**Appreciate the New Covenant Blessings**

Hebrews 12:18-24; September 14, 2025

Sometimes I take things for granted. Maybe you would join me in that confession. While I hope I am improving across all areas of my life, I will mention one person it is especially easy to take for granted … Stephanie

* I do not always appreciate Stephanie’s continual service to me and our children as much as I should. Her works of service caring for us and our home has been monumental and yet, there are moments when I can be unappreciative or maybe even disrespectful of that sacrifice.
  + Of all the examples I could share, I will choose laundry… she likes to keep her clothes nice and wants to do the same for the rest of us. September 11 was our 32nd anniversary. For 32 years she has done my laundry because early on in our marriage we had a laundry episode.
    - I understood that darks were in one load, whites in another, and reds in yet a third. But one day I was sorting the clothes and I came across one of my shirts. I liked the shirt, but since I had never washed it before I did not realize what a messenger of Satan it really was.
      * You see, some Creten designed the shirt with a big red section, a large navy blue section, and finished it off with a huge white section.
    - I did not know what to do with that shirt. I stood over the piles with smoke coming out of my ears as my brain was caught in an infinite loop wondering what to do with it.
      * It was at that moment Stephanie realized that I was not capable of handling my laundry in an acceptable fashion let alone hers. She calmed me down, assured me that it would be okay, got me a beverage and then requested that I never touch her laundry again.
        + Finances were my job … laundry was hers
  + Her care does not stop with just doing the laundry. No, she is sensitive to how I look too.
    - Earlier this year we were having lunch at the Northend Café. In God’s sovereignty It was the same day that the search committee shared the church pastor survey results with the congregation.
    - I had not read it. She had skimmed it. While looking she came across a comment that said something like, “We think Rob might do a good job, but he dresses like a slob.”
      * That comment did not bother me. It made sense to me. Stephanie and I were like two teenagers on a date laughing hysterically and probably causing a bit of scene.
        + Amid the laughter, joy, and fun we were having, there was a more serious tone too. You ever heard of a mama bear? You don’t mess with mama bear. There is wife-bear also.
      * Now my wife and children have no problem making fun of me and my clothing choices. In fact, we had an ice cream emergency [explain] one day and Dairy Queen’s ice cream machine was broken. How is that possible?
      * Regardless, I was not calling an ice cream emergency and going home empty handed so I drove to Meijer to buy ice cream. I was in jammies and dress shoes. No one wanted to go in with me. In fact, they were already coming up with excuses should they be asked about my clothing choices by other church members.
    - But let me tell you. Somebody else saying that Rob dresses like a slob was full on fighting words. After lunch Stephanie was going to Kohl’s because she needed to get a few things. However, after that comment she went with new motivation. 2 hours later this is the photo I received (**Show picture**). She bought Kohl’s and brought it to our living room.
    - So, if you see some new and improved threads, you now know where they came from.

I tell those stories to make a point. Even amid all that care, love, fun, and joy it is still possible to take another person and their treatment of you for granted. As serious as that issue might be for a marriage, I would like us to reflect on whether we take the Lord and his new covenant blessings for granted.

Please turn to Hebrews 12:18. I have titled this message **Appreciate the New Covenant Blessings**. We will see that the Lord decides to contrast how his people relate to him under the old covenant with how his people do so under the new covenant.

Please follow along as I read Hebrews 12:18-24. This is the Word of the Lord. Read the text. At first, the text seems incomplete, even confusing.

* I was telling some of the other pastors that I had this passage and when compared with Greg’s text last week (which was loaded), this one was a nothing burger (I stole that phrase from Lee Morrison).
* In all seriousness, this text is also loaded. By telling us about the new covenant blessings, it invites us to think more about something that we could easily take for granted.

We can appreciate the New Covenant blessings …

**I. By recognizing the contrasting experiences of the Old and New Covenants**

There are seven descriptions of the Old and the New Covenants. They are not parallel. Instead, each of the descriptions reinforces the summary of the respective experience.

1. **The Old Covenant highlights our sin and guilt**

**Hebrews 12:18-21 For you have not come to *a mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.” 21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.”**

For all the positives about the old covenant, you could not escape the summary of “fear and trembling.” While the word mountain is in italics (that means it is not in the Greek text), the context is clear that Israel’s experience at Mount Sinai summarizes life under the Old Covenant while Mount Zion summarizes life under the new. Regarding the old … [**bring these in together**]

1. **Mount Sinai cannot be touched**
2. **It is burning with fire**
3. **Darkness**
4. **Gloom**
5. **Storm (Whirlwind)**
6. **A trumpet blast**
7. **A frightening voice**

Mount Sinai was not accessible except for a select few with specific permission. God’s holiness was on display.

