

A Better Sacrifice

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to open your Bibles at Hebrews chapter 9. So as I said, we're really picking up the argument halfway through here.

! Last week we looked at how in the new covenant there was a better priest,! and a better covenant and a better temple or tabernacle or sanctuary.

And the argument is presented really in four ways, but not separately, four ways that are interchanged as I pointed out last week.

First of all, the new covenant is actually more fundamental, more basic than the old covenant of law and Moses. The old covenant foreshadows the new, the old covenant predicts the new, and the new covenant overcomes the limitations of the old.

So again, if you'd like to keep those four principles in mind, you will see how they're interwoven into the argument that the writer presents in this passage.

[1 : 09] So we're going to break the passage down into these four sections, and I'm really not going to try and do more than just bring out the main points from the passage.

I think, well, that's all we can do, really. But we trust that there's a lot of, I say, great stuff in it, and we trust that the Lord will enlighten us and warm our hearts when we do that.

So we'll break it up into those four sections. The lesson of the early temple, that without blood there is no forgiveness, that only one death is actually required.

And then there's a summary of the argument, followed by what, by my count, is the fifth warning, but don't hold me to that, certainly by one of these warning sections with which Hebrew is broken up.

So let's look first then at the lesson of the early temple. So what we learned last week is that the temple on earth, the sanctuary, the tabernacle, which was a sort of portable temple that Moses, or Aaron, built, and the Levites, was not really the real thing at all.

[2 : 23] It was a model of the true temple that exists in heaven. And at the beginning of chapter 9, the writer to Hebrews goes on to develop this idea.

And you can ask the question, what's a model for? What is a model? Well, some models, of course, are just toys. But other models have a more serious purpose.

We might look at a model of a building to see, to get some idea of what it's going to look like when it's constructed. Or we might not be able to go and visit the real thing, but we want to get the best impression of it we can.

And so we might perhaps, again, look at a model of a building or some other site that we might want to go and see. So playing with a toy Ferrari is not the same as driving one, but it might be good enough to persuade you that going to seek the real thing is worthwhile.

And that may be true as we see the picture or the model of a building. That might indeed encourage us that it really is worth going to go and see the Taj Mahal or whatever it is.

[3 : 34] And that's kind of the argument that the writer puts forward here. They show us, the model shows us what the original is like before we can go and see it for ourselves.

They're not a substitute for the original, but if they're good enough, they might point us towards the original and say, yes, this is something really I really need to do and go for. So what is the tabernacle for?

Well, he points out, first of all, in these first few verses, what was in the temple of the tabernacle.

There was, in the center, there were the holy relics, the Ark of the Covenant and Aaron's staff that budded.

And it was not a place of public access. It was separated from the world by a curtain. And then outside that, there was a sort of inner antechamber called the holy place.

I'm going in-out, the description, as it was read, is out-in, but I'm going in-out here. Only the high priest could go into the most holy place only once a year, and then only after a blood sacrifice. [4 : 47] And even that holy place was separated from the world outside by another curtain, by a courtyard. And the point of all this, of course, is that God is fearsomely holy.

So access is difficult and has to be carefully controlled. Otherwise, you're just going to be burned up by the holiness of God.

But in fact, the writer goes even further than that. He repeats in verse 8 that the true most holy place had yet to be revealed.

The tabernacle was only a copy. And indeed, he suggests there that the tabernacle is now gone, which again is another hint that perhaps this was written after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

I can't be sure of that, but that is possibly true, because once the tabernacle is gone, then we need to look for the true tabernacle, the true holy place.

[5 : 51] Because that temple just foreshadowed the true place of access to God. And of course, the point that he's making here is that the Old Testament covenant wasn't just a matter of external...

It was just... It appeared, at least, to be just a matter of external regulations and wasn't really up to the job. The death of a lot of animals couldn't really clear the conscience of the worshipper.

Verse 9. Now, of course, as many Old Testament quotations show, this wasn't really the case, even under the old regime. So that quotation from Psalm 40 that's in chapter 10 tells us that the sacrifice of Jews did not desire, but a heart that seeks God.

But too often, the Jews thought that merely killing sheep or cattle was enough. And the Hebrews were clearly in danger of drifting back into that kind of thinking.

