

A better sacrifice

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Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0 : 00] Today's reading is in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 1 to 25, found on page 1209.

! Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?

But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sin every year, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me.

In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.

[1 : 23] When he said above, You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings, these are offered according to the law.

Then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will. He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us.

[2 : 42] For after, saying, This is the covenant that I will make with them. After those days, declares the Lord, I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds.

Then he adds, Therefore, brothers, Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. For he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Great. Do please keep that passage open. We'll be referring to it throughout this morning. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you have not left us in the dark about who you are, how we can know you.

Thank you that you speak to us through your word. Please do so this morning. May our hearts be warmed by this chapter of Hebrews. Amen.

[4 : 40] Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Andy. It's great to see so many people here today, whether you come every week, whether this is your first time, and you didn't know there was going to be baptisms, whether you're here as a family member or friend of Isaac, Amelia, and Ted.

We're so glad you joined us for this special occasion. And whether you would already call yourself a Christian or not, or you're not sure what you believe, this morning we're invited to see something of what Christianity is really all about.

There's a story about the writer, C.S. Lewis, attending a conference. He was asked, what is unique about Christianity compared to all the other religions and philosophies in the world?

And they were debating it for this time, and then C.S. Lewis just comes in and said, oh, that's easy. It's grace. It's the difference between do and done.

You'll know that the way our minds usually work is we get what we deserve in life. It's about our efforts and our achievements. That is why lots of young people have been studying furiously, or should be, at this time of year.

[6 : 02] It's why we work hard in our jobs. If you want anything good in life, you have to earn it. That's the way of the world. And that mentality is there in all other religions and belief systems in the world and philosophies.

It's all about what you do to be acceptable to God. But the Christian message that we'll see in Hebrews 10 stands apart, because it's not about what you do.

It's about what Jesus has done. That means we are acceptable to God. And whether this is your first time hearing this, whether it's your hundredth and fiftyth, thousandth time hearing this, my prayers, that is a great encouragement for us this morning.

We're going to see this visually through baptism after the service, but first we're going to see it through the words of Hebrews chapter 10. It's a rich and complex chapter.

We haven't got time to go through it all, but the main message is surprisingly clear. Because of what God has done, Jesus has done, the way to God is open.

[7 : 05] And that means we're not asked to keep God at arm's length. We can draw near to him. We're being invited to rest in a finished sacrifice and draw near to the God who made us and loves us.

And so this morning, we're going to think about just three things that Jesus has done. Three aspects of his sacrificial death on a cross that sets Christianity apart from everything else.

There's a handout on the sheet. It'll be on the screen behind me. The first thing, Jesus' death, a single sacrifice, a single sacrifice. Look down at the little one, verse one.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

The law being referred to here is the Old Testament law, specifically the sacrificial system. And under this old system, sacrifices, animal sacrifices, were brought daily into the tabernacle, into the temple, and repeated.

[8 : 19] And we see it throughout these verses. So verse one, continually offered. Verse three, reminder of sins every year. And then if you flick over to verse 11, every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices.

In the Old Testament, priests never sat down. There was no chair in the temple. They were like chefs in a busy London kitchen, constantly on their feet, offering sacrifices again and again, all because their work was never finished.

But now look at the contrast at verse 10. We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Verse 12, when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins. Verse 14, by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

sanctified. The Old Testament priests had an old, a never-ending job day after day, offering the same sacrifices over and over again. Their work was never finished because their sacrifices never fully dealt with sin.

[9 : 37] But when Jesus died on the cross, he did what generations of priests and thousands of sacrifices could never do. He finished the job and dealt with sin. One sacrifice, once for all.

For years, people used to say that painting the fourth bridge, that vast red railway bridge in Scotland, was a never-ending job. As soon as the painters finished at one end, it was time to start again at the other end.

It led to a kind of an idiom, that phrase, painting the fourth bridge, an endless task that is never truly complete. I actually, I did some digging to see if that's still true.

Apparently now, they paint every seven years. Paint's got better and better, basically. But still, it's still a job that has to be kept doing all the time, round and round, always working, never finished.

