

Sermon 28: Hebrews 10:1-18: The Sacrifice that Makes Perfect

OUTLINE

The necessity of Christ's sacrifice
The provision of Christ's sacrifice
The outcomes of Christ's sacrifice

INTRODUCTION

We come to the end of the doctrinal section of Hebrews. Jesus as a greater High Priest; mediating a greater covenant by the offering of a greater sacrifice has been the focus of this portion. The point of the book comes to a great crescendo before going on to the section that exhorts the readers. Much of what has already been said is gathered together to make a final point about Jesus being the superior sacrifice that brings an end to the Old Testament. Now we must remember that these Christians, believed to be Jewish believers in Rome in the mid 60s of the first century, were being persecuted. Christians have been targeted in the past being kicked out of Rome, and things are heating up again. Judaism is an acknowledged and protected religion that has been given certain dispensations, but Christianity has not. With the pressure of persecution looming, with the attractiveness of their old ways of living and believing calling to them, the author is writing to show that Jesus is greater than anything Judaism can offer. He is the greater word than the one delivered by angels and mediated by Moses. He is the greater Joshua giving us the greater rest. He is the greater high priest who is both king and priest. And He is the greater sacrifice. All of this is gathered together and our portion in 10:1-18 ends this demonstration of the superiority of Christ by leaning into Jesus superior sacrifice. We will be dividing this section up into three parts. In v1-4 we will see the inadequacy of the laws sacrifices and the necessity for Christ's sacrifice. In v5-10 we will see God's provision of Jesus as the sacrifice we need. And in v11-18 we will see what Christ's sacrifice accomplishes that the OT sacrifices could not. So our three points are the necessity; provision; and outcomes of Christ's sacrifice.

The necessity of Christ's sacrifice

V1-4, 'For since the law 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 every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.' These verses state and prove the inadequacy of OT sacrifices. Firstly, we are told that the law and its sacrifices are a shadow not the realities themselves. Now this statement would have gone down like lead with a Jewish audience. The law after all is perfect; it is what the man of God should meditate on day and night to flourish like a tree near streams of water. We must be clear that the law was a good gift of God, but it was not God's final word. It was good but incomplete. It announced its own incompleteness by pointing beyond itself to someone greater. We do not despise the OT, but nor do we abuse it by making it all that God has to say. In fact this gives great value to the OT. This encourages us to read the OT in light of the NT seeing the unity of scripture. There is continuity between the OT and

the NT. We are also encouraged to read the OT looking for Christ in it. Jesus Himself revealed that the OT was all about Him.

Secondly, we are told that therefore the sacrifices of the law could not make perfect those who draw near. The word perfect here is not teaching a doctrine of perfectionistic holiness but is describing the outcome of Christ's finished work in our salvation. The sacrifice of Christ makes us perfect in righteousness/justification so that we are able to draw near to a holy God; and it enables us to have our conscience cleansed of the guilt of sin knowing that they are no longer held against us but paid for.

Thirdly, we see that the sacrifices are shown to be deficient in three key ways. Firstly, repetition means that they are not dealing with sin definitively. Secondly, there is an ongoing consciousness of sin due to the need for repetition. V3 talks about yearly reminders, likely referring to the day of atonement. These repeated sacrifices acting as reminders have been compared to medicine. If you have a terrible illness, and you have to keep on taking your medicine to survive. The medicine prevents death but is not a cure. Every time you take it you are helped but not cured; and every time you take it you are reminded that you are sick and need a cure. You can look in the mirror and pretty yourself up to give the appearance of health, but as soon as your eyes fall upon that bottle of medicine you are reminded, I am dying and need a cure. And so it was with the law, it was like medicine but not the cure. Thirdly, v4 emphasizes again that animal blood cannot atone for human sin.

So, if the law is not the solution, then we must reject the notion that there will be some future millennium where a new temple will be rebuilt, and the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices reinstituted. In hermeneutics, the science of interpreting the bible, we have a big word which helps us here, a christotelic hermeneutic. That Christ is the telos, the end of OT revelation. The whole of the OT is driving towards Christ, the law, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices, it all points to Jesus, and now that He has come, the purpose of the OT is fulfilled. It would be nonsense then to revive the law in a future millennium or to expect a future temple where sacrifices take place and priesthood presides. We do not go back to the shadows once the reality has come. This would be like a man who takes a photo of his wife on a date and talks to it and kisses it and not his wife.

