

Perfect Reality

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[0 : 00] Open your Bibles again, back to Hebrews chapter 10, and keep them open because we'll be hopping around a little bit from different texts in the Old and New Testament this morning.

And when I woke up yesterday morning, God had blessed me with a cold. And so if I drink an unusual amount of water during the sermon, that's why.

So I'm sorry. There's an assumption that the book of Hebrews has been making as we've been working our way through it throughout the past few months. And the assumption is this, that you can't understand this book without having a keen awareness of the knowledge of sin, the knowledge of your own sin.

In fact, the book of Hebrews is telling us that the history of the world, from now all the way back to Genesis chapter one, has been the history of God's dealing with this problem, with the problem of sin.

And whether you're a Christian this morning, you've been a Christian for as long as you can possibly remember. I want you and I to awaken fresh to the knowledge of our own sin.

[1 : 16] Just think about this week for a second, and be aware of the lust and the lies and the gossip and the anger and the hatred that just pops in and out of our minds constantly.

Every morning, I bike to school every week, and I can think of so many instances of anger at buses. Just little things like that.

Let it pop into your mind and be keenly aware of the fact that you're a sinner, and I'm a sinner. And if you're a non-Christian this morning, if Christianity's new to you, if you're coming and exploring this idea of Christianity for the first time, the book of Hebrews tells us that all people desire to be saved.

Maybe that's why you're here. You have a desire deep down that you need to be saved from something, and what this passage is telling us is that that something is not outside of you.

It's not somewhere out there, but it's here. It's sin, as the Bible calls it. It's sin, and it's guilt before the living God of disobedience.

[2 : 26] So all this old and new language that's going on in this book that Derek's been working through, and you've been thinking, I don't have a clue what this means. Old covenant, new covenant, offering sacrifices, bulls, goats, you know, why are we talking about this in 2014?

It's because God is telling us this is how we deal with our biggest problem, and that's the problem of sin, and the problem that we are guilty before God.

We should have his wrath, and that's the problem that this book is dealing with. So the way I wanna look at this passage is in three parts briefly this morning, and I wanna do that by focusing on the climax of this passage, which I wanna argue is actually the climax of the entire book so far, and it's found in verse 14.

So look down with me for a second at verse 14. It says this, for by a single offering, as Jesus' offering, he, Jesus, has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

So what we'll do is simply look at that verse in three parts, single offering, that's the first one. The second one, he's perfected for all time, and the third one, those who are being sanctified, and we'll try to illuminate the entirety of this passage based on that one verse, which is the summary of what the whole passage is saying.

[3 : 53] All right, so let's start by a single offering. Now, like I just said, verse 14 is the climax of a big argument that the author's been making.

So he said things like this, the new covenant is better than the old covenant, right? You've seen that in the text. Jesus, as Derek has told us a thousand times, is better than bulls and goats, obviously, right?

All right, it said in chapter eight, verse seven, if the old covenant would have been faultless, there wouldn't have to be a new covenant. So we've got this dichotomy throughout the whole book between old and new, worse and better, the old sacrifices and Jesus' sacrifice.

And so the offering that this first part of verse 14 is talking about is specifically Jesus' death, Jesus' death on the cross. All right, so come with me to verse one.

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.

[5 : 05] In other words, every single year, according to the old covenant in the Old Testament, priests are going into the Holy of Holies, or the Holy place in the Tabernacle, and they're killing animals to offer to God for sin.

But what this passage is saying is that that continual year after year process tells you that because it's year after year, it doesn't actually work.

It doesn't actually make atonement for sin. If it did, if a bull could actually make atonement for sin, then they wouldn't have to do it every year. All right, so the contrast here is that those offerings in the Old Covenant are just a shadow.

It's just a shadow from a building. It's like standing with a building behind you and looking down and seeing the shadow of this massive building, right?

But you can't actually see the building. You don't actually have the substance. So it's contrasting that these Old Covenant sacrifices were shadows.

