

Perfect Covenant

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn back with me to Hebrews chapter 8 as our ongoing study, now this is very much an overview of the book. Okay, we're taking a chapter at a time you could take a lot longer because there's a lot in it, so please don't expect everything to be covered in our overview of the book, but I hope it will give you an overview of some things that are very important that will encourage you to look into this book more and look into the Bible more.

I'm going to start off by saying something very obvious this morning, which is that none of us can see God.

We can't see God and we can't see Jesus. I mean that physically. We can't see him. We're not here.

We can't touch God or Jesus or see him at that level. I know we've talked about seeing God by faith, seeing Christ by faith, but I'm speaking kind of visually.

And that can be quite tough sometimes, particularly when the society we live in is very hostile to the Christian faith, generally speaking.

[1 : 21] And it's increasingly so. And it's tough. It's tough when people accuse you of being a complete nutcase because you believe in something that is just in your mind.

It's something you can't see, something you can't touch, something that's not real. And that can be difficult for us because we live in a very visual age.

People like things are tangible, things that they can feel and touch and see. And the temptation might be for us when we're struggling as Christians, when we can't see Jesus and when other people are telling us that we're crazy because we do believe in Him and it's just a figment of an imagination.

The temptation is to ask the question, well, Jesus, you know, where are you? Where are you? Are you really real or have we been hoodwinked?

Or is it just something that has been a humanly generated system of beliefs that have come through the centuries to us?

[2 : 26] And the danger can be, and I'm not saying this is a reality for you, but it certainly can be a danger, and it can be a danger for me and for all of us. It's to retreat into the temporary, to the temporal, to what we can see and what we can feel and what we can touch.

We can do that generally in life by filling our lives with just what is there right before us, what is there for the day, what is there right in front of our eyes, or even in religion we can just settle for the ritualistic, what we can see and touch, the hymns that we sing or the Psalms that we sing, or the people that we mix with, the church service at 11 o'clock that we come to, something that's very tangible and real and we can rely on that.

We can certainly live in that reality that is very, very visual and very real and very much in front of our eyes. And there's a sense in which the Hebrew people to whom this letter was written were facing some of these issues as well, maybe in different ways, but for them Christ had gone as well.

Christ was no longer there in the flesh. They had the apostolic teaching and the preaching of the oral tradition that had been handed down to them, they had the Old Testament book, the Bible, their Bible.

But Jesus had gone and it was really difficult for them and it was a struggle for them to keep believing in him because they didn't understand fully and they needed to learn more, they were being persecuted for their faith and so the temptation was them, for them sorry, was to hark back to the old ways, to the old days, to what was tangible, to the ritual, to the sacrifice, to the temple, to all these things of the Old Testament that they were safe and secure with, that they knew about and that would free them up in a sense from persecution and from temptation and from difficulty and would leave them with comfort, a degree of comfort.

[4 : 28] Things that were less challenging, things that were safer and maybe you feel that today, temptation to get somewhere safer, somewhere that's less challenging, less difficult, less swimming against the tide, is it, where are the society in which we live?

So I'm going to ask the same question today, where is Jesus? I'm going to come back to it and I want to do a little bit of digging before we get there. Where is Jesus?

We're going to find that in the first couple of verses but I'm going to come back to that in a few minutes, just in a few moments. So I want us to step back, just from that question, just for a moment, to step back from that question about where is Jesus today?

Literally where is Jesus today? Step back to asking the question which I think sometimes preaching and churches got to be about for us in our lives is we're asking, slightly taking a step back and asking the bigger questions, what today then for us is our greatest need?

What's the most important thing we need to think about? What is our life about? Why are we here? We can just stop for a moment and think, not why are you here in St. Colombo, Johnston Terrace, but why are you here?

[5 : 46] Why do you exist? What is my life about? Where have I come from? Where am I going? Who am I? Some of these big important questions, what about morality?

What about evil? Why is there evil? Why is there good? What about my death? What will happen when I die? What happens beyond the grave? You know, the kind of big questions that take us out of the temporary and take us out of the immediate, the immediate that fills our lives so much and what am I going to eat next?

What will I wear? This is beyond that into something that's more significant and bigger and asks the kind of frightening questions in many ways about our life.

Because we need to remind ourselves that the Bible is, the message of the Bible is it will relentlessly push us to ask these questions because these are the kind of big questions that the Bible's answering.

It's not going to tell you what to eat today. It's not even going to tell you what to wear today. But it will speak about these big issues relentlessly clear from the beginning that we are made by God, that we are made for God, we are made in God's image, that we are made to worship, that we will return to God, that God is the core of life, that God is the core of all that we see and of everything that there is.

