

A better sacrifice

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 March 2025

Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0 : 00] So Hebrews chapter 9. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties. But into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

By this, the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age.

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

[2 : 08] For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.

And in the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

[3 : 48] Thus, it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites. But the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own. For then, he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Thanks, Alice. Do keep that open. My name is Andy, the assistant pastor here at Grace Church. It's great to see you. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your words.

[5 : 05] Please help us now to understand what you are saying. Amen. Amen. I think it's fair to say that we all know something of a pain of a guilty conscience.

In theatre, I guess we think of Macbeth. Furiously trying to wash Duncan's blood from his hands. Then later in the play, there's Lady Macbeth, tormented by nightmares, sleepwalking, rubbing her own hands, wondering what will these hands ne'er be clean.

Here's the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. We all know something of a pain of a guilty conscience.

All it takes is that familiar-looking face and distance, a visit to that place, a sound of a particular song, and the flash of a memory hits us.

And the waves of guilt come flooding back. So the big question is, what do we do with that? Where do we go? What do we do with our guilt? One answer is to deny that guilt even exists at all.

[6 : 25] It's not my fault. I'm a victim of my circumstances of upbringing. Three influential thinkers of the 20th century want us to do away with guilt.

Guilt makes us weak, says Nietzsche. Guilt makes us neurotic, says Freud. Inauthentic, says Sartre. We could deny it.

Or we could hide. Secrecy, perhaps, is our natural response to a guilty conscience. Like Adam and Eve hiding from God in the garden after they sinned in Genesis 3.

Of course they hid. The last thing a guilty conscience wants is to come out into the open and be exposed. And it's no different for us, is it?

Our guilt, it prompts many to hide from God. It's why I know people who find it hard to even walk through church doors.

[7 : 25] Well, another option is to seek solace in religion. Particularly a form of religion in which there was some sort of tangible proof of my standing before God.

If only a priest absolved me. If only a bishop would bless me. If only I had some sort of solution that I could see, touch and taste to persuade God to overlook my guilt.

We all know something of a pain of a guilty conscience. Which makes our time in Hebrews 9 this morning wonderful news. Because it is a chapter flooded with assurance.

As God promises us that if we are Christians, the blood of Jesus Christ has fully and finally purified our conscience. Washing away our guilt.

So now not even a trace of dirt remains. And the way the writer wants to convince his readers and us of this is to do another compare and contrast that we've been doing over the last few weeks.

[8 : 36] He's compared Jesus to the old priest. Now he's a new priest. He's compared the old covenant to the new covenant in Jesus. And now he's comparing the old sacrifices before Jesus to the sacrifice of Jesus himself.

He's taking them before and after. So firstly on the handout on the back of the sheet on the screen, before Jesus, the best system didn't deal with sin and guilt.

The best system didn't deal with sin and guilt. And I say the best system because it was given by God himself. And in verses 1 to 7 of chapter 9, it's like a virtual tour around the Old Testament tabernacle.

And it's easy to get distracted by the details, the lampstand, the table, the bread, the golden altar of incense, etc. But the key truth is very simple and very vivid.

The tabernacle had two rooms. And you couldn't get into the second room except by going through the first. There was no back door to the second room.

[9 : 45] You had to walk through the first. And then there was this massive curtain that separated the first from the second. That second room was the symbol of God's presence on earth with his people.

But it was also the symbol of a big problem. Because if we looked on verse 6 of the live stream of the virtual tour of the tabernacle, you'd see priests go in and out of the first room all day, all the time.

But not the second room. They get close to the presence of God, but they never get into the presence of God. And verse 8 gives us the reason for this history lesson.

If you look down at verse 8. By this, the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened, as long as the first section is still standing.

In other words, the whole point of the first room was to deny access to the second room. So as long as the first room was functioning, with the priests going in and out and offering sacrifices, the way into that second room had not been opened up to the people.

[11 : 00] The first room shouted to the people, you could not go in there. I think how often the priests must have looked longingly at that curtain that led to the second room.

