

The Cross of Christ: A Single Sacrifice for Sins

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to another Sermon on the Web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada. You are free to use this mp3 audio file and to redistribute it to others without alteration and without charge. After the sermon, listen for more information about St. John's Shaughnessy Church and the St. John's website. The following message is from the October 15, 2000 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. The Reverend David Short delivered his message from the book of Hebrews, the ninth chapter, verses 11 to 28. The title of the message is The Cross of

Christ, A Single Sacrifice. Let's open our Bibles to Hebrews chapters 9 and 10, page 208 and 209. Jesus said that God hides his wisdom from the wise and the clever but reveals it to babies and children which is why it's only adults who have difficulty with the Old Testament. Children don't seem to have any problem with the Old Testament. Indeed the more perplexing and morally challenging it becomes the more children love it, at least my children. So when it comes to the book of Leviticus I can't tell you how many of my friends have either just skipped it when they're reading the Bible or when they get to the book of Leviticus stop reading the Bible altogether. Which is a pity because the book of Leviticus is not intellectually challenging but it is spiritually challenging and is one of the most important books for us as Christians because it teaches us how we should understand the cross of Jesus Christ. Halfway through the book of Exodus God announces to Moses that he wants to come and dwell with his people. He's rescued them from slavery in Egypt with his mighty power and outstretched arm. He's brought them to Sinai and given them the law. But before they go into the land he says, I the God of all the earth, the creator of the ends of time, want to come and dwell with my people. And the second half of the book of Exodus is a detailed plan given by God for them to build a tent for God to dwell in, a tabernacle. And the book of Exodus finishes as the glory of God comes down from heaven and dwells in that tabernacle. There's only one problem. God is holy and we are not. In fact God burns with such a purity of love and majesty and holiness that no human being can see God and live. Which is a major problem if God wants to come and live with you.

But in his kindness and in his mercy God provides a way to make it possible. And he gives his people a system, a way of life to teach them about holiness and the seriousness of sin. A system which deals with human sin in such a way that they may enjoy the very presence of God. Because the problem really is not God's holiness. The problem is our unholiness.

And it's not possible to break free from it or to hide it or to cleanse ourselves. Only God can provide a way for us to draw near to him in love. And the way that he gave his people in the Old Testament is the way of sacrifice. He gives to his people a sacrificial system.

Not because of the inherent value of animal sacrifices but to teach his people that sin always demands a death. That the only way we can be cleansed from sin is by the shedding of blood. If you lived in the Old Testament times, each week you and your family would go to the tent at the center of the camp. You weren't allowed inside but at the door of the tabernacle there was an altar set up and you would purchase a clean animal and take it to the priest. And the priest would lay his hands on the live animal and confess your sins on the animal in such a way that your sins would be transferred to the animal.

[4 : 36] Then the animal would be killed, you would be sprinkled with its blood and the animal would be burned. It was a dramatic lesson that the penalty for sin was death. That before your sins could be forgiven a death had to be performed.

The priests could go into the tabernacle but there was one place they could not go and that was the Holy of Holies. The room which the very presence of God dwelt. There was only one person in all the tribe of Israel who could go in and that was the High Priest.

And he could only go in one day a year which was the Day of Atonement. He would have to make sacrifice for his own sins and for the sins of priests. And then he would take some of the blood of the sacrifice from the bull and go into the Holy of Holies and present that blood.

And then he would come out of the Holy of Holies and he would take a live goat and he would lay his hands on the goat and he would confess the sins of Israel on the goat and the goat would then be sent out into the wilderness never to return bearing the sins of the people from which we get the word scapegoat.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year God's people brought sacrifices for their sins. And after they entered the land and the sanctuary was replaced with the temple, sacrifices were offered to God.

[5 : 56] Israel's whole understanding of reality was shaped and built on these symbols. The incalculable gulf between the holiness of God and my own sinfulness. The dramatic need for the sacrifice and the death powerfully formed their understanding.

And that is why the promise of the new covenant is so precious. Because God says there's going to come a time where I'm going to forgive your sins and remember them, take them completely away.

I'm going to deal with that gulf once and forever and you're going to have joyful, uninterrupted access to my presence. Which brings us to the letter to the Hebrews.

It's written to a group of Jews who had converted to Christianity but were under pressure to slide back into Judaism. And the writer says that is because you have not grasped what has happened for you in the death of Jesus Christ.

And chapters 9 to 10 are an extended explanation of the cross. Because in his death Jesus Christ has become our High Priest.