[7 : 14] And yet there's been that massive disruption, the Bible speaks about that massive disruption, a cataclysmic fallout between ourselves and between God, where humanity has questioned his love, questioned his truth, questioned his rights and his lordship, rebelled against him, being judged by him, are separated from him naturally and have died spiritually.

Big, big truths that you know, there's a, you know, from the very beginning there's been a spiritual death. That is a death of love, a death of relationship between us and God.

And throughout that relentless truth about the big questions, the theme of the Bible is God's progressive revelation of how to be in relationship with him again.

It's how he has put right this wrong, that we can't put right, but that he in his grace and in his goodness has done, has provided the answer, has provided the rescue, has provided the relationship again through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, which you know, she understands.

It's really the book that speaks about the hound of heaven coming, exposing our sin and providing the bridge, isn't it?

[8 : 45] The great high priest that we've spoken about to kind of make it in terminology we understand a little bit better, is the great bridge builder, isn't it, between humanity and between God and Jesus Christ is the great bridge builder and he has done what has needed to be done to both expose and to take our and forgive our sins when we put our faith and trust in him.

And this is a very long way of taking us around to verses one and two, which says we need the Old Testament for that. We need to know the Old Testament and understand the Old Testament because it's part of God's progressive picture and revelation of what he has come to do and why he has come to do it.

So don't be, don't shorten and shrink your experience of God's revelation by only staying with the New Testament, okay?

Move to the Old because the Old will help you to understand. And Hebrews will make very little sense to you and it makes little sense to us unless we have that background, unless we, you know, the words, the terminology, the thinking, the pictures that it gives are all Old Testament pictures because that's part of God's ongoing revelation of himself as we'll come on to see, hopefully.

And in verses one and two he speaks about where Jesus is and he does so in Old Testament language. The point of what we are saying is this, we do have such a high priest, you could underline all the things that are Old Testament high priests who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, also an Old Testament term that's used to describe God and who serves in the sanctuary Old Testament.

[10 : 39] The true tabernacle Old Testament set up with the Lord not by man. So you've got these words that only really make sense for us if we have some kind of understanding of the Old Testament and particularly here of the tabernacle.

And we're going to look at the tabernacle more next week, okay? Because that'll speak in the next chapter, it speaks more about the tabernacle. But really the tabernacle is just a place in the Old Testament with God's people in the Old Testament where God lived with his people.

It's a dwelling place. That's what the name means, it's a tabernacle. It's a dwelling place. And God gave Moses certain many detailed instructions, many of which we have, about what the tabernacle was to look like.

And that is important for us because visually the Old Testament people learned spiritual truths about God from the physical building of the tabernacle.

There was lots of things physically about the building that were symbolic of spiritual truths about God which they learned, not least the separation of God and the Holy of Holies from everyone else.

[11 : 52] Not least from the fact that the priest would only go in once a year to represent the people. You know, you couldn't just drift into the tabernacle. You couldn't just drift into the Holy of Holies. There was rules and regulations because God was trying to explain the kind of God he was and the kind of need that we had and the sinfulness that separated us from him.

So as he had his people in the Old Testament, they would build a tabernacle which was kind of like God's house where God would dwell, God would live, would come down in the cloud of his presence and Moses would go into the temple or the tabernacle and meet with him or the priest would meet with him.

And the structure and everything is important and is central and speaks about the character of God. But the interesting thing is that there's also progression. And I just take a bigger picture just for a moment of the progression in the Bible's revelation.

You started with a desert tabernacle where God would symbolically live among the people. He would come and dwell in the power of his presence there. And then when they entered into the promised land, then it was slightly more permanent.

The tabernacle would live in different cities in the land of Canaan. And then of course it became the temple which was a beautiful, grand, amazing building that was in Jerusalem, the Solomon built.

[13 : 22] God dwelling among his people. God with us. But then came Jesus. Jesus is called Emmanuel, which is God with us.

See, the tabernacle spoke of God with his people in this physical way. And now Jesus comes and he's called Emmanuel, God with us.

And the Bible, John speaks about Jesus tabernacling among the people, dwelling with, living among the people. And Jesus does his work and he returns to heaven.

And the Holy Spirit comes and lives in the Christian so that the Christian is called, becomes the temple, we're told, of the Holy Spirit.

So there's this progression all the time. There's this really clear picture of what God is trying to say. He said, I want to be with your people. I want to show you what it is to be in relationship with me, but there's a barrier between us.