Wouldn't you have wanted to peep behind it? Just have a little peep? A little sneak little look when no one was there? But they didn't dare. And the reason they didn't dare was that their consciences were still guilty.

As the writer goes on in verse 9, if you look. According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper.

Although the sacrifices could sometimes give a temporary and partial assurance of sins forgiven, or that God can and will forgive sin, they're also lurking doubts.

What if I sinned since that sacrifice? What do I do now? What if that sacrifice didn't actually cover that particular sin? Always their consciences accused them and said, you cannot go in there.

[12 : 06] You are too dirty and guilty. I don't know if you've ever had the misfortune of spilling red wine on a white carpet, or having a child who has spilt juice on a carpet, and in their haste, they run and get a towel, tea towel, try and clear it up, but they're just rubbing it around, aren't they?

They're just rubbing the juice around. Maybe you tried that with wine. You try to get the wine out. You try and scrub. You're just scrubbing it around. You're moving the wine around. It's not doing anything.

Or you could get a rug. A clever child could then just try and get a rug, reposition the rug over the stain. It's not going to deal with it. The stain remains.

And it's the same with this Old Testament system of worship, all these sacrifices. A lot of blood being moved around. The stain of sin and guilt remained.

It was never designed to do the full job. It was designed to point forward to something else. Now, as we've seen in Hebrews, it was written, this book was written to people who had come to put their trust in Jesus.

[13 : 19] But now their faith is waning. They're struggling with various temptations and suffering for being part of God's people, and shame that comes with being a follower of Jesus.

They're following an invisible Jesus next to the impressive, visible religion of Judaism on their doorstep. And the lure back of putting your trust in visible, tangible sacrifices would have been huge.

You can see the bull sacrificed in your place. You can smell the smoke billowing up from the altar. You can taste the sacrifice. Touch, smell, taste, all the things that confirm your apparent cleansing and forgiveness.

Yet the writer is saying, that old style religion, with its fancy priests and sacrifices, it might look seductive and tangible, but ultimately it did not open the way to God.

It couldn't deal with your guilt. So don't put your trust in those things. Actually, the fact that it keep happening day after day, year after year, is a sign that it wasn't really working.

[14 : 33] If you glance over to chapter 10, verse 3, at the end it says, there is a reminder for sins every year. And if this best system, God-ordained system, couldn't deal with sin and guilt, then it's true of all other systems today.

All other religious temples and sacrifices scattered across the globe, high church rituals and smells and bells and anointing oils and priests and penance and absolutions.

Now that kind of religion is usually more socially acceptable. because we said last week, religion like that is more about us and what we do and less about God.

And it doesn't work in cleansing our guilt. The same is true for any secular solution that might be offered. And to deny or to deny or to hide or to try and make amends on our own steam.

Maybe you've read the Ian McEwen's novel Atonement or seen the film. The whole thing is driven by a guilty conscience of a character.

[15 : 48] A deeply guilty person longs to find some real means of making atonement. And they don't get it. And that person that does not find any real atonement is one of the tragedies of the story.

It's both haunting and frightening. And so let me say, if you're not someone who has pinned your hopes on the death of Jesus to make you right before God, then any guilt you feel this morning or this week or this year, any guilt for your neglect of God or the harm that you've caused other people, that is right.

It is real. It's true guilt. And nothing in the world, no religious practice, can get rid of it. We all know something of the pain of a guilty conscience.

And even the best system didn't deal with sin and guilt. You may have noticed, though, I left out one crucial thing in verses 1 to 10.

Because one man was allowed in that second room. Verse 7 describes how the high priest went in once a year.

[17 : 06] And that really is a sign of hope. It was a sign of hope that one day there would be a high priest who would not only go in by himself, but would open up the way fully for people to come in behind him, for every believer to follow.

And when Jesus died on the cross, that is what happened. As he died, rose again, and ascended on high, that is what happened.

