

Shadow and Reality

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, it turned out that there were questions from last week, because some of you gave feedback to me at the end of the service. Two interesting things came up. The first is that someone suggested that I should have more dad jokes in my sermon.

So the person said my exodus was good, but the sermon needed more dad jokes. She even said there were some websites I could go to for inspiration. Now, I'm not sure what the rest of you think, but before you all pile in and think it's a good idea, perhaps you should consult Emma and Lauren first.

The second thing, however, was more relevant to the text. Some of you were surprised when I said that the old tabernacle or temple wasn't where God dwelt. After all, you've read in the Old Testament about God's presence filling the temple with smoke.

And there are verses like this one in Exodus 25, verse 8, where God instructs Moses to build the tabernacle so that he may dwell among them. Doesn't this suggest God dwells in the temple? Elsewhere, when King Solomon finally builds God's temple, he makes this statement in 1 Kings 8, verse 12. The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud.

[1 : 15] I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever. But then we have this a few verses later in verse 27, where Solomon prays, but will God really dwell on earth?

The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built. Stephen in Acts says the very same thing in his speech. Remember how he was speaking against the Jewish elders who taught they could confine God to the temple?

Well, Stephen refutes them in chapter 7, verse 48. However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says, Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord? Or where will my resting place be? And so the truth is, God's dwelling place, his true dwelling place, is in heaven.

That's where his throne is. But he condescends to be present on earth, but only to the extent of placing his toes on it. For you see, God's simply too big for this tiny planet of ours, much less for a small temple within it.

[2 : 30] Of course, we know God doesn't really have feet or toes. Rather, the point is to ward us from thinking that the temple is really where God's fullness dwells. It's a little like how embassies work.

The land on which an embassy sits actually belongs to the foreign country. It's foreign soil. That's why, for example, the Brits cannot arrest WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, even though he's in London.

Because being holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy, he's technically on Ecuadorian soil. And so the Temporal Echo is heavenly territory, if you like, and God's present in it.

But his true dwelling is in heaven. He cannot be confined to time and space. And yet, his presence in the Temporal Echo expresses his great desire to dwell among his people.

Which is why, as an aside, I'm blown away when I read a verse like Colossians 2 and verse 9, because it says that the fullness of the deity dwells in the person of Jesus in bodily form.

[3 : 33] The Temporal Echo or the entire earth, in fact, cannot contain the fullness of God, but he does dwell fully in Jesus. And so when we know Jesus, we meet God fully.

Not a copy or shadow of him, but his real fullness. I mean, how amazing is that? Now, I've gone a little about this from last week, because it's actually a fitting prelude to this week's passage.

For tonight, we come again to the idea of copies and reality, of the shadow of things and the real thing itself. So remember last week, in verse 23 of chapter 9, the writer notes that it was necessary

then for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Well, this idea is taken up again in verse 1 of chapter 10. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. What the law stipulated of annual animal sacrifices by the priest in a man-made sanctuary was only ever a shadow of the real thing.

Going on, For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered?

[5 : 01] For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Instead, these continual offerings was God's way of reminding them that the blood of bulls cannot take away sin. Now, this idea of copies and the real thing is something I want to delve a little deeper with you.

You see, there's normally two ways of talking about copies and the real thing. The first way is when the copies are improvements on the original. So, for instance, we all know that the modern cars today are improved copies of the original Model T Ford.

The original invention was the Ford, but there have been many improvements since then. So much so, aside from vintage car lovers, today everyone prefers modern cars.

You know, they're faster, safer, and more comfortable. But there's also another way to look at copies and originals. And it's where the original is the genuine and best thing, and the copies are cheap imitations.

[6 : 15] And so, the classic case in point are the fake branded goods, like this pair of lovely Nike slippers, spelled N-K-I-E.

Now, in this case, the copy hasn't improved on the original, has it? Rather, it's a pale imitation of it. And it's this second way in which we need to think about the tabernacle and sacrifices.

Jesus isn't the improved version of the Old Testament. Rather, God always had Jesus as the original. But He sets up the earthly system as a copy to prepare the people for what's to come.

And so, for thousands of years, the people had something to teach and prepare them, and to help them see their inability to save themselves, so that when Jesus finally comes, they'll get it.

Well, at least some of them did, like the apostles whom God chose to then proclaim it, and write it down in the New Testament. And if I may digress again, God does this with other things too, like marriage, for instance.