[14 : 19] But all the way through, I'm going to show you how to live in relationship with me and all focuses on Jesus Christ, who is God with us, who gives us as we trust in him, the Holy Spirit in our hearts, God in us, God with us.

And that of course will end in the new heavens and the new earth, which we were singing. I mentioned at the beginning in Revelation and we'll come back to as we sing from Revelation at the end of the service, where we will always be, God will always be with us eternally in perfect renewed kingdom, new heavens and the new earth face to face.

So we have that progression and Jesus is spoken here of as the one who sits at the right hand of God in the tabernacle set by the Lord. This kind of presence of God in his nearness and his grace.

We can see from Hebrews and I've said it again and again and again, the centrality of Jesus is absolutely significant and important. He is the the bridge builder between us and between heaven and between God.

And we sung about the resurrection because the resurrection reminds us of what we saw last week, that he is high priest by the authority of his indestructible life.

[15 : 40] He is the God who in Christ is the living because he is the author of life. He's the one as we saw last week who meets our need. So he is crucial to our worship.

He's crucial to our identity. He's crucial to our understanding of ourselves and of eternity and of salvation. He's crucial to our understanding of the Bible and to our interpretation of it.

We interpret everything in the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus Christ and through the message that everything is pointing forward to Jesus. So you read the Old Testament as a believer thinking what is this pointing towards?

Why does this speak about Jesus Christ? And we see that because it's central to him. Also in our motivation to pray, Jesus Christ is central because he is the one who intercedes for us.

He is the one who has redeemed us and he's the one who is our Lord and Savior. So I go back, I have a very long way round, go back to the very first question saying where then is Jesus?

[16 : 40] Where is Jesus? If you're asking that question, where is Jesus? The Hebrews 9, 1 and 2 tells us Jesus is in heaven.

That's where he is. That is where Jesus is. Where God is enthroned. Jesus is there at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

He is in the place today, this morning, where the souls of people that we know and love who are Christians have gone. That's where he is. He's in heaven. He's in the place where the angels are.

He's in heaven. Literally, physically, there in his risen body. He's there. He's in heaven. He's in heaven today at the right hand of the majesty and that's important for us.

That's important for us because exactly because we can't see him. So you can't see Jesus Christ today. So we must live by faith, okay?

[17 : 44] It's not simply enough to rely on ritual and church going and even other things that we might think are important because we live by faith and that is hugely significant.

He is real and we need to live in a spiritual reality as believers. Life then today for us is more than simply what we can see.

For you and for I today, this life is passing very quickly. For some visits, passing quicker than for others. There is a hell to shun and there is a heaven to gain and there is a real and meaningful eternity which we can't see but which by faith we believe because of the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension physically to a place where he is.

The only way that we can overcome temptation is by remembering that. For our light and momentary trouble, second and things forces are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes on what is not on what is seen but what is unseen because what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.

[19 : 00] So we have a really important principle today in our Christian lives, this core reality that we fix our eyes on what is unseen.

And that's very difficult for us because our lives are jam packed with today. They are jam packed with what will happen today, with my life today, with everything crowding in on us today, with burdens and fears and worries and concerns today.

So the concept of eternity is difficult for us to understand that Christ is enthroned, that Christ is victorious, that Christ is victor over death and is a redeemer and is even though we can't see Him enthroned in heaven.

So we need, we have a responsibility spiritually to fix our eyes on what is eternal. How do we do that? We do that through having a relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and His word.

As you read His word by faith and as you pray, you will be moving from one dimension to another. You're moving, you're not ignoring or forgetting this life but you're applying all of this life and looking all of this life through the lens and perspective, not only of eternity but with His help and grace to enable us to live in the way He wants us to live.

[20 : 30] So He is in heaven, we can't see Him but we know and believe that He is their serving believers. That's what He's doing.

He's at the right throne of the majesty in heaven and who serves in this sanctuary. So that picture of Jesus Christ who for believers today is interested in you and who is working on your behalf.

He is acting as the bridge builder, as the great high priest for you and me today. Not in the sense of being sacrificed again, that's a once for all act but in the sense of pleading on your behalf, empowering God to act on our behalf.

Very briefly at 3 verses Romans 8, 34. God before us who can be against us, Christ Jesus who died, who was raised to life and is at the right hand of the Father, is also interceding for us.

Now I've said this before and I'll say it again, it's a great thing when someone comes to you and says I'm praying for you. I was praying for you today. I was burdened for you today, I prayed for you.

[21 : 42] I know you're going through a difficult time, I'm praying for you. I understand your loss, I'm praying for you. He's a great thing. It's a great act of encouragement.

