

The Heart of the Covenant

Hebrews 8, 10

- If you have been around church or church culture long enough, you have probably heard some pretty standard Christian Cliché's
- There are some that are common, but not really biblical at all
 - Like, "God will never give you more than you can handle"
 - "If it's God's will, you'll have a peace about it"
 - "God only helps those who help themselves!"
 - Get outa here...
- Then there are some that are just confusing like:
 - "When God closes a door, He opens a window!"

- What? What does that mean? Am I supposed to be just looking out the window or crawling out the window, I'm confused!"
- There are some that are absolutely true, but we just kind of say them without really knowing the full weight of what they mean, and they become a bit of a cliché.
- How about this one: Christianity is Not a Religion, it's a Relationship
- Do we really know what that means?
- Because it's true, Jesus isn't here to offer a religion.
 - In fact, it is very important for us to understand that Jesus did not come to set up a new religion.
- **JESUS CAME TO END RELIGION**
 - Whenever Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, he actually put religion to death.

- This is how I know this to be true: At the beginning of chapter 8, the writer of Hebrews kind of gives a thesis statement. He wants to remind his readers the main point of everything that has been discussed thus far in this letter
- He says, ***“Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, Who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and Who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.” -Hebrews 8:1-2 (ESV)***
- One thing that would have drastically stuck out to these Hebrew readers was the fact that it says that He serves as a priest, but yet He is seated.
 - You see, no priest would ever serve from a seated position. You only sit down whenever the work has been done.
 - It was the position of completed work.
- But that’s the point that the writer is trying so desperately to make! That Jesus as our Great King-Priest is seated because the work of religion has been completed!
- That’s why the writer goes on to say in chapter 10: ***“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God,” -Hebrews 10:11-12 (ESV)***
 - He sat down, because He has brought an end to the work of religion by completing all of the requirements for it on the cross.
- Therefore, the statement is absolutely true. **Christianity is not a Religion to be Observed, it is a Relationship to be Enjoyed**
- You see, every religion that has ever been observed or created has two things in common.

Sunday, May 5, 2024

- 1. They all agree that there is some sort of Higher Power or Ultimate Reality
- 2. There is a gap between us and that Higher Power or Ultimate Reality
 - The difference between the religions is when they disagree about how we are to go about bridging that gap.
 - Some talk about finding some sort of enlightenment
 - Some talk about living a certain way by a certain mortal code
 - Some talk about presenting certain offerings
 - Some talk about just finding that ultimate truth within yourself
- Every teacher or founder of any religion always believes that they can teach you the key or show you the path to bridging the gap to whatever Higher Power or Ultimate Reality that they claim to know
 - However, what separates the message of Jesus and made it so radical in the early centuries was the fact that Jesus did not just claim to know the High Power, He claimed to Be the High Power
 - He did not just claim to know the path, He claimed to be the path that bridged the gap for you
- Jesus declares that He is not only the Ultimate Truth, He is not only the Ultimate Life, He is the Only Way
 - The message of religion is all about the work that humanity has to do to get to God, the message of Jesus all about the work that God has done to come to humanity
- This is the very reason why the Roman Empire, who was a polytheistic culture and supported and encouraged a vast diversity of religions, adamantly opposed and persecuted Christianity
 - Because it wasn't a region. It was anti-religion.

- Tim Keller states that in order to really understand the radical difference between Christianity and all other first century religions, you have to envision a conversation between a Roman and their Christian Neighbor
 - The Roman says: “Oh you’re a Christian? That’s a new religion, where is your temple?”
 - *The Christian says: “Well we don’t really have a physical Temple, Jesus is our Temple”*
 - “What? Where do you offer your sacrifices?”
 - *“We don’t need to offer sacrifices, Jesus was the sacrifice for us”*
 - “Well, what do your priests do?”
 - *“We don’t have priests, Jesus is our High Priest”*
- All of the religious aspects have been completed and fulfilled
- So while all other religions will say, “If you work hard and live like this, you will be accepted by God,” Jesus says, “I’ve already done the work,

so you’ve already been accepted, therefore, live like this”

- It was so confusing to the world that before we were every referred to as Christians, they couldn’t find a good name for whatever this movement was, so they just called it “The Way.”
 - Christians were called Followers of The Way
- Pastor Robby Gallaty in his book *The Forgotten Jesus*, when speaking in the context of Jesus being the Way the Truth and the Life, he says: **“Jesus avoids saying, “I Am the destination.” In other words, He’s the way because the Christian life is a walk. It’s a walk we make with God, not a journey to find God.” -Robby Gallaty: *The Forgotten Jesus* (pg. 111)**
- *The power of living the Christian life is not found within us working hard to bridge the gap, it is found in simply walking with Him over the bridge that He provided for us*

