

Spiritual Heart Transplant

Hebrews 8:1-13

The 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,² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

³ Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴ If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”^a ⁶ But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said:

“The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers 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.

¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house 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.

¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”^c

¹³ *By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.*

We are all too familiar with the devastating tsunami that hit Japan this past March. The tragedy is increased when you realize how many people ignored the warnings. I am not referring to the sophisticated buoys floating in the ocean that relay tsunami data but rather the hundreds of ancient stone markers that dot the coastline of Japan.



One such marker in the city of Aneyoshi reads, "High dwellings are the peace and harmony of our descendants. Remember the calamity of the great tsunamis. Do not build any homes below this point."¹ This particular city did heed the warnings as all of Aneyoshi's houses are built on higher ground.

One, in the coastal town of Kesenuma, is inscribed with these instructions: "Always be prepared for unexpected tsunamis. Choose life over your possessions and valuables."²

Another, in the city of Natori, simply advised, "If an earthquake comes, beware of tsunamis." This was a warning that not everybody heeded. In this one town

alone they discovered 2000 bodies.

Why did they refuse to heed the warnings? Like these stone markers in Japan, there was another stone marker in human history that was not heeded—but this one was much more serious. This one is detailed in Joshua's famous farewell speech to the nation of Israel.

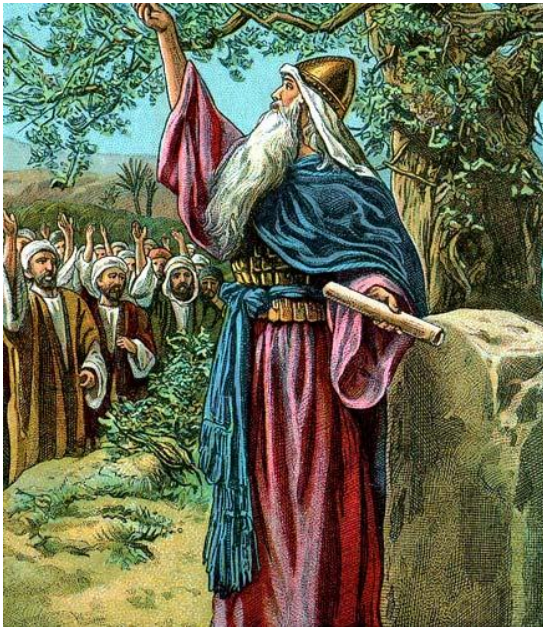
¹⁴ *"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."*

¹⁶ *Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."*

¹⁹ *Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."*

²¹ *But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."*

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”



“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

²³ “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

²⁷ “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

This was the renewal of the covenant that the Lord had made with the people through Moses over forty years earlier.

³ When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.” ⁴ Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”

⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:3-8)



Do you see the pattern here? The people promised again and again to obey the Lord and do everything that he commanded. They set up a large stone marker to as a witness of their commitment to the Lord’s commands. Any guesses how that worked out for them? Two chapters later in Judges 2 we read the outcome.



"The people lifted up their voice, and wept." - Judges 2:4.

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you,² and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?"³ Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you."

⁴ When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud,⁵ and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD. (Judges 2:1-5)

Here is a summary of their commitments to the

Lord.

- They responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do.
- They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."
- We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.

What do you think—did the people want to obey or were they just making false promises to appease Moses and Joshua? They set up stones of witness. They built altars and entered into a blood covenant with the Lord. I believe that all of these things were done to show that the people fully intended to keep these promises. These were not the empty promises of a used car salesman. These were true promises spoken out of sincerity and truthfulness. So what went wrong?

The author of Hebrews drew this conclusion. *For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another* (Heb 8:7). What was wrong with the first covenant that Moses made with the people? Paul referred to the law as "good," "spiritual," "holy" and "righteous." (Romans 7) but the author of Hebrews refers to the Law as "useless" (7:18), "wrong" (8:7) and "obsolete" (8:13). How can the Law be all of these things at the same time? The Law is good and spiritual but the problem occurs when you add in the element of the human heart. Paul expressed this in Romans 8:3. *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.*

Here is an illustration of the Old Covenant. When you add the holy and righteous law to our sinful human hearts, the heart weakens the righteousness of the Law and the result is useless and powerless.

