

Communion Part One

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together for a few moments to the chapter that I read previously, Hebrews chapter 10, and we're going to read together at verse 10, and Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 10.

And by that will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

This chapter, as does much of the letter to the Hebrews, sets a comparison between the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus, and particularly the Old Testament sacrifices and the sacrifice at Calvary.

And it says several things by way of contrasting the two things. It first of all tells us that the sacrifices in the Old Testament were insubstantial.

If we look together at verse 1 in chapter 10, this is the way the writer puts it. For since the law, and by the law, he means the sacrificial law, the sacrifices, that process and system whereby people of Israel worshipped by taking to the tabernacle their animals and putting them to death through the high priest.

[1 : 33] Because it was through the sacrifice that they came close to God and they knew God's forgiveness. But then he tells us, he tells us first of all in chapter 10, verse 1, For since the law, the sacrifice, 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, make perfect those who draw near.

The first thing he tells us then is that these sacrifices were insubstantial. What do I mean by that? Well, let's look at the example that he uses. The illustration that he uses is a shadow.

Look at what he says. Since the sacrifices were a shadow of the good things to come. Let's stop for a moment and see how that example helps us to understand the sacrifices and how they reflected Jesus.

You think of yourselves on the beach on a sunny day, perhaps as the sun is going down. And you see that in the opposite direction to the sun is your shadow on the sand.

It's a long shadow. That's what a shadow is. It's caused by the light shining on something. When that object gets in the way of the light, the shape of that object gets replicated on the ground.

[2 : 58] That is what a shadow is. But a shadow in many ways is nothing at all. It's nothing. It is only the shape of the thing which is casting the shadow.

But on the other hand, the shadow is something. It represents. It is the shape.

It is the true shape of the thing which casts the shadow. And it wouldn't be there at all if there wasn't something real casting the shadow.

There would be no outline of you on the sand if you were not standing on the sand. So the fact that there is that outline by way of a shadow means that there is something that is you casting that shadow on the sand.

If you were to, and again this is maybe using imagination a little bit, if you were to be walking on the beach, your head was down, you're looking at the sand, and all of a sudden you came across a shadow upside down.

[4 : 16] In the shape of an upside down human being. And you saw this. Then you would instantly lift your eyes to see who was casting that shadow.

The shadow in front of you means that there is something or someone in front of you on the beach. And if you don't lift your eyes, you're going to bump into that person. On the one hand, a shadow is insubstantial.

There's nothing to it. It's just a form. But on the other hand, it's an important form because it represents that something is casting that shadow.

And it was the same with sacrifices. The message in this chapter is quite clear. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

In other words, they are insubstantial and ineffective. And yet, they are necessary because they reflect the reality that was to come, which was the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 21] He is the one who cast the shadow throughout the Old Testament. And by looking at that shadow, they knew that God somehow was preparing for them a perfect sacrifice to take away their sins.

So, the sacrifices were insubstantial. And yet, they reflected and they pointed to the reality of Jesus Christ.

That's the first thing. The second thing the chapter makes clear is that the sacrifices in the Old Testament were incomplete. Several times, we are told that they were repeated every single day, some of them.

Every single month, every single year. Let me tell you, just by way of information, how many, just in a couple of minutes, how many sacrifices were regularly made in the Old Testament?

Every day, every month, every year. There were the daily sacrifices. In which a male lamb and a cereal offering with oil was added were offered daily as a burnt offering, morning and evening.

[6 : 40] Then there was the Sabbath sacrifice on the last day of the week, doubled. And that was a double portion of the daily sacrifice. Then there was the offerings of the new moon.

Then there were the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted seven days. There was the feast of weeks, which we spoke about a couple of weeks ago. Then there was the new year, which was also consisted of a burnt offering.

One bull, one ram, seven male lambs. There was never an end to the shedding of blood in the Old Testament. There were the feasts. There were the daily sacrifices.

There was this constant repetition of the same sacrifices. And that, again, it indicated how incomplete the sacrificial system was.

And that's the second thing that we're thinking about this morning. This repetition of sacrifices, they indicated that sacrifices were incomplete.

[7 : 39] The very fact that they had to be repeated told the people that there was something missing. Something which had to round off God's process for the forgiveness of our sin.

It's a bit like, I suppose, if you have someone on a kidney dialysis machine. That person, because his kidney is not functioning properly, has to go to the hospital regularly, on a regular basis.

And the very fact that he has to go there time after time shows you that there is something needing to be done. But as soon as he receives a kidney transplant, he doesn't need dialysis anymore, as far as I know.

He doesn't need any repetition of the same. It was the same with the Old Testament. Once Christ came and once he gave himself as the once-for-all sacrifice, then there was no need for the repetition of the same sacrifices they were done away with.

And then they were innumerable. Third thing, innumerable. There was an innumerable number of them. I've just made mention of some of them there.

[8 : 50] Every day, morning and evening, every month, the new moon sacrifices, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Atonement, and so on and so forth.

