

Perfect Sacrifice

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- [0 : 0 0] So we're going to return for a little while this morning to Hebrews and hopefully there'll be a straight run now. God willing on Sunday morning to the end of the book of Hebrews.
- And if you remember anything about Hebrews, the theme of Hebrews is that Christ is better. Christ is better than anything. Christ is better than anyone. And so if there are times when you are bleak and when you're down and when you're struggling and when you're tempted to give up your Christian faith, then it's a great book to go back to because the whole point of the book, the whole point of the letter to this Jewish people, this Jewish diaspora who are worshipping God, is that Christ is better.
- Please don't go back to what you had before Christ. It's what really the writer to the Hebrews and what God is saying to this Jewish Christian people who are in some ways they're nostalgic. They're looking back to the good old days of the Jewish religion, of the sacrificial system of the temple and of everything that went with it.
- And they were tempted to go back to that and to the security of the ritual that they enjoyed. And they were beginning to think Christ wasn't all that they thought he was going to be. And they were still battling and still struggling.
- And so God is reminding them of how much better he is and warning them against turning back. And I would do the same for yourself and for myself.
- [1 : 2 8] In times of our deepest doubts, in times when we don't understand, in times when we struggle with issues and even with theology and with truth, that we always find ourselves going back to Jesus, going back to the cross, going back to his sacrifice, going back to his love, going back to his grace, going back to what he has achieved.
- Because if we lose sight of that, whatever we do or if we've never had sight of that, we don't understand and we will not be able to live radically and gracefully in the shadow of his great love.
- So today is very much an overview of this chapter. The writer himself recognizes there's a great deal in the imagery and in the symbolism and in the pictures of the Old Testament in verse 5.
- He says, but we cannot discuss these things in detail now. And I'm just going to go in the back of him there and say, we also are not going to go into these things in great detail today. But I hope to give an overview a little bit and maybe a little bit of a, we're kind of going over past ground.
- But please stick with me. Stick with it. It does need our thought and our involvement and our concentration as we listen to what God is saying through this great link between the Old and the New Testament and the teaching of God.
- [2 : 5 7] And I want to do it by way of using visual picture of color and black and white and describing the Old and New Testament in that way. So looking by way of overview at the Old Testament being something that is in black and white.
- It's the story of God, but it's still in black and white and it's incompletable. It's grainy and it's shadowy. And we do need the New Testament to help us to interpret it and help us to understand it.

But what we do know is it is preparatory that God's timing for the coming of Jesus into the world is absolutely perfect. And that this timing between creation and between Calvary, which we have recorded or at least some of which is recorded for us in the scripture, is necessary.

It's a preparatory time when God reveals himself and reveals what he is coming to do and points us towards what he's coming to do. And one of the central themes of the Old Testament, one of the really important themes of the Old Testament, revolves around a tabernacle that we read about in chapter 9.

The tabernacle is really important. It's an important kind of emblem in the Old Testament. It's really significant.

[4 : 27] And if we were to just summarise what the tabernacle means, it means that God makes his home among people.

That's the important symbolism of the tabernacle. You know, we sometimes think of all the ritual and all the different things, but the basic message of the tabernacle is that God makes his home among his people.

We all understand that whole concept of being home. I mentioned it with the children as well, and that longing for home, and what home brings. And wasn't it beautiful what Mary said?

To be with family and to be with those that are closest to us. And we see the brutality of the world in which we live when that's ripped apart, don't we?

When that's ripped apart from us personally, or when it's ripped apart in war or in brutality, when we lose people close to us, when home is broken, it's the most terrible thing.

[5 : 28] And the gospel is all about God coming to make his home with us once again, because sin is broken at home, and that relationship with God that is so significant.

And that is the picture of the tabernacle. Don't just think of it as a ritualistic thing. See it as this picture of God making his home among us.

And the tabernacle is exactly that. It means the dwelling, the dwelling place. God would dwell in the tabernacle. The tent of meeting.

It's a place where the people met with God. Now, I know there was all kinds of rules and regulations that seemed to govern that, but that was pointing towards the character of God and also the problem that sin had created.

Now, I've asked the lads, they've got a picture that I wanted just to show you, but kind of give you the idea. That's a kind of idea, rough idea of what the tabernacle looked like before the grander plans of the temple made it permanent.

[6 : 39] And it was kind of modelled on the typical Bedouin home of the day, which would look like that, and well, roughly like that, it wouldn't feel out of place with the people to whom it was given as.

