

A Better Sanctuary

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 10th of August 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled A Better Sanctuary and is based on Hebrews chapter 9 verses 1 to 28. And you may like to have open the Bibles in the pews at page 975, Hebrews chapter 9.

And as I said at the beginning, this is part of a sermon series through the letter to the Hebrews. And we're up today to chapter 9, page 975. Let's pray that God helps us to understand these words and apply them in our lives.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that though you are the God in heaven, you reveal yourself to us on earth through the words of the scriptures. And we thank you for these words in the letter to the Hebrews.

We pray today that you'll not only inform our minds, but reform and transform our lives so that we may bring you glory and honour in all that we do. And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[1 : 13] Well, every Friday the routine is the same. Laundry day. It's my day off and the day begins with doing the laundry. And the big decision every week is which laundry powder do you use?

Do you use Omo, which boasts that it is the best? Or do you go for cold power for some reason or other? Or do you have lemon fab, if you've got any lemons on the tree?

Do you use nappy sand for your cricket whites? Dynamo. Do you need to spray anything with preem? These are big decisions, let me tell you, to cope with at the beginning of your day off on Friday morning.

So I go back to bed and ponder it for a bit longer before I eventually get round to do the laundry.

Every Friday is laundry day. And as you think about the laundry powders, each one boasts different features to bring a whiter wash or a better colour or more protection or softer wash or all those sorts of things.

Which is better, blue beads of bleach or a bit of lemon? Well, I don't think it makes any difference, let me tell you. I think they waste their time advertising stuff on TV. Buy the cheapest one.

[2 : 24] That's what I recommend. And it all looks the same to me. And besides, next Friday you're going to have to do it all over again anyway. I mean, after a while, why are we so fixated by dirt and cleanliness?

I remember working with someone years ago who had a test for his shirt. In winter, his test was the cuff test. He'd look every morning. If there was dirt on the cuff, it was time for a new shirt.

If there wasn't, he'd wear the same one again. In summer, the test was not the cuff test. It was the smell test. He'd smell under the arms and if it smelled, he'd wear a new shirt and if it didn't or wasn't too bad, he'd wear the shirt again.

Why are we so fixated by issues of cleanliness and issues of dirt? There are dozens and dozens of cleansing agents for every appliance you could ever imagine and probably appliances that you can never imagine, but you can still buy the cleansing agent for them.

And laundry powders and soaps and the adverts on TV boast that this one is the best and usually by showing you some white shirt that they have washed compared to some off-white shirt that somebody else has washed, aren't we better?

[3 : 28] Now, on the issues of cleanliness and dirt, let me say that parents are the worst. Don't walk the dirt in the house. How many times do you say that or have heard that? Wash behind your ears.

Don't spill your dinner. Vacuum up the mess. You need to have a shower before you go to school. Who knows why? Everyone smells at school, it seems to me. But on and on it goes.

The issues of cleanliness that parents go on and on like broken records to their little kids about.

Kids, after all, don't care about dirt and cleanliness at all. Well, Hebrews chapter 9 is about the

greatest cleansing agent of all.

And like a TV advert, it compares this cleansing agent with an inferior product to show us that this cleansing agent of Hebrews chapter 9 is the best.

Now, the inferior product is the ritual cleansing that the Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood brought about. And it's described in the first paragraph of the chapter verses 1 to 10 of chapter 9.

[4 : 35] It's a fairly elaborate ritual. So, let's understand what is described before it's compared with a better cleansing agent. It describes the Old Testament tabernacle.

Later on, it became the temple in Jerusalem in a fixed building, but it uses the language of the tent and the tabernacle in the early part of the Old Testament. Basically, it's sort of one big hallway, probably a bit smaller than what we're in, but let's imagine that this is it.

And about two-thirds of the way down, there was a curtain across to separate the bigger part, the holy place, from the smaller part, the most holy place or the holy of holies.

So, verse 2 describes the outer court or vestibule, if you like. For a tent was constructed, the first one in which were the lampstand, the table and the bread of the presence.

This is called the holy place. That's part of the furniture that was in it, other things as well, but they're the key things. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the most holy place or the holy of holies.