[6 : 10] Jesus' sacrifice is substance. It's real. It's what actually makes satisfaction. Now, we live in 2014, right?

And you may be thinking, why blood? Have you ever thought about that? Why blood? Why do we need blood? Why do we need animals dead or somebody to die in order for sins to be forgiven? And that's a good question, right? In Genesis chapter two, you remember that God gave Adam and Eve so many blessings and then he gave them one specific negative command, right?

You remember what that command was? You shall not eat of the tree, right? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest you die.

Now, in Hebrew, the language that the Old Testament was written in, that word die there actually appears twice. It actually literally says donate to the tree or you're gonna die, die.

[7 : 16] That's exactly what it says. Now, we usually translate it as something like surely die, just for emphasis. But the point is that Adam, if you eat of that tree, you get annihilation, you get total death, you get hell.

But then what happened? They eat of the tree, God comes into the garden, and what do they get? They don't get immediate hell, do they?

Right? They get curse and they get sacrificial system and they get law. But God instilling the act of the sacrificial system in Genesis chapter four, which I think we can see from Cain and Abel bringing the sacrifice to God in the very next chapter, is an act of grace, you see.

It was God's grace that gave us the system of sacrifice. He told Adam, you should die, but instead I'm gonna give you an atonement system. I'm gonna give you an opportunity to live, to have your sins forgiven.

So the very idea of offering blood in the Old Testament and offering blood in the New Covenant, Jesus blood, is a system of absolute grace. It's so easy to let that whole thing weird us out in 2014, but it's God's grace.

[8 : 31] So what we're getting here is this great contrast between the one single, non-continuous, once for all offering that Jesus gave versus the blood and bulls and goats that the priest has to walk in every year and repeat and repeat and repeat.

Look down with me at verse 11, and you can see it really clearly here. Verse 11, every priest stands daily at his service. Now why does he have to stand daily?

What do you do when you're standing? You're working, that's what it's saying. The priest is always working. But then look what it says, verse 12, but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice, what did he do?

He sat down. Sat down is being contrasted directly with stands, right? The priest is always working. Christ, when he was finished with his death and resurrection, he sat down at the right hand of God. Work is finished, no more to do, completely done.

[9 : 39] What does that mean? That means that the work that Jesus did on the cross made absolute and complete satisfaction for you if you're a believer in Christ this morning.

It doesn't matter what you did this week, or what you did in your college years, or the pornography that you continue to struggle with.

If your faith is in Christ today, he has made complete satisfaction for your sin before God. He is seated right now at the right hand of the Father because of it.

That's good news. God is completely satisfied. He is the single and only solution. So often we are tempted to bring our gift offerings of merit before the throne room of God.

Even as Christians, or if you're a non-Christian this morning, the message of Christianity is that you cannot bring your good works as sacrifice offerings and place them on the altar before God and have them work for atonement for your sins.

[10 : 49] They won't work. Single, once for all satisfaction made by Christ is the only way. It's the only way. Now, there's a question that crops up in all of this.

Question that you might have wondered before. It's a really important question. If the blood of bulls and goats doesn't take away sin, then how is it that all the Old Testament people became saved? Have you ever wondered that? How? How could Abraham be called a Christian? How could anybody in the Old Testament go to heaven when they die if the blood of bulls and goats doesn't make atonement for sins?

Well, the good news is that we have more in Hebrews to come about this. And over in Hebrews chapter 11, he answers this question. And the answer is, if you know the great roll call in Hebrews of chapter 11, the word that's repeated over and over again of the Old Testament saints is by faith. By faith. By faith. By faith, Abraham believed in the promise. What promise of the one that was to come, Christ? The answer is that the Old Testament saints were saved by the very same gospel we are.