It was seen, it was recognised as a home. And then the second picture is just a cut into the different ways in which that home was divided out. And the Bedouin tent would be exactly the same.

It would look a bit like that, and it would be divided into different segments inside it, different areas for living in. And it was, of course, in the Old Testament for much of the time, it was movable, it went with them in their desert travels.

But what it said was, this is God with us. God is with me here. God is with us as a people here. And it speaks about access, access to God.

You know, when you walk into someone's house, you learn quite a lot about that person by what you see in the house, by the furniture, by the pictures, by the carpets, and by everything that's there, you kind of learn a little bit about the person.

[7 : 49] And it gives you access to that person. It tells you a little bit more. That's why opening our homes really is such an important thing, isn't it? Because it gives people access to you beyond what you're like in the pew on a Sunday morning.

It tells them a little bit about what's important to you, what matters, that you're willing to open that to people and show them who you are and show them what you are like when you're living at home. And it gives access, and these first few verses of chapter 9 give us access into the nature and the character of God through some of the things that are there, the stone tablets and Aaron's staff and the gold cover arc and the consecrated bread.

And all of them are part of the story that speaks about God's grace and God's mercy and God's lordship over them. It speaks about his character, it speaks about the rescue that he had won for them in Egypt.

It speaks about heaven. We have no time to go into them, and I can't spend time, and I'm grieved at that in a sense because there's so much there. But it speaks about access and the nature and the character of God.

It's a lot of room, but it also speaks about privacy. Because sometimes when you go into someone's home, there's a room that you can't get into, isn't there? You're in someone's house and there's a locked room, and you really want to go in.

[9 : 09] Because you think, that would be a great room to go into. There must be something really great behind that door. And you want to go into the locked room. I'm not speaking about the WC, which is a locked room for a different reason, but there's sometimes a locked room and you wouldn't it be great?

There's something secret about this family, something secret about this individual. They've got a room they don't want people to go into. Well, there was a kind of locked room in the tabernacle, the holy of holies, the place that people couldn't just go into.

And it speaks about that God was separate, and God is separate as well from his people, that only one representative of the people could go with the High Priest once a year, and shed blood for the forgiveness of his own sins and for the sins of the people.

And there was all these kind of regulations that said, you can't just breeze into God's presence. You can't just stumble into the holy of holies and say, Hi God, how are you doing? It wasn't that kind of relationship, that God is separate, and God is holy, and God is different from us.

And the access to him is limited, and isn't up to us to decide that we are sinful, that God, even though he makes his home among us, hates sin and so is separate from sin, and sin leaves us under his judgment, which only the sharing of blood it deals with.

[10 : 34] So there's a whole kind of raft of things going on there, isn't there, about the nature and character of God in this home which has access to him? By his grace, by his redemption, by his rescue, but also privacy.

Now, so that's kind of the Old Testament picture of the Tabernacle, 100 miles an hour very quickly. But the New Testament, what the New Testament does for us, it introduces glorious colour into the whole picture, and it introduces amazing three-dimensional realities about the nature and character of God and about the work that Jesus came to do.

So what we have in a sense in the New Testament is we have a much deeper understanding into that locked room, and into the nature and character of God and our need for redemption, and we see much more clearly.

The New Testament speaks about our gulf. The Old Testament's very strong on that, about the unity of God, the oneness of God, and also our gulf from God and our need for rescue. And in the New Testament we see that opened clearly, and we can understand the way home.

Isn't that the message of the New Testament? Jesus is the way home. He says, I am the way, I am the way. I don't show you the way, I am the way, the truth in the life.

[11 : 58] Nobody comes to the Father, the Heavenly Father, except through me. He is the way home. The single answer that the Old Testament points to is Jesus.

Jesus is the way home to God. Jesus is the key. And we have two very significant facts in this chapter that reverberate throughout the New Testament with respect to our need and God.

And one is in verse 22. I am going to jump around a little bit, I am sorry, but I hope it will come together. Which is, in fact, the law requires that everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

There is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. That is a hugely significant fact in the Bible. If you go back with me to the second book in the Bible, sorry, the third book in the Bible, I did not know that.

Leviticus chapter 17 and verse 11. We have also a very important principle that is related to that, which says the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar.

