

Series: A New Covenant Primer
Sermon Five: The Person of the New Covenant
Text: I Corinthians 11:23-25
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Introduction:

I am sure that everyone has had a problem with a product or service. You have tried to get the salesperson or technician to rectify the situation, and often they don't even understand what you are trying to explain. In your final exasperation you exclaim, "Let me speak to your supervisor!" What are you trying to accomplish with this appeal? You are hoping to speak to someone who has experience, authority and even a vested interest in carefully hearing and rectifying the problem. You are looking for an interested face who isn't radiating the idea of "its not my problem." At risk of offending a certain family here at the Chapel, that is the underlying premise of a slogan seen in a commercial for a particular service company in town. "You can count on my company because you can count on me!"

Our use of and reliance upon the Scriptures only has power and effect when we take seriously their divine source. It is because God is the ultimate author of the Bible that should cause us to take note and listen to live out the Holy Text. We must truly believe we have God's Word intended for us, accessible to us, and right here with us. Because we wholeheartedly believe this, the pastors at Clearcreek Chapel are committed to providing framework, analysis and outworking of the Bible to make it indeed accessible and understandable. Not that God needs our help to make His Word able to be understood, but He positions us and charges us to clear the barriers, the blinders, the sins and the idols that inhibit our seeing clearly the wonders of His plans and purposes in His revelation. This is why we are working through these various sets of texts over the past few weeks. We are spending time to get a handle on the implications of the Biblical concept referred to as the New Covenant. We will eventually spell out some of the more far-reaching and perhaps even radical conclusions that come out of a comprehensive application of this as an interpretative and theological pattern or paradigm.

We understand that the Gospel, the work and revelation of the Son, Jesus Christ, has inaugurated a new and better way. God has spoken in past events, speeches, rituals and law that now find their true and complete meaning in the power of the Gospel. The Old Covenant, its laws, rituals and ceremony given through Moses had a real but symbolic and temporary purpose. Its value must be re-visioned in light of the coming of the Gospel. The Old Covenant cannot and was never intended to "bring one to God" or keep one in a "right relationship" with Him. This relationship has always been in and through faith, even if an anticipatory faith. This faith now has substance that has been realized, made

real, in history in the coming of the Son and the sending of the Spirit. Hearts are cleansed and lives restored in a way only pictured before. The problem with the Old Covenant was it could not (and was never intended to) change the heart/conscience of those under it. The Old Covenant led us to a real, final and utter need for something better.

In the claim that the New Covenant is better the author of Hebrews asserted in chapter seven and verse eighteen.

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

*“The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest forever.’ ”*

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

His status as priest based on the Father’s pronouncement (and his character as portrayed in the first 5 five chapters of the book) brings this new and indeed better covenant. This is identified as the promised New Covenant announced in the very Scriptures of the Old Covenant. As we continue to assert, this newness is the expected and planned unfolding of God’s eternal plan. This morning we want to look at this “person of the New Covenant” more closely and will go to a different text (this is not after all a sole project of the author of Hebrews but is the underlying message of the entire New Testament). This morning we will go together to Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians to launch our thinking.

Anticipation

I Corinthians is often viewed as a collection of independent individual “discourses” on the particular problems that were occurring in the Corinthian congregation. Reading the text as merely a resource manual for solving church problems does not allow one to see the underlying “big picture” that Paul has for life and living. One way of thinking through the Corinthian correspondence that includes both of Paul’s letters “to the Corinthians” is to see his emphasis on what it is that creates the life of the individual believer and how it is that we are then engaged with one another in community. Paul intimately connects all of this to the outworking of the Gospel present in their individual and collective lives. This “new covenant” is the basis for much of his argumentation, rebuke and instruction throughout these letters. God’s revelation to us in these very emotional and personal letters emphasizes the importance and even foundational thinking that the Gospel should hold for all of life, not only for the “becoming” of a Christian, but the daily living in faith that follows. From the very

beginning of the letter Paul addresses and in effect dedicates this letter to “the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with *all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, both their Lord and ours.” The phrase “the place”, related to Paul’s “in every place”, is used at least ten times in the book of Deuteronomy and especially in chapter 12. In Deuteronomy we have several addresses given by Moses to the nation of Israel reinforcing their covenantal status. (Sometime in the future take the time to read chapter 12 in light of what you know about the letters to the Corinthians and you will see remarkable foreshadowing.) Deuteronomy calls the people to proper worship, challenges them to avoid idolatry and sexual immorality and calls them to remember the mighty acts of God in their Exodus deliverance in particular through the Passover celebration. But God through Moses announces their impending apostasy and exile and yet promises a return with a powerful promise. In the opening verses of chapter 30 it says:

“And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ² and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. ⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live...And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today.”

Paul is quick to see the New Covenant/gospel implications to this and follows this thread through the Wisdom announced in Isaiah. He quotes Isaiah 29:14 in verse 19 of chapter one with the wisdom challenge and expects the rest of the wisdom echoes of Isaiah to come crashing through. Take the time to read Isaiah 53 with respect to the Suffering Servant/Messiah and his noted wisdom as well and connect that to his brokenness that is scandalous in the message of the cross. As one commentator states: “Paul, like Moses, seeks to spell out for the new people of God the theological and ethical consequences of the act of salvation that is an exodus. He wishes to explain the nature of an obedient response to God’s grace. The apostle stops short of calling himself a second Moses, but he does compare and contrast his role as a minister of the new covenant (a text Pastor Russ will open in a few weeks). In Deuteronomy repeated reference is made to ‘the place which the Lord your God will choose to have people call upon his name’, rather than refer to that place, Paul says that the Corinthians are among those who call on the name of our Lord ‘in every place.’ This is a near

quote from the forward-looking Malachi in 1:11 anticipating the glory of His name being great among the Gentiles “in every place.” So Paul is basing his arguments on a comprehensive application of the new position of believers because of the Gospel and the nature of the New Covenant.

