



KIAMA ANGLICAN  
CHURCHES

### Preamble

The last time I preached my first sermon as a new pastor in a new church - some sixteen and a half years ago - it was the start of new series at the start of a new year. And as the only pastor, I had worked out the series and the first Bible passage that I was to preach on.

Here, I arrive in the middle of the year, in the middle of a series, with another pastor, and I'm told, 'This is what you will be preaching on.'

But what a great way to arrive, and what a great series to be in the middle of as you've been looking at the book of **Hebrews** and been seeing again and again that **Jesus** really is the "**Name above all names**"

And in the first 7 chapters you've seen: Jesus is better than the angels, better than Moses, he's the bringer of a better salvation, leads us to a better rest than the promised land, so he is better than Joshua. So Jesus gives a better hope for the future, a sure and certain hope. And he's a better priest, as we saw last week in chapter 7 with Rod...

Jesus, the forever priest who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Jesus who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice, once for all, he saves completely, he meet our needs and lives and intercedes for us.

Better, better, better, Jesus is better! Jesus is simply the best (better than all the rest!)

Jesus is better than everything that preceded him, better than everyone who came before him in the Old Testament. As we read in Hebrews 10:1 - The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves.

The law, the OT law, is more than individual laws, not just the 10 commandments but the **covenant**, the whole agreement between the LORD and the people of Israel when he says, 'I will be your God, and you will be my people' (Lev 26:12) and this is what it looks like, this is how you are to live.

And we read about how that old covenant played out in what we call the old testament, as history unfolds, as the people break the covenant, repeatedly, as the prophets call them back to covenant faithfulness.

But that old covenant is only a shadow of a new covenant / new agreement that we read about in what we call the new testament; and as we heard last week - it's tied up with Jesus being the better, the perfect, the forever priest...

Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb 7:22) or as we hear in today's reading Jesus, is the mediator of a superior covenant. (Heb 8:6).

### Introduction

This light bulb is 122 years old. It's called the Centennial Light and it has been switched on for almost all that time. It's been moved a couple of times but it is still shining in a fire station in California and has now been on for over 1,000,000 hours.

For those of us who have changed more light bulbs than we care to remember, we ask ourselves how an incandescent bulb made in the 19th Century can last so long when those made in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century cannot.

Back in the 1920s representatives from top light bulb manufacturers worldwide colluded to artificially reduce light-bulbs' lifetimes to 1,000 hours. Details only emerged decades later. Well might we say – “*They don't make 'em like they used to.*”

And light bulbs that are built to not last are the least of our worries when you compare it to the built in **obsolescence** of today.

What? You want to replace the battery! No, you'll have to buy a new iPhone. That new app won't work? Of course not, your phone is three years old! And from phone to fridges and TVs to technology, all are disposable, not durable and they come with a built in obsolescence that's designed to make you buy the new, the better, with fancy advance announcements and product launches which all seem motivated by the need for company profit.

So it may surprise you that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC at Mt Sinai, God launched a covenant with built in obsolescence. Then in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC the LORD, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, made an advance announcement – quoted in our Hebrews reading: ‘The days are coming ... when I will make a **new covenant** (8:8) and then in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD that new covenant had its launch.

And after that extensive quote from Jeremiah 31, the author of Hebrews concludes: By calling this covenant ‘new’, [the LORD] has made the first [*the old*] one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear - making way for the superior covenant.

### 1. **The Glory of the Old Covenant**

Of course that Old Covenant, that Old Agreement that God made with the people of Israel, when he brought them out of slavery in Egypt, was a great and **glorious** thing. It was established by God, it was his idea, and with his stipulations.

With the benefit of living under the new covenant, it's easy miss how great and glorious the old covenant actually was!

God rescued the Israelites from Egypt, he saved them to be his people, and entered into a covenant with them. He gave them instructions for the tabernacle (8:5) - the mobile temple which was a place where he would dwell in the midst of his people, though separated behind the curtain in the holy of holies (9:3); a place where priests, as representatives, could offer sacrifices for sin (8:3, 9:7). He gave them his law.

We can often have negative attitude to the law of Moses but for the Israelite, it was their agreement with the God who had saved them. It told them how to live acceptably; how to walk as God's people. That's why Moses said to the people... Deuteronomy 4:7-8: ‘What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us, whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?’

You remember at the very end of the book of Exodus when all is completed and set up? Exodus 40:34-35 ‘Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.’

So why the need for **new** covenant?

## 2. The Obsolescence of the Old Covenant

Well, there was something wrong with that covenant as the author says in Hebrews 8:7-8 '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' ... Why? ... 8:9c '...because they did not remain faithful to my covenant.'

The people of Israel broke the covenant again and again. It's the story of the Old Testament, it's the reason they went into Exile in Babylon, it's the message for most of the book of Jeremiah in which the Lord highlights the need for a new covenant because of the obsolescence of the first covenant.

But we need to note that the new covenant is not an afterthought. It didn't catch God by surprise when [Hebrews 8:9] the people did not remain faithful to his covenant and he had to come up with a plan B.

There was a built in obsolescence in the old covenant and it was built in by God.