And we say, you might think, well, it doesn't apply to us, does it? But perhaps it does. We can sometimes think that following Christ is just a matter of going to church, of going through the motions of singing the hymns and reading the Bible, being respectable and not murdering anybody or committing adultery or abducting children.

[7 : 12] But of course, that's not enough. The new covenant requires a change of heart. It's a serious business.

And for that reason, we move now to the heart of the argument in verses 11 to 22, which says that there has to be a death. And the key verse here is really the one at the end, verse 22.

Without blood, without a death, there cannot be forgiveness of sins. And you know, some Christian teachers have tried to remove this idea of blood sacrifice from the Christian gospel, claiming it's old-fashioned and barbaric.

But you really can't do it. The writer is quite clear here. There has to be a death. There has to be a purifying blood.

That was true under the old covenant. How much more it is true under the new covenant. There has to be a blood. There has to be blood. The blood that represents a death and a sacrifice being sprinkled on us, as it were, to make us able to approach God.

[8 : 30] The shed blood, of course, is what proves that the death has occurred, verse 16. And there has to be a death so that the obligation to the law, to what God says must be done, is satisfied.

And the writer points out that the death has a number of specific effects, each of which are worth just thinking about for a second. First of all, he says that blood washes our consciences clean, so that we are freed to serve God, verses 11 to 14.

It's a kind of paradox, isn't it? Blood is what makes things gory and horrible and dirty. And yet, the blood of Christ, just as in a sense the blood of the animals in the old covenant, washed things spiritually clean.

And this blood, the blood of Christ, doesn't just make the vessels ritually clean, but actually cleanses our consciences, so that we are free to approach God and to worship and serve him.

And then he reminds us that the blood has the effect of ransoming us from slavery. We've imposed, we've broken God's law, and that it imposed a penalty on us, and that penalty was a kind of slavery.

[10 : 00] And we had to be bought out of slavery. And it's that blood of Christ which ransoms us, buys us out of slavery, says, I've paid the debt, now you're released.

And the blood, he reminds us, sorry, getting the right order here, the blood gives us access to God's forgiveness, that I say is in a sense the key verse in verse 22, that without such death there can be no forgiveness of sins.

And just going back to verse 20, the blood is what establishes and seals the covenant. That was the idea of a covenant in the Old Testament, or in the old, in Bronze Age times, you would kill an animal and divide it, and you just kind of take half each and say that if I break this promise, then I'm going to land up like that animal.

And so it is the blood that seals the covenant and the promise. Perhaps we should be more familiar with that than we are, because remember what Moses actually says, this is the blood of the covenant.

And of course, we repeat that word, don't we, in our communion, perhaps without realizing that Jesus is explicitly quoting this. He says, this is the blood of the new covenant, the blood that seals the covenant, that makes the promise sure and says, if I break this covenant, then the penalty is on me.

[11 : 43] You'll notice one thing, though, that the writer hasn't mentioned yet, and he hasn't mentioned, actually, the idea of sacrifice.

Why not? Well, because he's just coming to that. But he does want to remind us that although the death of all those cows and sheep weren't sufficient to cleanse the consciences from sin, they were not entirely pointless, they were not entirely wasted, because they did point forward.

They did symbolize that true sacrifice that was to be made, that true blood which seals the new covenant. So moving on, we notice that only one death is required.

A lot of sheep and cows got killed. In the Old Testament sacrifices, if you read the story of the dedication of Solomon's temple, it's quite horrific, really.

There must have been blood sort of running down the hill. Thousands of animals were killed. But none of them was really sufficient to do the job.

[13 : 03] His Old Testament sacrifices pointed towards the one sacrifice. There was only one death, the writer says, that really matters.

And that's the death of Jesus. And through that sacrificial death, he was able to take away the sins of his people, verse 28, and to enter the presence of God as our representative, verse 24.

And he only had to do that once. The animals had to be sacrificed every year, but Jesus only had to do that once. And in fact, the writer points out to us in verse 27 that you can only die once, but that isn't the end.

After that is judgment. And so Christ, again, can only die once, but he does not need to go through judgment because he was without sin and so he's able, through his death, to enter into the true holy place, the presence of God, as we were thinking last week.

The corridors of power, not the branch office on earth, but the corporate HQ in heaven. So there's no repeated sacrifice.

