

Maundy Thursday
April 9, 2020
“Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament” (Hebrews 9:15)

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Mediator of the new testament. Amen

Our text for this Maundy Thursday is from the epistle chosen for tonight Hebrews 9:14-15.

**14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new testament, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This night, Maundy Thursday, in our epistle and Gospel readings, we hear the word “testament” used. For when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper He says in Matthew 26:28

“28 For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

The word “testament” is a very special word that God chose to describe His very special act of salvation. It is good for all of us to understand the richness of this word and what it means for each of us. First, I would like to describe the **unilateral nature** of Jesus’ new testament, and how this gives us much comfort. And second, I would like for us to receive comfort from understanding of who **the beneficiaries** are of this new testament.

I. The unilateral nature of Jesus’ new testament

The word “unilateral” literally means one-sided. A general dictionary definition is: (an action or decision) performed by or affecting only one person, group, or country involved in a particular situation, without the agreement of another or the others.

One example would be a "unilateral nuclear disarmament". One country decides to disarm one’s stockpile of missiles regardless of whether other countries follow suit. Of course, the country that disarms does so hoping that others will likewise follow but there is no guarantee.

Unilateral means there is no bargaining going on...no give and take. There is no “let’s make a deal” type of an agreement. I love that TV show because the contestant has the choice to trade what’s in the envelope or what’s in a small box for what’s behind the curtain. It could be something great like a new car, or it could be a zonk and the person gets nothing.

God's new testament promises of the coming Messiah and the actual mediating of them are dependent on God and God alone. He is the one who initiates and keeps the promise of the new testament Savior whether or not man believes it or not.

For a testament to have full affect, there has to be the death of the testator.

¹⁶For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. ¹⁷For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. (Hebrews 9:16-17)

This is how the law works, that a person doesn't receive an inheritance from the last will and testament until Uncle Harry leaves this world. Then, there is a reading of the will and an execution of it for the benefit of the heirs.

An important aspect of a will or testament is that it cannot be changed. What's written by the testator is what it is. It is unilateral. The testator's decision alone.

Galatians 3 speaks of this immutability when describing God' promise of the Savior to Abraham.

⁵Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's testament, yet *if it is confirmed*, no one annuls or adds to it. ¹⁶Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. ¹⁷And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the testament that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. ¹⁸For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise."

In a nutshell, God made the promise to Abraham that one of his offspring, the Seed, would be the Christ, and that the giving of the Ten Commandments 430 years later on Mount Sinai did not change that testament in the slightest.

There are no conditions and no agreements by a second party for a testament to be efficacious and in full effect. It stands on its own, unilaterally. No man or devil can annul it. And furthermore God's testament was made to the Seed, to Christ Himself. Does it not include then as beneficiaries all who are united in faith to Christ? Yes, indeed, but that's a little preview of the second part of this message...the beneficiaries of the testament.

But...back to the unilateral nature of the new testament and what a comfort this is. Again, this is God making this testament without consulting man first. God saw the sin of man and his inability to rescue himself from eternal condemnation and so God acted unilaterally, by sending a Savior, regardless of whether man would receive His testament or not. And many have not. It still remains in full force for you and me.

What remains in full force? ...that Jesus once and for all shed His precious blood to appease the wrath of His Father for the sins of the world. Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of the Passover who protects the beneficiary of His testament from the angel of death, of eternal death in hell. The

blood of Jesus is not marked on the doorposts of a physical house to protect the inhabitants as it was for the Israelites. But, it is marked on the doorpost of a person's heart where Christ Himself makes His temple and dwells there with all His forgiveness.

For our epistle describes what the unilateral action that God undertook to fulfill His new testament.

11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

The physical temple and the animal sacrifices in and of themselves were not able to forgive sin. But, they pointed the Old Testament people to the new testament Mediator who would sacrifice Himself once and for all! And, by their faith in the Messiah, these symbolic animal sacrifices pointed them to the forgiveness found alone in Christ! And they received forgiveness by virtue of the blood of Jesus!

Verse 24 after our epistle ends goes on to say...

24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are [k]copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Psalm 40 describes what was necessary to fulfill the new testament.

**Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;
My ears You have opened.
Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.
7 Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me.
8 I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law *is* within my heart."**

This was the unilateral decision and action of God alone to rescue man by taking on our flesh and coming to be our Savior.

The temple made without hands and not of this creation is Jesus' human nature. And by offering His blood on the cross, He entered the Most Holy Place – heaven itself!

All of this can never be annulled or taken away. The testator's will was accomplished! It was recorded in Holy Scripture, witnessed and confirmed by His resurrection.

So the next chapter of Hebrews, chapter 10 we hear:

11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

One unilateral, offering was made by Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament by which He perfected forever those who are being sanctified. What a deal! What a one-sided deal...that Jesus has done it all for all the beneficiaries receiving their salvation!

II. The beneficiaries of the Mediator's new testament

Well, who are they? According to the old testament, only the High Priest could enter into the Holiest of Holies after cleansing himself with a sacrifice. Who can enter the Holy of Holies ...heaven itself, where the High Priest Jesus is seated at the right hand of God?

All who believe in the Testator receive the inheritance of the will! The High Priest Jesus has torn the curtain to the Holy of Holies and all are invited to enter in to receive His mercy.

So Hebrews 10 tells us:

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:19-21

We have access! Every sinner has access to the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, our High Priest

The beneficiary is every sinner who receives Jesus' testament by faith and says, "Yes! I believe!"

This, my friends in Christ is the spiritual eating by faith of Jesus. This is eating Jesus, the bread of Life who has given us true hearts and a clean conscience!

Back to our epistle reading and our text:

14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new testament, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

And the conclusion of chapter 9 puts all of life in perspective. All men will die, whether it be by the Coronavirus or not. A Christian doesn't fear death, because at his or her judgment will be standing the High Priest who bore all sins. Jesus will appear a second time...for salvation!

²⁷And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

On this Maundy Thursday night, we hear of the hand that dipped with Jesus into the dish was the hand that would betray Him the next night. This had to happen. The testator had to die for His gracious unilateral testament to take effect.

“The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”

Jesus “**goes**” from this room where He celebrated the Passover and instituted the Lord’s Supper to the cross the very next day. He goes to accomplish what the first testament couldn’t accomplish. Not with the blood of goats and calves is the new testament of complete forgiveness paid, but with the blood of the Son of Man.

And yet, before Jesus goes, He initiates and enacts unilaterally one more gift for His church...the Lord’s Supper. He does this so that those who eat and drink His body and blood can be assured that the new testament has been accomplished and this is the very body and blood that were given and shed.

This, my friends in Christ, is the sacramental, supernatural eating that by faith the Christian does at the Lord’s table. And by “doing this in remembrance of Me” a Christian spiritually eats the Bread of Life by remembering what Jesus accomplished in His new testament.

Again, this last testament, the Lord’s Supper, is unilateral and cannot be changed or annulled. The real presence of Christ’s body and blood are not dependent on whether the recipient believes it or not. Jesus unilaterally gives His body and blood. Those who believe receive the forgiveness of sins and those who don’t receive it for their judgment, unworthily.

May the spiritual eating of Jesus, the Bread of Life, the new testament, strengthen all our faith as we look forward to the time when we can also be strengthened by Jesus’ gift of the sacrament of the altar.

So, this evening, we thank God that we are living under His mercy and grace through, Jesus, the Mediator of the new Testament. Jesus brought the new testament fulfillment or as I said colloquially on Palm Sunday, the “new normal”.

We live in days where our governor and judges speak unilaterally to us. And their orders of how we must live during this epidemic are to obeyed for our physical well-being. We may not agree with every order but out of love we do our best to abide by them. Our services come to us through electronic means, but the word is still efficacious! Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God!

What a joy it is to hear how our God acted unilaterally for our benefit. He required His Son to obey the orders that we could never fulfill. Jesus paid the ransom with His blood and established

New Testament! It can never be annulled and it's beneficiaries have in their possession, waiting for the final unveiling – heaven itself. What an inheritance!

John 3:16: "For God (the Testator) loved the world so much that He gave (into death) His one-and-only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him (the heirs) would not perish (the Testator's signature by word of promise) but have everlasting life (the inheritance)." Amazing! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 4:7)