

Hebrews 10:1-18 AM

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[0 : 0 0] and pray. Now, Heavenly Father, we pray that you would give us such a view of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would draw near to you with great confidence, that we would hold fast the hope that you've given us in him, and that we'd think carefully and creatively about how to stir each other up to love and good works. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated.

Well, I want to add my greeting as well to Jordan, saying congratulations to those of you who are here in person. I was going to say a greeting to those who are online, and I will.

Greetings to those of you who are online. Great, great that you're able to join us. How wonderful that we have a production ministry now post-COVID, but it is nice to meet with the real Christians here in person. With Will doing the kids thing on the beach, I've done some baptisms down at Jericho from time to time. I shouldn't say this, but now that I'm on my way out, I can say anything I like.

And the first time someone asked to be baptised, the only date they could do it was January the 4th, and it had snowed. So we went down to the beach with people and we went into the water. And what I didn't tell this person was that I still have my wetsuit from Australia. So I was able to get through it, but they struggled. Now let's turn to Hebrews chapter 10, shall we? Page 1006.

And around the office, the lunchroom, the younger staff recommend TV series to watch. And so one of the ones that was recommended is a series called Silo, which I've been watching. It's pretty grim.

[2 : 0 0] I'm not recommending it. It's set in the future. The world is not habitable. And the silo is 10,000 people are living in a giant underground silo of 144 levels. And at key points, the mayor of the silo reads from the founding document and says, we do not know why we're here. We do not know who built the silo. We do not know why everything else outside the silo is as it is. We do know when it's safe to go outside. So we do not know when it's safe to go outside. We only know that that day is not today.

Spoiler alert. The beginning of season two, we discover there are other silos. And that there's a much bigger world out there and that their story in the silo is actually part of a much bigger story. And I think that's a great picture of life without God. We don't know why we're here.

We don't know where we've come from. We don't know what the purpose of life is. We don't know what's wrong. We don't know where we're going. But we're busy designing and creating our own little stories without seeing that we too are part of a much greater story. And this series is called The Story of God. And the story of God tells us where we come from and where we're going to and what the purpose of life is. And the story of God is a love story, which means the story of the world and the story of history and the story of the Bible and our story is also a love story. So when God created the world, he did it out of his generosity, goodness and kindness as a place for him to dwell with his people.

When he rescued them from Egypt, the same thing. He delivered them, then came to dwell with them through priesthood and sacrifices. And then at the end of the Old Testament, he promises a new covenant. And right in that chapter 31 of Jeremiah, he says, so I will be their God and they'll be my people. I'll put my law in their hearts. And last week, Mary puts baby Jesus into the hands of old Simeon. And he says, I can die a happy man. I'm holding salvation in my arms.

But the story of God is not all happiness and harmony. It's a love story, but it's a story of unrequited love. Because we don't return his love. He gives and longs, but the love never really comes back to him. He yearns, but we ignore him. And the reason that we don't return his love is the same reason Jesus has come into the world. It's one of those very big little Bible words. It's the word sin, S-I-N.

When I first came to St. John's, I had a number of people that whenever I mentioned sin in a sermon, objected afterwards. I now understand we don't like this word. Sin has I at the centre.

[5 : 10] When you talk to people, your friends, they'll always agree there's something wrong with this world. But apart from the revelation of goodness and holiness of God, we'd never believe it was sin.

Because one of the things that sin does to us, it's like a power in us that blinds us to reality. And it drives us away from God to not love God, but instead to want to be God.

To replace God with ourselves. To put a little crown on ourselves and try to act like little deities. This is important because sin, the only time you see the word sin is on a dessert menu.

But sin is not selfishness. It's not impersonal. It's not doing bad things. It's not messing up my life.

Sin is a deeply personal violation and betrayal of the God who made me and loved me.

It's the opposite of the return of love. And it creates a hostility in my heart to God. It defaces the image of God in me. It defiles my inner life.

[6 : 13] And it means I can't draw near to God. And something has to happen that's vast and radical. That has to take away my sins somewhere else. That has to cleanse my heart.

That has to bring me to God to give me a new heart. And that is what the whole of the book of Hebrews is about. And the writer keeps using the word better to describe who Jesus is and what he's done.

Jesus is better than angels. He's better than Moses. He's better than Joshua. He's better than Aaron. He's better than all the Old Testament priests. And Jesus gives us a better hope and a better covenant and better sacrifices.

He is the better sacrifice. In chapter 10, what Jesus does in his death is so conclusive, it ends every form of religion.

He doesn't just come and establish a new form of religion alongside the others. He actually comes to bring a new creation, to bring us to God. He offers himself as the one final sacrifice that we can draw near to God, not just now but forever.

[7 : 19] And verse 1 picks up the Old Testament ceremonies, the offerings and sacrifices, the priests and the temple, and says they're a shadow foreshadowing the great thing that's going to come in Jesus Christ.

And what I have found astonishing looking at this this week is the chapter takes us inside the heart and mind of Jesus as he entered our world in the incarnation.