The provision of Christ's sacrifice

So, the OT is not the cure but does point to the cure. The author will now demonstrate using OT messianic prophesy that Jesus is the answer to our sin problems not the OT sacrifices. He paraphrases Ps. 40:6-8, in v5-7, 'Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" This is a fascinating use of the OT by the NT. Here is a quick overview of what Psalm 40 is about, 'Psalm 40 is a lament psalm where David asks the Lord to rescue him from his enemies (vv. 11-17). In the first part of the psalm, David remembers past instances of God's deliverance when he was in desperate straits (vv. 1-5). In the middle of the psalm, we have the verses appropriated by Hebrews (vv. 6-8) and the reminder that David has proclaimed the Lord's righteousness, faithfulness, and salvation among the people of God (vv. 9-10).

What role do verses 6–8 play in the psalm? It seems that David gives another reason God should deliver him. David is not merely offering sacrifices and offerings. He has given himself and the entirety of his life to God. He has pledged himself to do God’s will, and God in his righteousness will deliver and rescue the one who belongs to him.’¹

So then how is this a messianic psalm? Firstly, David as a king is a type of Christ. Secondly, David alludes to the fact that the ‘scroll’ God’s word prophesied his coming, where? I think David is thinking of Gen. 49:10, ‘The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.’ David is of the tribe of Judah. He is the first in the tribe of Judah to become king. But of course this prophecy is not pointing ultimately to David but through David to Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah. So this is a psalm where David is reflecting on himself as prophesied, but as a type of Christ. Recognizing this connection the author now brings some important points to the foreground.

Firstly, we have here one of several OT texts that are a trinitarian conversation between the Father and the Son. Like Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, psalm 40 gives us another insight into a conversation between the Father and the Son. The author of Hebrews is attuned to this moments in the OT and references them several times in 1:5; 2:12; 7:20-22; and 10:5-7. This one focuses on the Son’s words to the Father and what it reveals. We are listening in on a conversation in eternity, where the Son is pre-incarnate, and shedding light for our benefit upon the significance of His coming into the world. This is another verse that sheds light on the doctrine of the covenant of redemption.

Secondly, Christ alerts us to the insufficiency of sacrifices in David’s words, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired;’ and ‘in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.’ Now originally David was likely alluding to the sentiment of Samuel, 1 Sam. 15:22, when Samuel was rebuking Saul for keeping the best of the flocks and God rejected Saul, ‘And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.’ And please note that in contrast to animal sacrifices God prefers the obedience to the King of Israel. David as king and a type of Christ offers himself to be obedient. Once the psalmist realizes that the psalm is about Christ, and realizes that the Father has sent Jesus because He does not delight in sacrifices, this becomes a proof-text for Christ coming to do what sacrifices could not. Once he realizes that this is a conversation happening between the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son, the non-pleasure of God in sacrifices is no longer limited to Saul’s performative hypocritical use of sacrifices in worship in one historical moment, but the principle of sacrifices and their uses in general.

Thirdly, the psalmist seeing that these are words of Christ offering His obedience rephrases a part of the psalm to foreground Christ’s incarnation in a human body which is obediently offered in sacrifice. Originally David said, ‘you have given me an open ear.’ Or literally, ‘ears you have dug for me.’ This strong picture of creating ears is an idiom for, you give me the grace to obey. But because David

1 Thomas R. Schreiner, [Hebrews](#), ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 296.

is speaking on behalf of Christ, there is an implication behind the statement. Christ is not a sinner who needs a heart change to be made obedient, so the psalmist takes a more literal sense assuming the body God has prepared for Jesus, the human nature that He takes to Himself to be obedient. The author of Hebrews makes the assumption clear by paraphrasing 'ears you have dug for me as', 'a body you have prepared for me.' The statement 'I have come to do your will' is referring to Christ's arrival as a human being in history.

The messianic prophecy where a king opposite to Saul, an obedient king who has come to fulfill the will of God. And this on the heels of a statement about God not being pleased with animal sacrifices. With the hindsight of the cross, the author of Hebrews under inspiration of the Holy Spirit is telling us that this change in redemptive history from repeated animal sacrifices to the single laying down of the Messiah's life, was announced. V8-9 make this point plain. 'When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second.'