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- Because it is true: **Christianity Isn't a Religion that Tries to Get TO GOD, It's a Relationship in Which We Walk WITH GOD**

- However, if we look at that statement through the lens of modern relationships it falls completely short.
 - Modern relationships, are based on the commitment of, "I will be what I should be for you...if you are what you should be for me."
 - They say, I will hold up my end, only as much as you hold up yours
 - And in doing so, our relationships are extremely self centered and we enter into them with one foot out the door
- However, the bible talks about God offering a covenant relationship
 - And the word covenant is very hard for us to pin down, because there isn't really a good english word to translate it in
 - Many times it is translated as a contract or a will or testament, but those definitions fall

short because God set up covenant's as being legally binding intimate relationships

- We saw a picture of God's seriousness in His covenants in chapter 6, whenever He set up His blood covenant with Abraham.
 - So for a refresher, In these covenants, a person of a lesser standing would enter into the covenant with a friend of a much higher standing.
- And it was the duty of the lesser standing person to provide the animals and make the preparations for the covenant to show their seriousness and commitment to keep their side of the bargain
 - So God has Abram go get 5 different animals.
 - And the way this would take place, is the one preparing the covenant would kill and cut the animals in half, place each half of the animal across from each other and form a sort of path.

- Then traditionally after the preparations were made, each party would step into the path and say out loud *“May what was done to these animals be done to me if I do not keep this covenant.”*
- And then the greater party would pass walk through the path of bloody carcasses, followed by the lesser party and thus they were bound together by the blood covenant
- Now, this seems very barbaric and strange to us in our day and age, but for them in their context and this culture, this was to highlight the seriousness, the magnitude, and the heaviness of how serious this covenant was.
- However, we see in the way these covenants were made, whenever one party was making their promise, they were not concerning themselves with how the other person would keep up their end of the bargain
 - They didn’t say, “If I don’t keep up my end, let what happened to these animals happen to me, but if you don’t keep up your end then it’s all null and void.”
- They were solely focused on them doing what they needed to do.
- So entering a covenant relationship, is to say: *“I will be what I’m supposed to be for you, whether or not you are who you are supposed to be for me.”*
 - And whenever two people can enter into a relationship with that mentality, there can actually be a chance for there to be real lasting intimacy within that relationship
 - Because it is based around selfless commitment
- However, there were still holes within the covenant that God set up with Abraham, because the reality was, God was always going to be for His people who He promised to be... but Abraham, his descendants were not going to be able to keep up their end of the bargain

- The writer of Hebrews goes on to say: ***“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to My covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.” -Hebrews 8:7-9 (NIV)***
- Therefore because the people kept breaking the covenant with their sin and idolatry over and over again, God had to keep turning from them over and over again.
- Therefore, there was still a religious component to this covenant...because by law, those who broke it were supposed to die, but God in His grace set up a temporary sacrificial system that could serve as a temporary atonement for their constant breaking of the covenant
- Therefore God, promises through the prophet Jeremiah, who the writer of Hebrews is quoting here: That there will come a day when He sets up a new covenant.
- ***“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” -Hebrews 8:10-12 (NIV)***
- Now the question is, how was God going to establish this new covenant?

- Well God has already alluded to how He was going to do this in Genesis whenever He originally set up the Covenant with Abraham.
- In Genesis 15 we see: ***“As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him....When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram...” -Genesis 15:12, 17-18 (ESV)***
- We see elsewhere in scripture that smoke and fire were regular symbols of the presence of God
- So we see God’s presence passing through the covenant twice, once in Abram’s place and once for Himself.
- Signifying that the sole responsibility for the keeping of this covenant would be placed on God Himself.
- That this would all come to fruition, whenever Jesus, God in flesh, despite His innocence and perfection: hung on the cross in our place, and all of our sin was placed on to Him...and at 3 o’clock, darkness covered the land and the Father turned from the sin that He carried upon Himself, and Jesus let out a loud cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?!”
 - But He was forsaken for us! So we could be accepted!
 - So that as He died, religion died with Him!
 - So now all of the religious duties and requirements could be fulfilled and done away with, so God could freely turn His face toward us and remember our sin no more
- God is always going to be what He is supposed to be for us, despite of whether or not we are what we are supposed to be for Him