What was on his mind and heart. What he was thinking he was going to do on the cross. So we're going to dive in and start at verses 5 to 7. Here are the words of Jesus before he came into the world.

And using the words of Psalm 40, we hear the voice of the heavenly Jesus before he is incarnate.

Just look at verse 5, please. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you've prepared for me.

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

[8 : 33] And of all the things Jesus could have said, this goes to the essence of why he came. He looks at the entire Old Testament system of sacrifices and priests, which God gave in the first place.

All the offerings of bulls and goats and sheep and doves. And Jesus tells us that God took no pleasure in any of it. That the killing of animals, yes, it points forward to the death of Jesus, and that's part of the reason he gave it.

But there's no value, there's no intrinsic value in the death of an animal itself. It doesn't give God pleasure. But what does give God pleasure is the willing, heartfelt obedience to his will, the return of his love.

And that's what Jesus says, You have prepared a body for me, I have come to do your will. Isn't that amazing? As Jesus enters the world, as a human baby, he knows God is giving him a body which will become the true sacrifice for sin once for all, the ultimate act of doing the Father's will.

To all the animal sacrifices in the world cannot deal with human sin. Under the Old Covenant, they covered, that's the word that's used, they covered the sin, but they never took the sin away.

[9 : 58] And they never gave fresh hearts. They never cleansed us inwardly. And all the sins of all the people under the Old Testament times was covered until Jesus came.

And in the death of Jesus, he takes away the sins, not only of those who come after, but of those who came before. That's what chapter 9, 15 says.

But no animal can pay for my sin or your sin. Nor are they able to cleanse my heart inwardly or make me a new person or enable me to love God.

No animal can truly substitute for a human. And no other human can pay for my sin. You've got your own sins to pay for. Sorry about that.

What we need is a human who is wholly innocent, entirely without sin. Who voluntarily offers themselves to give their life over to death. To take away my individual sins.

[10:58] And then I can draw near to God and enter his presence. And we also need that person to be not just human, but God in the flesh. So that their death might cover more than just one person, but might extend to all who come to him and have faith in him.

That's why Jesus comes into the world saying, I've come to do your will. This is an offering infinitely superior to any other animal offering.

Because it is the love of God that is now being returned. Absolute loving surrender. Because you remember in Jesus' life, he was obsessed with doing the will of the Father.

It is my food. It is my bread. It's my meat and drink to do the will of my Father. And I think that's what made Jesus so secure and so compassionate and so clear.

Throughout his life and in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced vicious, fierce temptations to sin. But he endured right to the bottom. We don't understand Jesus' resistance to sin because we usually give up halfway down.

[12:07] But through his sufferings and in these temptations, he learned obedience and has become perfectly qualified to die in our place. And this is the offering God desires.

So his sacrifice does what no other could ever do. And it has two results. Chapter 10. One result outside us, external. One inside us, internal.

The first result is external. Jesus' death on the cross, his perfect sacrifice, does away with the entire Old Testament system. His death on the cross creates an entirely new reality between God and humanity.

Now the way is open for us to draw near to God. See verse 9? Behold, I've come to do your will. He does away with the first will, the first covenant, in order to establish the second.

He does away with it. That's why there's such a strong emphasis on the idea of Jesus' death being once for all. See, in verse 2, if you look back at that verse, when it speaks about the old covenant sacrifices, there's a fatigue in the verse.

[13:20] They continually offer it year after year, day after day. And in verse 3, they only serve as a reminder of the reality of sin. You have to come back again and again and again.

I mean, it must have been depressing to be an Old Testament priest. You knew that you had to do what the Lord had given you to do. You knew it covered the sins of people. And yet you had to come back again and again and again and again.

And in verse 4, it is impossible for the blood and bulls and goats to take away sin. And in chapter 7 and in chapter 8 and chapter 9 again and again and again, we read Jesus died once for all, once for all.

Look at verse 11. Every priest, that is every Old Testament 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 sin, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting for the time when his enemy should be made a footstool for his feet.

[14:29] For by a single offering of himself, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

This is why there are no altars in Christian churches. We're not offering Christ again and again and again to God.

That's happened once and for all. And now he is seated in heaven at the right hand of God. He's not offering himself over and over again.

Next time you feel completely overwhelmed by your sin, think about this. He is seated in the heavens. He's done it. He's opened the way for fellowship and communion with God.

And the Anglican prayer book makes this incredibly plain. So in the consecration prayer we say that Jesus made there, by his one oblation of himself, once offered, a full, perfect and, you know how it goes, sufficient sacrifice, offering and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

[15:39] So in the prayer book, this is a table. It's not an altar. It's a table because through the once for all offering of Jesus Christ, we now come forward and we participate in the death of Jesus

by eating the bread and drinking the wine and we feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

There's no more special class of priests, I'm glad to tell you. You're all priests. There's no more holy place. There are only holy people being built into a spiritual temple as we offer spiritual sacrifices, yielding our bodies to God in loving obedience.

So this is the first result of Jesus' death in Hebrews 10. It's that Jesus begins the new covenant in his death, so all the ceremonial provisions under the old covenant are done away with.

