**God's Forgiveness Guaranteed**

Based on [Hebrews 9:15-18](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Heb9.15-18)

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Maundy Thursday

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(Based on this reading from Hebrews 9, verses 15-18). "**Therefore [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood**" (vv. 15-18).

This evening is Maundy Thursday. On the first Maundy Thursday, Jesus instituted a New Covenant in his blood. He instituted the Lord's Supper. And this New Covenant is a promise of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

If there is a New Covenant, there must have been an Old Covenant. And there was. The Old Covenant was the promises God made to the people of Israel as found in the Old Testament. And under the Old Covenant, there was already a sort of forgiveness promised. You can read about the "Sin Offering" and the "Guilt Offering" in Leviticus, Chapters 4 and 5. But the forgiveness offered there was very narrow and very limited. From the start, you and I likely wouldn't have qualified for this forgiveness, because it was only available to the Israelites: that is, the blood descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Leviticus 4:1).

But even for the qualified, the forgiveness of the Old Covenant was no picnic. It involved endless sacrifices of bulls and goats on the altar in God's temple (Leviticus 4:20,26). These sacrifices only atoned for **unintentional sins** (Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22), they only covered **past transgressions** (Leviticus 4:3) and only for known sins for which **one recognized their guilt** (Leviticus 4:13). The "sin offering,"--as it was called--forgave specific sins, but it did absolutely nothing about "sin." The Old Covenant did nothing about our sinful condition inherited from Adam.

The Old Covenant was given to Moses, and had been long in effect when David became King of Israel and wrote his Psalms. And you can see in David's writings what was lacking in the Old Covenant. David, from his heart cries out for *forgiveness*, and forgiveness of a type that the sacrificial system didn't address or cover. In Psalm 51, David writes, "**For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me**" (Psalm 51.3), and "**Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me**" (Psalm 51:5). Notice, he cries out to God not just on account of specific sins of the past, but on account of his whole "sinful condition", a condition he was born with, and a condition that is always before him.

David also writes in Psalm 19 of how impossible it is to recall, let alone number each and every sin that need atonement when he says, "**Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults**" (Psalm 19:12).

And even though the type of forgiveness David seeks is not granted under the Old Covenant, He repents of his sinful condition and is confident that he receives the forgiveness of sins from God. He writes, "**I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."** (Psalm 32:5). David knows first-hand that God forgives the repentant. Because in 2 Samuel 12 when David committed adultery with Bathsheeba, David repented. And--even though it was an **intentional sin** not covered by the Old Covenant--it was forgiven by God.

So let's review: The Old Covenant only covered sins that were (1) unintentional, (2) enumerated, and (3) confessed. And for each one of your unintentional, enumerated, and confessed sins, the Old Covenant said you had to sacrifice a goat. The sacrifice required a bull if you were a priest! This is no small thing. Imagine this in liquidated terms today. Imagine that you had to pay $100 per sin before you could be sure they were forgiven by God. We'd all be broke before this sermon is over. And once broke, we would be continuing to rack up debt upon debt to God every moment following. It is no wonder that Jesus says that he came, "**to give his life as a ransom for many**" (Mark 10:45), and that Peter says, "**You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot**" (1 Peter 1:19).

Hebrews 10 says of Jesus, "**By a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified**" (Hebrews 10:14). And it continues, "**Where there is forgiveness of lawless deeds; there is no longer any offering for sin**" (Hebrews 10:18). Redeemed of the Lord, please pause for a moment and consider what a great gift it is we have inherited from Christ for free. The Old Covenant made no provision for unintentional, hidden sins. Neither did it atone for our sinful nature as David so earnestly recognized. But because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, you don't have to worry whether this or that sin snuck past you, or whether in your anger or in your weakness you intentionally said or did something contrary to God's law. You don't have to fork over a goat every time you sin. You should still avoid sin, but sin cannot damn you or get the upper hand, because the New Covenant established in Christ, promises forgiveness for all sins of any who come to him.

Before Christ came, God forgave sins, and he even did so freely to all who return to him (Isaiah 55:7). But it was not part of the covenant. He did not promise to do so. **The Israelites were certainly "at" his mercy, but they were not entitled to it.** His full forgiveness was not bound to anything except rigorous and limited sacrifices of bulls and goats. **But when Christ poured his blood out on the cross and into the cup of the covenant, God made a new guarantee and he made it to all people.** He always forgave sins, but now we know he has committed himself to it. We who are in Christ not only have a trustworthy God, but we are entitled to forgiveness, because Christ won it for us and promised it to us. The new testament of God's Son guarantees free and full forgiveness for all who believe.

