His children. Have you sinned this week and fear you are for the junk pile, to be cast off as unworthy? In the NC God has made it so that all your sins are paid for; there is no divorce clause in the NC. He will not cast out those who come to Him.

Another benefit of Christ's mediatorship of the NC is that we will receive the promised eternal inheritance. John Gill in his commentary highlights how the author is showing that this is all of grace, 'every word shows this affair to be all of grace; it is an "inheritance", and therefore the Father's gift; it is by "promise", and so of grace; and it is "received", and so freely given, and not merited; and only such who are "called" by grace possess it; and yet it is through the death of Christ, that so it might be received in a way consistent with the justice of God.' In this life you may or may not get an inheritance. Farmers in the UK can no longer leave their farms as an inheritance, if the child wants to inherit the farm they have to pay an inheritance tax. Here in NZ your parent's inheritance might

be used to pay for medical expenses diminishing the amount by a lot. But in Christ we receive, not the earthly inheritance of Israel, but the eternal inheritance Israel was always pointing to. All those promises of delivering from satan; of living in peace free from sin and death; being with God forever and ever; Christ and the new covenant deliver this not the old. The portion we will receive is immense because we are coheirs in Christ partaking in the Beloved Son's portion. All that the Father has, has been given to the Son and all that the Son has is our sin Him, 1 Cor. 3:21-23, 'So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'

The incredible value of Christ's person and the result of His work as Mediator is further magnified by the last part of v15, 'since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.' This is one of the important proof texts that explains how sins could be forgiven in the OT. We talk about there being power in the blood. This can be taken wrongly to mean that in spiritual warfare you can 'plead the blood' as a type of spiritual bug spray that chases away demons; or like a magic substance that you conjure to cause healing. This is to totally misunderstand the significance of the blood of Christ. Here we can see that death redeems us from sin because it pays for our sin debt. And the power in the value of Christ's death; the value of the God man; the last Adam; the perfect offerer and offering is so great that it has a retroactive power reaching back to save those who believed in the OT. Any who were saved in the OT were not saved by works by keeping the law; no they were saved by grace through faith in the Christ who was to come. This sacrifice is so powerful that it reaches all the way back to the first sinners. When Adam and Eve sinned and God made a promise of a child that would conquer satan, and God killed an animal shedding the blood of the first sacrifice to make a covering for them. Adam and Eve were saved by grace through faith in God's mercy and provision spoken of in His promise of a Son of Man. The power in this sacrifice is so great that it is powerful enough to wash away the guilt off your deepest sins. It cleanses not merely the outward man but the very conscience. The power in His sacrifice is so great that it pays for sins past, present and future. It is so great that it can save sinners from every corner of the earth and unite to God. We must see this. If the blood of OT sacrifices could not remove the guilt of sin and only the death of Christ what hope can there be in Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam. At least the OT pointed to Christ, but none of these religions does, in fact Islam even blasphemes Christ. His death is our only hope for salvation.

Why Christ's death was necessary

V16-17, 'For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.' There is a bit of discussion in the commentaries about the right translation of the word 'will' here. The usual way to translate it is 'covenant' but given the fact that it appears like the author is wanting to illustrate a truth from the legal world it has been translated as will. The point the author is making is this one: the question about why the messiah would have to die would be a stumbling block for the Jews. Paul says as much in 1 Cor. 1:18-25. The Messiah should come and conquer, but the author is here trying to show why Jesus must die. Not only to pay for our sins by His substitutionary death. His death is also the way God establishes the new covenant. The author seems to be wanting to illustrate a new state of legal affairs being realized through death through the common use of a will. We all know how they work. Generally

speaking, a will comes into effect upon the death of the one making the will. There are wills that can work while a person is alive, but the author is drawing on the type where death brings about the benefits. The beauty of the situation we are in is that we get to have the inheritance and the one who died is still alive and the greater prize. It is not a choice between the inheritance or our Savior, we have both.