[5 : 37] And in it stood the golden altar of incense. And the main thing in that holy of holies was the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant, we're told in verse 4, is overlaid on all sides with gold.

And inside the Ark of the Covenant, I should explain that the Ark is like a box or a chest, so big, so high, that sort of dimension. And inside it were placed the rod that Aaron, the brother of Moses, the first high priest, had a rod of wood that budded miraculously with leaves.

Inside it also was a little urn containing some of the manna that was the miraculous food provided in the wilderness. And also the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, the tablets of stone on which were the Ten Commandments on each of the two tablets.

They were inside the Ark. The Ark was covered around each of its sides with gold. And over the top of the Ark was a gold cover.

And on each end of the Ark on top was a cherubim. Two cherubim facing each other, angelic beings, not the little baby-faced, what is it, Raphael paintings that you can see.

[6 : 50] But two angelic figures, probably looking relatively fierce, wings outspread facing each other on the top of the Ark of the Covenant.

The cherubim don't occur very often in the Scriptures, but the first time they occur is when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, having eaten the forbidden fruit.

And having been expelled from the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Eden is then guarded by two cherubim, flaming swords to stop people getting back into the Garden.

Notice that in verse 5 here they are the cherubim of glory. That is, they are the cherubim to do with the presence of God. Often the word glory, especially in the Old Testament but also in the New, signifies God's presence.

The glory of the Lord filling the temple, that sort of idea. So here in the very heart of the tabernacle or temple, in the Holy of Holies, above the Ark of the Covenant, overlaid with gold, was the presence of God.

[7 : 52] Not symbolised by cherubim, they were around God's presence. There was nothing to symbolise God's presence, there never is in the Scriptures. If you like to look at it, it's an empty space, but there was God present in the Holy of Holies and the Ark was like the footstool of His throne.

And that's where God, in a sense, dwelt and lived. And across the covering of the Ark was the gold covering which was called the mercy seat or the seat of atonement.

So verse 5 says, Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Now these things we cannot speak now in detail, the writer says. There's a lot more that can be said. And you can read about this set up of the tabernacle in greater detail at the end of the book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

Here then is the throne room of God, the way in which God, in a sense, condescends to dwell in the midst of His people here on earth. And so those opening verses 1 to 5 describe the set up, the

furniture, if you like, of the old tabernacle temple in the Old Testament.

The next paragraph, verses 6 to 10, describes what happened in the procedures of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. We note that the access to the throne room of God is strictly limited.

[9 : 14] Even though at one level this is a very gracious act of God to come and dwell in the midst of His people, you couldn't just saunter in behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies to sort of browse around God's throne room or have a chat to God.

Access was very limited. The normal people were not even allowed into the outer court, the first court or vestibule of this tabernacle.

They would be beyond maybe looking in when some of the key events happened. Verse 6 tells us about the outside court. Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties.

So every day some of the priests would be offering sacrifices on the altar in the outer court, the first court if you like, of the tabernacle. Every day.

Some days more special than others, special Sabbath sacrifices, special sacrifices to do with some feasts. But every day there'd be priests ministering in the outer court alone. What about in the inner court where the throne room of God was and the Ark of the Covenant was?

[10 : 20] Only once a year could anyone go into that place. Only then could it be the high priest, no one else. And only then he must carry the blood of the atonement sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

Nobody else could go into the most holy place and only the high priest when he went in had to carry the blood of the atonement sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

So verse 7 tells us only the high priest goes into the second and he but once a year and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

So that's what happens in this Old Testament tabernacle or as it later became the temple in Jerusalem. And clearly this is an inferior product for spiritual cleansing.

Verse 8 tells us that by this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing. That is the way into the real sanctuary.

[11 : 28] Yes, there is limited access, strictly limited access into the sanctuary in the Old Covenant temple or tabernacle but for access into the real sanctuary, that is heaven to God's real presence, that's not yet been disclosed to people on earth.

So it is looking forward to a better access and it's also looking forward to a better cleansing. So verse 9 goes on to say, this is a symbol of the present time during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.

That is, it is looking forward to a better cleansing where the conscience, the insides of a person are cleansed. For all the Old Testament paraphernalia and ritual and elaborate detail, it only ever deals with, if you like, an external ritual purification.