They were innumerable. I often wonder what it must have been like to be an Israelite living and watching what was going on in and around the tabernacle every day.

There would be the constant bleating of lambs and goats and bulls. There would be the constant cries of slaughter. There would be the constant sight of blood.

It was an awful thing. It was an ugly sight to behold. And deliberately so. Because the very number of sacrifices was a reminder to the people of Israel of their continuous need for forgiveness.

It reminded them of their sin and their guilt before God. It reminded them that there was something wrong, something that separated them from God. And that separation could only be removed by the shedding of blood.

[9 : 58] They could only be forgiven by the shedding of blood. But it had to happen time and again. And yet, the fourth thing was that the sacrifices were ineffective.

It is impossible, says the apostle, for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. And that's why the one sacrifice was required.

That could only be accomplished by the Son of God himself in our nature. And yet, despite the fact that these sacrifices were insubstantial and incomplete and innumerable and ineffective, they were instituted by God.

The people of God had to carry these out on the basis and on the regularity which God commanded. All of them day by day, month by month, year by year.

They absolutely had to. They could not worship God without going through these sacrifices. Often you get people asking, were the believers in the Old Testament, were they true believers?

[11:16] Or rather, the question is more often put like this. Were the people of God in the Old Testament, were they saved by some other way than we are saved?

Were they saved by the sacrifice? And we are saved by Christ. Did the sacrifices save them? Were they effective means whereby their sin was forgiven?

Well, the answer to that is no. No one has ever been saved by the blood of a bull or a goat. I mean, you just have to think about it.

What is there in the blood of a bull or in the life of a bull or a goat or a lamb that could possibly take away our sins? There cannot possibly be anything. And yet, it was necessary for this to be carried out.

Why? Because this was God's means of showing the people. First of all, their need to have their guilt removed. And then secondly, that it's only by the shedding of blood that that guilt can be removed.

[12:20] And thirdly, that God has promised his own way of taking away sin. You see, along with the sacrifices in the Old Testament, there were the promises of God.

And the true believer in the Old Testament, there were plenty of people who pretended to believe believers. They went through the motions. You could never be saved in the Old Testament just by going through the motions of all the sacrifices.

It was possible to tick all the boxes in the Old Testament, to go through all the offerings and the sacrifices. And from the outside, it would appear that everything was in its right place.

I guess the same is true today. It's possible to go through all the motions of being a Christian from the outside. And yet your heart could be far from the Lord.

God forbid that that would be true about anybody here. But it was possible in the Old Testament for you to go through all the lip service of being obedient to God, going the right form, and yet your heart could be complete.

[13:28] That's why at one point in the Old Testament, God said, I despise your sacrifices, because he knew that they were only offering them, that their hearts had become corrupt and backslidden.

Their hearts had become hard and unbelieving. They no longer loved the Lord with all their heart and mind and soul and strength. And that was the first commandment, to love the Lord with all our heart. And if the sacrifice was not carried out in love for the Lord, that love that listens to the voice of God, then it was completely ineffective.

It was of no meaning whatsoever. It was just paying lip service. It was outside only. But a person who really took God seriously, and who really wanted to be right with the Lord in his own heart, he would bring his animal because God had commanded, and he would bring it in faith.

His faith was not resting in the animal, but his faith rested in God, who promised by his own system of shedding of blood, by the means of shedding of blood, that his sins were forgiven.

And he knew that he could trust in God because God had promised. You see, all the way through the Old Testament, interwoven with the commands to make sacrifice, there was the promise of God that was first of all given to Eve at the time of the fall, when God promised that her seed would bruise the head of the serpent.

[14:58] That was the very first promise of hope. That was the light of hope in the Old Testament. And it ran all the way through the Old Testament. There was the promises of Abraham that in his seed, all nations would be blessed.

And then we get the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, promising that God would make a new covenant, and that he would remember their sins and their iniquities no more. A person in the Old Testament who really took God seriously, and who loved the Lord, and who was repentant for all his sins, he was able to come in faith, believing that God was merciful.

And that somehow or other, through sacrifice, that God could and would forgive all his sins. He didn't know what that was.

We know because we live in the New Testament. The Old Testament believer didn't know how God was one day going to fulfill this great plan of our salvation. But we today are in the privileged position of being able to look back with thankfulness, and with clarity, and with understanding, and we're able to see how Jesus fulfilled everything that the Old Testament pointed to.

And so, all of these sacrifices, they were ineffective, they were innumerable, they were incomplete, and they were insubstantial. And yet, this was God's means of showing his grace, and his forgiveness, and his plan, that one day the great sacrifice would be made.

[16 : 28] And the moment that Jesus laid down his life, all of the regularity, and the multiplicity, and the variety of sacrifices.

We looked at one of them last night, the sacrifice of the red heifer. All of these sacrifices were brought to an end, because the one sacrifice had been made.

Looking at verse 10 then, which focuses on that one sacrifice, I want us to see three things, just three very, very brief things.