* As our worship team read this morning, there was a certain amount of fear and awe for a holy God. Approaching flippantly was dangerous, even deadly.

When God spoke, the people asked for Moses to speak instead. When v. 20 says that animals who touch Sinai must die, the people found the commands too heavy. They even asked the Lord to quit talking directly.

* Exodus 19 and 20 is wonderful in many ways, but the experience was also scary and overwhelming. Since sin and guilt were present so was fear.

**Exodus 20:18-19 All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it,* they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.”**

Although God wanted to warn and encourage them, the writer of Hebrews reminds all of us that God’s holiness was a scary thing.

* Even Moses feared and trembled. Hebrews 12:21 quotes from Deuteronomy 9:19 where Moses reacts to the people’s rebellion with the golden calf and explained how he prayed for them.

The Lord tells us that Israel’s experience at Mount Sinai explains the overarching experience of the old covenant. Sin and guilt were ever before them and that means fear and trembling was normal.

* That does not mean God was not forgiving, gracious, compassionate, or patient. However, when you lived under the old covenant, you could never quite get away from the fear and trembling that came from personal sin and guilt.
* The sacrificial system that Jesus replaced was a constant picture as you watched the priest slit the throat of your family pet.

Now let’s consider the overarching experience of the new covenant …

1. **The New Covenant highlights our forgiveness and cleansing**

**Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.**

We also have seven descriptions of the New Covenant just as we had seven of the old.

1. **Heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God**
2. **Thousands of Angels in Joyful assembly**
3. **The church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven**
4. **God, the judge of all people**
5. **The spirits of the righteous made perfect**
6. **Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant**
7. **Jesus’ blood speaks louder than the blood of Abel**

These sound better. If the two lists of 7 were placed side by side, we would prefer this list. The blessings he describes summarizes a significant portion of the book of Hebrews. If the old covenant is about sin, guilt, a place you cannot approach, or a voice that scares you, we find the complete opposite in the new covenant.

* Here we find Jesus our mediator, thousands of angels rejoicing, entrance into the most beautiful city you can imagine, the spirits of those who were righteous (remember that equals living by faith even if there were some head scratchers) made perfect, God dwelling with his people and … and … and.
* Abel’s blood was crying out for justice. With no video cameras or witnesses, his blood testified to Cain’s guilt.
  + But Jesus’ sprinkled blood on the alter not made with human hands in the heavenly places screams out forgiveness and cleansing.

Our experience is totally different. Instead of fearing God we are more tempted to take him for granted because he is so good to us.

* Because my sin was removed as far as the east is from the west, I don’t worry about it.
* Because he graciously forgives the repentant, we can take ownership and move forward.
* Because he covers me with his righteousness, I appear clean before my judge.
* Because he mediates the covenant, I only need to draw near to him.
* Because he made my reservation (he wrote our name in heaven), I will enjoy the most beautiful place imaginable.

Being part of the new covenant is totally awesome. It is even better the more I read about the old one.

* For the new is fundamentally characterized by forgiveness and cleansing … by nearness and joy … by safety and beauty … by perfection and freedom.

I can show appreciation for Stephanie’s kindness in doing the laundry by: (a) always picking up my dirty clothes and placing them where she wants; (b) putting clean clothes away neatly; (c) folding finished laundry and moving washed clothes to the dryer; and (d) using my voice to thank her for her work. So …

What might it look like to appreciate our new covenant status? What might indicate that we understand or value the blessings of being part of the new covenant?

I started by saying we can appreciate our blessings by recognizing the contrast. What I would like to do now is make additional suggestions by looking at a few of the seven descriptions individually.

**II. By looking forward to your heavenly home**

**Hebrews 12:22a But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**

We learned in Hebrews 11 that God approved those who looked forward to the city not made with hands. They lived and died believing that God would still keep his promises for their eternal purposes.

While we should steward our life well and enjoy the blessings of God today, let’s not forget the heavenly home the Lord has prepared. I am not suggesting that we should desire a quick end to our life, we can live out …

**Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.**

Thus, there is always a sense in which we are living for our future.

* While there are things that we currently look forward to let’s thank the Lord that we have come to Mount Zion, the living God’s city, the heavenly Jerusalem where we spend eternity with him in his presence.