[7 : 19] All human marriages are actually shadows of the ultimate marriage between Christ and His Church. That's what Ephesians 5 is about. Which is why, if you're a single and a Christian, the wonderful truth and comfort is that you haven't missed out on the joy of marriage, but you're part of the greatest marriage of which every human marriage is a shadow.

The same can be said about father-son relationships. The ultimate father-son relationship is between God the Father and God the Son. All other father-son relationships and parent and child ones are patterned after it.

And so, when we believe in Christ, everyone, male and female, share in Jesus' sonship, so that we can each call God our Father. And so, that's a great comfort, isn't it?

Because even if you haven't had the best father, or your father died when you were young, you still have the perfect father in heaven. And this perfect father is from which every human father is simply a shadow.

But let's return to the passage, because week after week now, I and others preaching have been saying how, in Jesus, we finally encounter the real thing. He's the priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

[8 : 35] He's the guarantor of a better covenant, the one who serves at the true tabernacle, the one who offers himself as a perfect sacrifice, whose blood is able to cleanse our conscience.

But the question remains, what makes him all these things? What has he done that makes him the perfect high priest and sacrifice? Well, that's what the next few verses explain for us here, for we see point two, that Jesus offers what God really desires.

Now again, the writer touched on this earlier. We see, for instance, in Hebrews 2, verse 17, that he's the faithful high priest in service to God. Then again, in chapter 4, verse 15, he was tempted in

every way, yet did not sin.

But we now see Jesus' faithfulness and perfection is expressed in another way. And the way he dies, it is to ascribe another psalm to Jesus.

So in verse 5 we read, Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifice an offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

[9 : 58] Then I said, Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, my God. God did not desire sacrifices, you see.

Instead, the thing he really desired is for his people to be wholly submissive to his will. If that had been the case with Adam and Eve and with Israel afterwards, no sacrifices would have been needed.

Samuel gave Saul the same admonishment in our first reading tonight. Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

To acknowledge God as God is to submit to his sovereignty over us, and that means to submit to his will. And it is only in Jesus that we find someone who not only did it willingly, but perfectly as well.

That is why the blood of animals did not please God, because there is no sense in which they were willing sacrifices. Jesus, on the other hand, wasn't a perfect sacrifice simply because his body was physically superior.

[11 : 10] No, his body was just like ours. Neither was it that his blood was somehow more pure. Rather, it is because of his perfect willingness to obey the Father.

That was why he was the perfect sacrifice. All his life was lived in submission to God's will, even to the point of death on the cross. Remember his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Father, if you are willing, take this cup of suffering from me, yet not my will, but yours be done. If this perfect will totally submitted to God's will, it is this perfect will that makes Jesus the perfect once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

Which means, as I said last week, he fulfills and therefore sets aside for us the requirements of the first covenant. Verse 9. While at the same time, again for us, establishes once-for-all the requirements of the second.

Therefore, as a result, verse 10, by that will that is of Jesus, wholly submitted to the will of God, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once-for-all.

[12 : 21] God accepts Christ's sacrifice as our sacrifice, something we should have given instead. Now, in verse 11 and 12, we again return to the refrain of copies and realities.

So the copy, day after day, again and again, priests offering sacrifices that can never take away sin. And the reality? Verse 12. This priest offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, and sat down at the right hand of God as high priest, but also as conqueror over sin and evil, waiting for all things to be subject to Him.

And when we willingly subject ourselves to Jesus and God, then what Jesus offers us, point three, is the reality of the good things to come. It's a funny phrase, isn't it?

Which I borrowed from verse one, to have the reality of the good things to come. It's a sort of now and not yet kind of phrase. So on the one hand, we really have the good things, but on the other, they are also things to come.

But we see this dynamic right here in verse 14 too. For it says, By one sacrifice, He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

[13 : 37] And so, we're already made perfect forever by Christ's death. Verse 10 confirms that to us as well. But on the other, we are being made holy, not in the sense of sanctification or becoming better Christians, but in the sense that we've yet to enter our final rest.

We're still waiting for Jesus to bring salvation. Chapter 9 and verse 28. So that we may receive the promised eternal inheritance. Chapter 9 and verse 15.

But what's so wonderful is that we've got the real thing now. Our life as Christians isn't a shadow of the real thing. It's not a fake imitation like those Nike slippers.

No. When we are in Christ, we live under the new covenant now. The old has already been set aside. Our lives today is a true experience of what it will be like in eternity.

Which is why the writer returns again to Jeremiah 31, which we saw two weeks ago in chapter 8. There we saw what life under the new covenant is like. So, verse 15 here.

[14:46] The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says, This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds.