[7 : 03] He has become the mediator of a new covenant. And the author wants us to see that there are three realities that have come to us through his death. The first is this. We now have permanent access to the presence, the heavenly presence of God.

Look down at chapter 9 verse 11 please. When Christ appeared as the High Priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy place, taking not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

You can hear the writer's astonishment. All the symbols of the old covenant, which showed the privilege of access to God, have come. Now that Jesus Christ has appeared and died, the shadow and the symbol have given way to the perfect and eternal reality.

And this, Jesus has died not to win us access into a human structure, the Holy of Holies, but into heaven itself, into the presence of God. And the blood that has opened the way for us is not the blood of an animal, it is the blood of the perfect Son of God.

Jesus has gone through the heavens into the presence of God where he is today. Look at verse 24. Christ has entered not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

[8 : 38] Under the old covenant, the high priest went into the Holy of Holies and came out very smartly. But Jesus has entered the actual presence of God.

And there he stays on our behalf. And that is why when Jesus died on the cross, God tore the curtain of the temple in two from top to bottom to demonstrate that there was no longer any barrier between him and us.

So long as Jesus has gone into heaven, our sins can no longer be counted against us. There is no more sacrifice that is needed. And if you cast your eyes down in chapter 10 verses 11 to 13, the writer makes a great deal of the fact that Jesus is now sitting in heaven.

He is sitting down there. In the old covenant, the priest would never have dared sit down in the Holy of Holies. Day after day, year after year, they had to keep offering sacrifices.

But when God raised Jesus from the dead, he exalted him and seated him at his own right hand. Because of his death, Jesus has achieved what all the generations of the Levitical priests could not.

[9 : 49] His sacrifice has purified us for all time and made those sacrifices obsolete. Nothing can now be added. His death is a single sacrifice offered for all time.

He now sits in God's presence. God has received his work as successful. Our sins are forgiven and paid for. And that is why the author of this letter urges us to draw near to the throne of God's grace, where God is, with boldness.

Because we have someone who has gone through the heavens into the presence of God, Jesus the Son of God. And that means this. That when we are tempted to think that our sin is very deep, and that I am not welcome in God's presence, and that I cannot, I am beyond forgiving, this book says to us, look at Jesus Christ, seated in God's presence.

He has died our death. He has purified us for all time. The one seated guarantees our welcome. Draw near and find mercy and grace to help in time of need.

Jesus died to bring us permanent access to the presence of God in heaven. Secondly, Jesus died to purify our conscience. If you look down in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 9, you can see that the system of sacrifice under the old covenant was not just an education.

[11 : 15] They did restore formal communion with God. But they could never deal with internal impurity and unholiness and guilt. Do you remember in Psalm 51 when King David, overwhelmed with guilt, says to God, You have no delight in sacrifice, O Lord.

If I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart of God you will not despise. The death of Jesus is a different kind of death than the animal symbolic death.

It operates in a moral and spiritual plane. It brings inward and spiritual purification. And it makes real communion with God possible. And that is why you can always tell if Jesus' death has become real in someone's life.

Because it changes them at the level of their heart and motivation. It doesn't make church going and reading God's word suddenly easy and always brilliant. But it means that the reason we do it is because we have an inward desire to do so.

Jesus' death not only brings us access to the heavenly presence of God, not only purifies us, but thirdly his death is a single sacrifice.

[12 : 33] An eternal and unrepeatable sacrifice forever. And it is here in this third point that we come to the core of the passage. Again and again through the book of Hebrews and particularly in these two chapters we are told that Jesus Christ has died once for all or once for all time.

That is why through his death we have an eternal redemption, an eternal salvation, an eternal covenant. In his death, Jesus accomplished our salvation and forgiveness.

It never needs to be repeated. It is permanent and eternally valid. And such is its power that even those who sinned under the old covenant are forgiven through it.

It works forward and it works backward. That is the point of verse 15. And it is not that Jesus has now gone into the Father's presence and is offering himself over and over again to God.

Rather what the writer is saying is in that one event on a particular Friday afternoon outside the walls of Jerusalem under the reign of Pontius Pilate Jesus fully and finally secured our redemption.

[13 : 49] What he did on the cross he did in relation to God. And now he has entered into the holy place. And for all who trust in him the consequences are eternal.

Look down at verse 25 of chapter 9. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly as the high priest enters the holy place yearly with blood not his own.

For then Jesus would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is he appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And just as it is appointed for men 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.

Jesus has appeared once and the purpose of his appearing was to conclusively and finally take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

[14 : 53] By dying in our place Jesus has removed our sin. The atoning work is final and finished. And I want to finish by pointing out three implications for us.