When was the last time you said to someone you were praying for them? Good thing to do. It's a really positive thing to do and it encourages and it's a great thing. Not just to say of course, it's a great thing to do.

But Jesus Christ is doing it, he's interceding on our behalf. You don't believe that do you? You don't believe that today? I know you believe it in your head because it's written down but you don't believe it really.

You'll not go out of here saying I believe Christ Jesus prayed for you because the way we live and the way we act often displays practical atheism when it comes to these things.

That we don't live as if we believe that Jesus is praying for us because it will make a difference. If the living God is praying for us, that makes a difference to how we live. It makes a difference to the way we speak to people, the way we react to the multitude of everyday things that come in and press on us.

[22 : 51] Doesn't it? If we know that Jesus Christ in heaven is interested and is active before the throne on our behalf. Hebrews 7, we read it a couple of weeks ago, therefore he's able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Are we wanting to give up because we don't think we can be saved completely? We'll not keep on until the end. Why because we think it's all up to ourselves? He says he's able to save completely. Why because he's always interceding for us?

It doesn't mean that we give up. It doesn't mean that we just say, ah, that's fine. Jesus interceding for us, you can do anything you want. But it does mean that our motivation comes from this great knowledge of his love and his concern and his interest in us.

One John 2, one, but if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ the righteous one. We have an advocate.

He's pleading for us, he's speaking for us, he's saying always, he's always making clear that his work is done. He's paid the price, our sins are forgiven. We have an advocate with the Father and that's what he's doing.

[23 : 53] He is in heaven, we can't see him, but he is working for us. And this book is all about Christ being better, better, better, better. There's 10, eight or 10 references to better in this book of Hebrews because the writer and God wants them to recognize, don't fall back, don't go to something else because there's nothing better than him.

There's no one like him. There's no one in heaven advocating, interceding on your behalf. Jesus is the only one that's there. Do you feel your life is insignificant and unimportant and that nobody loves you?

You need to lift the picture and see Jesus Christ as a Christian, as a believer and recognize him and what he is doing in your life and for you.

The centrality of Jesus, he is in heaven. And interestingly, he is also in us through his spirit and that's the kind of ongoing stages of God with us, God in dwelling us, God being with his people.

On Corinthians 6, you know it well, do you not know that your body is a temple, tabernacle of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God, you're not your own, you're bought with a price therefore on our God with your body.

[25 : 14] Because God gives us his life, spiritual life so that we can love him and serve him and love one another and we can overcome.

That's what he's done for us. We could never do that on our own and that really is the core of the better promises that are spoken of in this chapter, chapter 8.

I'm really looking at verses 1 and 2, the tabernacle, but also just that section or generally that section that is quoted from Jeremiah.

This is the largest Old Testament section that is quoted anywhere in the New Testament. It's the biggest section and it's a very important section because it's reminding us of the better promise.

It's reminding us that God knew what he was doing in the Old Testament. This whole section speaks about the old covenant, that there was something wrong with it, it needed to be changed, the blood of bulls and goats never take away sin and all of that.

[26 : 21] Now what it's not saying is that God said he tried it and said, well, how does it work? Ah, tell you, he tried something else. The Old Testament way didn't work.

It was a failure. I wonder if there's another way to save people. That's not what it's saying at all. And the quote from Jeremiah, which is an Old Testament prophet, it's a reminder that there was always going to be a better way.

This, the temporary way that things were done in the Old Testament wasn't God trying out a way of salvation, give it a go here, give it a go there and then trying another way.

It wasn't for his benefit, it was for ours. It was to make us see that just obeying the Old Testament laws would never save us. Nothing outward.

Just the blood of bulls and goats would never take away sin. It's reminding us that our need is so great that simply doing our best isn't enough. Obeying the law is impossible.

[27 : 19] And so it brings us to the point where we understand Jesus and there was always this better promise. It's brilliant, isn't it? This better promise that he says, when he says, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, I will be, what there?

I will be their God, they will be my people. It's a tabernacle thing all over again. I will be with them, they will be with me. And it's this great language of Jeremiah 31, where he's saying and reminding us that his way for us is not ritual, it's not moralism, it's not trying to be nicer, good or religious.

It's that we become a new creation from the inside out, that we are reborn spiritually, we are changed from the inside out. Don't rely on just being a nice guy.

It's just not going to work because we need to be born again from the inside out and move from death to life and be given an understanding and a love of God and his law from within, not from without.

So what we're reminded of in this passage that is prophesied from Jeremiah is that in Christ we are just not the same old person who happens to have a little bit of religiosity now and again.