But the second result is, I think, more wonderful and more magnificent, and it's this, that Jesus cleanses us from sin.

And as I prepare this, I feel like we need the Holy Spirit to help us to even imagine this is true. The death of Jesus in our place takes away our sins.

[17 : 06] It cleanses our hearts. It makes us holy and perfect in God's sight. Now and forever, we are welcome to draw near to his presence.

That's what it's saying in verse 10. I have come to do your will, verse 10, and by that will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all.

We've been made holy. Animal sacrifices and religious rituals can't cleanse our heart from sin.

Turning over a new leaf, making New Year's resolutions, don't give us new hearts.

We need God himself in a great act of mercy to write his law in our hearts by his Holy Spirit. We've just prayed that in the service. We need him to transform us inwardly so that we love him and love one another from the heart.

And what Jesus' death does for us is it changes us and he enters us bringing his holiness with us, taking away all our guilt and all our sin, washing our consciences clean before God.

[18 : 19] Isn't that astonishing? I hope you feel it's astonishing. You see, forgiveness is no such thing as bare forgiveness. It's not wiping the slate clean so that we begin again tomorrow.

But by his perfect sacrifice of himself once offered, we have been made perfect in the sight of God. Holy, consecrated, God's own possession, his community.

So the secret song in every Christian heart is, Jesus died for me. Ah, but you say, I'm a very sinful person and I continue to sin.

Read on. Verse 11, every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices that 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 for that time until his enemy should be made a footstool for his feet.

Here's the point, verse 14. For by a single offering, he has perfected, made perfect, for all time, those who are ongoingly, now, being sanctified, made holy.

[19 : 36] What Jesus has done for us counts for all time. He doesn't need to die again. He don't need to be born again and again and again. If you come to him and place your trust in him, he takes your sins away.

He has made you perfect. He has perfected for all time, all of us who are now being made holy. This is so helpful.

To perfect balance. You know, we're deeply aware that our lives don't reflect his holiness. We continue to sin all the time until we die.

We want to be more holy. But where does it come from? Where is the power to become more holy? By the single offering he has made us perfect for all time, those who are being made holy.

You see, they're being joined together. And the ongoing process of being made holy in his life depends on this fact of his single offering making us perfect.

[20 : 39] The complete cleansing of the cross changes everything. That's how we're to draw near. That's how we love him now. And that's how we have a sure and certain hope.

I love the verse in the hymn we just sang. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, where do I look?

Upward I look and I see him there. And where do I see him? He's at the right hand of the Father seated. Because the sinless saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free.

God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me. And it's that kind of reckoning and that kind of understanding that enables me to press on with holiness. And I love this book of Hebrews.

The great thing is that the writer makes his own applications at the end of this. And there are three of them. He applies it to our faith and to our hope and our love. Number one, to our faith.

[21 : 40] Verse 22. He says, Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith that our hearts, with our hearts, sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

By the way, that refers to the priests. When the priests went off sacrifices, they had to have a bath, pure water, and they then got sprinkled with blood. In other words, this verse pictures us as going into heaven, approaching God as priests.

And since Jesus has dealt the death blow to our sins, we now enter the story of God in a whole new way. We're able to draw near to him.

Draw near to him. That's the definition of a Christian in the book of Hebrews. Which is much more than just agreeing, you know, I agree, I can say the creed. Drawing near to him is going out in our hearts toward him, constantly coming close to him, knowing that I'm completely clean, completely forgiven, holy, ready to be in his presence.

Do you remember in the prayer of humble access in the communion service where we say that our bodies may be cleansed by his body and our souls washed for his most precious blood? This is where it comes from.

[23 : 03] Faith. Secondly, hope in verse 23, let us. Did you notice the three let us's? Bible commentaries are a dry lot, but they like a little joke here.

They call it the let us salad. Let us, let us, let us. So the second let us is hope, verse 23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

It's lovely, isn't it? You know, our hope comes and goes, goes up and down, but it doesn't all depend on us. Because he is faithful, he has promised to sustain us in faith and hope to the end, to strengthen it.

And thirdly and finally, love, verse 24, 25. Let us consider how to stir one another up. That's the pokey, proddy word.

Let's get under each other's saddle. Let's stir one another up to love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, except on snow days, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

[24 : 13] Because the experience of being made holy, being made perfect by the death of Jesus and being able to draw near to God is not something just for me as an individual.

It draws us into a community. And the writer says that we're meant to get creative, we're meant to think of ways on how to spur each other up, to prod each other to greater love and to greater good works.

So I wonder if you're doing that this morning. Thinking about how to stir up the people around you to love and good works? That'd be a very good thing to do. So let me pray. We pray as you, Heavenly Father, for the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ offered once for all, the full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction in it we have.

We rest on him this morning and we pray that you would so convince our hearts of the reality of this that you would make us increasingly holy, that we would draw near in our hearts to you, to the heavenly place, constantly.

That our hope would be more steadfast and that we would think creatively about how to stir each other up to love and good works. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

[25 : 43] Amen.