And that, in many ways, is what religion is like today. A kind of spiritual fourth bridge, a lifetime of effort to get close to God.

[10 : 48] If God is there, then of course it's down to me to try harder, to live my best life, to do more, to make up for past mistakes, to prove myself.

It's basically paint, paint, paint. But the job is never done. And even when we think we've made progress, being a better me in however we want to do that, there's always that sense of falling short.

never feeling sure you've done enough for God to welcome you into heaven. But in Jesus, well, he does what we could never do.

He has dealt with sin. He has, his one sacrifice atoned for all our sin. There's nothing left to add, nothing left to repeat. The work of salvation is finished as he dies for us on the cross.

that's the power of Jesus' sacrifice, a single sacrifice. Well, how is Jesus' sacrifice so powerful?

[11 : 51] Well, because secondly, it's a sinless sacrifice, a sinless sacrifice. So under the old system, sacrifices involved animals, bulls, goats, lambs, pigeons, offered again and again.

And now this sacrificial system was a great gift from God. It did allow people to continue in relationship with him. But every time a sacrifice was made, it reminded them of two truths.

First, that sin really matters and it's so serious that it can only be paid for in blood. And at the same time, God is a God of mercy. He provides a way for us to be in relationship with him.

He provides a substitute so that sinners might live. But even in the Old Testament, it was clear that these sacrifices couldn't truly deal with sin.

So the writer is quoting Psalm 40 in verses 5 and 6. If you look down, it says this, sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

[13 : 01] In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. God wasn't ultimately pleased by those offerings because verse 4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Why? Because bulls can't and goats can't obey God? In fact, even the biggest bull enthusiast in the room would have to admit they have a very limited skill set as animals go.

They stomp around, eat grass, smash through fences and charge at things that annoy them. That's pretty much a bull done and dusted. They can't commit themselves to obeying God.

They can't offer themselves. Likewise, a goat cannot bear human guilt. A pigeon can't truly represent a person.

Only a substitute of equal or greater worth can stand in our place in order for us to be acceptable to God. And that is where the Lord Jesus comes in.

[14 : 05] Verse 5 again, when Christ came into the world, Jesus, the Son of God, stepped in. He took on flesh, a real body prepared by God and his life encapsulated the words of Psalm 40, behold, I have come to do your will.

I have come to live obediently, perfectly and to give my life as a sacrifice for sins. What an old contrast to the old sacrifices. The old system before Jesus.

The lamb doesn't volunteer. The bull doesn't wake up and say, put me in, I'm ready. But Jesus did. He came by choice, not randomly selected, not unwilling.

The eternal Son of God entered this world, lived in perfect obedience and gave himself in love. The sinless sacrifice. That is why, while the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins, the blood of Jesus wonderfully can.

He is the perfect, sinless, willing substitute we need. The sinless sacrifice that truly deals with sin by dying in our place once for all.

[15 : 23] That is why his death can cover the sins of billions of people. Have you ever thought that? How does this one death of one person cover billions of people in all their sin?

Well, because he's not just any man. He's the God man. He's fully God. And so his sacrifice had infinite worth. He's completely sinless.

living that obedient life to God that we know we should be doing and cannot do. Sacrificing himself for us.

A sinless sacrifice. And so because of that, thirdly, Jesus' death was a sufficient sacrifice. sacrifice. A sufficient sacrifice because it actually deals with our sin and brings forgiveness.

Nothing that religion can do can do that. As we've seen, this wasn't the case beforehand. Verse 3, at the start of our passage, in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year.

[16 : 29] So before Jesus, under the old system, every sacrifice was a visual reminder that sin hadn't been properly dealt with yet.

Day after day, lamb from lamb, was like a message from God. Sin is still a problem for you. It's a bit like living with a chronic condition.

if your doctor says, take this and you'll be cured, that's one thing. But if the doctor says, well, there's no cure yet, just treatment, then you're grateful for the medicine.

But each time you take it, it's a constant reminder that you're still sick and there's no cure yet. That's what the old system was like, a temporary treatment for sin, not a lasting cure.

Yes, these sacrifices enabled our relationship with God, but everyone was a reminder that sin was serious and it can only be paid for in blood. And so much of that is religion nowadays.