And the first has to do with purgatory. You may be aware that purgatory was a teaching invented around the 8th century.

Purgatory teaches that after death God offers us a kind of second chance. A period for moral improvement where we can purify ourselves before we get to heaven. But I want to say that the idea of purgatory or a second chance not only flies in the face of the plain teaching of verse 27.

It degrades the death of Jesus from being our eternal redemption into something not quite good enough to get us to heaven. Something which needs our help.

Because we are an Anglican church I want to turn you to the prayer book. I wonder if you would pick up the wine coloured prayer book and turn to the back to page 706. I probably shouldn't tell you this but there are 39 articles at the end of the prayer book which are the basis of Anglican belief based on the scriptures.

[16 : 14] And they are very good reading during dull sermons. Look at article 22 of Purgatory.

The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory wrote Cramner, pardons, worshipping and adoration, as well of images and of relics and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of scripture but rather repugnant to the word of God.

What Cramner is simply saying is that there is a cruelty in the doctrine of purgatory. It is a vain hope because it takes our trust away from the death of Jesus.

The one true sacrifice for sin. That's the first implication. The second has to do with pluralism. By the way keep the prayer book in your hand for a minute.

The second has to do with pluralism. Now all of us have friends who belong to other religions. And it's vital for us as Christians to affirm much that it is good in other religions.

[17 : 18] Many of the people I know in other religions are asking very perceptive questions. We need to build bridges and we need to be very good listeners. But when it is our turn to speak we must not be ashamed to say that Christ Jesus has offered for all time the single sacrifice for sins.

That apart from his death there is no forgiveness of sins. We need to say with the writer of this book that it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to deal with sin. It is by the blood of Jesus alone that we can draw near to God.

And there is deep sincerity and deep yearning in other religions. But we need to be clear that sincerity is no guarantee of truth. And I think we as Christians have failed in this area.

When we are called upon to speak about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. We usually speak about the uniqueness of his person. He is the divine son of God. He did wonderful miracles. And while that is true I think it is less than half the truth.

Because ultimately the reason that we believe that Jesus is the only way to God is because Jesus has died our death. It is only Jesus who now sits in the presence of God on our behalf.

[18 : 35] It is only in his death our sins are forgiven and we have access to God. That is why eternal life cannot be found outside of Jesus and his death.

We cannot achieve salvation through the five pillars of Islam. Through Hindu renunciation. Through Buddhist detachment. All the patterns of Sikhism. It is Christ alone who has entered the holy place, the presence of God.

God taking with him not anything we do but his own blood thus securing for us an eternal redemption. And the third and final implication is life under the new covenant.

You see under the old covenant life was full of symbols. And all those symbols pointed forward to the person of Jesus Christ.

Now that Jesus has appeared as the mediator of the new covenant. He has left us two symbols. Both of which point back to his finished work on the cross.

[19 : 40] Baptism and Holy Communion. And it is very important for us to be clear. That when we celebrate the Holy Communion. We are not sacrificing Christ over again.

Nor are we offering to God Christ's sacrifice. Rather in Cramner's words. It is a memorial of Christ's once for all finished work on the cross.

Take up the prayer book again. Turn over to Article 31 please. On page 710. At the bottom of the page.

The offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world both original and actual.

There is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifice of masses in the which it was commonly said that the priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead. To have remission of pain and guilt were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.

[20 : 47] And you can ask Dr. Robinson what the second half of that is all about after the service. That is why when Cramner wrote the Book of Common Prayer. He dropped every reference to the altar.

Instead he wanted us to call it a holy table. You won't find any reference to the altar in the Book of Common Prayer. It is not a biblical nor a helpful way of speaking or thinking about the table.

As we come and celebrate the Holy Communion. Each time we hear these wonderful words. That Jesus Christ suffered death upon the cross for our redemption.

Who made there by his one oblation of himself once offered. A full perfect and sufficient sacrifice oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

So friends let us rest ourselves entirely on the death of Jesus the blood once shed. As we come to communion let's confess our sins confidently that our lives will be cleansed by that death.

[21 : 54] Let us draw near to the throne of grace. Because the one who loved us and died for us is there seated at the Father's side. He has entered by his own blood.

He draws us by his mercy and grace. To enjoy the eternal redemption that he has secured for us. Amen.

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That address is www.stjohns.org.

On the website, you will also find information about ministries, worship services, and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy. We hope that this sermon on the web has helped you, and that you will share it with others.

[23 : 07] Thank you.