



A Superior Mediator. A Superior Covenant.

Hebrews 9:15-28

Personally, I've been amazed at our study in Hebrews. I've told multiple people that I wasn't expecting Hebrews to be *this* amazing of a series. I was hoping it'd be good, but I had no idea how rich this book is. And, I think many of us here who have been trekking through this book with me would agree with me.

One of the things that has grabbed my attention in this book is that Hebrews has the strongest warning in the entire New Testament and yet, in going into the valley of that warning, the author then climbs to the highest heights of Heaven itself to elevate our confidence and joy in God. The last few weeks have been encouragement after encouragement – and I know so many who have been encouraged by this.

Isn't it amazing that God wants us to have a superior encouragement and amazement? But, as I think about my amazement, I want to be careful that I'm responding rightly with my amazement. In his devotional, Paul Tripp wrote, **"There is a significant difference between amazement and faith. God doesn't just want to blow your mind; he wants to rule your heart."**

Many of you were also here at Ventura when we went through the book of Matthew, and you might remember another similar quote that I shared on different occasions. Leon Morris, the commentator said, **"Jesus was not [only] looking for amazement and admiration, but for repentance"** – Morris While Jesus certainly deserves our amazement and admiration, if there's no turning to him and if there's no desire to have him rule your heart, then we miss *everything*. I could preach with excitement every Sunday and walk away with a smile on my face, but I'm just making noise if I don't love God. You could sing songs on a Sunday and talk about the amazing message, but if you don't depend on the Lord and offer your life a living sacrifice, you're embracing merely an appearance of godliness without the power.

There is a significant difference between amazement and faith. One is a sham and the other brings us the substance – Jesus himself. I bring this up because the author of Hebrews isn't writing these things to simply cause the Hebrews to feel amazed and then walk away saying, "WOW!" He's writing these glorious realities because these Hebrew Christians in Rome are contemplating turning away from Jesus. They're concerned they're not going to endure the persecution either. And so, the author reveals the superior glory of Jesus in order to strengthen them to endure and to pursue Jesus together. Jesus' glory ought to shape the 1st century Christians and it ought to shape us as well.

Now I don't say all of this to say you shouldn't be amazed. I don't want you sitting through this sermon thinking, "No excitement. Don't be happy or joyful." Don't do that! Because, I have a confession. The author of Hebrews heightens our amazement in the text we're looking at this morning! I almost feel like it's impossible to get any better – and yet it does each week! Be amazed. But also let that amazement

drive you straight to Jesus' arms in humble submission and joyful perseverance. Or, as the apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 2, let God's kindness (his tremendous, beyond-our-comprehension kindness) lead you to turn to the Lord and cling to him!

If you haven't turned in your Bibles yet to Hebrews 9, please turn there. Before I read, I'm going to be praying for us, another gospel preaching church in the area (Lakeshore Baptist in Grand Haven) and then a missionary family of ours – the Horns.

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁸ 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, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ 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. ¹

The big idea of this passage is stated in verse 15. This verse starts with "Therefore," and as always, we should wonder what the "therefore" is there for. In the previous verse, we read that Jesus' sacrifice purifies our conscience so that we stand purified in God's sight and we are also set free to obey the Lord! What a glorious gift.

Then, verse 15 says, "Therefore. . . ." Because Jesus gives us a purified conscience and gospel-motivated obedience, Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. Two Sundays ago, we studied what that new covenant was. The author quotes from Jeremiah, who prophesies a day when God will give a superior inwardness, superior knowledge, superior relationship and a superior forgiveness. That's what the new covenant brings, and we see that Jesus gives this to us. Because *he's* the one who gives this to us, he's the mediator of that covenant.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:15–28.