[17 : 31] When we try to do more, we're just more reminded of how we fail or how we are not on our own acceptable for God, living with that chronic condition of sin.

Now look at the contrast. A reminder of sins each year, verse 3, verse 17, God declaring, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

Not that God has amnesia, that he's just getting a bit old and things just slip, but meaning that because of Jesus' sacrifice, God chooses not to count our sin against us.

And so through Jesus, we are fully forgiven, finally free, not just from sin and guilt, but the constant, exhausting reminder of how we fail.

So the encouragement this morning is that if we have trusted in Jesus, dead, everything that defiles us in God's sight, everything that we think, gosh, I wish I never did that or thought that, everything that we've done that displeases him has once of all been forgiven.

[18 : 47] And God promises to remember our sins no more. And so, verse 18, where there is forgiveness, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Again, that's what makes the Christian message, the gospel, so unique. And we're not relying on a system, a belief system that's still trying to deal with sin. We don't gather each Sunday to earn our acceptance to God.

We gather to remember the one sacrifice that has already made us right with him. And so, we can celebrate the victory that Jesus has won for us.

Now, this is for Isaac. I'm going to talk about Tottenham. Recently, Isaac and the whole Witton family gathered to watch their beloved Tottenham Hotspurs play Man United in the Europa League final.

If you don't like Tottenham, if you don't like football, I'm sorry. Hopefully, you can understand. It was close and tense for the whole Witton and Sedgwick family.

[19 : 55] Not for me, I fell asleep. It was a boring game. But they were very anxious, biting nails, checking the clock, everything uncertain in that injury time.

Is it enough? One nil, you're winning. Is it enough? enough. But when the final whistle was blown and Tottenham won, it was time to celebrate and I got a lovely picture of them celebrating and Isaac's dad, Mark, and Uncle Robbie with a glass of champagne afterwards.

That is the difference between religion and the gospel. Religion is still playing the game, trying, striving, hoping to be accepted.

Is it enough? Have I done enough? But with Jesus, the game is over. The victory is secure, forgiveness has been achieved, and for those who belong to him, it's time to celebrate you see, religion says do, do, do, but the message of Christianity is done, it is done.

One sacrifice, one moment, effective forever. Jesus' death was a single sacrifice, a sinless sacrifice, a sufficient sacrifice.

[21 : 13] Well, time is racing on, but three brief applications from verses 19 to 25 that the writer makes. Firstly, draw near to God.

Draw near to God. Verse 19 says this, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Now, these verses summarize so much of what we've seen in chapters 5 to 10 of Hebrews, if you've been with us over the many months, and the big point is actually beautifully clear.

The door to heaven is wide open. Jesus has blown it off the hinges through his death on the cross, so what should we do?

Make the most of it. Draw near to God. We can do that with a true heart, full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

[22 : 32] That is a wonderful picture of what it means to become a Christian. It's what we'll witness later as Amelia, Isaac, Ted get very cold and very wet as they are baptized.

baptized. Now baptism hasn't saved them, it doesn't save anyone, but it is that powerful sign of what Jesus has done for all those who trust in him.

Hearts cleansed, consciences set free, and new life of drawing near to God in faith is not about achieving perfection, but about trusting the one who has made us clean.

And that invitation is for all of us, not just to admire God from a distance or keep him at arm's length, but to come close because of Jesus. And if you haven't done that, then today is a wonderful day to do that.

The door is wide open and we can draw near to him. And yet for those of us who would already call ourselves Christians, this truth is still often hard to grasp, especially when we are so aware of our flaws, in our thoughts, our patience, our parenting, our obedience, we fail.

[23 : 49] Perhaps you veer towards being a perfectionist and you're so aware of every day where we fail. Our shortcomings are often painfully obvious.

In those moments, we're tempted to pull away from God, not draw near, aren't we? But in those moments, despite our sin, if we trust in Jesus and his single sinless sufficient sacrifice, we've been cleansed from that evil conscience, washed, made clean in God's sight.

And yes, we still grow. Yes, we still mature. Yes, we will still fail. But the fruit of grace is seen in our life as we grow. That is a response to what Jesus has already done, not an effort to earn what's already been given.