The author moves from the illustration from Roman culture that death brings about a new state of affairs to the OT truth that covenants are also inaugurated through death, showing that this is how the death of Christ establishes the new covenant, v18-22a, 'Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood.' The author is proving that the new covenant is in full effect through the death of Christ, because after all the mosaic covenant was inaugurated with blood as well. The author draws on Ex. 24:3-8. The ten commandments have been given. Moses calls the people together and reads the law to them, v3a. They accept the terms of God's law, v3b, 'And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." He writes the law down, v4. He makes some sacrifices, and then reads the law to the people again and they answer, v7, 'Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Now that the terms of the book of the covenant have been read and the people have agreed to accept those terms, Moses seals them under the covenant with blood, v8, 'And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." the author of Hebrews, some think might have been a Levite like Barnabas, adds some details that are not recorded in Ex. 24. The mixing of water with the blood to dilute it; or the use of hyssop branches with wool wrapped around them that would have been dipped and used to apply the blood in sprinkling. These are likely insights that the priests would have as they reflected on how Moses would have done it. The people had bound themselves to a covenant that demanded their obedience or they would receive the curses of the law; and this was sealed by blood. Now remember the law was a good thing. The Israelites were saved by grace through faith as Christ was presented to them through the promises, and prophecies and types of the mosaic administration. However, their national blessing, rain, victory in battle, good crops, dwelling in the land, these physical blessings depended upon their obedience to the terms of the covenant. By their sins they regularly violated the covenant, and though God was patient with them and sent them judges and kings and prophets to lead them, and rebuke them they would not listen and God brought the curses of the covenant upon them. This was when He promised a new covenant one where He would make a way of forgiveness that would cover their sins; and where He would put the Spirit in their hearts. When was this new covenant established? When Jesus died.

You will remember on the night that He was betrayed when He was in the upper room with His disciples celebrating the Passover He announced the beginning of the new covenant which would be inaugurated as the old covenant was with His blood. Matt. 26:26-28, 'Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after

blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Paul makes explicit that it is the new covenant in His blood 1 Cor. 11:25. Just as Moses consecrated a people bringing them into covenant relation with God by blood; Jesus will shed His blood and bring us as a people to God. But where Moses brought the nation of Israel into a covenant that had conditions that if not kept would rain judgement on their heads; Christ brought us into a covenant where all the judgement had already been poured out upon Himself. Moses was a covenant that could end in divorce; the new covenant where Christ marries us to Himself is one where nothing can separate us from His love. It is because of the way in which the Lord's Supper reminds us of the covenant God made with Israel in Ex. 24 that many approach the Lord's Supper as a moment of covenant renewal. Like a couple renewing their marriage vows, they don't get remarried but they do lean into their vows again, so Christians love to come to the Lord's Supper in a type of covenant renewal. I think this is a good way of thinking, as long as we avoid one very important problem. The nation of Israel committed themselves to a covenant where they promised to do in order to secure blessing, the new covenant is not of this nature. We come to remember that He has done it, and yes there is obedience on our part, but this is not to be construed in the same conditional way of the MC. We do not work in order to earn the rewards, no He has secured the benefits of our eternal inheritance through the work that He did when He died upon the cross. Our work and obedience and holiness all flow from the love and gratitude of His finished work.

V22b, 'and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.' Why so much talk about death and blood? This is one of the most important verses in the bible and one of the most hated. We feel ourselves to be so civilized now that we have done away with corporal punishment; capital punishment; some have even given up eating meat. For many having a religion that commands the shedding of blood is automatically offensive and does not even need argumentation to refute just highlighting the many animal deaths that have taken place as a sign of insanity and error. We have no idea about the seriousness of sin. Our consciences are cold; everyone around us sins; lightning does not fall upon us when we do it; we are hardened to the seriousness of sin. But here in this verse we are reminded. Sin is a crime against the God who made us; the all glorious one that we have replaced; the one to whom we owe all allegiance and obedience but we have spent our service on sin instead. The one who has given every gift and we have expected, abused and scorned them. We deserve to die. Do you agree with that statement? Our rebellion is a high handed insult against infinite majesty, and the wages for sin are not therapeutic and restorative judicial measures because we are victims who could not help it, we are the villains who deserve justice. All that animal blood that has been shed is a mirror for you to see that it should have been you. But animal blood cannot fully pay for sin, it was never intended to, it was a stand in until God, the one to whom all is due, He paid for what we deserve. God came Himself as a man to take our punishment, die our death, shed His blood, face our judgement day wearing all of our sins and taking the punishment for it. Because without justice there can be no forgiveness of sin with God. One has now come who can die and shed His blood and pay for sin. The lamb who takes away the sin of the world. And by this death He brings in the new covenant securing all of its promises for us; for by His death He pays for the sin that we can be in a covenant relationship with God. Let me close by reading again, Matt. 26:26-28, 'Now as they were

eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'