



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 10th March 2019

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Scripture: Hebrews 9:15-28

Subject: Part 23 – The Greatness of Christ’s Death and Sacrifice

The discussion here is about the most important event that has ever happened on earth. It affects all peoples, cultures and creeds. It’s effects extents back in time, the present as well as the future. Whether one believes or not, there are the eternal consequences in addition to the here and now. The difficulty experienced by those sharing the Gospel at the time of this epistle has not abated. In fact, presently the difficulties are increasing as we see the powers of darkness gathering for the final war.

When we look down at the verses before us, the truths that have been established and rooted in previous verses, are being weaved together to compress the purpose, the plan and the power of God that He has towards mankind with such mercy, love and yes, even longsuffering.

We can say that we understand what is in front of us, but have we over simplified the text by saying that it’s just about Jesus dying for our sin? Or can we stand back and contemplate the most magnificent doctrine of Atonement, Substitution, Mediation, Love and Rescue by the Divine Creator. We, like those who this book was addressed to, can sometimes have theological blind spots. The writer of Hebrews proceeds to give three reasons why it was necessary for the Messiah, Christ Jesus, to die –

1st – A Testament demands a Death

2nd – Forgiveness of Sin demands blood, and

3rd – Justice demands a substitute

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. (9:16-17)

The point being made in verses 16 and 17 is simple and obvious, however, its relevance to the Old Covenant, was anything but obvious to the Jews being addressed here, which is why the writer briefly explains how it applies. Building on verse 15, God gave a legacy, an eternal inheritance, to Israel in the form of a covenant, a will. As with any will, it was only a type of promissory note until the provider of the will dies.

There are two very important prophetic portions of Scripture in the Old Testament which were known to the readers or hearers which explains that the death of the Messiah, a human sacrifice not an animal one was necessary to accomplish complete forgiveness and bring about the new covenant. The first is Psalm 22 which we know as the Psalm depicting Calvary. The second portion is found in Isaiah 53 which clearly speaks of the suffering and death of the Messiah. They would have known this well. The whole tenor of that passage, unavoidable stresses this. The Messiah would have to be God Himself for He made the covenant and He will not give Glory to another, hence the necessity of Jesus death. 2 Corinthians 5:19 tells us-

“that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

This leads us to the point that -

Therefore, even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Therefore it was necessary for

the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (9:18-23)

A “sacrifice” specifies that something very precious has been offered up for a cause or a reason. Surely the offering of a human sacrifice is the most important sacrifice. The world considers, that when men go to war to obtain peace, it is the ultimate sacrifice, and we often hear this line in documentaries about various wars. Now take a moment and think about Jesus, by whom all things were made, gave up his position in Heaven, clothed himself in flesh and humility, and died on our behalf so that we may have peace with God, and end our war with God’s wrath.

Philippians 2:5-10

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

So why does Forgiveness and reconciliation with God demanded a blood sacrifice? The answer is found in Leviticus 17:11

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement”

God does not forgive sin by looking down and saying, "It’s all right. Since I love you so much, I’ll overlook your sin." God’s righteousness, Holiness and His Justice, will not allow Him to overlook sin. The penalty for sin is death as Romans 6:23 tells us. Just like when someone goes before a Judge and says ‘I’m sorry I offended’, that is not enough to get him off his jail sentence. The penalty as prescribed by law, still demands payment. We cannot enter into God’s presence because of the total depravity of man. Never mind our self-effort, but the very core of our being is defiled by sin.

Romans 1: 18 - *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”*

Therefore life is required for life.

Since God cannot forgive a person’s sins without the shedding of blood. The question is, “Who dies?”

The first sacrifice occurred after Adam and Eve sinned. The forgiveness of sin required blood to be shed. God could have killed Adam, but He used an animal instead as a substitute. Every time a person sinned a new blood sacrifice had to be offered as a substitute in order for their sins to be covered. Looking back to the Old Covenant, the death of animals were a typology and prophetic, looking headlong to the death of Christ that would ratify the second covenant. Even before the old priestly sacrifices begun, the covenant itself was ratified with blood.

As explained in verse 19, Moses sprinkled blood on the book and on the people which is referenced in Exodus 24:6-8. When we examine the general sacrificial system, it can be hard for us today to understand how bloody and messy it truly was. The great amount of blood was a continual reminder to the people of the great penalty of sin and death.

