

On the Cross: A Better Sacrifice

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[0 : 0 0] Think of yourself back, if you can, to the year 1980.! Not all of us were there, but it wasn't that long ago.! What happened in 1980?

! It's one of the diseases that was carried to the Americas by Europeans in the 16th century and wiped out much of the native populations.

Evidence of smallpox has even been found on Egyptian mummies, dating back 3,500 years. For all of human history, there was no effective treatment, no way to take it away.

But imagine one day someone saying, I can stop you getting smallpox with this one simple solution. One jag, one little sting, and you never need fear getting that disease again.

You'd struggle to believe it. Sometimes people do need convincing, don't they, that one jag can do what thousands of years of medicine and sickness and death couldn't do, but it worked.

[1 : 3 1] And smallpox is gone. Sadly, not all solutions are like that. Governments are constantly trying to find the one thing that nobody's tried before to fix the country, fix the world.

Indeed, smallpox is the only human disease that has ever been eradicated. There are countless more that we have no solution for. Wouldn't we love for someone to come along with a jag for cancer, for dementia, for depression?

What about a jag for poverty, family breakdown, alcoholism, a jag that could fix the NHS, the economy, education, the environment? There is hardly ever a single, simple solution to our problems.

We search hopelessly. We try everything. Nothing seems to work. But friends, the wonderful good news in our passage this morning is that our single, biggest problem does have a single, simple solution.

For all of human history, there was no way to deal with it. There were plasters and bandages, but the wound never healed. You always needed another treatment. But now here is the cure.

[2 : 5 0] Friends, there were never enough sacrifices to cover our sins. But now there is one single sacrifice that can take away our sin.

We're dropping into the book of Hebrews this morning. It's not the easiest book of the Bible, but the overall message is simple. Jesus is better because Jesus is best.

He's better than angels, better than priests, better than Moses. As we focus in our summer series on what Jesus did on the cross, we're coming to chapter 10, which tells us that Jesus is better than all the Old Testament sacrifices put together.

because on the cross, because on the cross he offered the best sacrifice of all, the sacrifice of himself. Which means, says Hebrews, that Jesus' death on the cross does for us what nothing else could ever do, which is take our sins away fully and forever.

Now, even as I say that, isn't there a part of us that thinks, is that too good to be true? Can you believe it? That Jesus' death upon the cross could do that for you, for us?

[4 : 08] Well, let's look and wonder at Jesus' cross work again this morning and see beginning with verses 1 to 4 of our passage, which tell us that the never-ending sacrifices of the law were ineffective.

And now our boys have got into magazines this year. Boys and girls, well, I suppose lots of the boys and girls are downstairs, but those of you who are here, maybe you love a magazine, okay? And if you're young enough, maybe your magazine has a little quiz and there's an outline, a shape or a shadow of one of the characters in the magazine, and you have to guess which one it is.

Well, Hebrews says that the Old Testament is like one of those games. It says, verse 1, the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.

So the laws of the Old Testament, especially, I think he's saying, the ceremonial laws to do with worship, priests, temple sacrifices, and so on, they're like an outline or a shadow of the real thing.

We're going to see who they're a shadow of in a minute. I wonder if you can guess. But before we get there, we need to grasp that because they're just a shadow of the real thing, verse 1, those laws can never, by the same sacrifices offered continually every year, make perfect those who draw near.

[5 : 36] He's saying you can follow those laws all you want, every day for the rest of your life, but they cannot do for you what you need them to do. You might as well be asking a shadow to help you lift a box or bandage a wound.

A shadow can't do those things. A shadow can't do. The only thing a shadow does is to tell you that someone or something real is there who perhaps can help you.

But for the people who are first hearing this, the things that Hebrews is talking about, they didn't seem much like helpless shadows. The blood and sacrifices and death looked properly important.

The temple looked and smelled really, really real. So can those things really not take my sin away?

But think about it, he says, if those sacrifices really could make you spiritually whole, verse 2, would they not have ceased to be offered? Since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins or a guilty conscience.

[6 : 49] If those sacrifices worked, he said, then surely at some point you would stop needing them. Saying those sacrifices work is like saying, these plasters really work as long as I keep putting them on.

And the wound grows green and a bit pussy, and you say, I must need more plasters because whenever I put them on, they really help me get better. And your whole arm goes red and puffy and swollen, and you say, I can't get enough of these plasters, if only I had more.

At what point would you think these plasters aren't working? Hebrews says it's the same with the sacrifices. You offer them because you want the guilt of your sins taken away, but no amount of sacrifices can do that.

In fact, it's actually worse because you take your sacrifice wanting your conscience to be cleared from the sins of the past week and know peace again with God, only to be confronted with a graphic dramatization of what your sin actually costs.