So, the big idea that the author is bringing out in this verse (through the end of this chapter) is that **Jesus is the superior mediator over a superior covenant**. Now, what does this mean? I want to take a moment to define the words “mediator” and “covenant.” The idea of a mediator has already been brought up, and in this text, we’re going to see again that Moses was a mediator. But Moses is an inferior mediator. All he could do was mediate on behalf of people to God. The same is true of high priests and priests. They were sinful, too. They mediated, through God’s ordained means, for people (including themselves). But Jesus is superior to all of them because Jesus not only mediates on behalf of people, but he does also for God. Jesus is both God and man and therefore the sufficient mediator. God’s blessings can flow to mankind because of Jesus (God the Son) and humankind can be drawn to God because Jesus took on flesh!

These blessings come because of the superior, new covenant. What we’re going to see in this text is that the author decides to emphasize the different meanings of the word “covenant.” In our English translations, you may see in verse 15 the word “covenant,” but in verses 16-17, you see the word “will.” In the Greek, those are all the same word. But we all should understand words can have different meanings. If we say that all words must only have one meaning, then we miss the beauty of nuances – like what we can see here. The word “covenant” can refer to an ancient practice of making a promise to accomplish something. But the word can also refer to a *will* – like when we refer to someone’s last “will and testament.” So, this covenant also involves giving blessings. This superior covenant is both a promise for a superior inward change, knowledge, relationship and forgiveness; but it is also a covenant that brings an eternal inheritance with it. It’s a covenant will. And all the blessings of this covenant flow to people because of and through Jesus, the superior Mediator.

With this backdrop, we can get into the author’s argument, and what we first see is that:

1. Jesus’ death supersedes the old covenant sacrifices (vv. 15b-22).

The end of verse 15 through 17 continues by saying, “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.¹⁶ 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.”²

Jesus can purify the conscience and cause us to live life for God’s glory – which is what we were created for! He fulfills our longings and desires! Therefore, he’s the mediator of a new covenant. Ok, got it. But what does that mediation do? The phrase “so that” teaches us. Jesus mediates “so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. . .”³ The word “called,” I think refers back to Hebrews 3:1: “Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus. . .”⁴ To be called means that you have been summoned. It involves a new relationship and also a new way of living. For all who trust in Jesus, we were summoned to the presence of God – not merely to appear before him but to be accepted by God and then to follow him! We are *the called*.

But this phrase, I think, has more specific implications in this verse. The author goes on and says “since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” To

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:15–17.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:15.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 3:1.

redeem is to purchase and to set free. **Jesus sets free people from what? From transgressions.** This isn't simply sin, but this is willing, voluntary choices to transgress God's commands. Remember last week and the temple system didn't cover sins with a high-hand? Jesus' sacrifice can bring atonement for *all* sins.

Notice one more specific phrase "transgressions committed under the first covenant." The author is specifically talking about people in the Old Testament period. Hold on a second. Jesus' death covered sins before him? Absolutely! Putting all of this together, people in the Old Testament were summoned, experienced blessings and were promised an eternal inheritance *before* Jesus even died! And they received it not because they honored the first covenant perfectly, but because they were looking to the coming Messiah and the covenant to come. Remember last week when I mentioned David and his sin? He said he couldn't offer a sacrifice for his presumptuous sins. He was *under* the mosaic covenant. What made him think that God would accept him and his repentance? He had to have believed there was a Messiah to come, and a covenant that was superior to the mosaic covenant. Remember the book of Zechariah when he recounts the sinfulness of the High Priest named Joshua? Joshua enters God's presence and Satan accuses. The High Priest was sinful. He was unclean in God's sight. No temple sacrifice could purify. Then what happens? The angel of the LORD, which I believe to be Jesus, gives Joshua pure clothes that were not his.

How could God forgive David? How could God forgive Joshua? What about Adam, Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob? What about all the people we read about in the Old Testament? How could he really forgive them? Because everything at that time was pointing forward to the Messiah's sacrifice. Yes, they did commit sins, as verse 15 says, "under the first covenant," but there was an understanding that there was a covenant that superseded the mosaic covenant – one that could actually bring cleansing of the conscience and purity before God. And so, when Jesus died, he not only took our sin on himself, but he gave his righteousness, like clothing, to all who trust in him! And Jesus didn't just give that to people in our day, but his sacrifice extended to the uttermost of the past and the future!

