

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:41-45

Background Scripture: Hebrews 9:23—10:25

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 9:23-28; 10:1-4, 11-14, 19-25

I. Absolute Necessity Hebrews 9:23-28

²³ 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. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

23. The word *then* indicates that the writer is moving from establishing facts of Christ's blood atonement—the "What's so?"—to exploring the implications of those facts—the "So what?" The

phrase *copies of the heavenly things* refers to things of earth with counterparts in Heaven. The need to use animal blood to purify various elements of the old covenant worship structures seems clear in Leviticus 16:15-19.

24. The word *for* implies that what follows explains or expands on the previous statement. Mortal high priests enter into a sanctuary made by human hands. Christ, on the other hand, *entered heaven itself* at his ascension.

25. This verse compares how Jesus' service differs from mortal high priests. The Law of Moses prescribes an annual Day of Atonement for addressing the people's sins. Two goats were chosen, one for sacrifice to atone for sins and one for release into the wilderness as a scapegoat to carry off sins. On the Day of Atonement and only on that day, *the high priest* would enter *the Most Holy Place* to set these procedures in motion.

26. Hebrews 7:27 makes much the same point that we see here. Both passages emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Rather than suffering *many times*, his sacrifice was one-time only.

27-28. The death sentence that all humans labor under was pronounced in Genesis 3:19. The writer's phrase *to die once* refers to physical death. There are some notable exceptions in that a hand-

ful of people in the Bible died twice physically: those whom Christ raised from the dead during his earthly ministry died again later. Contrary to humans, who were *destined* to die once, Jesus voluntarily sacrificed his life to settle the debt of sin. His death was a conscious act of self-sacrifice.

II. Weak Sacrifices

Hebrews 10:1-4

¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

1. The author of Hebrews continues to compare and contrast the realities of the old covenant with those of the new covenant. Having shown the superiority of Christ's priesthood, the author explains the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to animal sacrifices.

2. The word *otherwise* introduces a logical conclusion to the current argument regarding the limitations of the Law of Moses. Were the Law of Moses to have been God's "final word" to humanity, God would not have settled the sin issue *once and for all*. Paul makes a similar argument about the law in Galatians 3:21, where he denies that righteousness comes through the law because God did not give a law capable of imparting eternal life.

3. Instead of freeing the people from their guilt, the animal sacrifices of the

Law of Moses had the opposite effect: they were *an annual reminder of sins*. The sacrifices highlighted sinfulness rather than fixing the problem of sinful hearts.

4. This verse highlights the main limitation of animal sacrifices. Given that God commanded the animal sacrifices, it may seem strange that the author of Hebrews denies that they *take away sins*. After all, do not Leviticus 16:10 and Numbers 29:11 say that the two goats make "atonement"? But notice again their temporary nature. It's "wash, rinse, repeat" indefinitely.

III. Perfect Sacrifice

Hebrews 10:11-14

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

11. The author continues to draw together the threads of the argument. He does so here by first describing the duties of *every priest*. Under the old covenant, a priest's work was never done. He would perform the same rituals and sacrifices repetitively. The blood offerings he would make were categorized in various ways: the sin offering (Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30); the guilt offering (5:14-6:7); the burnt offering (1:3-17); and the fellowship offering (3:1-17). The bloodless offerings were the grain offering (2:1-16) and the drink offering (23:13). None of these rituals or sacrifices could ultimately remove the people's sins.

12. By contrast, Christ's priestly service required only a single offering: himself.

He offered this sacrifice one time for the sins of humanity. At that point, his duties were completed, and he took his rightful seat at God's *right hand*. The writer of Hebrews draws on Psalm 110:1 to affirm Jesus in this position. By the time we get to this point in the book of Hebrews, the writer has already pointed to this psalm three times. The use here implies that the Son's sacrifice is completely satisfactory, never needing to be repeated. He will remain seated until his second appearing.

13. This verse continues the quotation of Psalm 110:1. The idea seems to be one of rest now that Christ's work on the cross is completed. He offers no more sacrifices. Instead, he occupies a seat of honor while his Father works to make every knee bow to Christ and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

14. This verse concludes the argument. The numerous animal sacrifices of the old covenant have given way to Christ's *one sacrifice*. This is the offering by which people may be *made perfect*, not by the animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The people being perfected by Christ are also referred to as *those who are being made holy*. To be made holy or set apart is to be sanctified, and there are two aspects to this.

IV. Implications Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswerv-

ingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

19. According to Leviticus 16, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, the dwelling place of God's presence in the tabernacle and temple, and this only once a year. Because Jesus' sacrifice completely satisfied the penalty for sin that we owed, we can have access to God that was unthinkable before.

20. The *new and living way* distinguishes the new covenant from the old one. This way is "new" because it was inaccessible before Christ offered himself as a sacrifice. This way is also "living," which means it gives life to those who follow it.

21. The author provides a statement of fact that gives the reason for the imperative of the next verse. Before we go there, however, we take a minute to examine the designation *the house of God*. That was a title for the Jerusalem temple, especially after the return from Babylonian exile.

22. This is the resulting imperative; this is what we are to do *with a sincere heart* and *with the full assurance that faith brings*—an imperative echoed in various ways elsewhere.

23. The verb *hold unswervingly* denotes consistency in adhering to the professed faith. The ability of God's people to be faithful is based on God's faithfulness to uphold his promises.

24-25. These two verses are logically connected. Think about it: wouldn't it be almost impossible to encourage *one another on toward love and good deeds* unless we are in the habit of *meeting together*? That's the context of supporting each other.

Involvement Learning

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Into the Lesson

In what ways are a globe, a doll, a flower, and a model airplane like and unlike the real items they represent?

It is important to distinguish "the real thing" from "representations of the real thing." As we do, we learn that the representations aren't necessarily counterfeit but are predictive or foreshadowing. In today's lesson, stay alert for the symbols and shadows to consider the greater truths they represent.

Into the Word

Read Hebrews 9:23-28. Then read Genesis 22:1-14; Exodus 12:1-13; Numbers 21:4-9; Joshua 2:8-21; and Jonah 1:11-17. What is the symbol in this passage?

Key Verse

Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

—Hebrews 9:24

How was that symbol predictive of Jesus?

Read Hebrews 10:11-14. Then read Judges 10:10; 1 Samuel 12:10; 1 Kings 8:47; Psalm 106:6; and Jeremiah 14:20. What is the common theme or phrase in all these verses?

Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Identify the cause(s) and effect(s) mentioned in these verses.

Identify the reactions that result from the effects.

Into Life

Consider the concept of "accountability partners" and how it differs from a "mentor/protégé" relationship.

Whom will you ask to be an accountability partner for mutual encouragement in light of Hebrews 10:24-25?

Thought to Remember

Jesus opened the Most Holy Place to us.