

SERMON HEBREWS 9:11-14
THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE
Rev. David L. Masterson, Ph.D.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, and not through the blood of goats and calves but through His own blood he entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption.”

Our Epistle reading this morning brings us into the depth and riches of the book of Hebrews. What is the background to this passage? The writer of the Book of Hebrews is writing to Jewish people to assure them that they can leave Judaism, move beyond the OT sacrifices, the priesthood and all of the rituals that went along with the Old covenant, and come to Christ. In order for them to do that, he must prove to them that Christ is superior to Judaism, that Christ's covenant is better than the old covenant, that Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, and that Christ's sacrifice is superior to all of the others.

That is the approach of the book, and if you read through Hebrews you will discover that in the first few chapters we have (1) the superiority of Christ as a person, (2) then the superiority of Christ as a priest, (3) then the superiority of Christ as the maker of a new covenant, (4) then here in chapter 9 the superiority of Christ as a sacrifice.

The old covenant was unable to bring access to God. The old covenant provided for a limited relation between man and God, a relationship which existed only until the next sin, and then sacrifice had to be made all over again to reorient the relationship. Jesus came to bring a better covenant and a better sacrifice that gave full access to God on an eternal basis.

When Christ died on the Cross, He became the mediator not only to pay the penalty of sinners who lived since the cross—32AD to the present—but that He might pay the penalty of sinners who lived before the cross—all the way from Adam to Jesus. When

Jesus died, He gathered up all the sinners from the beginning of time to the end of time in that one sacrifice. That's the point of these verses in Hebrews.

Our text in vs. 12 says that Christ entered into heaven, not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood. God required death in order for His judgment upon sin to be satisfied. But all the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin. It was only Christ's death on the Cross, and the shedding of His precious blood which satisfied forever the just requirements of God's holy law, which man broke. The purpose of justification is to declare God righteous. People ask, "How can a just God let sinners go free?" The answer is that God never lets sinners go free. Redemption cost God the death of His only Son. God cannot let sinners go free without a sacrifice for sin—and Jesus Christ was that sacrifice.

We need to remember that forgiveness under the OT economy came on credit—because no sacrifice truly satisfied God. But God forgave people in the Old Testament on the basis of their faith and trust that He would bring a perfect sacrifice in the coming of Messiah. Since God operates in an eternal now, there is no past, present and future for God. Therefore, Revelation 13:8 says that Christ was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. In God's mind, salvation was already accomplished.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices did not take away sin. They were merely acts of obedience that showed faith and trust in God. They were symbols—foreshadowings—of an act that would satisfy God—the death of His only Son on the Cross.

How, then, were people saved in the Old Testament? They were saved by God, knowing Christ would in the future bear their sins. How are men saved today? By God knowing Christ in the past has borne their sins.

God declares a believing sinner righteous only because of the death of Christ—and not because of anything we do. You cannot enter into God's presence by being good. You cannot enter into God's presence by being a fine citizen, by going through religious rites and ceremonies. You cannot enter into God's presence by reading the Bible, by going to church, or by taking Holy Communion. You cannot enter God's presence by thinking

sweet and devout thoughts about God. The only way you will ever enter into God's presence and participate in the New Covenant is by the death of Jesus Christ and your faith and belief in His shed blood on the cross on your behalf.

Modern men and women really don't understand how bloody and messy the OT economy was. There was blood all over everywhere, and this was God, by sign and symbol, always showing that the wages of sin is death. Constant death everywhere.

The importance of the blood of Jesus is that it showed He died. There is no magical or mystical power in the blood itself, for it is the death of Christ that atones for sin. His bloodshed was an act of death. And all the blood of the OT points to the shedding of His blood in the New Testament.

Blood, blood, blood, and more blood. The Tabernacle, the vessels of the Tabernacle, every part of the divine service was sprinkled with blood because God wanted men to know that the only way to satisfy the problem of sin is through the death of a victim.

So Christ as high priest of the world offers Himself as a sacrifice. No necessity bound Jesus to the Cross. It was not the nails but His obedience to His Father and His love for us that held Him there. The Eternal Spirit, the Divine personality within himself took the knife and slew the human body of Jesus. His sacrifice was without blemish because nothing stained or faulty is worthy to be given to God.