It is possible to become morbid about Christ’s sacrificial death and preoccupied with His suffering and shedding of blood. It is especially possible to become unbiblically preoccupied with the physical aspects of His death. If the Israelites could have been saved by blood without death, the animals would have been bled, not killed. But one life requires another, hence why they had to die and why Jesus had to die. Remember, at the end of that eventful Passover week when Jesus was finishing His ministry, the Romans had prepared three crosses for three criminals. On two of the crosses, thieves were to hang. The third cross was for an insurrectionist named Barabbas, who had been found guilty of treason against the empire. But Barabbas never made it to the cross. He was guilty and condemned, but he was not executed—because someone took his place. On the middle cross that day hung not a violent, profane rebel, but the sinless Son of God. Barabbas went free not because he was innocent, but because Jesus took his place. Jesus was crucified not because He was guilty, but so that He could take Barabbas’s place and the place of every other sinner.

Jesus took our place and became our substitute.

With His death, we must never forget his resurrection which vindicated his promises as well as God being satisfied with his sacrifice. We must also never forget the wrath of God upon sin, and how serious God views sin, that it necessitated Christ's death on the Cross.

God was so satisfied with what Jesus did that He

"highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

God is immeasurably satisfied with Jesus and He is seated on His right hand.

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (9:24-26)

When Christ rose again, He did not go into an earthly Holy of Holies. He ascended into the presence of God, the heavenly Holy of Holies. How beautiful to realise that when He went in, He took us with Him! Ephesians 2:6

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (KJV).

Positional we are there but practically we have yet to ascend. He has ushered us into the very presence of God. Unlike the earthly high priests who were sinners before God and who had to continually offer animal sacrifices, as we've seen, Christ offer Himself, once and for all, for all time.

If Jesus' sacrifice had not been once and for all, He would have had to suffer from the foundation of the world, that is, from the beginning of humankind. He would have had to die continuously, since the time Adam first sinned. But, praise God, His sacrifice does not have to be repeated not even once. It is finished, completely finished.

People often wonder how Old Testament believers were saved, since salvation is only through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). They were saved on the same basis as believers today are saved, by the finished work of Christ. Part of Christ's work as mediator of the New Covenant was the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant. One of the first accomplishments of Jesus' death was to redeem all those who had believed in God under the Old Covenant. After Christ died, they saw what had only before been a promise. It was a certain promise, a guaranteed promise, but until the Messiah's atoning death, it was an unfulfilled promise. The point being made here to the writer's original readers, who were Jews, both saved and unsaved, is that Christ's atoning death was retrospective. Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) also pictured symbolically what Christ's atonement actually did. It, too, was retrospective. When the high priest sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, the unintentional sins of the people were covered for the previous year. Paul presents this same truth in Romans 3 in verses 24 and 25, that we are

"justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" (Romans 3:24-25).

God is satisfied when a man puts his faith in the shed blood of Christ. Because His blood was not shed until hundreds or even thousands of years after many Old Testament believers died, their salvation was, so to speak, on credit. By their obedient faith in God, they were credited with what Jesus Christ, their promised Messiah, would one day do on their behalf and on the behalf of all repentant sinners who have ever lived and who will ever live. Knowing this, God was forbearing and patient, and, until the true sacrifice was made, when He saw a true heart of faith, He passed over their sins. In a deeper sense, the sacrifice had already been made in God's mind long before it was made in human history, because Christ's

"works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews 4:3; 1 Peter 1:19-20; Revelation 13:8).

From the human perspective, however, the Old Testament saints could only look forward to salvation. So the Old Testament sacrifices were not means of salvation, but marks of faithful obedience and symbols of the one perfect sacrifice that would be the means of salvation.

The eternal inheritance spoken of in the text, indicates that the Old Testament saints could not receive salvation without Christ's death. For it is Salvation that brings total forgiveness and access to God. The New Covenant was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ and provided the full salvation that Israel had been hoping for since the very beginning.

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him
(9:27-28)

All men have to die, and our death is by divine appointment. It is one appointment everyone will keep, no matter how late they ran in life! The mortality of man has a twofold reference. The Power of Life, to give and to take, is possessed by God alone. Man is totally dependent on God for the gift and the continuance of life. Man is mortal because of the curse of sin and it is sin that separates him from the Source of Life. But death is not the end. For while it is the end of man's life as he knows it here on earth, his soul lives on and so he will face the final judgment.