[13 : 13] It is in the blood that makes atonement for one's life. So there is, you know, people talk about how brutal and awful it is about shedding blood and talking about shedding of blood and these sophisticated and wonderfully beautiful days in which we live.

And yet this great principle is that the life is symbolised by the blood. And the blood that courses through our veins is what enables us to live, is that it pumps from our hearts.

And that is such an important picture because we have a picture of God being life and being good, and that sins separates us from his life and separates us into death, a death that we are all under.

And the shedding of blood symbolises both the reality of death but also life being poured out. It speaks about substitution, it speaks about payment, because God's perfect justice demands that wrongdoing be paid for.

We all have that sense of justice, it's a bit perverted and twisted, but we all know that wrong things need to be dealt with and paid for, otherwise there is no justice. And God as judge, God as creator, God as Lord recognises that justice demands that wrongdoing be paid for, punished, re-repaired.

[14 : 43] And our rebellion against God, our sin against God as people, forfeits that relationship of life with God because sin separates us.

And that's always been the picture right from the very beginning. Whether we like that or not, we are people who are living but we are dying. And what God says is that is a spiritual problem, and it's a big, serious problem.

It's a justice level that's kind of way above our own ability to understand in many ways in our own sinfulness, but we are guilty. A very unpopular concept, we are guilty before God.

I could go on painting these truths in very dark terms. We're in great need. It's not a lifestyle choice, it's not just an optional extra, we are in great, great need as people.

That's one very important truth of the Bible, without the shedding of blood there's no forgiveness of sins. But the second amazing truth in verse 26, second half of that, but now he has appeared as Jesus once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

[16 : 08] So we have this terribly bleak picture, and then we have this amazing reality of the Bible's messages that God pays the price in his justice for our sins in himself.

That's at the very heart of God. The divine answer is the story of the cross, and that is the most remarkable story.

If you look at verse 14, what we have in a sense is this spiritual transaction in the locked room happening. In a sense what we have is, I'm struggling with the right words here, behind closed doors, the salvation of God that's played out on Calvary is explained to us here.

Verse 14, how much more than will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God the Father cleans our conscience from acts that lead to death so we may serve the living God.

You've got this amazing insight into the heavenly picture of what happened between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, between the Triune God. This Triune Conclave that's both profound and divine, and this once for all solution, is that Christ offered himself by becoming flesh, and then by dying on the cross, his blood was poured out.

[17 : 38] The life of God as it were is poured out once for all. The author of life, Tabernacles among us, comes into our experience, makes his home with us, loves us, then faces separation from his Father, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Sheds his blood on our behalf and voluntarily gives his life up to be our atonement, to be our sacrifice, to satisfy his own perfect justice.

So it's a grim picture of our condition spiritually, but it's a magnificent picture because the answer is given in Christ. You know that we can't provide the answer ourselves, but Christ has done it for us.

And it's in a sense then, in a sense in every way, it's God's route map home for us. How do we get home? How do we get right with God? How do we get forgiven? How do we have hope for eternal life?

How does death in this life lose its sting? How can we look beyond this life and see eternity because we have the route map that's 2,000 years old, that happened once for all, that doesn't keep repeating itself, that the grace of God, the love of God, the power of God has said, I've done it for you. You're condemned, I'm condemned, there's no way back, he said, but I know I'll do it. I'll do it for you.

[19 : 04] I love you this much. It takes our understanding of grace just to a different level because he's said, I've done it. I've completed it. It's happened and the cross he says it's finished. And that is the route map back. That's what Hebrews is all about.

So in the good news of the gospel is that in Christ we come home. We come home to God. And that moves from black and white, from glorious colour to, now I'm going to show my age here, to a live transmission. You probably don't say that anymore.

That's kind of from the 60s and 70s, a live transmission from Buckingham Palace or something. It's probably, there's some more technical phrase you would use now. But it's that we are in the story, is what I'm trying to say, that it's not just we look on and see God's amazing grace and see it in colour through the New Testament, is that we become intimately involved, we become home. We come into God's home and it's absolutely radical.

Sheen verse 9, in summarising the Old Testament, the writer says, this is an illustration for the present time indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.

But Christ's coming is able to clear our conscience because as Jeremiah prophesied in Jeremiah 31, he says, I'm going to bring a new covenant and I'm going to change you from the heart out.

[20 : 32] And we're giving a new heart, a heart that is alive. Now, do you see this important thing, the difference between death and life, is that when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we're giving a heart that is spiritually alive.