[12 : 03] The gospel that's given us in verse 14, the single offering of Christ. And the entirety of the Old Testament actually points to that. If you've ever read the book of Leviticus, which Derek told us to read at the beginning when we first started looking at the book of Hebrews, you know, it's all those laws and it's a really difficult book.

But there's one passage in Leviticus chapter 16 called the day, and it's about the day of atonement, right? And if you're familiar with Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur, that comes before Christmas, that translates to day of atonement.

That's what is celebrated from Leviticus 16. And in that passage, once a year, the priest goes into the Holy of Holies. He takes with him two goats, two lambs, and he is told to sacrifice one and then to let the other go.

Now why? It says that he lets the other lamb go out into the wilderness and roam freely forever until it dies.

Why does he do that? He doesn't because it's a symbol that the blood of this lamb that I'm sacrificing right now before the altar will not pay for our sins.

[13 : 15] We're still waiting for a sacrifice that will. And so he lets that lamb go out into the world as a symbol for Israel waiting for the day that the true lamb would actually come.

The single offering of Christ. That's where we get the idea of the scapegoat. Comes from Leviticus chapter 16. All right, so let's move on to point two.

Christ's single offering contrasted with the continual offerings of the Old Testament. Point two, he has perfected for all time. He's perfected for all time.

So we've said that the blood of bulls and goats will not actually take away sin, but the blood of bulls and goats is not actually totally useless either.

What's the distinction? What's the distinction between Christ's blood and the blood of bulls and goats? Now it's right here in the text. Back in verse one it says this, that every year by the same sacrifices that are continually offered, they did not make perfect those who draw near.

[14 : 25] Or if you hop down, so focus on that phrase, that little line, make perfect. And think about that. What does that mean? Make perfect. And then if you go down to verse 11, sorry, verse nine, verse 10.

And by the will, by the will of Christ, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body. Have been sanctified, past tense, it's done.

And then if you come back to verse 14, you get the same idea. By a single offering, he has perfected what tense is that in, past tense, right?

All three of those are referring to a past tense made perfect. So now verse 14 is telling us Christ has died. His sacrifice was better than the blood of bulls and goats.

In fact, it has past tense made everyone who believes on him perfect. Now, that should strike you as odd immediately because you think, I don't feel perfect.

[15:33] Right, do you feel perfect? The way that we make mistakes constantly, the way that we can't do math very well, some of us. The way that we gossip, the way that we have that besetting sin that will not go away.

I don't feel perfect. And I bet that it's probably the case that you don't either. What the author is not saying here is that when Christ made you perfect past tense, that you became free of sin completely today.

You still sin, you feel it, you feel it in your bones. You still feel the weight of death. It's coming for all of us. We're not perfect.

So what does he mean? We know that from the rest of the book. He thinks that the people he's writing to are not perfect people. He talks about it constantly, right? He's writing to them because they're actually leaving the faith.

That says in chapter six that they're bearing thorns and thistles. They're not growing fruit. They're bearing thorns and thistles. They're not perfect. So what's the author trying to tell us?

[16:43] The word here that he uses for perfect is a word that you've all heard before probably and it's the word tell us. You've heard of a goal being a tell us.

It's an end goal. It's a future accomplishment. It's something that you're striving to. It gives a sense of finality. It's final, tell us. And so the way he's using the word tell us here for have been made sanctified or has been made perfect is to say this.

That the blood of Christ given at his death has finally and forever completely made you perfect. Where?

Not now, not here on this earth, but in God's sight. In God's sight. This is what Luther, if you remember back to the Reformation, not that any of us were there.

I don't know if you could remember back, but if you remember the Reformation, maybe what you've learned about it in history class at some point, in the 15, around 1520, this is the great realization that Martin Luther had that really kickstarted the Reformation.

[17:51] And it was this, that our actual problem is that we're legally guilty before the face of God. That's our biggest problem in this life, is that before the face of God, if you're a lawyer in here, appreciate this, that we are legally, legally like courtroom type legal, guilty before God for what we have done.