So the Old Testament sacrificial system was strictly limited. It provided limited access to the throne room of God. It provided limited atonement because verse 7 says it's really only for sins committed unintentionally.

So the deliberate sins are not dealt with here. It is limited cleansing because it only deals with the ritual purification, not the cleansing of the insides, the conscience or heart or mind.

[12 : 50] And it's also limited in time. It's just a temporary measure looking forward as verse 10 says to the things to come, the better set up. So then, the better set up, the comparison if you like, the better product, the better cleansing and it's better or added new features come in verses 11 through to 14.

Notice the contrast, but verse 11 says, a very sharp contrast being painted here. But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy place.

Not talking about a tent on earth, a temple in Jerusalem or anything like that. It is saying that Jesus, the great high priest, has entered the real sanctuary, that is heaven itself.

That's where Jesus has gone. So this new set up, this new feature, if you like, provides firstly better access because it actually gets into the real presence of God in heaven.

The beginning of verse 12. He entered once for all into the holy place and he does so with a better blood. Not with the blood of bulls and goats, as verse 12 says, but with his own blood, that is, his own death on the cross, is the blood by which Jesus enters into heaven.

[14:17] And it is a better redemption. The end of verse 12 says, it is an eternal redemption. Now the word redemption is the language of the slave market of the ancient world.

A slave, if he was able to build up some money, could redeem himself from slavery, set himself to become a free person by paying an amount of money to pay off his slavery.

Or somebody, a nice benefactor, might do that for him. Money would be paid in order to redeem from slavery. And the writer here is saying that the effect of Jesus' death is to bring us an eternal redemption.

That is, we're redeemed for eternity from some form of slavery. And Jesus' death is the payment of the ransom to set us free.

So what is then this liberation, that this redemption that the writer has in mind here? Well, he goes on in verses 13 and 14 to make that a bit clearer, again by painting a contrast.

[15:21] Under the Old Testament system, the blood of goats and bulls, as verse 13 says, and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, they're all part of the system of the old covenant in Exodus and Numbers, sanctifies those who've been defiled so that their flesh is purified.

That is, it's an external thing, an external washing, an external spiritual or ritual cleansing. But, verse 14, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify not just our flesh, not just a ritual cleansing, but purify our conscience, our insides.

The thing that makes us tick on the inside of us is purified by the blood or death of Jesus Christ. And it's purifying our conscience from dead works, that is sins, purifying them, us to worship the living God.

That's the slavery from which we're being set free. The slavery to sin so that we are set free to worship or serve the living God. Not set free to do what we want, but set free, liberated, to serve the living God at the end of verse 14.

Now, behind this description of spiritual cleansing and the nature of sin is something about sin that we often neglect or misunderstand.

[16:52] Often we think of sin as being, we could add them up as though, yes, I told a lie or I coveted something or I hated somebody, didn't love somebody.

You know, we can list our sins as though there's just sort of actions or events or words that we've committed. But sin is more than that. Sin is dirt within.

Uncleanness in our hearts, our minds, our souls, our conscience, if you like. And like if you, I suppose, pour some dirt into the engine of your car, it corrodes, it spoils, it stops it working properly. It's not just something that we do wrong, but it's something that's wrong in the inside of us. Sin stains the soul. Sin makes our conscience, our heart, our mind, dirty and not what it's meant to be. And it requires more than just a ritual cleansing under the Old Testament system. It requires more than washing your mouth out with soap. It requires some cleansing on the inside.

[18:01] And what these verses, 13 and 14, are saying in particular is that it is the blood of Jesus, the death of Jesus on the cross that is powerful enough not just to forgive us for our sins, but to purify our conscience, to change us on the inside so that we're not just forgiven but we'll finally stand pure in our hearts before the presence of God in heaven.

That's what these verses are saying. That the death of Jesus is powerful enough not just to forgive but to purify us on the inside and take us into the very presence of God, not just a symbolic tent on earth but to take us into the throne room of God in heaven where God fully lives and dwells.

There's an old hymn that puts it this way, There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners purged beneath the flood lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see the fountain in his day and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.

Now what this is saying is a bit like what we saw last week in slightly different language. There we saw the language of the new covenant which writes the law of God on our hearts and minds.