I get that we look forward to a wedding, the birth of a child, an exciting vacation, or some other event, but let’s not allow that to be the sum total of our excitement.

* We are destined for heaven because our savior Jesus is there.
* I don’t think we show much value for it if we act like we are bummed to go there.

Another way we appreciate the new covenant blessings is …

**III. By living with joy knowing the fullness of joy still to come**

**Hebrews 12:22b-23a** **and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven**

When the Bible was written, they did not use spaces between the words or punctuation. The Bible looks like one enormous string of letters (**Please put this picture on the ppt.** [**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex\_Vaticanus#/media/File:Codex\_Vaticanus\_B,\_2Thess.\_3,11-18,\_Hebr.\_1,1-2,2.jpg**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Vaticanus#/media/File:Codex_Vaticanus_B,_2Thess._3,11-18,_Hebr._1,1-2,2.jpg)). This shows the end of 2 Thessalonians and where the green stripe is, it starts Hebrews 1. They did not even use page breaks between books!

That is important because sometimes it is not always clear which word goes with which other words. In the NASB we see the myriad of angels, then a comma, then the general assembly. Notice how other English versions render our passage.

**Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. (NIV)**

**Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering. (ESV)**

Do you notice the difference?

* Are there a lot of angels with a whole bunch of other people standing there doing nothing?
* Or is the Lord telling us about an innumerable number of angels all assembled for joyful worship?

The word rendered general assembly, joyful assembly, for festal gathering is only used for parties. In most places, there is a feast that goes with it.

Here is my point. Being recipients of the new covenant blessings brings joy. There will be unhindered joy in the future when we reside with the Lord in his heavenly Jerusalem. In the meantime, there is joy in the blessings.

With our sins forgiven, our future secured, Christ’s righteousness applied, and his ongoing commitment to work in my life until the day of Christ, we have lots of reasons to live with joy now because Jesus made it possible.

The Bible tells us that angels rejoice every time a person places their faith in Jesus. No wonder they are rejoicing. The Lord is saving people all the time.

It might be that the Lord wants to save you today. The Bible is clear that not everyone is a recipient of the new covenant blessings. These are reserved for those who by faith trust Jesus as their personal Lord and savior. It is reserved for those who understand that their sin and guilt separate them and that they remain under God’s wrath.

* But Jesus came, lived a sinless life, and offers forgiveness for all who will repent and believe.
* I encourage you to place your faith in trust in Jesus today so that these blessings can be true of you.

Not only is their rejoicing over our salvation … then you add to it the joys associated with the Lord’s gifts….

* Last Sunday we celebrated the stadium. That was so cool. We had joy seeing what the Lord did, joy in watching the kids go crazy on the field, and imagining what the Lord will do in the future.
* Wednesday night ministries are going with people learning more about the Bible, encouraging their children, training others, learning to be a more biblical mom, preparing for a gospel presentation in song this Christmas, and learning more about our church in Introduction to Faith.
* Then we add the joys the Lord gives us in our family.
* Then we add that we live in a society that allows freedom of worship and freedom to tell others what we believe.

We ought to be the happiest and most joy filled people. The angels should not be alone in their joy. I suggest that we appreciate the new covenant blessings by recognizing the contrasting experiences of the old and new covenants, by looking forward to our heavenly home, by living with joy … fourth …

**IV. By being gracious to others as God has been gracious to us**

**Hebrews 12:23b-24a to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.**

Abel’s blood spoke in his place or the place of a witness. It testified to Cain’s guilt and treachery. However, here we find that the spirits of the righteous were made perfect.

* That is a testimony to God’s grace as we saw as we considered the inductees to the Hall of Faith.
  + Some of them surely were amazing, but others seemed more normal. They were approved because they believed. They trusted in the Lord’s promises.

But even more than the fact that those who lived and died by faith were made perfect, we have Jesus’ blood proclaiming freedom, the price being paid, and the worshipper set free from the power and penalty of sin. We deserve the wrath associated with disobedience.

We show appreciation for that grace—his grace—by giving it to others.

* There are times that our children do something we wish they wouldn’t. Maybe there is appropriate discipline that must help that child learn. But grace should also be at the forefront of our minds.
  + That means, even in discipline we show a lot of love.
* Spouses are not always wonderful to each other. There is a sweet union that comes with being married … with being known. But there is also greater opportunity for hurt.
  + Close relationships like a marriage will have some suffering. Is there grace for those moments?
* Unless we own a business, we work with people we did not hire nor did we ask to work with. Sometimes we jam each other up. How do we respond?