Death, blood, entrails, fire. You know, it hardly soothes the soul to see the punishment for your sin enacted in front of you on an animal that's standing in for you.

[8 : 12] Far from gently washing the conscience clean, says Hebrews, those sacrifices only serve as a painful reminder of your sin.

Because, verse 4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. So, friends, those never-ending sacrifices are completely ineffective at dealing with sin because they are just a shadow that was there to point to the real thing.

Now, I trust that none of you are sneaking off after church to offer your goat on some altar. I don't even know where you would do that in Aberdeen. But we find our own ways, don't we, of trying to deal with our guilt in ways that look or feel more real than the real thing.

So, how many times have you felt guilty for not having spent enough time with the Lord and, therefore, as the solution, try to knuckle down to some serious quiet time with the Lord and I'll do my daily devotions and I'll get them done, only to find that after a couple of weeks, you're just back where you started.

Friends, the pages of the Bible or hours clocked up on your Bible app or your daily devotional cannot take away sins.

[9 : 40] They cannot by themselves remove guilt. They point to the one who does, but if we're honest, coming to him personally with our sins, asking his forgiveness and for his renewal doesn't feel as real as my daily verses being read.

Or I wonder how many of us today even thought, brilliant, Sunday again, time to go to church, get back in the right place with God. I'll feel much better after church. Friends, there is no church and there is no amount of services that can do that for you simply by being here at very best, very best.

A church or a worship service can point you to the one who can bring you back to God. Yet coming through the door, doesn't it feel so much more real to us than coming to Christ?

Like the sacrifices of the old covenant, these things, the Bible, worship, prayer, they are means of grace. They're good things. They do things for us, but on their own, they cannot do the thing that we really need, which is to bring us back to God and make us whole again.

That's not what they were made to do. So what can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[11 : 11] This is our second point. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is enough. I wonder if you got it. Who is the shadow of? Of course, it's Jesus.

Jesus is better because Jesus is best. Have a look, verse 5. Consequently, because of this, when Christ came into the world, he said, Psalm 40, sacrifices and offerings you've not desired, but a body you've 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's written of me in the scroll of the book.

Now, I had an interesting time trying to work out when or where Christ had said that. It's not recorded in the Gospels, though probably he did say or at least sing those words at some point in his life on earth.

But I think more what Hebrews is getting at is that this is what Christ's coming says. These were the verses, if you like, that would have been printed on the publicity as he came into the world.

[12 : 19] I've come to do God's will in a way the sacrifices ultimately don't. Indeed, when Jesus' publicity manager, John the Baptist, saw Jesus coming towards him, what did he say?

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In short, he is the sacrifice that we need.

Now, God did delight in the sacrifices in a relative sense. Of course, he commanded them. But only as a placeholder for his son. So that when God sent his son into the world to have a body prepared for him in Mary's womb, it was ultimately with a view to him doing that work.

The sacrifices didn't. The womb was to prepare him for the tomb. In the truest sense, Jesus was born to die.

And Hebrews' point here is that his one sacrifice, his death, is the only one we need and it's enough for two reasons. Because he is a sufficient sacrifice and because he is an effective priest.

[13 : 38] He is a sufficient sacrifice. Have a look at verse 10. He says, Jesus came to do God's will and by that will, we have been sanctified sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Now, I think this is one of the clearest verses in the whole Bible about what Jesus did for us on the cross. His body was offered up as a sacrifice only once on the cross, but through his one time only sacrifice.

We who believe in him belonged to God forever. Forever. Verse 8 compares Christ's death to two types of sacrifice in the Old Testament, burnt offerings and sin offerings, which we heard about in Leviticus.

Now, they did a very specific thing for the person who offered them called atonement. They were atoning sacrifices.

Or we could call them bringing back together sacrifices, putting right sacrifices. Atonement means just what it says if you break it down.

[14 : 54] It is at-one-ment, atonement. It's taking two things that have been broken off and separated and bringing them back together, making them at-one again. The sacrifice did that by taking the person's place, being loaded down with their sins and suffering that punishment from God so that the person's sins were taken away from them and they could come back to God and not be pushed away from him but be welcomed in.

Friends, we are separated from God by our sin. But here is a sacrifice which atones to sins.

It undoes what our sin has done. it takes us and God and brings us back together. And Hebrews says that Jesus' death was that kind of sacrifice but properly, permanently, fully, completely, forever.

For those who put their trust in him, he took our place, he carried our sins, he suffered the punishment so that we who have sinned could be at one with God again.

Through the cross, our sins are atoned for and his blood has washed them all away. And we don't need to come back then with another sacrifice when we sin because his death has done it once for all.

