

**April 2, 2026**

**Exodus 24:1-11**

**A Better Covenant**

*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, along with Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship me from a distance. <sup>2</sup>Only Moses is allowed to come near the LORD, but the others are not to come near, and the people are not to go up with him.”*

*<sup>3</sup>Moses came and reported to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances. Then all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do.”*

*<sup>4</sup>Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.*

*He got up early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He set up twelve memorial stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup>He sent young Israelite men, who offered whole burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings of cattle to the LORD. <sup>6</sup>Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and he splashed half of the blood on the altar. <sup>7</sup>He took the Book of the Covenant and read it out loud to the people and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do. We will obey.”*

*<sup>8</sup>Moses took the blood and splashed it on the people. He said, “Look, here is the blood of the covenant, which the LORD made with you by means of all these words.”*

*<sup>9</sup>Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up. <sup>10</sup>They saw the God of Israel. Under his feet they saw what looked like a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky. <sup>11</sup>The LORD did not lay his hand on the dignitaries of the people of Israel. They gazed at God, and they ate and drank.*

For three days, Israel camped in the shadow of a mountain covered with thick smoke and cloud. God had spoken. He had given Moses many laws for the people to obey. He had made it clear to them how they should live. Their response clear and united. Together, they said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do.” This was the birth of Israel’s bilateral – or two-sided – covenant with God. If they would live as his people, then he would be their God.

What a joyous and momentous day. Moses built an altar and placed twelve memorial stones, one for each tribe that had just entered into this deal with God. What a beautiful deal it would be, God leading them to victory by his power and them living the lives God called them to live. What could go wrong?

But you know how things went. In fact, you don’t need to read on very far in Exodus to find their inability to keep their end of the promise. In their fear that God was no longer with them when Moses went to the top of the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, they built a statue of a golden calf, worshipping it in place of the God who had rescued them from Egypt. They grew tired of the miraculous food God had given them, and they grumbled against him. And when they would finally get to the Promised Land – the land God had promised them now for generations – they chickened out because the people living there were too strong and they didn’t believe God would give them the victory.

Pick anywhere in the Old Testament and you'll inevitably find many such failures. The pages of scripture are stained with sin. This covenant, while good and holy, had created a mountain that God's people could not climb, literally and spiritually. Their sin kept them from climbing Mt. Sinai to see God. In fact, God had erected a border around Mt. Sinai. Anyone who crossed it would have to be put to death. Why? Because a flawed people cannot come into the presence of the holy God.

But our attention turns to another mountain, more than 200 miles from Sinai. The Latin name of the mountain was Calvary and the Greek was Golgotha. Both mean "the place of the skull." On this mountain, the covenant between God and man was not bilateral, but unilateral. The focus was not on what the people had done. There was no promise required like before. Instead, this one-sided deal focused on a man, a man making his way up this mountain with a cross crushing down upon his shoulders. And this man was not on the mountain to cut a deal. He was there to pay a debt; to give the kingdom of God away to a world full of broken failures, all those who had not been able to keep the first deal. On this mountain, the covenant was kept because God is both the giver and keeper of this promise.

But let's return to the first mountain again. After Moses built his altar to God and laid the memorial stones to remember this day, things got messy. He tasked some of the young men to start butchering oxen for the sacrifices God had commanded. They drained the blood from these animals and placed the carcasses on the altar, some to be burned completely and others to be cooked only partly. Then Moses took the blood. Half of it was used to splash the altar. You can imagine the sizzle as it met the fire. It reminded them of what they had agreed to with God and what would happen to them if they failed to keep their end of the bargain. After this, Moses began to read the Book of the Covenant, bringing to the surface everything God expected of them. They responded once again: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do. We will obey."