- We are offered this new covenant relationship, that is no longer dependent upon religion or performance
- Therefore, we can enjoy this relationship freely, without any fear of Him leaving us if and when we fall short.
- Because as the psalmist says, ***“as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”***
-Psalm 103:12 (NIV)
- That is how we can enter into this covenant that is not religious, it is relational
- Because our relational standing with God is not based around our performance, it's based on His
- So what does this New Covenant mean for us today?
- Well first, it is God's desire for us to Know Him
- We see in verse 11, that there are two different words that we translate as “Know” from the original language
 - When He says, “No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’- that word “Know” means: *to have knowledge of, or to become acquainted*
 - But that's not the type of relationship that God wants to have with us.
 - He doesn't want acquaintances with basic knowledge about Him, the relationship He offers is deeper than that.
- He says, in the new covenant they won't be after basic knowledge about Me, because they all will Know Me
- That word “**Know**”, is the greek word **eidō** which means more to perceive, to be sure of. One definition says: ***to have regard for one, cherish, pay attention***

- GOD WANTS A CHERISHED RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU

- He has committed Himself to be everything that you need Him to be for you, whether you are what you need to be for Him or not
- He has promised to never to leave us for forsake us
- Even we are faithless, He remains faithful
- And the only way we are going to reap the benefits of that relationship that He offers is if we cherish Who He is and what He has done for us.
- It comes from cherishing Him, for the way He has cherished us
- And because the religious requirements of this relationship have already been accomplished, we can be so much more free to cherish the relationship

- Because think about it: The relationships that you cherish the most in this world are the ones that know you the best, that know all of your faults and shortcomings, but unconditionally love you anyway
- That is exactly what Jesus offers us. He is your Maker and Creator, He knows you better than anyone else on the planet ever will, and He loves you more than anyone on the planet ever will
 - You see, God does not offer a relationship with one foot out the door. He doesn't offer a relationship based on fear, or walking on eggs shells.
 - He doesn't offer a relationship based on feelings
- He offers a relationship based on the promises He gave and the commitment that He showed on the cross

- Paul says, ***“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” -Romans 5:8 (ESV)***
 - This type of love is so counter cultural to us today because we always think that someone has to prove themselves to us before we love them.
 - They have to earn our trust before we offer a relationship to them
 - But Jesus, while we were in the midst of our sin, our lostness, and our hatred against God...He still loved us even when we had absolutely nothing to give Him!
- That’s what makes His love so mind boggling, because there is absolutely nothing that I can do or give that can add any value to God.
- He is already perfect, Holy, and complete, all on His own. There is nothing I can do to make Him any better or content than He already is!
- But yet He still chose to give me everything, when I had nothing to give back.
- That’s why Paul says in Ephesians: ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved,” -Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)***
- The question is: What are we going to do with this information?
- Are we going to Cherish Him? Or take Him for granted?
 - Because the reality is: Because of how simple and how freely this relationship is offered to us, it’s actually much easier for us to take it for granted.
- It could be argued that the religious way is a little easier, because there are aspects of the relationship that are still dependent upon us and within our control

- And that's why so often, we as New Covenant Christians still find our selves trying to make this life with Christ religious
 - We think, well if I go to church enough, if I give enough, if I read enough, if I do enough good deeds, then I can prove my value in my relationship with God
 - And we are so prone to do that, because that is exactly how we see relationships in our own lives, we tend to only value the relationships if the other person proves their value to us.
- But it doesn't work that way with God because He offers all of the value
- So because of how simple and free this is, we have a tendency to either revert to religiosity, or easy believe-ism
- Which is to say: Because Jesus fulfilled all of the requirements and if there's nothing I can do to make Him love me anymore or any less
 - Well that means, I'm good and can just do and live however I want.
- But if that is our mind set, then we do not cherish the relationship at all
- Paul says in Romans 6, "***What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?***" -***Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)***
 - Here's an example: A guy can't get married, and then continue to live like a single man.
 - When I got married, I can't manage my time the same, I can't make my schedule the same, I can't spend money the way I used to
 - I used to buy the best presents for my coworkers...
 - But those things had to change, not because of rules and regulations, but because I am in a covenant relationship with someone I cherish