So secondly then, the better sacrifice that dealt with sin and guilt completely. completely. The writer tells, describes Jesus' death, his resurrection, and return to heaven in the kind of terms of this Old Testament visual aid.

So if you look at verse 11, but when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

So much packed into this chapter that was read. We're just going to look at these two verses mainly and spot four things that these verses that the writer wants us to grasp about the old system compared to the new, how the old has been trumped by the new way.

[18 : 36] So firstly, whose blood is involved? Probably not escaped you there's a lot of blood in this chapter as it's being read out. Thirteen times, I think the word blood is there or allusions to it.

I mean, in the old system, animal sacrifices, blood was everywhere. If you were squeamish or a vegetarian, you probably wouldn't have done well. It was on the tabernacle, it was on the equipment, on the altar, in the floor, in buckets, in basins, in bowls, it's on the scroll.

That was news to me this week, blood in the library here. Perhaps most starkly, there's blood all over the people. Verse 13, verse 19, blood is everywhere and over everyone in the belief that it made them clean.

And the point being that God is making is that we need blood to deal with guilt. We need a sacrifice. God in his holiness demands justice for us turning away from him, for our rebellion as humans against him.

end of verse 22 says this, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. But as we've seen, those visible blood sacrifices did not do anything.

[19 : 54] They could not help with sin and guilt, but now, we'll actually look at chapter 10, verse 11. That makes that point as well. Scan across, every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifice which can never take away sins.

But now, flick back chapter 9, verse 12. Jesus entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

On a Friday in AD 33, Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem, standing in as our substitute, sacrifice for sinners.

dying our death for us, paying the fair and right penalty that sin deserves. In an amazing sacrifice, Jesus takes away all the sin of those who put their trust in him.

All of it. Bottles of detergent often claim to kill 99% of household germs. I don't know if you've seen that in your, when you look at that underneath.

[21 : 05] I think they're just covering their back really, aren't they? But 99%, often when I read that, I often think, well, what about the other 1%? What about that? How dangerous is that? How serious is that? Well, in terms of physical health, that 1% might not matter that much.

But when it comes to spiritual cleanliness and spiritual protection, nothing less than 100% will do. Covering 99% of our sins, well, it's not enough.

Not if we're to be safe forever. Only 100% coverage will do. Now, the blood of Christ is the perfect solution for every sin.

That's what he's saying. Jesus' blood removes 100% of all known sins and unknown sins. He removes every stain and cleanses our guilt.

And now, it was a public event. If we were there, we could have seen it. We could have seen Jesus' blood dripping from him as he died. But now, we can't see it.

[22 : 16] It's not visible anymore, but it's no less real. At that moment, as Jesus shed his blood for us, he satisfied God's judgment on our sin, the wrath that we deserved.

Jesus' sacrifice is a better sacrifice because of the blood that is involved and better because of where Jesus is now. So look at verse 11 again. When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once of all into the holy places.

Whereas verse 24 says, for Christ has entered not into the holy places made by hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven himself, itself. Now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

The Old Testament priest went through the first room of this man-made tent into the second room, but it was just a shadow. It was a shadow of the reality, a copy.

Last week, if you were here, you remember we thought a bit of it like a battle reenactment. But where battle reenactments point back in history, this was pointing forward in history to when the perfect high priest would appear, entering the true holy place, the true divide of heaven itself.

[23 : 43] And so the writer is saying, as Jesus rose from the dead and he ascended into heaven on high, he didn't just enter a man-made tent to enjoy the shadow of the presence of God for a time, he entered the true heavenly place of heaven itself, there at the right hand of God, not speaking to a shadow of God, a shadow of his glory, but the Lord himself.

What the tabernacle pointed to actually happened in the Lord Jesus. That is why it's a better sacrifice, because of where Jesus is now. Thirdly, Jesus is better because how often this happened.

Old Testament sacrifices had to be offered again and again, day after day, year after year. It was a very busy place. But because Jesus' sacrifice was perfect, verse 12, he entered once for all into the holy places.