And with the benefit of hindsight, and under the inspiration of Holy Spirit, in a couple of chapters the author of Hebrews will say ... [10:1] The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming. The law, the Torah – all of the first five books of the OT, including the narrative sections point us to Jesus. And Paul says the same thing [Colossians 2:17] These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

But why go through the whole first covenant thing if it only a shadow? Why set up a covenant that you know the people will not be faithful to? Why not go straight to the new?

At the very least the old covenant and all of the OT, removes any self-deluded perceptions we may have, that somehow we can bridge the gap between us and God that came about by the sin; the disobedience of Adam and Eve. And even a God-ordained Covenant, such as the Old, that has humans as deliverers and leaders, and kings and priests, is doomed to fall short because of the unfaithfulness of people. And something more, something better, is needed.

It's a human problem that humans need to fix but can't. And so the solution is that God himself, enters His creation, becomes human. The creator becomes a creature; the artist becomes part of the painting and brings us, not shadow, but reality. As John tells us... The eternal Word of God who was with God, who is indeed God became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1) and gets it right, living in obedience, yet paying the price for our sin as the perfect offering, perfect priest, perfect everything, as we have been seeing, and will continue to see, in Hebrews.

Jesus fulfills all that the Old Covenant pointed towards. He brings it to completion with continuity, similarities and parallels. But it is so much better, so new, that... as the writer of Hebrews concludes... By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear. (8:13)

And we thank God, that despite the obsolescence of the old, he didn't throw his hands in the air and walk away but that he filled the void (as he had always planned to do), and said through Jeremiah ... 8:8-9 ... I will make a new covenant ... it will not be like the [old].

And in fact, as the writer says, 8:6 this **new covenant** of which Jesus is the mediator, is **superior** to the old.

### 3. **The Superiority of the New Covenant**

And we see that superiority spelt out for us in 8:10-12, as God says, [8:10a] ‘This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord...’ and goes on to describe it, firstly in the **transformation it brings**.

The Old Covenant could show what you were doing wrong, but supplied no power to change. As has been well noted – the Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone and papyrus but the New.... [8:10b] I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. It’s an internal thing.

Though the internal thing isn’t new of itself. In the OT we read... Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. (Deuteronomy 6:5-6)

But despite this call for an internal response, the righteousness the Old covenant called for was not produced. So the newness is more in the way the internal thing happens... God says, 8:10b ‘I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts’ and when that was read in conjunction with what God said through one of Jeremiah’s contemporaries – the prophet Ezekiel - through whom God said...

[Ezekiel 36:26-27] ‘I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.’

The old covenant could not bring about truly meaningful righteousness - nor make the people live as God’s people should. The righteousness God wants comes from an obedient heart rather than finding its expression primarily in religious observance, and for that to happen - God has to....

- put his law in our minds and write it on our hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33)
- put his Spirit in us and move us to follow his decrees and be careful to keep his laws. (Ezekiel 36:27)

The Holy Spirit - promised as part of the new covenant – brings about the **transformed** lives of righteousness the old covenant called for, but failed to produce.

We live in the tension of “the already and not yet” so living as God’s people is not always easy and won’t reach its completion until Christ returns, but when I hear Christians making excuses - “I’m only human” it seems sometimes we forget that, as those who have turned to Jesus in repentance and faith, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit - the indwelling, empowering personal presence of God - in us.

When we try and do it on our own it’s like we have a new-fangled smartphone and only use it to make phone calls, never connecting to the internet or using the apps.

Under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit enables us to live with a growing righteousness, producing in us the fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5... a growing... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And as Paul goes on to say, Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit, as part of the **superiority of the New Covenant**.

And it's a transformation which flows from the **Relationship the New Covenant Brings**.

What did God say about the New Covenant through Jeremiah? [8:10b] 'I will be their God, and they will be my people.'

To be sure God had said that as part of the Old Covenant... Exodus 6:7 'I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.'

Without going into detail, it ramps up in the new covenant and ramps up again, further in the final consummation at the end of the age, when finally and fully, as John hears in his vision [Revelation 21] 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'

And all that flows from the **Forgiveness of Sins**. As God says... 8:12 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

There will be more to say about that in the next couple of chapters, but through the death of Jesus, dying for our sin, the problem of our sin is dealt with, our sin is punished as Jesus takes that punishment, and we are offered forgiveness.

And we are reminded of that at that last supper; that Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he was crucified, when he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood (Luke 22:20) which is poured out for many for the **forgiveness of sins**. (Mat 26:28)

So Paul reminds us... [Ephesians 1:7-8] 'In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.' And it's all because of, it's all through Jesus, who is the mediator of a **superior covenant**.

### **Conclusion**

The old covenant is obsolete. Everything is obsolete. Even that light bulb that's lasted for 120 years will one day burn out.

And one day... 2 Peter 3:11-13 'The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.' But in keeping with his promise [the better promise of the new covenant] we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells...

Revelation 21; 22 ... to the heavenly city that does not need a 120-year old globe, nor the light of any lamp, nor the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. And it's all because of, it's all through Jesus, who is the mediator of a **superior covenant**.

So this day, as we gather as God's people, marvel again at all he has done for us in Jesus. Determine again to live in the light of that in the power of the Spirit, knowing his ongoing forgiveness when we fall short and looking to that day of his return, when, even more than we experience now, we will be his people, and God himself will be with us and be our God.

Amen