- Imagine me deciding that because Rachel and I have entered the covenant relationship of marriage...well, because she promised to be with me for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part...well then I can just do whatever I want, because she already promised!
 - I don't need to spend time with her, I don't need to change any poopy diapers, I don't need to help around the house, I don't need to celebrate her birthday this year, because she always promised to be with me
 - That's not a sign of being confident in a relationship, that's a sign of a non-existent relationship
 - There is no such thing as a one way relationship, and if I cherish our marriage, I will make time to spend with her, to celebrate her, and help her
- Now, if I am doing those things to try and prove myself to her and win her affection and her

approval, that's a religious relationship that I am trying to manipulate

- Instead I am to be present and contribute to the relationship, and not take it for granted because I cherish it and I cherish her
- If we understand this, we will really understand what Jesus meant whenever He said: ***"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."***
-John 14:15 (ESV)
 - You see the old covenant, was if you keep my commandments, we will have a relationship...the new covenant is, because we have the relationship you will naturally keep the commandments
 - Love always precedes the command, in this new era
- That's why Jesus also says, ***"Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words,"***
-John 14:24 (ESV)

- Because the old statement is true: “Rules without relationship lead to rebellion”
- So if you don’t have a cherished relationship with God, you will not understand His prescribed way of life
 - If you don’t have a relationship with God, you won’t understand His Heart for sex and for marriage
 - If you don’t have a relationship with God, you won’t understand His heart for giving and generosity
 - If you don’t have a relationship with God, you won’t understand His Heart for us living moral lives and avoiding the appearance of evil
- Because if we are not in a place where we truly cherish our relationship with Him, we will not understand His deep desire to bless us and how He wants the best for us
 - He wants us to have life and have it to the full
 - He doesn’t want to take anything from you, He wants to give to you everything
- And if we look at any of the biblical commands and instructions outside of the context of a relationship, we will just see them as a set of religious rules
- But the question is: What are the commandments that Jesus is talking about?
 - So first off: We don’t really need a list. Because God said in the new covenant: **“I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.” -Hebrews 8:10b (NIV)**
 - And this has been accomplished by the ministry of the Holy Spirit
- Jesus said: **“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...**

He dwells with you and will be in you.”

-John 14:15-17 (ESV)

- And in Chapter 16, Jesus says: ***“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth” -John 16:13 (ESV)***
 - Jesus is letting us know that the Truth, the Way of Life we are to live, the commandments will no longer be a document and physical list
- *No, He is replacing the Ark of The Covenant, with the Heart of the Covenant*
 - And when you are living in tune with the Holy Spirit of God Who dwells within you, He will lead you in the truth of every situation of life.
 - Even the truth of the new covenant itself, is revealed to you by The Holy Spirit!
- That’s why in chapter 10, the writer reiterates: ***“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,***

declares the Lord: I will put My laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” then He adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” -Hebrews 10:15-17 (ESV)

- The Holy Spirit is Who reminds us of the truth of the new covenant
- The Holy Spirit is Who reminds us of our forgiveness and acceptance
- The Holy Spirit is Who reminds us of the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Jesus!
 - The Holy Spirit is the power within you that can help you to put all of the fleshly, selfish, religiousness aside and CHERISH the new covenant relationship with God.
- Now that does not mean we neglect the Word of God, because the Holy Spirit loves to teach us through the word

- And the reality is, you will never understand the Word of God without the Help of the Holy Spirit.
- And we have four Gospels full of the teachings of Jesus that we are to study and learn from. However, we do know one command that brings all of Jesus' teaching together
 - One that even supersedes what we often refer to as the Greatest Commandment or the golden rule
- If you're not familiar with what I'm talking about, there were times that Jesus was asked what the greatest commandments were. And His answer was the same every time:
- "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength...and the 2nd is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself."
 - He says if you could just keep this two commands, then you would be able to keep all of the other 314 Old Covenant laws, no problem.
- But the problem was, no one person could even keep those 2 commandments perfectly all of the time
 - And Jesus knew that. He could simplify the entire Old Testament law down to just those 2, and we would still fall short
- Because even in that Golden Rule, "Love you neighbor as yourself," or "Do unto others and you would have them do unto you,"... is still a very religious way of thinking
- Because at the end of the day we will still make that about ourselves.
 - *We will only love and do in the capacity in which we want to be loved and do.*
- But we forget that Jesus up'd the ante and gave a commandment that superseded that old covenant one.