So what's the difference between a trustworthy and merciful God who makes no covenant, and having a merciful God who does? An illustration. Let's say you are going to lease a house to somebody. Are you going to do so without some sort of formal agreement with the tenant?...Some formal guarantee or assurance that they are going to uphold their end of the bargain? Of course, not. You might check a tenants references and things like that. You might know the tenant personally to be a trustworthy guy. Still you are not going to rely solely on the good character of the tenant without any paperwork at all. You need to lay out the terms of the lease and get him to sign an agreement.

Even for the most trustworthy tenants you do this, and it's for two reasons: (1) **So that you are both clear on what you are agreeing to and expect,** and (2) **Because when a trustworthy person signs his name to a promise, it is the most certain thing in the world.** It's not much use to have an untrustworthy person sign his name; he'll try to wiggle out of his agreement if he can get away with it. But the Word of a trustworthy person is solid gold, and as sure as the sunrise. If you're fortunate enough to find a trustworthy tenant that's wonderful in and of itself. But when he signs an agreement, you know what to expect and all that is promised is as good as done.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the significance of what Jesus does on Maundy Thursday. He establishes a new covenant between God and Man, signed, as it were, in his own blood. What difference does a covenant make? Without the New Covenant, the cross would give us no guarantees, no certainty, no peace of conscience. Without first laying out the promises of the New Covenant, Jesus' going to the cross would be like someone showing up to the chapel on their wedding day without taking any vows. Showing up is a nice gesture, but there is no wedding if no covenant was made.

But when you take vows, you make a covenant **because what you promise and can expect of one another is expressly stated in words that you can rely upon and refer back to**. It's not a contract, because a contract is breeched and voided when one party doesn't meet the terms. **But with a covenant, if one party fails to keep their vows, the wedding is not null and void.** The relationship, though damaged for a time, remains. A wedding establishes a covenant, because it establishes promises that--even when they are not kept--don't release the other party from its obligations.

On the night his Son was betrayed, God made a promise. **He promised that all who seek salvation through the blood of His Son will have forgiveness and life in Him**. In the words of Institution of the Lord's Supper, **Jesus signed his name to that promise**. He gives his Word, and when a trustworthy and reliable person gives his word, it is the most certain and valuable thing in the world. If you trust a tenant who signs his name, how much more shall you trust when God himself gives his word to an agreement?

Through his Word and His Sacraments we enter into his New Covenant of forgiveness. Like a marriage there are vows taken by both sides, by God and by us as well. We make promises too. **We promise that we believe his Word and will remain in it when it is convenient and when it isn't. We promise that we will Love one another as Christ has loved us. We promise that we are willing to lose everything we have before we would lose Christ and not be found in him**. These are no easy things or small promises for sinners. But the wonderful thing about a covenant is that your unfaithfulness to your promises cannot void God's. The only thing that can void a covenant is your rejection of it. Scripture says, "**The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful--for he cannot deny himself**" (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

So what does Jesus blood and death have to do with this New Covenant? Could god not have made a new testament without these things? Another word for a testament is a will. "Last will and testament"... right? Hebrews 9:16 says, " **For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive".** Christ lived the perfectly righteous life and is entitled to all the riches of heaven because of it. On Maundy Thursday, he drafted his will in the Lord's Supper, bequeathing his life giving and forgiving body and blood to all who partake of this meal.

And his death on the following day means that his "**last will and testament cannot be changed**." If you upset a living relative, he can "write you out of" his will. Not that he would, but now Christ cannot write you out of his will, for when Christ died, his testament comes into effect Galatians 3:15 says, "**Even with a man-made covenant [will], no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified**." Christ died, and at that moment he gave up his Spirit and his property is distributed as inheritance to his designated beneficiaries. What are we doing when we celebrate the Lord's Supper? We are drawing upon our inheritance from the cross of Christ. And in eating and drinking his true body and blood, Scripture says, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So beloved in the lord remember this and do not take it for granted...that though sin will remain in our life, so will the forgiveness of sins found in Christ Jesus, according to the New Covenant in his blood. In seeking God's forgiveness, we are no longer simply ***at*** his mercy; but entitled to it through the inheritance of Christ. And when we share the Lord's Supper, we draw upon that inheritance, we claim it and make it our own abiding in that covenant until Christ comes again. Scripture says, "**The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?**" (1 Cor 10:16). Yes, and a participation in the body and blood of Christ is a participation in his new covenant that cannot be voided, for even when we are faithless, he remains faithful. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Amen!