Then came the second half of the blood. This blood was not splashed on the altar, but sprinkled on the people. He said, "Look, here is the blood of the covenant, which the LORD made with you by means of all these words." A blood covenant. Hebrews nine explains this well: "Indeed, after every command was spoken by Moses to all the people, in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water and scarlet wool and a hyssop branch, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people. He said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God established for you.' In the same way he sprinkled blood on the tent and all the objects for worship. And nearly everything is cleansed with blood according to the law. And, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."

Again we transition away from Sinai, to the upper room on the Thursday of Holy Week. Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover meal, a holiday that included an almost-liturgical format of eating and drinking. But Jesus diverted from the norm. He took some bread, blessed it, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then, after the meal, he took a cup of wine, and said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Another blood covenant, and almost the exact same words Moses had used! But this new deal would be different from the old deal. Of course the blood of bulls and goats could not

actually take away sin. All the sacrifices made in Israel would not rescue them from sin. No, it would take even more precious blood than animal's blood.

So, Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the world. He shed his blood to continually draw his people into this new, one-sided covenant of "God for us." It would take the blood of life to make mankind right with God. And that is what Jesus did, carrying every impure word and thought that ever stirred in the recesses of our minds, cleansing every selfish action that further corroded our relationship with God and others. And now, when you come to the table for the Lord's Supper, he comes to you again, not to sprinkle blood on you and make you aware of your sins, but to let you taste and touch and smell this blood of the new covenant, a blood that does not demand you "do" but instead cries out "done."

At Sinai, a meal was had too. But this one was exclusive. As God had commanded, only 74 were able to climb the mountain: Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. And once they reached the part of the mountain God wanted them to climb, he gave them some sort of vision. They saw him – in a dimmed state to keep them from perishing – standing on this lapis lazuli stone. God did not harm them, but they ate and drank in his presence, the greatest dinner and a show one can experience on this side of heaven.

It had to have been quite a blessing to be one of the few called up the mountain. But how about the rest? And what does this tell us about the old covenant? In a way, the limited nature of this meal also shows the limited nature of the covenant. God had given this to Moses and the Israelites. Not the Egyptians. Not the Canaanites. This group that had grown out of a nomadic sheepherder. Certainly, some Gentiles would come to know God through the Israelites. That was why God told them they'd be a light for the nations and that all the nations of the world would be blessed through Israel's seed. But this deal – "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" – was limited and exclusionary. It was a covenant for a few.

But this supper we see Jesus institute tonight has no family or ethnic boundaries. It doesn't call for representatives to receive it on behalf of others. In the Lord's Supper, the new testament in his blood, the invitation is for the many, that all may know the love of Christ in his new covenant.

Back to Sinai one more time. Was the old covenant a trap? We might be tempted to think that God set Israel up for failure. But this old deal had value. It served as a mirror to show people their sins. No one can read God's law with an honest heart and continue to boast in themselves. It silences our protests under the weight of its accusations. But the old covenant also served as a Jesus-shaped shadow of what was to come, continually pointing God's Old Testament people toward the Savior who would fulfill the old covenant of law and establish a new covenant of grace. Paul says this to the Colossians: "Therefore, do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ." The sacrifices mattered. They did not forgive. They showed Christ. The law mattered. It could not be kept by man, but it pointed to Jesus, who would keep this old covenant in our place and hand us peace with God in the new covenant. By showing Israel they could not keep the law, God was stripping them of their self-reliance. He was preparing them to trust completely in the promised Savior.

Mt. Sinai served its purpose in showing us our need. But now, no shadow is needed. The sun has risen on Golgotha, showing us the face of the one we need. We don't live in the "do this and live" of the old. We live in the "it is finished" of the new. The two-sided covenant is fulfilled. Now it is only one-sided, God for us. And in a few minutes, we are going to partake of that covenant all over again. Amen.