- Jesus says in John chapter 13: ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” -John 13:34-35 (ESV)***
- Jesus says, no longer are you to love and care for the others based on the level in which you would want to be loved and cared for.
- Now, I want you to look to a love that is beyond you, I want you to look at the love in which I have loved you, and make that the standard for how you show love and care to others in your life.
 - *If we love and cherish Jesus, for the way He has loved and cherished us, we will love and cherish the things that He loves and cherishes!*
- So when we let the love of Jesus set the standard for everything in our lives, we will

have a community that deeply desires to be everything we are supposed to be for the people around us whether or not other people are who they are supposed to be for us

- And in doing so we reflect the Heart of Jesus, and that is the gauge by which the world will know know that we really follow Him
- God cherishes the relationship that He has with us so much, that He wants His church to be identified by the way we cherish each other.
- And we will not cherish the people around us and the relationships in our lives the way we are supposed to, if we do not Cherish Him first.
 - Because here’s the final point for today:
- **We Will Replicate His Love for Others, Whenever We Reciprocate His Love for Us**
 - When we love God most, we will love other’s best

- And the only way we can love, is because He first loved us.
- I'm reminded of a time in Luke chapter 10, whenever Jesus was asked by a young lawyer who said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- Jesus says, "You know the law what's your reading of it?"
- The lawyer, probably having heard Jesus give His answer before, says, "Love the Lord your God with all of you heart, soul, mind, and strength."
- Jesus says, "Good! Do that and you will live."
- But seeking to justify himself, the scripture says, the lawyer asked, "Well who exactly is my neighbor?"
- Then Jesus responds by telling him probably the most famous parable ever told. The story of the Good Samaritan.
- He tells about a man who was jumped by robbers along the side of the road, who beat him and left him for dead.
- A priest sees him and just passes by, a levite sees him and just passes by
- But then a Samaritan, this man's enemy, had compassion on him, picked him up, put him on his own animal, took him to the nearest inn, tended to his wounds, and then told the inn keeper that he had to go but whatever the price would be for this man's medical bills, put it on his tab
- Jesus tells this story, turns back to the lawyer and asks him, "Who's this man's neighbor?" He responds, "The one who had compassion on him." And Jesus tells Him to go and do likewise
- Now that would be an extremely daunting task, because according to the law if you broke one you broke them all, and you had to stay 100% perfect all of the time.

- No one could show that kind of complete compassion and care, to absolutely everyone, all of the time!
- *But the purpose of this story was not to give us an overwhelming task to accomplish, the purpose was to point us to the Only One Who could actually accomplish it!*
- Because in this story, we are not the priest, we are not the levites...those were symbolic of the religious system
- We were not the Good Samaritan....we were the one left for dead on the side of the road
- We had no hope. Religion couldn't save us, our good deeds and acts of service couldn't save us...only the One, Who by nature we were His enemies, but yet He looked at us, had compassion on us, picked us up, took us in, and said "I gotta go away for a little while but in 3 days, I'm coming back and I will have paid the full price for you being brought to life!"
- We gotta stop reading the bible, as if we could ever be the hero!
- We're not! Only He will ever be the hero! We just fall in love with Him and try to emulate Him the best that we can!
- So the question is: Where do we begin to try and emulate a love like that??
- Well we are given the recipe in the very next passage of scripture in Luke 10.
- Right after Jesus tells this story, He goes to visit his friends Mary and Martha
 - Now it's probably a rather large dinner party that is going on, Jesus has at least the 12 disciples, and probably some more people with Him as well
 - And Martha is up to her eye balls in the kitchen
 - She's cooking, she's bringing out appetizers, refilling drinks, just taking care of everything

- But Mary, she's just sitting and Jesus' feet
 - Soaking up His presence, hanging on His every word, on the edge of her seat through every story, laughing at every joke
- And Martha finally has enough, she's busts out of the kitchen, and says, "Jesus! Aren't you going to rebuke her! Tell her to get up off of her lazy can and give me a hand in the kitchen!"
- ***"But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." -Luke 10:41-42 (ESV)***
- Do you want to serve well? Sit at the feet of Jesus
- Do you want to be able to love well? Sit at the feet of Jesus
- I'm telling you God is more concerned with quality time with you than He is your acts of service
- Because your acts of service will be nothing but a religious attempt to gain God's favor, if they are not based and rooted at the feet of Jesus
- So I'm not going to end this sermon by giving you 3 steps to loving better or anything like that
- No I want us to close out today, by just having a time of us just sitting at the feet of Jesus together as a church
- And we are going to do that by observing Communion together