We have incurred guilt before him, and we deserve death before him. But when Christ died, he finally and forever made perfect that guilt.

It's gone. The guilt that you have in the courtroom of God's justice has been totally acquitted for you, if you're a believer in Christ today. Totally acquitted.

And that's the doctrine that we call justification, that Paul talks about all the time. Legally, your sins are no more. Nothing that you have done in the past or will do in the future.

Now what does that really mean for us in application? It means this, that no matter what you do this week, or last week, the sin that you're really dealing with right now, it cannot borrow you from the grace of God.

[19:14] If you've been struggling with this coldness in your heart from some deep besetting sin lately, it won't keep you from God's grace. Second thing it does for us is this, if you're a non-Christian today, or if you're doubting your salvation, it's not too late for you.

It's never too late. There's nothing about Jesus' offering that is ever too late for you. There's nothing about any sin that you've ever done that is too late to get the grace of God that's revealed in Christ's offering.

In John chapter 10, Jesus has just told the Pharisees to their face, I am the shepherd of the sheep, not me, but Jesus. And you are the blind guides of Israel.

You're blind and you're leading Israel nowhere. And then he says this, he says, in fact, I and the Father are one. That was a monumental statement for him to make in the face of the Pharisees.

And you know what they did next? Anybody remember? They picked up stones to kill him. And Jesus does this amazing thing at that point in that text.

[20 : 34] Instead of running away or covering his face with his hands or anything like that, he says, listen, if you won't believe me, believe the works that I have done in my Father's name.

He gives them another chance. The Pharisees have tried to kill him six times by John chapter 10 in the book of John six times. And as they're starting to throw stones at him for being a blasphemer, he says, listen, one more opportunity, believe on me and I will forgive you.

It's never too late. If you're dabbling with Christianity this morning, it's not too late for you. Do not think that anything you have done in the past can bar the way to be forgiven before the face of God Christ is sufficient.

The work he has done is sufficient. All right, thirdly and finally, it will be done. For by a single offering, verse 14, he has perfected for all time, last phrase, those who are being sanctified.

Now your intent should go up right there because we've just read three passages in this chapter that we're talking about past tense, sanctification, perfection.

[21 : 59] You've been perfected, you've been perfected, you've been sanctified. And now at the end of verse 14, it says, and those who are being sanctified.

That's a present continual. It's still happening right now and it's gonna continue to happen. Now what's up with that? Why those two ideas, it's the same word.

We could substitute the word sanctified back into the word perfect in verse 14 and say it like this.

For by a single offering, he has sanctified for all time those who are being sanctified.

It could be read just like that. Now that's kind of confusing. What does he mean? What's he trying to say? The question that you might be left with at the end of that last part was, how do I actually know that I have the offering given to me before the face of God that Jesus earned?

How do I know that? How can I be sure of that? And the answer is right there in that third part.

Those who are being sanctified, who's included in this perfected state?

[23 : 11] We could say it like this. Christ has perfected those who are being perfected. The evidence that you have been perfected by the blood of Christ before the face of God, justification, is not how good you are today or how good you've been this past week.

It's not a Santa Claus theology where God's marking, tick marking what you've done and deciding what way the scales are gonna tip. It's not that kind of a theology.

The theology here is that your good works do not determine whether or not you are actually perfected fully and finally. But you can know by whether or not you've got an awareness of your sin, a love for God, a faith in Jesus, a constantly, gradually fleeing from the sins that you once loved.

That's what it talks about. If you flip over in a, just flip one page if you got your Bible out, Hebrews chapter 11, when it's talking about Moses' salvation and Hebrews chapter 11, it says this in verse 24.

By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. That's what we call sanctification. By faith, Moses, as he grew, started to realize that he was bought by God, that he was different, right?

[24 : 42] Didn't look at what it says. He was grown up, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Now, don't think this morning that the evidence of your salvation must be some type of sinless perfectionism, that every time you sin, you say, I'm not sure anymore. That's not what the passage is saying.