The writer keeps coming back to that, that Jesus Christ suffered once and only once. It's there in verse 12, verse 25, verse 26, verse 28.

Jesus' sacrifice has been completed and never needs to be repeated. Later, we will remember this sacrifice as we share the Lord's Supper together, but that sacrifice is never repeated.

[25 : 13] As we share the bread and wine, Jesus is not being re-crucified. We cannot add to what Jesus has done and we don't need to once for all.

Imagine going to a famous art gallery and you've just snuck in your paintbrush and your paints in your coat pocket and you're there and you see a great work of art, Da Vinci or Michelangelo and quietly, when the attendants aren't looking, you get your paintbrush out and your paints and you start doing little touches up on whatever it is.

When challenged, you say, well, it's a lovely painting. I thought there's a few bits missing. I thought I could just help a bit and just touch it up, you know. I hope that's okay.

And I'm sure the guard would probably say, no, that's not okay. That is not okay. You are ruining it. Well, in the same way, I cannot add to Jesus' completed work on the cross and I don't need to.

I cannot add to it without taking away from its value once for all. And then lastly, it's a better sacrifice because of the result.

[26 : 28] If you look at verse 12, by his blood shed for us on the cross, Jesus secures an eternal redemption. Verse 15, a promised eternal inheritance.

Verse 14, a purified conscience. Let's read verse 14. How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

So there is the objective truth. If you are a Christian, a follower of the Lord Jesus today, you've put your trust in him, then Jesus has taken the righteous anger of God for every sin that you've committed, the sins you are committing and the sins that you will commit.

Everyone. He has actually cleansed our guilt and purified our conscience. He has brought us into the presence of God forever, into that second room of heaven.

Jesus is the better sacrifice who has dealt with sin and guilt completely. And so the big application, the big implication, is draw near with full assurance.

[27 : 44] The whole direction of travel for this section in Hebrews really is chapter 10, verse 19 to 25. If you flick over, I'm just going to pick out, start from verse 21.

Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The sprinkling of blood is a reference to what Moses did as the blood of the sacrifice in Exodus 24 as a picture of cleansing. And where their skin was sprinkled with the blood of an animal, our hearts are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

And with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, we can draw near to God with full assurance. That would have been a wonderful encouragement and assurance to the first readers of Hebrews in danger of giving up on Jesus.

The writer says, don't stop believing in the better sacrifice. Don't look back to the religion you can touch and taste and feel. That cannot cleanse your guilt. But Jesus can through his blood shed on the cross, entering heaven itself on your behalf, bringing you into the presence of God forever.

[29 : 12] And the same encouragement is for us today. we can actually draw near to God. Not because of anything that we have done, but because of Jesus and we can enjoy life forever with him.

So if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here today, then any guilt that you feel for neglecting God and living his way and neglecting others, well, that is right.

It's true guilt. It is real. And nothing in the world can get rid of it, but wonderfully, Jesus, the better sacrifice, can. His blood shed on the cross once for all, taking away all our sin and guilt when we put our trust in him.

And if you would call yourself a follower of Lord Jesus today, and it often, it doesn't feel that way now. When a flash of a memory of past sin hits me, what do I do?

Well, I don't deny, I don't hide or turn to something visibly religious. I am to remind myself of the blood of Christ sprinkled over my heart to cleanse me of my sin and guilt and to keep doing that until there's no doubt about it in my mind.

[30 : 40] The shed blood of Jesus as he died on the cross has sealed the deal. Yes, there are human consequences for sin that have to be worked through, but Hebrews 9 says to us, well, don't let the memories of your sin unsettle you before God.

Rather, allow them to be an opportunity for thanksgiving. As you remember even for that sin, even for that sin, the Lord Jesus died and you have been cleansed and purified.

So we are to never give up drawing near to God. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that through the blood of Jesus we can draw near to you with full assurance of faith.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.