[19:27] Here, again, we're dealing with the internal side of a human being and here it's to do with the cleansing of the heart or the mind or the soul or the conscience by the death or blood of Jesus shed for us.

Now you might think that this talk of washing in blood is a bit grotesque and certainly there are some opponents of Christian faith who say that this is really just primitive barbarism but it actually lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

The blood or death of Jesus that is powerful enough not only to forgive but to cleanse us and bring us to the throne of God in heaven and blood is the essential ingredient.

So the writer goes on to make that point by talking about a will. In ancient Greek as this was written in the word for covenant is the same word for will or testament and so he uses a sort of play on words to make his point by now talking about a will and you know as well as I do that wills only come into effect when somebody dies.

I'm reading the latest P.D. James murder mystery and of course inevitably I'll be wrong about who did it but the issue certainly at the moment seems to be the issue of a will and of course the murder is probably committed it's only just happened in the book that I've got to but it's probably committed because of the will of that person or the will of somebody else being affected by somebody's death. [20 : 57] That is for a will to come into effect somebody needs to die that is the person who wrote the will. So for my will to come into effect which I wrote some years ago I need to die until I die all the beneficiaries of my will who are anxiously waiting for the millions they won't get a thing until I die and that's what the writer says here in verses 16 and 17 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's not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

And then he goes on to say that the Old Testament as we call it the Old Will if you like the Old Covenant needs a death for it to come into effect. And back at Mount Sinai where the laws of God were given to the people of God through Moses at the end of that time there was a ceremony in Exodus chapter 24 and in that ceremony animals were killed and their blood sprinkled and spread as a sign of that Old Covenant coming into force in a sort of sealed definite contracted way between God and the people of God and that's behind the next few verses hence verse 18 says not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood for when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law he took the blood of cars and goats this is Exodus 24 with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people saying this is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained 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 so what he's saying is that blood is essential for a testament or will or covenant to come into effect and in the Old Testament the Old Covenant came into effect when blood was shed in that ceremony to mark the beginning if you like of the Old Covenant in a way blood was essential for that covenant to come into effect and blood was essential as verse 22 says to provide some form of atonement or forgiveness that's the Old Covenant so too the New Covenant the New Covenant with the better promises that we saw last week comes into effect with the shedding of blood you see blood is not an arbitrary aspect of the arrangement blood is essential to bring about the New Covenant with the new and better promises and the better inheritance of heaven blood needs to be shed a death needs to occur for that to happen the death of course is the death of Jesus for the better promises to come into effect so verse 15 tells us for this reason

Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance because a death has occurred that redeems them from their transgressions under the first covenant what it's saying is that the death of Jesus brings into effect a new covenant with new promises better promises and a better inheritance and that inheritance becomes ours because Jesus dies on the cross and sheds his blood there a few weeks ago I played a game of Monopoly with some friends of mine I love playing Monopoly and trying to drive hard bargains and trying to put off other people making deals with others trying to buy Mayfair and Park Lane and all that sort of thing I lost of course I usually do I lost to the Vicar of Carlton as it happens but during the course of playing the game I thought to myself wouldn't it be good that I could pick up the Monopoly money that I have and buy the real Mayfair or Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Square appeals to me I think 240 pounds here it is I had Monopoly money for 240 pounds and later next month I'll be in London just briefly and I could go and buy Trafalgar Square with my 240 pounds of Monopoly money that really appeals to me I'm not quite sure when you arrive at Trafalgar Square who you actually buy it from because there's so many people there who are all tourists no one seems to own it but nonetheless of course it'd be stupid wouldn't it I'd arrive at

Heathrow with my Monopoly money it wouldn't even get me a tube ticket because it won't go into the machine it's the wrong sort of currency see Monopoly money works when you play Monopoly on a board that is like a model or a sketch of the real London but Monopoly money doesn't actually buy you the real Trafalgar Square or the real Mayfair not even the real old Kent Road if anyone would ever want to buy that you need the real currency to buy the real stuff in London and you probably need lots more than 240 pounds to buy Trafalgar Square