But what it is saying is that when we are true believers in Christ, we start to do what Moses did, retreat slowly, gradually, from the fleeting pleasures of sin.

We don't do that because of our good works. We do that because Christ has done a good work in us. If you're perfected, you're perfected by his offering.

If you're a sin-struggling Christian this morning, what I want to help you with is something that I've struggled with in my life, and that's this problem. Oftentimes, even though we might be believers in Christ, we fall away for a week, two weeks, three weeks.

[25 : 56] You know what I'm talking about, a month, six months. You might be there today, coldness in your heart, a bit of a desert spiritually for you. And we struggle all week long with no Bible reading, right?

You've been there, no prayer. Whatever that besetting sin is that's plaguing you, cropped up six times yesterday. And oftentimes our reaction to that problem is to shrink back away from God. So you say, I can't actually touch my Bible again until I have a week without this particular sin. I can't actually get back into the favor of God until I read this text five days this week. And we start to place on ourselves these categories of merit-earning favor that don't exist. And part of what this passage is telling us is that when you struggle with unbelief and when you struggle with particular sin, don't shrink back from Him, run straight to Him. God loves to take Christians who are struggling with sin and change them. So instead of shrinking back, go get into your Bible and read the Word and pray that the Holy Spirit would change you. [27 : 25] John Piper, a pastor in the States, wrote a book called, well, I can't remember the title, but the thesis is, what do I do when I don't desire God? Is that the title? That's the title, right?

What do I do when I don't desire God? And what he said was the same thing the author of Hebrews is telling us, run straight to the Scriptures and straight to prayer even if you don't mean it. Because the Holy Spirit, as it tells us from verse 16 to 18, will change you by the work of the Word. We'll close with this. Sometimes there's a fear actually in shrinking back. You don't want to go back to the text because it does something to you.

If you remember in Luke chapter 5, the disciples are fishing, right? Some of them haven't met Jesus yet. And Jesus comes and he says, cast your nets on the other side.

[28 : 27] And what happens? You remember, they catch a ton of fish, right? The boat's sinking. And at that point, you expect joy, right?

Happiness? We're going to make a lot of money off this fish. That's what I would have thought. The next verse says this, Simon Peter fell on his face before Christ and said, depart from me, for I'm a man of unclean lips.

Sometimes when we approach Christ, as he's revealed in the Bible, the only possible way we can react is to fall on our face and say, whoa, whoa to me, I'm unclean.

But what this passage is telling us is that's actually a good thing. That's what we need when we're struggling. Martin Luther said it this way, if God's mercy is true, you must bear your true and not imaginary sin.

God does not save imaginary sinners, says Luther. So be a sinner, sin boldly, but let your trust be in Christ stronger than your sin.

[29 : 45] Do you think that such an exalted lamb like Christ paid merely a small price with a meager offering for our sin?

Pray hard, Philip, that's the person he's writing to, for you are quite a sinner. When you struggle with sin, when your heart is cold, don't pretend that you have an imaginary sin there.

Remember that you do not have a meager savior who gave a meager offering for a meager problem. We have a big problem, and we have an excellent, worthy, and completed savior who's sitting down at the right hand of the Father now, right back to him. Let's pray.

Father, we ask now that you would help us to actually apply this. We don't want to shrink back, as the author of Hebrews talks about in chapter 8, and we want to be people who spring forward in our Christian lives, desiring to be sanctified and doing so, knowing that we already have been perfected, Lord.

We ask that you would help us never to forget that fact, that we are truly justified once for all, because of the once for all offering of Christ. And I pray now that if there are any unbelievers here today, any non-Christians, that you would also help them to see that that once for all sacrifice of Christ can be theirs.

[31 : 13] It's never too late. Do that work, Father, now, by your spirit, as we sing this last hymn we ask in Jesus' name, amen.