So, for Hebrew Christians who are struggling with following Jesus because they want to go back to a seemingly trustworthy Judaistic system, they're beginning to see how Jesus' mediation and covenant are superior and eternal! If you want to go to trinkets and symbols, go ahead; but wouldn't you rather have the substance?

But then the author moves forward with the idea of covenant and shows how Jesus' covenant truly is superior to the mosaic covenant. He uses a different idea of the word covenant – the idea of a will. A will is enacted whenever there's a death. Now, not all will's can be exciting, but there can be other ones that people anticipate. Yes, they ought to be saddened by the death, but they might be receiving things they had no idea of!

So, the author spends a number of verses emphasizing that death must take place for a covenant to be enacted. Verses 18-22 say: ¹⁸ 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, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.⁵

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:18–22.

Death was necessary. *Almost* everything was purified with blood because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. How much blood was shed in the Old Testament sacrificial system. I don't have a specific number, but Pastor R.K. Hughes wrote, "During the thousand-plus years of the old covenant, there were more than a million animal sacrifices. So considering that each bull's sacrifice spilled a gallon or two of blood, and each goat a quart, the old covenant truly rested on a sea of blood. During the Passover, for example, a trough was constructed from the temple down into the Kidron Valley for the disposal of blood – a sacrificial plumbing system" (R.K. Hughes, p. 235).

Why all the blood? Remember the death was to continually remind the people of the seriousness of sin. Sin always leads to death. It also speaks to the perfection of God. Sin is heinous and deadly. Every week, every year, the sacrifices were to speak of these realities. In order to get into God's presence, death has to happen. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

What's the blessing of the will in the old testament time? What do people receive? God allows for an animal to die instead of them, and they have a restricted relationship with God. Well, that's something to be thankful for! They still don't get what they deserve. And they get more than they deserve. Yet, that's still so limited and it doesn't guarantee anything for eternity. The death of the animals couldn't forgive fully. They couldn't truly bring people to God and free their consciences. What they needed is a death that completely covers and cleanses everyone! And that's the contrast the author brings up here. The old will gives minimal blessing. But **Jesus enacts a will with an eternal inheritance**. Verse 15 says it's a promised eternal inheritance.

But how does that come to us? In verse 17, the author says, "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."⁶ The new covenant had to be enacted. How would it be? Jesus had to shed his blood. He had to die! And, at Jesus' death, he established the new covenant with all of its retroactive power over the saints in the past.

Think of this, in the old covenant, the Day of Atonement, had retroactive power of sorts. It dealt with the sins of the previous year. Year. Did you hear that? One year. Do you realize what the author is saying here. Jesus' death has retroactive power all the way to the Garden of Eden! And, if it has retroactive power, we can be assured of its proactive power – it's far-reaching into the future! And that's what the author gets into in the next several verses.

But remember, the author doesn't only want to emphasize that the new covenant is a promise, but that it promises something specific: an inheritance to all who trust in and follow Jesus.

2. Jesus' mediation brings superior blessings and an inheritance (vv. 23-28).

Verse 23 says, "²³ 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."⁷

Because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins; then it was appropriate for the tabernacle to have all this blood. It was *purified* by these rites. And, by purified, I believe it refers to being consecrated to God – and consecrating people to God through the rituals.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:17.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:23.

It was necessary that death was a part of the old covenant. But then the author says that the heavenly reality that the tabernacle is just a copy of had to be purified with better sacrifices. Now that's interesting. Heaven has to be purified? Well, if we understand the word "purified" in terms of consecrating people to God through a sacrifice, I think we understand that the heavenly temple was awaiting Jesus' sacrifice to enact the new covenant. And through that new covenant, all people who trust Jesus now have unrestricted access to God!