[28 : 38] We're not the same old people that we were. We'll not always fail in the same way, lose our temper in the same way, get drunk, be full of doubt, be selfish because we're new creations from the inside out and our motivation is that God has changed us.

It's not about our clothes. It's not about what we look like on the outside. It's not about how we act primarily with one another in church, although outward things are important but the fruit of these outward things which can be like fruit must come from a heart that is changed, not from trying to change just from the outside.

And that's what he's promising here, the covenant is promised from Jeremiah about what Christ has come to do. He is the author of the new covenant. This we do every time we take communion.

This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in the remembrance of me. That's what Christ has come to do. He's come to change us from the inside out and that's what the Old Testament points to.

It says it's not just not enough to try and obey the laws or to try and do the ritual religion. You need faith and you need grace and you need the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 51] Those who believe in the Old Testament were believers on that basis. It points forward to the reality that we are dependent on God.

This is the covenant. It says, I will make, I will put my laws, I will be their God, for I will forgive their wickedness. It says God's initiative.

God is at work. We need God and we recognize that this new heart we need is about what God gifts to us. About what we can do for God.

That is so significant as we recognize that we come to Him in need and we come to Him in humility and it utterly, utterly dissolves self-righteousness and dissolves pride, spiritual pride and dissolves an independent spirit which says, I don't need God and I don't want God and I don't love God because by His grace we begin to see the cost and the plan that was always there to redeem us by His suffering and by His death and by His resurrection.

It is simply not tinkering around the outskirts of a reality. God is much, much more fundamental and it has that great forward trajectory as well, doesn't it?

[31 : 22] So that today is not the end of the story. Tomorrow is not the end of the story. Your death is not even the end of the story but that He is preparing a place where as He says, no longer will a man teach his neighbour or a man his brother saying, no the Lord because they will all know me.

From the least of them to the greatest for I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. So that future trajectory in the Bible which we pray, when did you last, maybe guilt, condemnation here we didn't do, we haven't done it for a long time in the church, the Lord's prayer.

When did you last pray the Lord's prayer yourself? Your kingdom come, you will be done in earth as in heaven, that focus even of the Lord's prayer where there is a future trajectory.

So this isn't the end, church isn't the end, it isn't an end in itself but there will be a day when everyone will know God in His kingdom, when sin and death and tears will be eradicated in eternal life with Him.

There will be peace and joy, selfishness and greed and division and chaos and death will have ended. That is His promise, that is the resurrection promise, because of the power of an indestructible life that is the hope that you have to cling on to as a believer when you can't see Jesus today.

[32 : 56] It is very important that we do that to be part of Christ's kingdom and to recognise spiritual realities and the spiritual dimension which the world in which we live is very quick to ridicule at one level, at one level, very often not at one to one level.

What then are we to fix our eyes on? There's many distractions that today will take your mind off the Lord Jesus Christ and of your faith in Him. Even before we finish the service, I am sure that is the case, but in terms of a perspective of living, you need to have a perspective and a thinking and I need to have that a way in which we regularly are able to fix our eyes on Jesus, moving beyond the things that are just transient and passing and taking our faith seriously.

Being committed to taking our faith seriously. It may be your family, it may be your career, it may be your health.

There's lots of things that can absolutely take up our life and He wants us to put Him first and to take faith in Him seriously because from that everything else will be in its rightful place and we will be better believers and better at loving God and loving one another because we are dependent on Him and that is our experience.

Let's bow our heads briefly and ask for that. Lord God, help us to be more dependent on you. Help us to understand that we are not in control ultimately and that when we die we will move into that reality of eternity which is exciting but also solemn and challenging and may we know today that the safe and secure place for us to be is in Christ Jesus who has promised his life and forgiveness and hope and eternity because he is risen and because he has been our bridge builder, our rescuer, our redeemer, our saviour and because he is God.

[35 : 18] So help us, we pray today to focus on that and help us in our own lives. We are particularly near to people who are here today, those of us today who might be struggling, who might find the way very difficult, who might find the world in which we live which is often quite aggressively against what we believe at least at some levels may we be able to stand up and with humility and grace give a reason for the hope that is within us and may we stand strong not on our own strength but may we be in this way at least dependent children on our Father in heaven that we come to you in need, that we come to you for grace, that we come to you for forgiveness, for wisdom, for an indwelling of the Holy Spirit and that we take our needs, our battles, our doubts, our fears, our struggles, our temptations, our sins, we take them all to you as the great, great high priest, the great bridge builder, the one who is interceding on our behalf.

May these truths move from our heads to our hearts and from our hearts to our arms and legs to the way we live and to the way we choose to the things we decide.

For Jesus sake we ask these things. Amen.