THE LAW + SINFUL HUMAN HEART = WEAK/USELESS/POWERLESS/OBSOLETE

Do you see—the problem is not with the Law but rather with our sinful hearts. The Law cannot change the heart. The Law is good because it shows us our sin. Paul said it this way. *Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law* (Romans 7:7). The Law is good but it cannot change our hearts. In fact, it was never intended to do so. This is why the author of Hebrews quoted from a well known section of Jeremiah. Verses 8-12 of this chapter are a direct quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34. *The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant.* When Jeremiah spoke this prophetic word, the timing of this new covenant was still six hundred years away.

Jeremiah was announcing the coming of Jesus and the new covenant long before it would happen. It is important to understand the timing of Jeremiah's prophecy as well. He spoke to the people after they had been carried away into captivity in Babylon. Not only were the people carried into Babylon but so were the temple furnishings and then Solomon's temple was completely destroyed. For the next seventy years this was the end of the temple, the high priests the sacrificial system. What would they do now? How would they offer sacrifices? How would their sins be forgiven with no temple? It was in this context that God stilled their fears by predicting a new covenant. Something new was coming and Jeremiah explained what it would be.

First he described what it would not be. *It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers 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.* At this point in time, do you think the Jewish people knew the failings of what would come to be known as their old covenant? The fact that their homeland was destroyed and they were captives in a foreign land would have been all the proof that they needed. The law demanded obedience and for the past 800 years they had record of utter failure. They needed something new and better.

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. What exactly does this mean? It is certainly much more than memorizing Scripture. We know that it results in salvation as verse twelve says. *For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.* This implanting of the Law of God into hearts and minds is the new birth of salvation often called regeneration. This is the implantation of new life into a person.

Jeremiah was not the only Old Testament prophet to speak of the new birth.

*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.*²⁷ *And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws* (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

We cannot meet the demands of the Law because our hearts are sinful. Therefore, what we need is a spiritual heart transplant. The Holy Spirit removed our heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh. Here are some more New Testament passages to describe the new birth.

Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3).

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Eph 2:4

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ (Colossians 2:13).

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:3).

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth. (James 1:18).

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

Scripture has many different ways of saying the same thing. The key to the new birth is that this is completely a miraculous work of God. God said *I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* I cannot give myself a spiritual heart transplant. I cannot make myself alive or give myself a new birth. It's all grace. It's all mercy. This is why the new covenant of Jesus is superior to the old covenant of Moses. The old covenant was carved in stone but the new covenant was carved in our hearts and minds. The old would tell you what you must obey but the new gives you the power to obey.

This is why we must never reduce the Christian life to simply a list of things that we must do. Many of us are lists kind of people. The only thing we like better than writing lists is checking those items off of the list—am I right. This is why it has been difficult for me to use Outlook on my laptop for my list of tasks. When I mark the items as complete, they just go away. I don't get the satisfaction of seeing my to do list crossed off. We also love checking off the items on our spiritual checklist. Prayed today—check. Read my Bible—check. Made it to church—check. Didn't yell at the kids on the way to church—check. Sang louder than usual—check. Wrote a check to church—check. We can become really nice people with long lists of good things that we do and long lists of bad things that we don't do. We can be doing all of this but still living under the old covenant. What happens is that we begin with grace but fall back into the law.

For certain this has an enormous impact on the way we parent our children. You only have to ask yourself, "Do I want my child to grow up to be a good person or do I want them to passionately follow Jesus?" The answer we would say that we want is yes to both, but our parenting probably reveals that our efforts are focused on training them to obey us and be a good person. I might as well carve my list of rules into a stone tablet, don a long robe and walk down the mountain and announce my ten, twenty or thirty commandments—the more, the better, right? But our rules carved in stone are no better than the ones Moses carried down from the mountain. They cannot obey them any more than the Israelites could—nor can we, their parents. I am not saying that we

cannot train our children to obey but the first step toward their obedience is for you to help them realize that they cannot obey.

There are two things that are necessary to obey God's commands. First, we must be born again. Jesus said it was necessary. If you are not a believer, you can turn from your sins and place your faith in Christ alone. The worst thing that can happen to you is to be a really nice person but not be born again.

Second, we must walk in the power of the Spirit. In Galatians 5, Paul wrote, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you?" we can start with grace and so easily fall back into following the Law. Part of the problem is that we like to take credit for our spiritual success. We don't like to feel helpless and powerless—but we are. We need to become so desperate and so helpless that we say, "Jesus, I can't do this." This is the key to walking in the Spirit.

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October 9, 2011

^a Exodus 25:40

^c Jer. 31:31-34

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/06/japan-tsunami-warnings-fr_n_845818.html

² <http://www.good.is/post/ancient-people-are-still-awesome-centuries-old-japanese-tsunami-warning-markers-saved-lives/>