So we move, you know, it doesn't matter how dramatic outwardly, it might be very undramatic, no one might have even noticed that we've become Christians outwardly. But inwardly, something amazing has happened because we've moved from one territory to another, from death to life, from the, we've become citizens of heaven and God doesn't tabernacle among us like a Bedouin tent.

He doesn't even come in the flesh in the person of Jesus, he makes his home in our heart through the Holy Spirit so that the New Testament can confidently speak about us being God's temple because God lives in us.

So say for example in 2 Corinthians 6 and verse 16, you would say, you know, for we're the temple of the living God. As God has said, and this is exactly the same kind of covenant language right through the Bible, I will live with them and walk among them and I will be their God, they will be my people.

So he uses this language in expressing that the Holy Spirit lives in us. We kind of, our spiritual genetics have changed from death to life and we can love him in a way that we could never do before.

[22 : 05] We can serve him because of what he's done. We have a new identity, new belonging, new relationship, new insight, new home, new heart. We have a life of grace.

And I want you to think about that when you're nostalgic for your unbelieving days. When you're nostalgic for days that you lived in before you were a Christian or when you're tempted or thinking about giving up the faith because Jesus, you think, has let you down.

He's not all that you thought he was going to be. It's not all that you thought he was cracked up to be. When you're tempted to do that, please look back at what the Bible says about himself and what he has done.

And that we are home with all the struggles and I'll just say briefly about that before we finish. Think about that. That's why this book was written. It was written to people who were tempted to give up on Jesus.

Sometimes it might be the church that tempts you to give up, might be fellow Christians, the way that they act or the way that we act. But maybe that you look to Jesus, always looking to Jesus.

[23 : 14] The good news is that we are home because we have a new heart so that even when we die, that heart still beats. Not the physical one, at least for a while, but our spiritual heart beats.

And we go into Jesus near our presence. And that then is both a duty and a delight. The Christian and the Jewish believers needed to know this also and so do we.

It's both a duty. In verse 15 he says, you know, that we have been set free. And we've been released.

It's that whole picture of the Jews being set free from slavery in Egypt. It relates to our freedom from slavery. We made clean. We're not in the dark anymore.

And we're not enemies of God. We're not at enmity towards God. That's amazing truth. We are no longer in the seat of judgment as it were or in the dock.

[24 : 13] We've been redeemed because Christ has taken our place. He's dealt with our sins. So we've been set free. It's a great thing. And we must speak about that truth. We're set free.

Set free from regulations and rules and religion and all these kind of things when they enslave us. But we're set free as he says in verse 14 that we may serve the living God.

How much more then will the blood of Christ free our consciences so that we may serve the living God. So there's this great truth that we are set free. We're made clean, forgiven.

Our past is forgotten and dealt with by God. Our sins are made annulled. And you know, you might come today with a horrendous sense of guilt, even as a Christian about your past few weeks and months.

I don't know. You're set free. Your sins are dealt with and forgiven as you come to Christ. And then we're set free to serve. You know, that's the beauty of the Gospel, isn't it?

[25 : 21] It's not an absolute, nobody had. There's not such a thing as absolute freedom. We either serve God or we serve ourselves and humanity and ultimately darkness and death.

But we're set free to serve in 1 Corinthians 6. We're told, you know, to flee sexual immorality and so on. Do you not know that your body again is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Who is in you? Whom you've just seen from God? You're not your own. You're bought with a price, therefore honour God with your body. So the way we follow and serve is because we've been set free to serve.

And because of what he's done for us and he gives us life. This is this great Gospel community in which we're to serve here. We, as a congregation, as a local church, you serve Christ.

Yeah, you serve Christ as an individual. Primarily it's expressed in serving and worshiping and serving together as God's people.

[26 : 24] And that's a harness. But in many ways it's easy to serve Christ because it's perfect, isn't it? But sometimes not so easy to serve one another because we're ugly and imperfect and selfish and greedy and proud and bitter.

And we do all the things that we shouldn't do. And so we have reasons for not serving one another. But he says, no, we are a community of grace and a community of giving.

Now the greatest homes that you'll ever visit are homes that are full of grace and giving, aren't they? And sometimes it's the hardest place to show grace and giving in the home. That's where we want to be most selfish.

We just want to be ourselves and we want to get in the home. And yet the greatest homes are homes where there's grace and where there's giving. They flourish and so is true of churches.