Part of the blessings of this new covenant will is that **Jesus gives us direct access to God**. Verse 24 says, "24 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."⁸ As the mediator, Jesus enters into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God! In appearing, he does it *on our behalf*! What does that mean? It's for our benefit. And it signifies that we, too, can enter into God's presence. All sin is forgiven. We are cleansed. Jesus is our High Priest, and he has made us priests to our God – meaning, we can enter into the heavenly temple that doesn't have a veil before God's presence! First Peter 1:2 says that followers of Jesus experience the sprinkling of Jesus' blood. We are cleansed. Look at Jesus' mediation. God accepts us completely and fully. We have purified, cleansed consciences so we can come directly into his presence with joy!

But not only does Jesus bring us to God. **Jesus brings God to us!** This is another blessing. Ephesians 2:22 says that in Jesus, we are ". . . being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."⁹ God decides to dwell with us, in our midst. Do you grasp the intimacy of the relationship. For Christians who are struggling with persecution, they must see that Jesus gives them superior relationship! If death comes from the persecution, then death comes – but then they're carried straight into the presence of God! Because of Jesus' mediation, God does not want to be without us – and we ought never to want to be without him!

Can you picture this? The love of Christ is gloriously superior! And this should shape how we think and behave in this world. We were created for God, and yet so often we are tempted to think that things around us are going to give us what only God can give. Some people turn to food, others turn to gossip, other people turn to being very moral. People turn to all sorts of thing for eternal satisfaction: money, sex, power, a good reputation, a nice job, a sports car even! Listen, you were made for God. God is most glorious, most beautiful and best! God is the summation of all glories because he is the Glorious One. In his presence, there is fullness of joy. And Jesus grants you GOD! Unrestricted. That means that if you turn from your sin and turn to Jesus, God isn't welcoming you with a scowl and arms folded. God is like the father in the story of the prodigal. He isn't simply sitting waiting for you to come to him, but he is running to you with arms open wide, ready to receive you before you can even make it to him!

Oh, if you've not trusted in Jesus, would you turn to him. And, if you have trusted in Jesus, does this kindness melt your heart and cause you to want to follow God?

But some of you could say, "Well, that sounds wonderful, but I'm such a mess. In about a week, God's not going to love me again." Look at verses 25-26: ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:24.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Eph 2:22.

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.¹⁰

Another blessing is **Jesus gives us absolute security and complete cleansing**. I put this together as one because we need to understand that Jesus' blood secures us with God. We're not just guaranteed forgiveness of past sins, but we're guaranteed forgiveness of past, present and future. Now, that shouldn't then cause us to say, "Well, let's just sin all we want!" If you have that attitude, you don't want God. You want sin. That said, we all still sin. We all can feel the weight and pain of our choices. We can feel Paul's cry "What a wretched man that I am" or even the hymn writer who says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it!" The Hebrew Christians could have been feeling all of this, especially as they're going to have to persevere in persecution. They know that left to themselves, they're not faithful or trustworthy. They've proven otherwise. They need more stability than themselves. We know our frame, we are dust. We need something more secure. We need a Solid Rock. And, the author of Hebrews says that God's new covenant is a promise of security!

We see this security in that Jesus' sacrifice was so powerful it only had to be offered once – and the ramifications go on for all eternity future. It was retroactive in power, but also proactive in the future! I love how the author says that the new covenant isn't one where Jesus had to die repeatedly. If he had to die repeatedly, he started too late. He would have had to start right at the beginning of everything. Instead, he appeared "once for all." Once for *all*. His death saves all who come to him through faith – all people in the past, present and future! No old covenant sacrifice had this power! And, the verse goes on. He sacrificed himself at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

This is a powder keg of phrases! The end of the age refers to the final time period before the end. When Jesus came, the Kingdom was at hand – God is drawing people from every tribe, nation and tongue. The next thing we await is for Jesus to come again! Jesus inaugurated a new age. In this new age, he puts away sin. This is where security comes in, Christian. This doesn't mean that we don't sin any more, but it does mean that those sins don't affect our security of relationship with God. Yes, it can affect our relational growth if we harbor it. But we are secure in God and he will even ensure, by his love, that we will turn to him and grow in his grace. Why? Because he has put away sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us!