We can come now boldly and freely because of Jesus drawn near to God. Second, hold on to your hope. Hold on to your hope. Verse 23, let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering that he who promised is faithful.

We all know what it's like to hold on to something precious. Maybe someone gives you a check for a million pounds. They're probably quite old and haven't got the hang of internet banking.

[25 : 11] But you're not going to wave it around. You're not going to wave it around. You're not in the wind. You're not going to leave it in a coffee shop. You're going to hold on to it very tightly until you take that picture or take it to a physical bank if you can find one.

Hebrews encourages us to hold on to our hope. That is not subjective wishful thinking but objective truth.

God's promises of sins forgiven, access to him, a future eternal inheritance of heaven. God's confession of our hope is when we, like Amelia, Isaac and Ted, are willing to stand up and say the Christian faith is my faith.

Now it's hard to do that. I guess if you call yourself a Christian, you know it's hard to do that with our friends, in the workplace, to be known publicly as a Christian.

When people think our faith is intellectually naive and morally oppressive perhaps. And it will be hard at times for Isaac and for Ted and Amelia to follow Jesus as it was for the first readers of Hebrews suffering for their faith.

[26 : 34] But my prayer is, and I hope it's the whole church's prayer, in those moments that they would hold fast to the hope they will confess this morning without wavering.

that whatever happens in life, they will hold on to Jesus and that hope of heaven to come. And the same for all of us who trust in Jesus.

Well, then the last implication before we close, encourage one another. Verse 24, here, then, is the job of every one of us, the job of our youth groups that Isaac and Amelia are part of, the job of Sunday Club that Ted is in, the job of our adult growth groups that meet each week, the job of the whole church family as we meet here each Sunday and throughout the week, to stir one another up, to agitate each other, not to evil, but to love and good works, not to neglect and meet together, but to encourage one another to hold fast to Jesus.

And I guess it might be the temptation for you as it is to me to tend to be the lone ranger Christian, just me and Jesus, that's okay, and I can keep others at arm's length, but the message of Hebrews is that we need one another.

Ted, Amelia and Isaac need us to pray for them, to remind them of Jesus' sacrifice, to stir them up, to turn up, to hold fast.

[28 : 27] Now if you've been with us since September you'll know why the writer of Hebrews has said all this, he's writing to believers who are in danger of drifting, not necessarily through some dramatic rebellion, but through a slow, quiet spiritual drift.

The shame of being a Christian, perhaps, the pressure of being social outcasts with families and friends and colleagues, the weariness of following Jesus, the temptation sin, the appeal of tangible, visible religion rather than the unseen Jesus.

All causing these believers to consider giving up on Jesus. And so the writer urges them and us to hold on. Hold on to Jesus, hold on to the hope that you have of sins forgiven.

Don't turn anywhere else. Don't go looking to any other philosophy or way of life that tries to earn its way to God because of what Jesus has done.

We are to hold on to Jesus and hold on to each other so that we don't drift away. I recently learned about sea otters from the children's TV show Octonauts.

[29 : 48] It's a very educational program. Apparently when they sleep, sea otters float together on the surface of the water in groups called rafts and they sleep holding pause.

They hold on to each other. That's very sweet, isn't it? They hold on to each other. Why? So they don't drift away. The current is subtle. It's not a storm.

It's not a wave. It's the gentle, quiet pull of the tide. And if they don't hold on to each other, they'll slowly drift apart. without even realising it.

You see, sea otters don't stay anchored alone. And neither do Christians. We need each other. And together we are to keep each other close and to keep each other going by staying anchored in Jesus, in his sinless, single, sufficient sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

Drawing near to God in that the perfect, the relationship that is on offer, looking forward together to heaven to come. In a world of weary striving, the gospel offers rest.

[31 : 05] Not do, but done. Let's pray together. Amen. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus through his one death on the cross that he pays for our sin, that we don't have to keep striving and trying to earn our way to ye, but we can trust in his finished work.

We pray again for Amelia, Isaac and Tener that they would do that, but each one of us too, Father, would rest in the finished work of Jesus.

Amen.