**April 3, 2026**

**Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9**

**Who do you trust tonight?**

*<sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, namely, Jesus the Son of God, let us continue to hold on to our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. <sup>16</sup>So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

*<sup>7</sup>In the days of his flesh, he offered prayers and pleas with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup>Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. <sup>9</sup>After he was brought to his goal, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him, <sup>10</sup>because he was designated by God as a high priest, like Melchizedek.*

Do we have to talk about sin too much on a night like tonight? You've walked this Lenten path with your Savior to the cross. You've been shown your sin at every turn. And tonight, you watch your Savior writhe in pain, crushed under the weight of your iniquities. Do we have to talk about sin too much on a night like tonight?

We gather here because our battle against temptation has not gone well. Each of us fails every hour of every day. Even on our best days, even when we think we're doing pretty well, sin slips its way in, sometimes without our even noticing. And the greatest temptation we face is the temptation to ignorance, to pretend that we're doing a great job and deserving of an attaboy from God. But neither our conscience nor the Word of God tell us that. They tell us we're broken. They tell us there's something in between us and God, a roadblock we have placed.

That's why we need someone to step in. In the Old Testament, that was the priest's job. He wasn't just a leader. He served as a bridge between a holy God and rebellious. He made sacrifices on the people's behalf, interceding with the Father on their behalf. But there was a priest of priests, the High Priest. He wore a breastplate with all twelve tribes of Israel carved into its stones. So, when he went into the Tabernacle to make sacrifices for all the people of Israel, he carried their names in with him. He was one of them, a mere man, but he was also set apart by God.

As we look at what the priests of Israel did for the people and especially what the High Priest did, we recognize that we need someone to do the same for us. We need someone to stand in that gap and

mend the relationship with God that we have ruined. We need someone to intercede for us, carrying our names upon his chest into the Most Holy Place of God.

And that brings us to tonight, to our text from Hebrews four and five. Jesus is not some outside observer of our pain. He doesn't know about it because he's studied it in a lab. He knows it because he's felt it. We think we know temptation because we feel its pull. But Jesus knows it better than even we do, because he never gave ground. He never allowed a "lesser" vice to take hold so he could escape the "greater" one. You say no one knows how it feels to be you, but Jesus does, better than even you do. As true man, he is God in the flesh, who entered his creation completely. Just listen to what the writer to the Hebrews says: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." Jesus knows the weight of temptation because he has felt the fullness of that weight and what it means to be human in this broken world. And because he understands our situation personally as the God-man, he is the only one who is qualified to mend what we broke.

Listen to those last few words we just read: "yet was without sin." This is where Jesus differs from us, and the reason he can be our High Priest in a way that none of Old Testament Israel's High Priests could. Jesus could perfectly obey the law of God. He could overcome temptation, not giving it even an inch. And he did. He lived the perfect life that we could not, even on our best days.

Do not take this for granted! It's easy to treat Jesus' perfect life with little amazement. We say, "He was true God, wasn't he?" But understand what obedience to God's commands brings. It brings the scorn of those who just want you to go along to get along, to bend here or there to make things easier. It brings having to say difficult things to those who don't want to hear them instead of quietly nodding along. It means sacrificing for others instead of yourself, letting your schedule and emotional battery be dictated by the needs of those around you – even your enemies. Jesus didn't just keep from blurting out crass language. He didn't just keep from stealing or murdering. He kept from lusting. He kept from hating. He kept from ever seeing anyone else as anything less than souls in need of a shepherd and dearly loved by God. His obedience to the Father's will did not come easy. It was a deliberate, agonizing choice that he made every second of his life.

Tonight, we see the completion of his work. Not only did he live without sin. He took that perfect life and gave it up. Our High Priest didn't just slaughter the lamb. He became the lamb. He took the punishment for every sin ever committed upon his body. He allowed himself to suffer hell and die for the sins of a world that drove the spikes into his hands and feet. Yes, Good Friday worship is darker and more somber than normal. Our inability to fight temptation and our need for a Savior make it so. But by finishing this work, by giving up his life, he becomes the source of our eternal life.