[14 : 33] There's no sacrifice in the mass. That's one thing I think. That was the real sticking point, you know, at the Reformation, what split people, split the Protestants from the Catholics.

Not the doctrine of justification by faith, because in a sense, Catholics do believe in justification by faith, even if not quite in the same way. But they insisted that the body of Jesus was truly present in the mass.

And that seems to me to be a terrible mistake because Jesus can only be sacrificed once. And I say that was the real sticking point at the Reformation. That's what led to the separation of the Protestant and Catholic churches, ultimately.

There is no repeated sacrifice. There is only one death. And that is sufficient to cover all, to buy all, to do all. So that, in one sense, is the culmination of the argument, this long passage.

But it is a long passage, and so we need to sum it up. But fortunately, I don't have to do that because the writer himself provides that summary in the beginning of chapter 10.

[15 : 51] So let's move on and look at that. So in the first part of chapter 10, verses 1 to 18, we find a sort of executive summary of this preceding section, this argument that he's made, a conclusion, if you like, a summary of the points he's made.

Although it's quite interesting because it's, there are one or two things that are not quite obvious that you might not have picked up. Oops, sorry. So in verses 10, verse 1 to 4, sorry, I'm on the wrong, that's what's confusing me.

I'm on the wrong slide, yes. Because we see that the Old Testament law was only a shadow of the truth.

These things could not really take away the... I've got myself confused. Sorry, I was on the... Sorry, I was on the right slide before.

Apologies for that, yeah. In verses 1 to 4, the Old Testament law and sacrifices were only a shadow of the truth. They couldn't really take away sin and cleanse consciences.

[17:18] But they did remind us of the need for forgiveness and they did point forward to Christ. Verse 3, well, that's what he's saying there in verses 1 to 4. And then in chapter 10, verses 5 to 10, we get this quotation from Psalm 40.

It was the third verse in the version we sang, but in the actual verses in the psalm, it's Psalm 40, verses 6 to 8. And these words are actually put into the mouth of Christ.

It says, the sacrifice of bulls was not effective, but Jesus' body was provided instead because he was ready to do God's will in the way that the rest of us were not or could not be.

But he was our representative who was ready to do God's will so that in fact now we are able to follow in his footsteps and do God's will.

And then in verse 10, chapter 10, verses 10 to 14, he reminds us of what we've just said, that unlike the sacrifices of the Old Testament priests, which had to be repeated, Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for those who is making holy, verse 14.

[18:36] And it says, in fact, he sat down and now waits for the final victory. It's an odd phrase, that, isn't it? He sat down. I don't think it means that Christ never, you know, is not at work today, but I think what it's there to tell us that it says, I've done it.

It's finished, as he said on the cross. The work is done and so I can sit down and say, yeah, I've done it. Finished. And then in those final verses of this chapter 10, verses 15 to 18, he reminds us that there is a new covenant and what's distinctive about this covenant is that the laws are written on the hearts of men and women, not just, not on tablets of stone or on scrolls or pieces of paper, but the heart, the laws are written on the hearts of God's people and because of that, we can try and chew forgiveness in the death of Christ.

So as I say, we've got a good summary there that reminds us of those main points. The Old Testament sacrifices shadow the truth. They were ineffective, so God provided a sacrifice of Christ, but that sacrifice is sufficient and the new covenant is written on the heart.

And then, as we always get in Hebrews, we get a therefore. Yes, I've forgotten to put the slide number in, that's what's confusing me here.

But in verses 19 to 39, we get another one of these warning sections that we find throughout the book of Hebrews. Now that you know that, you'd better do something about it.

[20:42] It's what they come down to. It's a therefore, and we'll say there's an old principle whenever you see a therefore, you look to see what it's there for. And it's there to say, well, you know a lot of stuff now, and you'd better put that into practice.

And so, how does he expand this? First of all, it has an exhortation or an encouragement, and it has a warning, and then it has another encouragement.

So, quite interesting, though, verse 19, look what he actually says here. He doesn't say Jesus has entered the holy place. He says that we have confidence to enter the holy place.

That's a step further, isn't it? He's saying that in a sense now, we are all priests, because we all have access to the holy place, not in our own right, but in the right of being united with Christ.