Exposition

He carries this implicit new covenant emphasis to an explicit reference in his challenge to flee from idolatry in chapter 10 of I Corinthians where he confronts them with the bread and cup of the Lord. Paul has already called Jesus our Passover Lamb in verse seven of chapter five. He has an expectation of their understanding of these concepts so when he gets to what he says in our text this morning, a text that deals with another specific problem he makes a direct use of these themes. That is what we find in chapter 11. Let’s now turn to I Corinthians 11 and read beginning in verse 17 and continue to verse 26.

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Our text involves instruction in one area that connects these several thoughts. The answer to their divisiveness (as well as their inconsistency with their notions of idolatry and morality) is to come to grips with the power and person of the Gospel. In calling them out regarding their particular practice of the Lord’s Table, he actually states in verse 20, “it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.” How can you claim the heart change and empowerment of the Spirit that is the engine of the New Covenant and allow yourselves to be so ignorant of the failure to see the unity of love that should mark and identify His people?

Paul relates Jesus actions in taking the bread of the Passover meal, unleavened bread that in Deuteronomy 16:3 is referred to as the bread of affliction, and declares that this is my body which is for you. He aligns himself with the

Passover tradition and sees its fulfillment in his own person. As reader/listeners to this text highlighting Jesus words recorded in our Gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke take note of this bread as “my body.” The fact that the Son of God took on a body and entered this creation is significant. His embodied state as a man reflects his condescension to us to be “with us,” to be the fulfillment of all we as humans were to be, even to the sharing of affliction. In fact it was to be “broken” for us. He was transitioning the understanding of a previous tradition to find its fulfillment in his own work. And Paul’s challenge to the Corinthians was to recognize their participation in this work and to see their place in what Jesus has done. We are to remember his provision as our Passover Lamb and our forgiveness and inclusion in the covenant community in the sacrifice of his body. When we marginalize other members of this community we fail to “remember” fully our true state.

And then Paul reminds them of Jesus’ words regarding the cup. “Cup” was often a metaphor for violence, suffering and even death. The former covenant was made with a blood sacrifice as Exodus 24:8 speaks of the “blood of the covenant the Lord has made with you” and notes that the New Covenant also has a “bloody cup” that Jesus identifies as his blood. This is the complete and perfect sacrifice that the author of Hebrews speaks of in Hebrews 9:11-15. This death (yet future for Jesus’ disciples) was the confirmatory event that established the New Covenant and highlighted Jesus’ position as the focal point of the New Covenant work. All that Jesus is and came to accomplish is the glorious, yes “good news” that is the Gospel. This is the message of the New Covenant.

The whole enactment of the table is to remember, reinforce and be recommitted to the challenge of living in obedience to the grace of the New Covenant. But in doing so, Paul is clearly pointing out Jesus’ position as not only the principle herald of the New Covenant, but the executor as well. He is indeed the focus, answer and reality to all the previous pictures that came before.

Implications

Let’s examine some implications to this text. How does Jesus’ presence and death as bread and cup/body and blood impact how we understand this concept called the New Covenant? We are asserting the need to see the nature of the New Covenant and more comprehensive in scope than merely being a topic in the theology of the atonement. By seeing Jesus’ own remarks in this light and recognizing the full allusions that bread/body and cup/blood brings should cause us to see the importance of the New Covenant as a key hermeneutical framework.

This text then connects Jesus to the creation of the world and the voice of God. He is the one who spoke and caused this world, its plans and intentions to come to being. (Hebrews 1:1-2, Col. 1:16)

It connects Jesus to man's mandate to be the image of his creator. Adam and all of mankind were to be not only the human reflection of his glory and character but also the representative of his kingdom. He was to extend and share the rule and dominion of Yahweh. Jesus is the complete and final Adam, accomplishing the task without fail or fall. (Rom. 5:14, Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3)

Jesus is the promised "offspring" to crush the head of the serpent and defeat death and the curse announced in Genesis 3. (I Cor. 15:45-56)

Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham, a son offered on the mount and yet lives again. He is the perfect lamb whose blood delivered from death and the evil embodied and pictured in the nation of Egypt. Jesus is the true Israel of God, his faithful and true son, wife and flock, and yet is its father, husband and shepherd-king. Jesus is the suffering servant, the herald of righteousness who gives his life as the penalty for sin. I could go on. But the references to body and then to cup call us to understand the power of Jeremiah's New Covenant. A Covenant predicted, portrayed and pictured in the lives and events of all that had been seen before in the Old Testament. That is why Luke (another great New Covenant theologian) makes sure we are aware of Jesus resurrection lessons. In Luke 24:27 he states "and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." And in verse 44 he goes on to say:

"Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." "

Reflect and Respond

1. Come to the table!

Any other attempt to draw near to God is doomed to failure. Only the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the breaking of his body and taking up the cup in his death and shedding of his blood can bring us to a relationship with God. If you need to know more about your sin, your ultimate destiny and the wonderful answer for these, speak to someone this morning about the power of the Gospel.

2. Remember Jesus!

Those of us who claim to know this Savior and say we trust in his work, we should reflect and live daily in light of our New Covenant calling. He

has brought us near, keeps us near and ever lives to make intercession for us.
All that the Gospel means needs to be in the forefront of our thinking and living.
May it be even greater here among Clearcreek Chapel!

We will tell you more what this looks like in the weeks to come!