Then he adds, Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. And when these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. To his readers being tempted to revert back to Judaism, the writer of Hebrews is pleading, Please, don't go back to the shadow.

Not when you've got the real thing. It's like saying to Devin, Welcome back, by the way, Devin. A few weeks ago when he was preaching and he talked about his experience going from tricycles to bicycles.

It's like saying to Devin, Please, don't go back to riding tricycles. Haven't you experienced the thrill of riding a bicycle? Why would you ever go back to tricycles? The readers had God's law written in their hearts.

Their sins, past, present, and future were totally forgotten and forgiven by God. So why go back to animal sacrifices to attain forgiveness? They are no longer necessary.

[16:00] But to sacrifice again is to deny that what Jesus did was enough. Now as for us in the 21st century and living in the West, our danger is probably not that we revert back to animal sacrifices.

And yet, there are still temptations, aren't there, to look for something other than Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice. You know, when the Jewish temple was destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago, which meant that the Jews could no longer offer animal sacrifices for sins, they eventually replaced it with other forms of sacrifices, that of repentance, prayer, and good deeds.

And they practice it to this day. That is how many Jews think they will be forgiven. Now as Christians, we repent as well and pray and do good, but our motivation isn't that there will be sacrifices for our sins.

They're not done to redeem ourselves or to make amends for our wrongs. That's because our sins are already forgiven in Christ. And so, we're motivated to do good because of the joyful and thankful heart that we have.

And our motivation for prayer and doing good is not guilt that needs to be assuaged that drives us to do that. It mustn't be driven by a debtor's ethic to think that we've got to do good somehow to repay God's forgiveness.

[17:29] It's sort of the difference between having a credit card with no limit versus one with a very small limit. When you have the latter, you're always worried, aren't you? You're always checking how much you've spent and paying it down because you don't want to breach that limit.

Whereas if you had a card without limit, then you don't think twice about putting it on the card, would you? Even better, you don't even need to consider how you'll pay it back. Well, with Jesus, we too have a limitless credit for our sins.

Now, that's not to say that we then use it to sin however we want, but it gives us confidence to know that we're forgiven whenever we confess our sins, knowing there is no limit to how much God will forgive us.

Of course, it's still important to regularly search our hearts and confess our sins because that reminds us that we're forgiven because of Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice.

It's the same reason why we celebrate the Lord's Supper every month as we do tonight. And because what we're focused on is new covenant living, not old, then the emphasis is on living to serve God, not continually raking up past sins.

[18:41] You know, when we wake up each morning, our heart's prayer should be, God, how can I do your will today? Which law have you put in my heart so that I may obey it?

And of course, we want to obey every law. That's what our heart should desire to do. And friends, let me encourage you to do this even when life is tough and you don't feel up to it.

Why? Because if you're in Christ, then the true reality is your life is now under the new covenant whether you feel like it or not. Now friends, I know how easily it is to forget this reality and we get caught up with the things of this life that it's easy to forget we're made for the new creation and that in Christ, what we're to do is to begin to live under it.

Day after day, the pressures of this life that demands our attention pull on us week after week the desires of the flesh tug at us. We're told constantly to work and play hard for rewards in this life to gain the love and admiration of this will.

And that's why I keep coming back to God's words so that the Holy Spirit can remind me that there's actually another way of living. That more importantly I have another better goal in life that the real thing isn't found in this life but in Christ who offers the reality of the good things to come.

[20 : 04] We already have that reality now in God's forgiveness, joy, peace and the Holy Spirit and we can live that life now by doing God's will as He's revealed in His laws.

But I'm living for that day when I'll be in God's presence forever in body as well as spirit. It's just like a trainee surgeon or airline pilot.

You know when she's at surgeon school practicing her surgeon skills I don't know do they still use animal parts? No they don't they must have another way of practicing anyway or if he's the simulator you know he's in the simulator cockpit as a trainee pilot you know none of them thinks wow this is so much fun I think I'll stay I'll just stay here forever just keep practicing surgery or flying no they practice because they're aiming for a bigger reality that are really saving lives and flying real planes C.S. Lewis had that famous quote didn't he it's on the slide if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can truly satisfy the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world so my friends if you have not received Christ yet but a desire has now been stirred that nothing in this world satisfies, then come to Him now and know this reality. Please, come and speak to me about this after church.

And if you already know and love Jesus, well, don't let go of Him. And don't let go of the vision of the good things to come. Remind yourself daily that you're made for the world to come and seeking and keeping God's will under the new covenant.

[22 : 09] Thank you.