

10am HC Sunday 24th August 2025

Isaiah 58:9, Heb 12:18-end, Luke 13:10-17 – With the new covenant we have a greater promise, a greater risk and a greater reward

This month at the cinema I saw **Materialists**, starring Dakota Johnson, Pedro Pascal and Chris Evans, and the first big-budget film in several years to focus on love and romance. And it seems to have touched a nerve, by articulating an uncomfortable truth about life for 20- and 30-somethings.

The film suggests that the easiest, safest, perhaps even the only, way to be financially secure is to marry money. Set in New York, it is the story of Lucy, a professional matchmaker determined to do exactly what her clients have decided to do: to give up on finding love with a potential partner, and settle instead for whoever offers the greatest material comfort and financial security. Not since the novels of Jane Austen have we seen the dilemma addressed so explicitly: should you marry for love or for money?

But the film also reveals a more modern phenomenon, which is an aversion to taking a risk with relationships. It identifies a widespread reluctance to invest the time and effort needed to get to know anybody who is an unknown quantity.

These are issues that raise important questions about our priorities: questions that are addressed in our reading from the letter to the Hebrews. The author of the letter is faced with a community of Jewish Christians who are facing a new challenge.

Will they hold onto their new faith in Christ, who has given them a better hope for the future, but is leading them into unknown territory?
Or will they give up on Christ, and settle instead for the familiar rituals and rules of their former Jewish faith?

In this section of the letter we see the unidentified author explaining to this community why the new covenant with Christ is so different from their old relationship with God. The new covenant is based upon a much greater promise. That means there's a greater risk in refusing to engage with it. But it also means that it comes with a greater reward.

A greater promise

The author begins by contrasting the new and the old covenants. The old covenant with God was embodied in so much that was physical. Sealed on Mount Sinai with Moses, in an unforgettable episode of blazing fire, darkness, gloom and tempest, and a voice to strike fear in all who heard it, even Moses said ***I tremble with fear***.

But the new covenant, mediated by Jesus, has inaugurated a new era, offering the inheritance of **a spiritual kingdom** and **a heavenly Jerusalem**. Those who hold onto their faith in Christ will join with **angels** and with the **firstborn**; the ones who are made children of God and who are **enrolled in heaven** through Christ's blood.

Christ's blood ***speaks a better word than the blood of Abel***. The blood from the firstlings of Abel's flock was just a foreshadowing of the Father's own sacrifice of his Son, and even

Abel's blood, which cried out to God from where his brother Cain had spilled it, could not pay for Cain's sin. Only the blood of Christ on the cross could do that. Through Christ's blood, shed on the cross for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins, we join the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

A greater risk

But if the new covenant with Christ offers a greater promise, its existence also entails a **greater risk** for those who hear about this promise.

Because once we have heard God speak to us, we are faced with a choice. Only very rarely will anybody hear God speak in a voice that sounds as if it could shake the earth. But by the power of his Holy Spirit, God can speak to us through the Bible and through prayer. He can speak to us through his creation and through conversations with other people. He can communicate with us through music and through contemplation. He can reach us simply through an accumulation of circumstances and events. The things that happen to us that can only be explained as the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives, seeking our attention and turning our hearts to God.

And when God does speak to us, we have a choice about how we respond. We can continue to believe that we are wholly in charge of our own lives and continue to ignore him. Or we can accept that he is reaching out to us, to warn us from heaven, of his sovereignty in our world and in our lives. We can choose to invite Christ into our lives and to follow in his footsteps. The stakes are high if we go on refusing to engage with God, because he is the judge of all, and if we reject him, we won't escape his judgment. With the new covenant offered by Christ, there is a greater risk.

A greater reward

But if the new covenant with Christ means that the risk of refusing to acknowledge Christ as our King is all the greater, the new covenant with Christ also means a **greater reward** for recognising Christ as our King.

For Christ is offering us **a kingdom that cannot be shaken**. This was good news for the Jewish Christians who were listening to this letter, and it is good news for us too. Our King is the king of an eternal kingdom, one that will overcome and will outlast every earthly and every spiritual power that might be ranged against it. The power by which Jesus set free from bondage the woman who'd been bent double for 18 years has defeated death and taken captive the forces that were fighting for control of this world. So one day those wonderful promises in the reading from Isaiah will be fulfilled.

So we have a choice. Like those 20-and 30-somethings depicted as choosing money over love, we can settle for what we can see, limiting our lives to what we think we can keep within our control, trading with what is tangible and what seems to be within our reach. Or we can let our lives be shaped by love. Responding to God by giving thanks and worshipping him. Living out the new covenant with Christ by investing for the long-term, spending time in developing a relationship with Christ through prayer and God's word. Trusting in God's goodness and love to take us through the tough times as well as the easy ones, knowing that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.