And so, he says, yes, we can, in a sense, we don't need a priest because we can access, everyone can access God directly, as it were. No longer are these barriers you have to go through, that the way to the holy place to meet with God is opened.

[22:08] And he says that we enter the holy place into the very presence of God. So in verse 21, Jesus is the high priest, and that's what makes it possible, but we're all, as believers, we share in that priesthood, and we're able to enter into the presence of God.

So what does this mean in practice? And he gives three bits of advice. First of all, he says, we should draw near to God. How can we do that?

Well, we should have confidence that our sins are forgiven because the death of Christ is sufficient, and so we should draw near to God. And he says we should hold unswervingly to the hope that we had, hold on to the hope, because it is a genuine hope, a founded hope.

I mean, I might hope that tomorrow morning I'll get a letter that says somebody's given me a Ferrari, but it's probably not a very well-founded hope, but this is a hope that is well-founded, and therefore it is worth holding on to.

And interestingly, he says, continue to meet with God's people. We were touching on this this morning, those of you here this morning. That seems a bit strange as well, doesn't it?

[23 : 30] You might think, well, each of us individually enters the holy place, and that, you know, therefore we don't need to meet with God's people, but he says, no, that's not the right way to look at it at all.

I mean, if you look back again at the old covenant, it wasn't that each person had an individual sacrifice, the people came together, together, and as they came together, the sacrifice for the sins of the people was made, and it is true, of course, that for some of them, it was ineffective because they didn't mix it with faith, and for others, it was effective because they did share in the faith, they didn't mix it with faith, but it's nevertheless true that the sacrifice was made for the people as a whole, and we are to draw near to God together, as the Jews would have done in those Psalms of ascents, as they rejoice that they're coming together to the place where they meet with God, and so, he says, it's wrong thinking to say that you can approach God on your own in that sense, rather, you should be all the more keen to meet with the people of God and approach God together, as corporately, so those are some practical issues to get from that encouragement, draw near to God, hold on to the hope, and meet with

God's people, but then, of course, we have the warning, and the warning, again, is one of those how much more warnings that he very often uses, and he says, well, think back again even to Moses, the Mosaic law, the Mosaic law carried the death penalty for all sorts of things, you can go and read through in Leviticus, and all sorts of transgressions of the Mosaic law resulted in the death penalty, and he says, if that was true even of Moses' law, how much worse it is to reject the salvation that Christ provides, particularly if you had originally signed up for it, as, of course, many of those Jews had, they had said, we will keep the covenant, but then they failed to do it, of course, and some people do say that they're going to keep the new covenant to follow Christ, but they're those who have no root in which it is, it turns out to be a false start,

God. So, if even the law of Moses carried the death penalty, to transgress the law of Christ carries the penalty of spiritual death, a far worse punishment, because it's a worse crime, as it were. Believers come to God through Christ's sacrifice, sacrifice, but if we reject that, then all God's anger over sin spills out, and that's all you can expect, to turn aside from Christ.

[26 : 44] Jesus said the work that God requires is to believe the one he has sent, and if we turn aside from that belief and put our face somewhere else than in Christ, then, indeed, there is no sacrifice for sin, that blood doesn't apply to us.

Now, as I've said before, I'm a full five-point Calvinist, I do believe, once saved, always saved, but still, there is that warning in the scripture, let's make sure that we are truly putting our trust in Christ. Then, we have that final exhortation, that final encouragement, and that's quite a simple one, really, he says, why give up now?

You've already faced a lot, you've been through persecution yourself, you've seen your brother Christians, brothers and sister Christians, go through trials and suffering, surely you don't want to throw that away now, when your reward is in sight, when your goal, as it were, is in sight, it's just foolish to throw that away now.

It's necessary to complete the course, but again, at the end, the writer says, and I'm confident that you will do that. He does really believe that once saved, always saved.

[28 : 18] If you're really putting your trust in Christ, then God is able to bring you through. And that's what he says, isn't it? The writer is confident that these things would apply to his readers, but he still needs to give the warning.

So let's take that warning again for ourselves, but let's nonetheless approach God with confidence through the blood of Jesus Christ, knowing that our sins are indeed paid for.

So we'll sing another hymn, which again is very much based on this passage, one we sang for those with last week, finished with last week, number 503. Thank you.