Communities of God's people where there's grace and giving. Where rather than looking at all the things that are wrong with others and the reasons why we don't serve and the reasons why we can't follow, where we just throw ourselves into all the mud and dirt of grace and serve and love one another.

[27 : 32] So I said, I finished just with this comment. We're still in the waiting room. We're still in the waiting room of this great home to which we've been ushered by the work of Jesus Christ if we are Christians.

If we've put our trust in Jesus, we are home. But can I say we're still in the waiting room? Verse 20, the end of the chapter says, So in Christ sacrificed once for all to take away the sins of many people and he will return a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation for those who are waiting for him.

In other words, there's more to come. Now, Hebrews is about Christ being better, being the best, but even so, the best is still to come. We're kind of in the front porch as it were of God's kingdom.

If I can speak reverently in these terms, we're not yet in the Banqueting Hall. Evil has been defeated, but it's not yet destroyed in our lives and in the world in which we live.

We are safe, we are free, we are loved, but in some ways we are still in the shadows because Christ is coming back. That is far too little discussed and thought about and meditated on and prayed for in this modern church.

[28 : 51] And in our own congregation for which I take full responsibility. Far too easy to live just in the present today and yet he's coming back. We have that great, great hope and that great future.

Being at Kevin McEver's funeral on Friday, 1200 people and a boy of 19 taken from life, it makes no sense.

Unless there's the hope of the gospel that Christ is coming back and this life is not all that there is. He will come back and we are asked simply to trust him. In all the difficulties we looked at that when we looked at Job a little bit.

He will be vindicated, he will be valued, he will usher in our internal inheritance. And we need to look at our lives here in the light of eternity.

And all that we hold precious and significant and important, we need to remember in the light of eternity. And in the light of this flashing life that is passing quicker than a weaver shuttle.

[29 : 56] It's mind-blowing truth that Jesus Christ is coming. So the perspective he asks for us is, I think the perspective of this book is patience.

It's a great Christian grace and it's one we desperately need. We are very impatient. We always want now. We want to receive. We want everything now. We want everything to be perfect and everything to be the way we want it to be now.

But there's still opposition. There's still suffering that we simply can't understand. But that we trust God that he is returning and that he is patient, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

We need to fight against the YOLO attitude of the world is that you only live once at one level. Because we must understand that we only live once in this life to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

And that is what is significant and important. Nor should we be wishing our life away just to times of pleasure or holidays or how important they are.

[31 : 08] They're tremendously important. I'm not saying they're not. But not wishing our life away for these things. Because we're asked to serve here now. And remember it's a battle.

And be renewed and refreshed certainly, but the best is still to come. And the challenge for us is to be a people who are waiting for him. Not a laziness sitting back and careless. That's not what it means.

It means waiting in faith, prayerful, serving obedience, getting over the crisis and the problems we face by coming to trust in Jesus and look for his strength and recognise his value.

And can I just ask, are you waiting for him? Bringing salvation to those who are waiting for him? There is a great salvation that we will enjoy, but we need to be those who put our trust in him.

Ask him into our hearts to forgive us and to renew us, to help us to see. Oh, I wish I could see more clearly myself. But he will enable us to see as we ask him, as we pray for his grace and his love to pour over us and change us and renew us.

[32 : 23] And may that be your experience and may it be mine and may it be our experience as a congregation. Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Father God, we ask that you would teach us and lead us and guide us.

We thank you that in the complexity of some of the passages that we read in the New Testament, which are a cursory reading, we might think have no relevance to us.

May we find relevance as we see God's perfect plan being unfolded, as we see the love and grace of Jesus, as we recognise that he has taken these first steps.

He has taken all the initiative, both in tabernacling among his Old Testament people, redeeming them from slavery in Egypt, and sending his son. He has always been the one who has taken the initiative to draw us back into fellowship with him, to forgive us, to renew our life, and to help us to know that death is not victorious and is not the end, and that separation from God is not a lot.

We thank you for your love and commitment. Help us to understand grace more clearly, and help us both to recognise the delight of that and the duty of serving you with delight and with the power of the Holy Spirit.

[33 : 51] So continue, we pray, to make your word apply in our lives and hearts to all the different people here who have everyone as different needs, different challenges, different fears, different strengths, different weaknesses, but all made in your image, all needing rescue, all of us needing being renewed and made whole.

And we thank you that Jesus is the answer for each of us. We ask it in your precious name. Amen.