[16 : 33] Friends, his death is enough to mend our relationship with God fully and forever. Verse 10 paints a really beautiful picture of that by using the word sanctified.

Normally when we think about being sanctified, we're thinking about becoming more holy, more Christ-like. But if we'd read Hebrews up to this point, then we'd see that it's been speaking about how Christ's blood has made things ready to be in God's presence.

Because God is holy, so his people and his place had to be holy, set apart for him. Otherwise they couldn't exist in his presence, they would be destroyed and undone.

So that's what Hebrews means by sanctified here, fully and permanently set apart as holy to the Lord. And so, brothers and sisters, if our trust today is in Christ's once-for-all atoning sacrifice, we have been sprinkled clean by his blood so that we are categorically, definitively, and permanently fit and ready to be in God's holy presence.

He will not send us away. He will not dismiss us. He will not destroy us. If we have taken hold of Christ's sacrifice for us by faith, he gladly welcomes us and we belong to him and with him forever.

[18 : 13] This is the miracle of the gospel, isn't it? That though we, as we know, are not holy in and of ourselves, God, through Christ's death, has set us apart as holy to him, made us his, not because of what we have done or offered, but because of what Christ has done and offered on the cross.

So if you're not yet a Christian here, let me just say that this is the very heart, the beating heart of Christianity. In fact, it's not going too far to say that what it means to be a Christian is to put your trust in Christ as your atoning sacrifice, to cover your sins before God and to make you his again.

Becoming a Christian is that easy and the rest follows from there. And you can do that today and therefore be saved from your sins forever to be with God because he is a sufficient sacrifice.

And he is an effective priest. He's not like the ineffective priests of verse 11. Every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.

From the start to the end of their shift, the priests are on their feet making sacrifice after sacrifice, animal after animal, on repeat, all day long, non-stop. The conveyor belt never ended because the sacrifices could never finish the job.

[19 : 49] Now there are pages and pages of instructions things about the furniture for the temple. But do you know what one piece of furniture was not in the temple? If you were to guess, there were lampstands, there were curtains, there was a table.

Do you know there was not one chair? Not one chair in the temple. Why? Because the priest would never need one. Because their work was never done and they could never sit down.

But after Jesus offered himself up on the cross, he did something that no priest had ever done on duty. What did he do? Verse 12. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

He sat down. Extraordinary words. Friends, our great high priest sitting down. What does it say? There is no more sacrifice to offer, no more work to do.

Switch off the conveyor belt of sacrifices, turn off the furnace, shut down the temple. The work of taking away sins is done. It is finished. And not just for a time, but until the very end, until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

[21 : 09] 4 verse 14. By a single offering, he has perfected, for all time, those who are being sanctified.

How many times do you think a priest at the altar wished that this could be the last one? Or this one? Or this one?

How often do we, like them, slog away at what we count as offerings and sacrifices, thinking that this one will finally get this over the line? Then no more. Will this be the last sorry that I have to say?

Or will it be this one? When will I ever be done of saying sorry? Surely no more after this. And we wonder, don't we, why our attempt at repentance and reconciliation is so ineffective? When actually, Jesus has finished the work of taking away our sins, so there is no more sacrifice to offer.

We do not have to spill any more blood to be reconciled, to say sorry, to be one with God, with each other.

[22 : 24] His blood has covered all of our wrongdoing, and so we are free to humbly and gladly say sorry as many times as we need to from now to the very end.

We're those who, it says, are being sanctified, so we will need to apologize to God and to each other very often. But friends, Jesus' once for all sacrifice means that we can do that without shame, without hesitation, knowing his single offering has cleared our consciences, freed us from guilt for all time.

There is no more offering, no more sacrifice. His is enough. His is effective. Brothers and sisters, Christ has sat down. It is finished.

Dare to believe it, that your sins are gone. They are ancient history. It's too good to be true, isn't it? But it's not, because the Bible tells us so.

See the wonder of the cross. And because of that, Hebrews finally gives us three let-uses, or three applications, then, as we close.

[23 : 41] Part of the point of this series is that we would strengthen our understanding of what Christ did on the cross. That's a good thing. But verses 19 to 21 tell us that we can't stop there.

It gives us a great big therefore, and it loads the application canon with the very truths that we've been taking in Luke, verse 19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, therefore, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way opened up through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, people see saying, since we have a sufficient sacrifice, and since we have an effective priest, then, number one, let us draw near.

This is the language of worship, coming to God together, and his point is how we come. How should we come to God in light of the cross? Verse 22 says, with a confident heart and with a cleansed heart.

The cross gives us confidence to enter the holy places. That's not this building, but it is the heavenly throne room of God, which is ultimately where we come on a Sunday.