I should imagine the currency for the old covenant the model if you like of heaven the tent or tabernacle was the blood of animals bulls and goats and sheep and so on that was the currency by which you were made ritually clean but it's not the currency to arrive in heaven to the throne room of God it's not the currency for an inside cleansing of your conscience that currency is the blood of Jesus not the blood of animals and it is the blood of Jesus the death of Jesus that is our currency given to us that we present when we arrive in heaven for our entry into the throne room there of God the currency for heaven is the blood of Jesus so the writer goes on in the next bit to say in verse 23 thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things that's the earthly tent or tabernacle or temple that's just the model it was necessary for them to be purified with these rites the blood of goats and bulls but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these a better currency for Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands a mere copy of the true one but he entered into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf the currency of heaven is the death of Jesus and Jesus has gone to heaven not just because that's where he's gone he's gone there on our behalf he's gone there for us for our benefit it's a little bit like leading a tour as I'll be doing in Greece and Turkey soon and some of you will be there part of that group we'll arrive at a hotel as the tour leader or guide one of us will get out go in and check the reservation for the rooms for the people on the bus

[27 : 48] Jesus in a sense has done that for us in heaven he's gone into heaven secured our room so to speak in the heavenly mansion he's gone there on our behalf guaranteeing our arrival and entry and accommodation eternally in heaven and the currency for his entry as well as the currency for ours is his death or blood on the cross for us well back to Friday mornings the usual boring routine of doing the laundry why is it that Omo or Fab or whatever haven't produced a product that boasts you only need to wash your clothes once and they'll always be clean wouldn't that be fantastic that is what I look for because every week you've got to do the laundry all over again wouldn't it be good if you could buy a version of Omo that says wash your clothes once and they'll always be clean now I'd imagine parents with kids in nappies would jump at the opportunity now of course the reason they haven't done it is not just because they can't it's because they put themselves out of business you wouldn't need to buy their product ever again every Friday you have to do the laundry whatever day you do your laundry how repetitive just like Old Testament sacrifices day by day week by week

Sabbath by Sabbath year by year on the day of atonement repetitively the priests of the Old Testament offered sacrifices but an added bonus feature if you like of the new covenant the new sacrifice of Jesus is that it is made once and once only verse 25 nor was it to offer himself again and again as the high priest enters the holy place year after year with blood that's not his own for then Jesus would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world but as it is Jesus has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself once for all that's powerful blood that's a powerful death not only does it forgive not only does it purify my heart and conscience and mind and soul but it does it once for the sins

I committed in the past the sins of the present and the sins of the future and for your sins in the past and your sins present and your sins in the future whatever they may be and for the sins of any person in the past in the present and in the future of any person who's ever lived in any place one death once for all that's a powerful death sufficient for every sin of every person who's ever lived who turns to Jesus for forgiveness see God will never say to Jesus in heaven Jesus your credit with me for the sins of the people is almost expired you've got to go and die again never will he need to say that God is never going to say to Jesus your death has now been met by all these people no more people can come in he'll never need to say that because the fountain of Jesus blood is sufficient for all people all time all sins all places and it's effective for those who turn to him for mercy and forgiveness in the communion service in the old communion service are the words by Jesus one oblation of himself once offered a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world can't get clearer than that like you can't get clearer than

these words at the end of Hebrews 9

Jesus' death was once for all why then do we so often doubt the certainty of our salvation why do we so often doubt that somehow God will forgive these sins that we've committed why so often do we doubt the certainty of our entry into heaven why are we so uncertain about our forgiveness of sins why do we carry around so often the guilt for our sin because our salvation is totally absolutely perfectly finally secured by Jesus' death on the cross for us he's gone to heaven on our behalf and nothing more needs be done in the old testament sacrifice of the day of atonement the people would look on from a distance anxiously and eagerly awaiting the high priest to come back out from behind the curtain having distributed the blood of the sacrifice there knowing that when he returned from the other side of the curtain it showed the acceptance of that atonement sacrifice and so for Christians the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of God accepting that sacrifice but we long for Jesus to come back again from heaven as the end of chapter 9 says 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 awaiting for him another old hymn says it this way guilty vile and lost were we spotless lamb of God was he full atonement can it be hallelujah what a saviour and when he comes our glorious king all his ransomed home to bring then anew this song we'll sing hallelujah what a saviour off another happier man all how you do that you may try others have to you may have har come

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