This is why we join on this somber night. It shows the weight of our sins, and because it shows the weight of our sins, it also shows the weight of Jesus' sacrifice. Because we have a High Priest who has sacrificed his perfect life in our place, God's throne of judgement has become the throne of grace. We don't approach God as defendants in a courtroom, but as children approaching their father. We have confidence because our High Priest has bridged the chasm of sin we had built, interceding on our behalf with the Father through his meritorious blood.

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You do not need to be afraid of God. You do not need to hide from him. Your sins have been crucified with Christ. Your debt has been paid. You can live freely because Jesus has set you free. You can trust him when he tells you your battle against sin, death, and hell is “finished.” Look to the cross of Christ and see what you so desperately needed but never could produce.

This is good news. This is such good news, that it causes a spring of faith to bubble up inside of us, erupting with all the power of Old Faithful. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, namely, Jesus the Son of God, let us continue to hold on to our confession.” We hold firmly to the truth that this sacrifice did the trick, that our fight against the forces of hell is over. Our High Priest has won. But this confession that Christ died for us isn’t only for this room. We confess it boldly to a world that is trying to mend the wound mankind cannot heal or has completely despaired. Our High Priest has passed through the heavens. He has done the work we needed. The throne of grace is ours.

So, do we have to talk about sin too much on a night like tonight? Of course we do. But we have so much more to say about God’s grace. We have God himself as our High Priest, who took on flesh so that he could fight the battle we could not. No more guilt. No more pain. No more fear. Why? Because we’ve stopped trusting in ourselves and instead find peace in Jesus. Amen.

**April 5, 2026**

**1 Corinthians 15:1–11**

**“I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”**

*<sup>1</sup>Brothers, I am going to call your attention to the gospel that I preached to you. You received it, and you took your stand on it. <sup>2</sup>You are also being saved by that gospel that was expressed in the words I preached to you, if you keep your hold on it—unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:*

*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*

*<sup>4</sup>that he was buried,*

*that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*

*<sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.*

*<sup>6</sup>After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, he appeared also to me, the stillborn child, so to speak. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God’s church. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not ineffective. On the contrary, I worked more than all of them (and yet it wasn’t my doing, but it was the grace of God, which was with me, that did it). <sup>11</sup>So whether it is I or they, that is what we preach, and that is what you believed.*

“I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” We confess those words at the end of the Apostles’ Creed. But by the time we get to the end of the Creed, are you already running on autopilot? Do these words mean anything to you, or are they just sentences we say every week after the

sermon? This is our confession. This is what we believe. And it's more than a Facebook post or TikTok video with our opinion on any given matter. This is our confession of unity in the faith handed down to us from of old.

But how much does it really matter? Sure, we get to celebrate a special service today. The church is beautifully decorated. Maybe you've got a nice family meal waiting at home and the day off of work tomorrow. But in the scheme of your life, how much does this day really matter? That's really the main question that the importance of this day hinges on: What difference does it make whether he rose or not?

If Christ has not been raised, the good news of the gospel is not all that good. If Jesus was just a man who died, he simply becomes a teacher and a martyr. But a martyr for what cause? Over the last two millennia, has the world really become a better place? Has human nature really changed? We still see wars and hatred. In fact, our increase in technology fills our screens with videos of violence and images of the unimaginable. We see broken families, ruined by the same things that families have always been snapped in half by. We see depression at sky-high levels, even as many will point to the industriousness of our age and claim that there's never been a better time in history to be alive. And – even though our doctors and nurses try everything they can – we still see death. It's no wonder that those who claim follow Christ – but believe the resurrection is nothing more than a metaphor – live with such despair about the state of the world. It seems his martyrdom didn't work. It seems his cause for peace has failed.

If Christ has not been raised, sinners remain trapped. Sure, Jesus had spoken, "It is finished." But how would we know the power of God that conquered sin? How would we know that the check cleared? How would we know his sacrifice was accepted by God? Victory was certainly not on the lips and minds of those who watched him die. If the tomb was the end of the story, there is no rejoicing for his followers; just scattering, hiding, and disavowing the fraud. Where do we find his disciples on the night of Easter? Locked in a room, terrified. "It is finished" gave no confidence to them as they grieved the loss of their leader and regretted ever following him.