And, by the way, when I think of "put away," I think of someone who has taken something away so that we can't get to it. Yet, how many of you have gone to the Lord in confession and then you try to find that sin again. You confess and confess and confess, and God says, "I've put it away! Why are you searching for it?"

But how is it put away? The text goes on to say that there's only *one* sacrifice that can cover sins: Jesus' death. This sacrifice is so great that the thousand plus years of old covenant sacrifices still can't even touch what Jesus' sacrifice does in its magnitude! Our sins were nailed to the cross and we bear them no more! Praise the Lord, O my soul! We are secure and cleansed.

Up to this point, we see the covenant promise part. Jesus' promise is to give us access with God, to bring God to us and to give us security and cleansing. But in verses 15-17, the author said that as a mediator, he also gives future blessings. To us who are walking this earth and still dealing with struggles and pains of life, we can hear all that Jesus gives us today, and they should cause us to rejoice, but it is

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:25–26.

entirely appropriate for us to say, “There’s still got to be more than this.” Our best life is not now. It’s the life to come! And if Jesus died to only give us a good life now, then we should be pitied.

There is more to come, and the author is motivating the struggling Hebrew Christians and us as well with what is to come. Don’t drift, don’t turn from God. He loves you. He’s made promises in this new covenant, but he also gave us a will. **He gives us an eternal inheritance** to look forward to. Remember verses 15-17? This will is glorious – it involves an eternal inheritance for us. But what does that mean? Now he opens the will a little bit so we get a glimpse of excitement of what’s in store. Verses 27-28 say: ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ 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. ¹¹

He’s bringing a comparison and a contrast here. Just like every person dies and then there’s judgment; so Jesus died and then something is coming – but it’s not judgment. Now, there must be clarifiers here. Some people believe there could be a second chance after death. This passage says otherwise. Every person will be judged. And the verbiage here is clear that there are no second chances after death. Don’t be presumptuous. Turn to God now is the consistent message of Scripture. Another thing to clarify is that some may think verse 28 is saying that Jesus is not going to judge in the future. He doesn’t come to deal with sin, but to save. That’s not what the text is saying. But let me explain it.

The emphasis is on the hope of the believer. Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. He atoned for real sins of real people: those who trust him! The new covenant was enacted then. But is that all there is? NO! He will appear a second time. And he doesn’t appear to deal with sin but to save. I struggled with the phrase “deal with sin.” That sounded odd to me. I prefer the phrase “to bear sin.” He’s not coming again to make atonement for sins again. He’s already done that. So, because he’s already done that, the next time he comes, he’s coming physically and visibly to take me straight to the presence of God.

Oh Ventura, can you rejoice with me in this?! Jesus is going to come in his glory as my Priest-King and he’s going to call me in the air with him. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye we’ll be transformed and then there will be an eternal inheritance awaiting us. We will not be condemned. We will be welcomed. There will be feasting. There will be a Kingdom to reign in. There will be unending worship, joy, rest, peace. We will experience God dwelling with us and us dwelling with God. I can’t help but wonder if we will then hear God’s singing over us, like what the Old Testament talks about. And we will also, with the full community of believers and angels, worship God. Imagine how loud and powerful it will be to praise our Lord together! What excitement there will be as we humbly honor and worship him.

This is our inheritance. Do you see it? And all of this comes because of Jesus.

This past week I came across a story of a doctor who lived in a rural village. After his death, his books were reviewed. At different places, there were entries that had red ink over them and it was written “Forgiven-too poor to pay.” The doctor’s wife didn’t agree with his allowance and so she filed a suit in the court. When before the judge, he asked her if that was her husband’s handwriting. She said it was. Then the judge said that there wasn’t a court in the land that can touch who he had forgiven! (see R.K. Hughes, p. 241)

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 9:27–28.

Ventura, the old covenant Law can't touch us. Jesus, by his blood writes over us "Forgiven," but he also says, "Just wait for all that's in store for you. I'm coming again!" As the mediator, he fulfills God's covenant promises of bringing us to God and God to us. And he also guarantees greater union in the future! Does this amaze you? Does this call you to worshipful obedience?

What a way for us to move into communion.

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