And he wants us to come with a true heart in full assurance of faith. That is not doubting your right as a Christian to be in God's presence.

[25 : 11] Lots of us struggle with that assurance, don't we? Should I really be here? Does God really want me? Is it really enough?

When we look at ourselves, it's easy to think, isn't it? It's all too good to be true. The cross can't possibly be enough for me. But God wants you to look up at the cross and the wonder of what Christ did for you there and say, do I really belong to God?

Yes, I do. Can I really be here with him? Yes, I can, because I am covered by a sacrifice that is enough for all my sins. Even the ones in the deepest corners of my heart that nobody else knows, and even I don't know really what they're there doing.

Christ's blood covers even them so that I can draw near with a confident heart to worship God. And with a cleansed heart, sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, that's what our baptism tells us has happened.

Just as our bodies were washed with pure water, says Hebrews, so when we put our trust in Jesus Christ, our hearts are sprinkled clean from spiritual impurity and filthiness before God.

[26 : 32] And so, friends, we don't need to be ashamed to come into his presence, as if we could really do with a shower. It's happened. Whatever we've done or not done this past week or month or year, we come to worship knowing that our hearts have been washed clean already by the death of Jesus.

You know, in my experience, this is actually the big reason people stop drawing near, coming to worship God on a Sunday, not because of falling out with people or busyness, but because of shame.

People get to a place where they feel they can't come because they are not good enough. Whatever else is going on, we can lose confidence, can't we, that Christ has made us perfectly ready for God such that we can draw near and worship him with his people in every season of life.

Whatever is going on, whatever we're going through, his death is enough for us. It has washed us clean. So, brothers and sisters, please know you are always fit and ready to come into God's presence.

Whatever, whatever else is going on in your life, if your trust is in Jesus, don't drift away, but draw near. Secondly, because of the cross, let us probably the one that's closest to our aim in this series, because he wants what he said about the cross to help us, therefore, to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.

[28 : 16] The people he is writing to were wavering. They saw what was going on in the temple, and it looked better than the cross. And how many things in our lives look better than the cross of Jesus, give us more confidence as Christians?

I can tell you what people say. How did you become a Christian? My upbringing? My church? The camps I went to?

The people I listened to? The YouTube videos I watched? The friends I spoke to? The people I was like, the people I was like, good things, perhaps, but if they feel more real to us than one day in history, when the Son of God died on a Roman cross, well, we're building, aren't we, on something that can give way.

Friends, your testimony might be wonderful. It's a wonderful thing to have a testimony of how you've come to Christ, but your testimony is not the gospel. It's wonderful to be part of a church where people have come to Christ in so many different ways at different times of life.

No two stories are the same. But we have one thing in common, don't we? That however we came to Christ, God led us to the foot of his cross to take hold of his atoning sacrifice.

[29 : 35] And that is the confession of our hope. Without that, we don't have a hope between us that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. And so, friends, hold fast that confession without wavering.

Don't let better looking or better feeling things take the place of the cross. Loosen your grip on the gospel. You let that be what you say when someone asks you how you became a Christian.

There were lots of reasons. But the reason above all reasons is what Jesus did for me when he died. He hasn't changed since that day.

He is faithful. So let us hold fast our confession. And finally, verse 24, let us stir each other up. You know, I pray that you go away from these few Sundays saying to yourself, look what Christ did for me.

But Hebrews also wants you to say to each other, look what Christ did for you. And look what Christ did for us. See, simply meeting together is encouraging.

[30 : 40] See that. Don't underestimate the encouragement of just turning up. Apparently, that's not a new problem. Don't be one of those people who neglects to meet together, he says.

And he says, get ready to meet. Prepare to come together. Don't just stir each other up, but consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.

And so that implies, doesn't it, that we are giving thought in between times to how am I going to encourage my brothers and sisters when I see them?

You know, how best might I encourage a brother or sister next time I see them? What can I do to get ready to come to church, to stir someone up, to love and good works?

And brothers and sisters, that is still true. Stir one another up in love. Encourage each other to good works.

So friends, let us draw near, let us hold fast and let us stir one another up because we have been saved through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all upon the cross.

[33 : 02] I thank you, Father, that we do not need to give back to you as if he is on loan to us, but you have given him for us in love, a sacrifice to cover every sin.

Strengthen our faith, Lord, in his death, we pray, let us hold only to the cross of Christ. We thank you for him and we pray in Jesus' name.

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flame for the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross

O to see my name written in the wounds Lord through your suffering I am free death is crushed today life is mine to live but through your selfless love it's the fire of their host son of God sing for us heart of love water cross peace and forgiven at the cross now may the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace amen and For more information visit www.fema.gov