Can we respond with grace toward others around us and show in tangible ways how much we appreciate the Lord’s grace to us?

Please notice something else. Moses was full of fear and trembling. That was the experience of the old covenant. However, by the time we get to Hebrews 13:5-6

*Hebrews 13:5-6 Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” 6 so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”

Between Moses’ words and our words of confidence, we have the blood of Jesus declaring that the penalty has been paid and applied to our account.

That means among other things that we receive the Word of the Lord differently. It does not drive us to fear, but to confidence. I suspect I could have made that a point all to its own.

**VI. By caring for others as the New Covenant shows God cares for us**

**Hebrews 12:23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. (NIV)**

We are part of both a local church and a universal one. While we have a general obligation to all believers, we have a special obligation to those part of our own local body because we have power to act here.

When you think about your church family, there are a lot of care opportunities.

* One reason that we have all the campuses working through the same material – Caring for One Another in Faith Groups and ABFs is that we want to improve at caring for one another.
  + While that has a staff component, it also has an everyone component.

There are opportunities for care practically everywhere. That is because there are many needs of different kinds.

* Sometimes the needs are huge, public, and messy. Some of those get covered well.
* Sometimes the needs are quiet and personal.
  + There are many parents in our church who have at least one child not living for Jesus. That is a burden for them.
  + There are some struggling with career decisions and choices. How do I do a good job and gain a good reputation without killing myself or neglecting the others?
  + There are some struggling with health issues.

I am not suggesting that we will be able to solve all those problems, but sometimes caring is enough. A phone call, a card, a conversation can be what is needed to encourage each other.

* Last week Stephanie and I received a card from Lauren Garner. I think Lauren is about 15 or 16. It was kind and thoughtful. After reading the note I was like, how old is Lauren again? I told Stephanie that if we had had more sons, then we would betroth him to her right now.
* Here was a teen who certainly did not need to take time to write to us, but decided to do so anyway. In that moment she was sharing the Lord’s care for her to us.

Appreciating the Lord’s care for us does not just occur in the big moments. There can be lots of little moments too. I hope that appreciating our new covenant blessings will help us bless each other more.

Lastly for this message … we appreciate the Lord’s new covenant blessings …

**VII. By taking communion together in a worthy manner**

Today, we have the privilege of sharing communion together. The Lord’s table and new covenant are closely linked. Notice the reference to the new covenant and the associated implication.

**I Corinthians 11:25-32 In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it,* in remembrance of Me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.**

The Lord’s table is a new covenant exercise. The cup does not represent the blood of Christ only. It represents the blood of Christ taken into the holy of holies not made with hands, that is the heavenly one, and offers forgiveness once for all.

* Just as Moses sprinkled blood on the alter, so Jesus did inaugurating the new covenant.

That is why taking communion is very different than other church things. It is why there is a penalty associated with it.

* Some of the Corinthians were sick and others died because they did not take the Lord’s table seriously. Instead of judging themselves, the Lord had to do it.

That is why, as I mentioned, that the Lord table’s is very purposeful. We do it together. We wait for everyone to be served. While the bread is passed, we quietly reflect and pray.

* We examine or judge our own hearts. We ask the Lord’s forgiveness, which he happily grants, because we are already forgiven.
* As we move to the cup, we sing praise. We thank him for his perfect obedience and humility to go to the cross and secure our freedom.

I am glad that we can all be there this morning to celebrate the Lord’s table as one expression of our gratitude for the new covenant blessings we enjoy.

While we do a couple of these on Sunday mornings most often we do so on Sunday night during Church Family Night. I encourage you to participate with us regularly.

* Instruct your children about the Lord’s table and help them understand the theology of the new covenant which makes the elements so special.

It is not hard to think of ways to appreciate the new covenant blessings.

* Thank you Jesus that the new covenant is characterized by forgiveness and cleansing leading to freedom rather than sin and guilt leading to fear.

Pray

Lord’s Table (After the song)

Ask the men to come … we practice open communion. You do not need to be a member but you must satisfy the 2 requirements (1) conversion and (2) examine yourself.

1 Cor 11:23 // Ask man to my right to give thanks

Read v. 24 // Take the bread

1 Cor 11:25 /// Ask man to my left to give thanks

Read vv. 25-26