Worst of all, though, was the fact that they still believed they were trapped in their sins. If there is no resurrection of Jesus, our guilt is still alive. Paul writes just a few verses after our section here, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." And if we are trapped in our sins, then death reigns over us. And if death reigns over us, does anything we do in this life really have any lasting meaning? Or are we just lives hurdling toward the grave?

If Christ has not been raised, the scriptures are untrustworthy. All the promises of God hinge on the historic resurrection. Even Jesus himself predicted and promised his resurrection. If the events of Easter are not historical facts, Jesus is a liar and nothing he said should be believed. Our Bibles should all be thrown out as worthless story books that do little more than to moralize us into a set of rules we can never keep. And there is no evidence of a loving God, no evidence of the forgiveness of sins, and not even evidence of a divine Creator. All fictions. All fairy tales.

But the tomb is empty. The strips of linen are folded up where his body should be. He is risen! And we don't just know he's risen because his body is gone. We know he's risen because he showed

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himself – resurrected from the dead – to many witnesses. And those witnesses held to that truth and confessed it even under the threat of death. If this was a concocted lie, at least one of Jesus’ disciples would have outed it. But many were put to death swearing to the truth that Jesus had risen. Why? Because they saw it with their own eyes. And they were willing to stake their lives and eternal being on it.

And Paul shows us that Jesus’ resurrection was not simply an event on the calendar of history. No, this was the fullness of God’s long and complex plan to rescue the world. Like the most intricate Rube Goldberg machine, God had made sure everything in his plan of salvation happened at exactly the right time and in the right place. The resurrection proves that the Bible is not a book of stories, but a record of promises kept. Because Jesus rose, we know that every word in scripture is from God and true.

Just as the scriptures are void of meaning if their promises hit a dead-end before the resurrection, they are also filled with meaning because Jesus rose. Every promise pointing ahead to a seemingly impossible resurrection of God’s Anointed finds fulfillment on Easter morning. And if this promise is kept, all God’s promises are as good as gold. This means sinners are actually forgiven for their sins, no longer locked in the dungeon of despair. Jesus died for the sins of the world, and his resurrection proves that those sins have been paid for.

But is this the case for me? Does the resurrection of Jesus actually mean that all my mistakes are forgiven? It’s that same question that Paul wrestled with. He describes himself as a stillborn child. This is intense. This sounds hyperbolic. But it’s the truth. Spiritually, he was dead when he lived as a Pharisee. He had worked hard to climb the ladder of success. He was zealous in his persecution of those he believed to be heretics and their false lord, Jesus. But Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus, not in a drive-by gang shooting to get back at Paul for killing so many Christians. He stopped him to change his heart. Paul had worked so hard to make himself pleasing to God, but that had only pushed him further into spiritual death. But now he was given life, through the resurrected Jesus who had paid for all sins, even Paul’s sins of murder and hatred of God’s Messiah.

If you’ve been striving to make yourself right with God, but only found the voice of sin saying, “Guilty,” know that the message of Easter is not a message of your work. And if you feel the shame of sin eating away at your heart – sins past and present – look and see what the resurrected Lord brings you. He brings you life with God, not just when your time on this earth comes to a close, but life with him right now. He has taken you from a stillborn child and breathed the breath of eternal life into you. And every promise he gives to his people in his word, applies to you.

Sins forgiven. Life eternal. Peace with God. This is the good news of the gospel. And this news couldn’t be any better. It’s why we don’t just monotonously read the Creed. We confess it boldly. We proclaim it loudly. We join our voices with those Old Testament believers who knew it was coming, with the women who saw it first, and with all who would come to see the risen Jesus firsthand or through the testimony of scripture. “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” Why? Because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!