

ASCENSION SUNDAY — A GREATER FAMILY

Hebrews 8:8–13

“For he finds fault with them when he says:
‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah,
not like the covenant that I made with their fathers
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.
For they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.
For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.’
In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.
And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

Prayer

Jesus, thank You that You don't just give instruction—you bring transformation. Open our hearts to receive what You've done and what You're doing right now. In Your name, amen.

Introduction

Some of you may know the story of Louis Zamperini.

Olympian. Disciplined. Driven.

The kind of man who believed if you pushed hard enough, you could overcome anything.
Then World War II hits.
His plane crashes in the Pacific. Forty-seven days at sea. Nearly two years in a prison camp.
Beaten. Humiliated. Abused.
But he survives. He endures. He returns home a celebrated hero.

But he's not okay.

The war followed him home. Nightmares. Rage. Alcohol. He could survive the ocean. He could survive the prison camp. But he couldn't fix what was happening inside of him.

And if we're honest, that's where a lot of people live.

You can function. You can succeed. You can hold it together on the outside.
But inside... something isn't right.
You've tried to change. Made promises. Broken promises. Tried again.
And deep down, you know—you don't just need help... you need something deeper.

Zamperini was on the brink of losing everything. His wife comes to faith and urges him to hear the message of Jesus.

Not try harder. Not fix yourself.
That Jesus didn't come to make him stronger—He came to make him new.
And everything begins to change.

The nightmares stop. The rage lifts. And the man who once wanted revenge goes back to forgive.
Years later, he stood in Nagano carrying the Olympic torch—full circle.

Not in his strength. Not in his suffering. But in a new self—living proof of the greatness of Jesus.

That's not self-improvement.
That's not behavior change.
That's transformation.

Hebrews 8

This passage is built on two words.

“I will.”

“I will write my law.”

“I will be their God.”

“I will remember their sins no more.”

The old covenant said, “You will.”

The new covenant says, “I will.”

And some of us are still living like the old covenant is in effect.

If I do enough, God will accept me.

If I try harder, I'll finally change.

If I fail, I've probably disqualified myself.

That's not Christianity.

That's pressure. That's exhaustion. That's a system Jesus already fulfilled.

If your relationship with God depends on you holding it together, you're living in the wrong covenant.

Because the new covenant is not based on your faithfulness to God.

It is based on God's faithfulness to you.

That's why it works. That's why it lasts. That's why Jesus is over everything.

And what that produces is a new heart.

“I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.”

The old covenant wrote on stone. The new covenant writes on the heart.

The old covenant said, here's what you should do.

The new covenant says, I'm going to change who you are.

The problem was never information.

The problem was transformation.

We don't need more rules. We need a new heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 says, *“I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you.”*

And this is why the resurrection matters.

On the cross, Jesus deals with sin.

In the resurrection, He declares it finished.

Jesus didn't come to make you better.

He came to make you new.

And when the heart changes, the relationship changes.

“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

This is not knowing about God.
This is knowing God personally.
Because “I will remember their sins no more.”

Your sin is not ignored. It is removed.

Which means you cannot have closeness with God if your sin is still counted against you.
But when it's removed, relationship is restored.
And that relationship is secure.
Which means you don't approach God cautiously.
You don't approach Him conditionally.
You approach Him as someone who belongs.
Not trying to get back in.
But already brought near.
And then the text says something powerful.

“They shall all know me.”

Not a portion. Or the qualified. Or even the cleaned-up ones.
Which means the family God is building is not closing.
It's not guarded. It's not exclusive.
It's expanding.

And this is where we feel the tension.

Because when we hear “family,” we instinctively protect it.
We decide who belongs. Who fits. Who doesn't.
We create distance without even realizing it.

We start protecting an idea of community instead of actually building one.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *“The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.”*

Because it's easier to love the idea of people than the people God actually brings.

It's easier to build something comfortable than something real.
But the family Jesus is building is not based on preference.
It's not curated. It's not controlled.
It's formed by grace.

And grace always makes room.

Because the same grace that brought you in is the grace meant to bring others in.

If your version of family makes it harder for others to come in, it might not reflect the family Jesus is building.

You see this tension in Peter.

Peter was confident. “Even if everyone else falls away, I won’t.”

And then three denials.

Jesus turns and looks at him—and Peter breaks.

And then... silence.

No explanation. No resolution.

Peter is left wondering, am I still in? Am I disqualified? Is it over?

The same man who said, “I will never fall,” is now wondering if he even belongs.

And then Jesus rises from the grave.

But He doesn’t leave.

For forty days, He stays.

Appearing, teaching, restoring.

Because He wasn’t just proving He was alive.

Jesus was forming a people.

He meets Peter on the shore.

No lecture. Just a question.

“Do you love me?”

Again. And again. And again.

Not just forgiving him.

Restoring him.

Rebuilding him.

Re-forming him.

And then He ascends.

Not because He’s done.

But because His work has entered a new phase.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Interceding for us.

Which means right now, Jesus is not distant.

He is active.

Sustaining your relationship with God.

Securing your place in the family.

Interceding when you don’t have the words.

Ascension is not Jesus leaving. It's Jesus reigning.

And from that place, He is holding you.
Which means your relationship with God is not fragile.
It's not held together by your consistency.
It's held together by His finished work and His ongoing work.
And that produces something.
Not just individuals.

A New Covenant – A New People

“They shall be my people.”
This is why we don't just attend.
We belong.
This is why we don't just sit in rows.
We move toward people.

When God restores relationship vertically, He begins restoring horizontally.

You don't just get a new relationship with God.
You get a new relationship with people.
Not perfect.
But real.
And that leads to something even deeper.

The Family of God.

Jesus didn't just leave a message.
He left a people.
And that people is a family.
A family that celebrates when it grows.
A family that makes space.
A family that moves toward one another.
A family that doesn't pretend everything is perfect—but knows where to bring what's broken.

And for some of you, that word “family” is hard.

Because for some of you—family wasn't where you were brought in... it's where you were pushed out.
It's been painful. Complicated. Distant.
So when you hear it, you don't lean in—you pull back.

What Jesus is building is not a reflection of brokenness. It's a restoration of what family was meant to be.

A place where you are known and not rejected.
Seen and not overlooked.
Brought in and not kept at a distance.
Not because people are perfect.
But because Jesus is.
And when something changes on the inside, a family marks it.
Not as pressure.
Not as performance.
But as a declaration—something real has happened in me.

Resurrection opens the door, the Ascension establishes the household.

And what Jesus is building is a family.
And the text tells us something else.

The old is becoming obsolete. It's ready to vanish away.

That doesn't mean it disappears overnight.
It means it's losing its power.
And this is where a lot of us live.
Because we've been made new, but we still feel the pull of the old.
We still think, if I do this, God will respond this way.
If I fail, I've set myself back.
If I don't hold it together, I might lose my place.

That's the old covenant thinking.

And it doesn't disappear instantly.
It fades as you learn to trust what Jesus has already done.

Zamperini didn't just become new and never struggle again.

He had to learn to live as a new man.
To forgive when everything in him said hold on.
To trust when everything in him said control.
That's sanctification.

Not becoming new, living from the new.

You are not becoming someone new.
In Christ, you are a new creation with a new heart
Now you are learning to live like it.
And the question isn't whether Jesus has made a way in—
it's whether you're still standing at the door.
Jesus didn't come to make you better.
He came to make you new.