What did the death of Christ accomplish? Vs. 14, "How much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Jesus' death cleansed our conscience from dead works. According to popular usage, "conscience" is the faculty enabling us to distinguish right from wrong. In the Bible "conscience" has a far wider meaning. It means "consciousness"— the whole sweep of a person's inner mind and outlook.

Dead works refers to all that contaminates our relationship to God. Anything that conveys inward, spiritual defilement is a dead work. Hebrews 6:1 uses the phrase "repentance from dead works." This refers to anything that belongs to the way of death and not the way of life in Christ. If we think about this, any work which is done that does not proceed from the life of Christ within us is a dead work. St. Paul urges the believers in 1 Corinthians 7:1 to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

This means obvious sins such as immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, strife, anger, malice, envy, drunkenness, grumbling and any other sins which pollute the soul and prevent fellowship and communion with God. It also refers the more subtle sins of dead works including self-indulgence, laziness, sloth, covetousness, dishonesty, neglect, and compromise. Therefore, anything we do in our own strength apart from dependence upon Jesus Christ living through us is a dead work. It is the work of man, the sinner, trying to somehow earn God's approval—to make himself right with God on his own terms.

This idea of "dead works" also includes people who do good works in order to feel good about themselves. But it is impossible to multiply enough good works to make up for the wrong that is within our very being. We are by nature alienated from God and estranged from his love. It is not only our trespasses that need forgiving, but our very inmost selves that need to be cleansed.

Ephesians 2:1-3 describes the painful truth concerning our condition apart from Christ, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the year, of the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we all formerly lived walking in the lusts of our mind and being by nature children of wrath even as the rest."

Therefore, our entire being— our disposition and attitudes, our motivations and desires must be reconciled to God—our entire consciousness.

So what are we to do? How do we receive pardon and cleansing. There are two simple steps. First, stop trying to change your own consciousness and admit you are helpless to change. Second, hand your entire life with its defilement and sin over to Jesus Christ.

When I was a Navy chaplain, I had service members come to me saying, “I can’t stop looking at pornography. I’m caught, I’m in bondage.” I had the privilege of showing them that they are completely helpless to change themselves and that they must repent and believe the gospel. They needed to throw themselves and their defilement and sin upon the Lamb of God who takes away their sins by His blood.

We must come in contact with the blood of Jesus which cleanses us. Jesus as our High Priest stands before the face of God the Father and presents His blood as availing to take away our sin. No other sacrifice will do because His sacrifice is perfect, sinless and complete. Go back to the Gospel reading in St. John 8 and you will discover why the scribes and Pharisees were so angry at Jesus. It is because He plainly told them that He was God the great “I AM” in the flesh—and that He was without sin.

Now if Jesus cleanses our consciousness from defilement and guilt and impurity, what is the result? The result is that He brings us into conscious possession of eternal life. St. John 5:12 says, “he that hath the Son hath the life.” This means that when we believe upon Jesus and fully trust in Him He gives Himself to us. He, in you, will illuminate your intelligence with the light of eternal life. He will dominate your affections and desires with the love of God. He, in you, will master your will to do the will of God. The eternal, abundant kind of life begins now on earth. It is a great spiritual consciousness that makes us able to say, “I know I am born again—first because God says it and I believe it; but second because in me life moves to new impulses, new desires, new passions, new energies; and the things I used to love I hate, and the things that once mastered me like a prisoner in chains have fallen off and I am free. This is the consciousness of new life which comes through the cleansing of the blood of Christ.

Just as blood is the life of our human bodies, so the body and blood of Jesus is life for our spiritual souls. We come in a few moments to the Eucharistic banquet. The question for all of us is, "Do we believe in Jesus? And are we living in the good of His life sacrificed for us?" As St. Athanasius writes, "The Living Word who became all things for us is close to us. Jesus Himself is the Shepherd, the high priest, the way and the door, and has become all things at once for us. It is He who purifies our souls and brings us to the threshold of the heavenly Jerusalem to enjoy the contemplation of that everlasting feast."

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.