I'm just going to leave them with you as we come to the Lord's table. I want us to see, first of all, that the sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary.

It took place by his will. By his will. If you go back to verse 8, it gives the context of this verse in the 40th Psalm.

[17 : 32] We've just been singing some of the 40th Psalm. And these are the words of God. When he said above, you have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices, or offerings, and burnt offerings. Then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will.

He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. I sometimes think of this verse like a wedding. Sometimes I get asked to do weddings.

Always a great privilege to conduct a wedding. It's a really important moment in the life of the man and the woman. And every time, without exception, we have a rehearsal.

Usually takes place the day before the wedding. And if on one level, a rehearsal is almost exactly a wedding.

You go through all the motions. The bride comes down the aisle. They assemble at the front of the church with all the bridesmaids, and with the best man, and with all those who are involved, the parents and the ushers, and everyone else who's involved.

[18 : 43] And you go through, you pretend that you're in the service. You pretend that you're singing, and the bride and her father comes down, and they assemble all at the front.

And we go through the vows. I read out the vows. In order to familiarize the bride and groom with what they're going to vow to. And so, in almost every respect, the wedding has taken place.

Except it hasn't. It's only a rehearsal. And the man and the woman go out single. They go out that door as single people. But when the wedding comes itself, then the great difference is, we go through the same motions again, and yet this time, it's the real thing.

And I often think of the coming of Jesus as quite like a wedding. In that, marriage is the voluntary union of one man and one woman.

The central question that is put to the groom and the bride in a wedding is, do you take? If you don't have that question, you don't have a real wedding.

[20 : 02] You can do away with the dresses and the kilts. You can do away with all the trappings of a wedding. Because that's not what makes the wedding. What makes the wedding is this question.

Do you take? And if the answer is not, I do, or I will, then the wedding can't take place. It's null and void. You can't go through with it. It has to be absolutely voluntary.

And here is Jesus making a voluntary promise to God somehow, and we don't understand this great conference that must have taken place before the foundation of the world in which God put into place his perfect plan for our salvation.

And it had to involve, it necessitated the coming of Jesus Christ into the world as one of us.

With all the pain and the suffering and the sorrow and the darkness and the dereliction and the desolation which that involved on the cross. And Jesus said, I will do it.

[21 : 14] it had to be of his own volition and what gave rise to that will was nothing short of his extraordinary love for you and I.

And all that that involved, all the pain and the loneliness and the darkness, the hatred of men on the cross, the wrath of God that he suffered, and every step of the way was a voluntary step. Remember what he said to Pilate, at any moment in time he could call on the Father to send legions of angels to deliver him. That could have happened. You remember the times through his life where he could have stopped, he could have stopped short of the cross as the devil tried to say if these stones, if you were the son of God, command these stones to be made bread, he could have used his power for his own ends and to establish his own earthly kingdom with great effect and he chose not to because he didn't come here to establish any kind of political kingdom in the world, he came to die and he never stopped short of death itself because of his extraordinary, gracious love for his people.

The second thing that this verse tells me is that the body of Jesus Christ, the offering of the body of Jesus Christ was complete once for all.

It brought an end to this endless repetition of sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice. All the noise that took place at the temple and the tabernacle, it suddenly became silent because there was no need anymore because the old things, the rehearsal had finished, the real thing had come.

[23 : 10] Jesus willingly came into the world and gave himself as the completion, as the culmination of everything that the Old Testament looked forward to. There is nothing, there was nothing more to be added.

There was nothing more to be done. When Jesus was on the cross, he said, it is finished. His death was imminent.

He had to take that one final step, but that one final step spelled out the completion, the termination of the work that the Father had given him to do.

He had to take that final step. Even having gone through unimaginable agony, there was one more step that had to be taken, and that was for him to enter into death itself because death is the wages of sin.

You might think that had he not suffered enough? Was this not enough for the Father? No, it wasn't. He had to carry out the Father's will in its entirety and give himself fully in death to God's demands.

[24 : 25] The offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Some of you may be wondering what the body of Jesus Christ means and wondering if there is some, if there's supposed to be there some kind of separation between the body and the soul of Jesus on the cross.

Well, I take this to mean exactly the same as what Paul means in Romans chapter 12 when he tells us to present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable to God.

Now, when Paul says that, he doesn't mean, he's not making a distinction between the body and the soul as if our bodies were to be offered to God and our souls were to do something different.

No, when he says that, apparently he's using a figure of speech which means our entirety.

Jesus gave all of himself on the cross in order to secure our forgiveness. And there is a third element I was going to, I was going to mention in verse 10.

I think we'll leave that till later on in the service as we're remembering the Lord's death. And then we're going to, I'm going to stop there and we'll continue this a little bit later on.

[25 : 50] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks for your word and for how it presents Jesus to us in the clearest possible terms. And we pray now, Lord, that on the strength of what Jesus has done for us, that we will now carry out in ourselves and with one another and in your presence the command of Jesus to do this in remembrance, in memory of what he has done for us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We always...