V10, 'And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.' Christ as the obedient one is emphasized in this verse. Christ has come to do the will of the Father, not only as a substitute fulfilling the requirements of the law on our behalf; but also in laying down His life for us on the cross. Many have emphasized how animals unwilling and spooked by the smell of blood were dragged to the altar, but Jesus knowing full well that would happen submitted His human will to the will of the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Notice the emphasis on 'body' and how it was offered. This underscores the sacrificial nature of His death for us. this verse is one of only three times the full title of Jesus Christ is used in Hebrews, the others include 13:8 and 13:21 emphasizing the confessional nature of v10. His sacrifice was once for all, and results in our sanctification. Sanctification here has religious connotations of being holy and set apart. In other words, we are made holy in a way that the OT sacrifice could not accomplish. Pulling these ideas together we can see that the sacrifice of Jesus is superior because Jesus is fully human and not an animal; and that His life was given willingly in obedience to God not dragged kicking and screaming.

The outcomes of Christ's sacrifice

V11-14, 'And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.' V11-18 focus on the results of Jesus superior sacrifice. V11 begins a comparison where OT priests stand and offer repeated sacrifices. And this is compared in v12 with Christ making one offering of Himself and then sitting down. Standing implies still working; and repetition implies not definitively effective. But Jesus makes a single offering of Himself in payment of our sins, and it is done. There is no chair in the tabernacle because the priest could not rest at his work, and he was never finished. But Jesus has entered the presence of God to sit because His work is finished. Sitting in the presence of God means that His priestly work of sacrificing Himself is finished, but this is not all it means. His sitting is also an enthronement, a bestowing of authority as reward for

finishing the work of salvation. It is a position of power from which He rules. This sitting and waiting for His enemies to be put under His feet underscores the finished nature of His work. His dealing with sin is so final, all that waits to happen is the final mopping up of enemies after this time of salvation where the gospel goes out to the ends of the earth takes place.

V14 is an important verse that summarizes what Christ has accomplished that the OT sacrifices could not. This is a classic text used to prove *simil Justus et peccator*, the truth that in salvation we are both righteous and sinful. You will notice the two tenses our translation has made apparent. We have a once off past tense perfecting; and then there is an ongoing present tense in those who are being sanctified. These tenses explain well the double truth describing every believer. Because Jesus has paid the full price for your sin, and has clothed you in His righteousness, you are at least legally speaking perfected. All that sin did to separate you from God has been undone and you are fit in Christ to come into fellowship with God. You are holy as He is holy as you are now the righteousness of God in Christ, 2 Cor. 5:21. But there is also a second reality. We are those who are on the pathway of progressive sanctification. We are those who are still a work in progress. The Holy Spirit is within us, and there is a true desire for holiness that drives us. On this front we are not perfect but there is progress. We are not yet glorified but there is an orientation towards God's will and holiness which is real.

We must highlight this second aspect. Too often Christians think that when we say we are righteous and sinful at the same time think that we are saying that you are the same dead in sin person you once were but the only difference is that you are forgiven. No, you are no longer dead in sin, you are alive. You are no longer enslaved to the whims of your sin, you have died with Christ. We must consider ourselves dead to sin in this manner. If we have a wrong conception of a Christian as merely a forgiven sinner with no power to put sin to death and live a defeated life making excuses for our sin saying that we are forgiven, we are insulting the gospel. And we should add that a true sight of our justification will spill over and give energy to our being sanctified.

V15-18, 'And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.' And if you don't believe that this is true, the author calls in the Holy Spirit as a witness to show the results of Christ's finished work. Once again Jer. 31 and the benefits of the New Covenant are pulled in to prove that we have been perfected and are being sanctified. Firstly, the author lists the inward changes wrought by the Spirit. The internalizing of the law upon our hearts and minds. All of those who have been born again, have had a heart realignment. The heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh. Our former hatred of God and love of sin has been overturned and there is a new hunger for holiness, a new hatred of sin. The external performance of holiness is replaced with a true heart's desire to love God and do what is right.

Secondly, there is forgiveness of sin. This was one of the grand promises of the new covenant. And Christ by His one sacrifice has provided it. And we must notice how the bible puts this precious benefit. God will remember our sins no more. The one who is all knowing, the perfect judged who sees all, how is it

possible that He will remember our sins no more. This is a metaphorical way to say that God will so well deal with our sin problems that it will be like they never were. As far as the east is from the west He will remove our transgressions from us. The OT saint was always conscious of sin, but God remembers our sin no more because Christ has dealt with them perfectly. And this brings this section to a grand conclusion with a simple restatement of the point in v18, 'Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.' No more sacrifices are needed because Christ has paid in full, forgiveness is ours.