Judgment is also appointed by God and no-one will escape. There are two types of judgement however. The Judgement for the Unrighteous, and the judgement for the Righteous.

The Judgement for the Unrighteous will be for people whose name is not in the Lamb's Book of Life. They may be very good people, who done lots and said lots, but their name is not in the Lamb's Book of Life. These people will stand before that great white Throne speechless, defenceless, inexcusable and accountable. They will never be able to say that their judgment sentence will be wrong. They will be ultimately condemned to eternal punishment of the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the

second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

The Judgement for the Righteous will be for people whose name are in the Lamb's Book of Life. They may not be who the world would have chosen, but they are who God chose. They will stand before God clothed in the righteous of Jesus and their accountability will be for their service and faithful use of the talents God gave them for His glory. Their works will be tested and the finding will be revealed, Awards will be given and they will gain their crown of life and enter into the Kingdom of God and find their room reserved just for them.

To refuse the cross as the instrument of salvation is to choose it as the instrument of judgment (John 12:48).

The humanity of the incarnate Son was exhibited not only in His living but also in His dying. Like all men, Jesus Christ was divinely appointed to die once. But unlike all other men, He can never face judgment. He took our sins upon Himself. He took our judgment for our sin upon Himself. He paid the price for sin required by God - The Just.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Indeed, the primary object of His first coming into our world was that as Man, to die for men as our Kinsman Redeemer. It has already been expressed earlier in Hebrews, chapter 2 verse 9 and 14, "that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone".

The declaration that Christ was "offered to bear the sins of many" is virtually a quotation from Isaiah 53:12, where the prophet affirms, "He bore the sin of many". This is the only plain reference in our epistle to the Suffering Servant concept of Isaiah, but it is a reminder of the special significance of this concept, and particularly in the 53rd chapter of the prophecy, as applied to and fulfilled in Christ, in the apostolic proclamation of the gospel.

Jesus did die once and for all, but he arose again and ascended to Heaven to sit at God's right hand. We know that he will return again because he promised us that He will.

In this passage it points this out and it got me thinking about the Day of Atonement, when the people waited expectantly for the High Priest to come out from the Holy of Holies. If he

did anything wrong, he would have failed and died. So they listened for the bells at the edge of his garments, waiting when he would reappear.

We know that God was pleased with Jesus' finished work on the cross and divine justice was also satisfied. So now we are awaiting his second coming. Unlike the Jewish people who waited outside the Tabernacle, listening for little bells to ring hoping that they didn't miss it, we wait, watching the signs of the times and waiting to hear the Lord's trumpet sound for our homecoming. No-one who is found in Him will miss it. We are eagerly waiting for our Great High Priest to call us –

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17,

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

These verse of course are speaking of the rapture, the sudden snatching and catching up of the believers.

Here in Hebrews however, it is talking about the second coming. This will occur after the rapture, when Jesus will come back to the earth, not as a baby, not as a servant, not as someone with no reputation nor as a gentle lamb, but as a roaring lion, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the day of reckoning. Every eye will behold Him and every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2).

These truths are firm and unchanging. It seems that we need these firm and unchanging truths more so now than ever before, as we are now living in a society that is bombing the boundaries that God has set, never mind tearing them down. When we read this book of Hebrews, we can look and say that this is a great book for the Jews then as they were under such pressure and persecution. Their lives never mind their livelihoods were at stake, they would have been under great pressure to go back to their religion.

For us, there has always been that pressure of going back, or to walk away. In the time in which we live, there are so many doctrines, teachings, ideas, lifestyles, world-views and

everything else, but truth. If you hold to the truth you are called all kinds of everything that is not very nice and we see how believers on this side of the world are starting to experience their livelihood and even families being destroyed.

Is it not the understanding of the cross which enable us to cling **to it** and its truth. This is why it is so important to deepen our personal relationship with God in His word. The more you study for yourself and the deeper you go, the more you will discover the gems and the gold that are within the deeper layers of the Scripture. You will fall so in love, that you will not let it go. It will give you confidence and you will become more committed to Christ, for you will get to know him more and understand what he has done for you and what you have escaped from.

These days there are many sensational churches, were people are looking for the experience not for the Saviour and His truth, but Jesus said it so clearly in Luke 10:17-20 when the

“the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”¹⁸ And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.¹⁹ Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.²⁰ Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

You need to become a Berean student. Study these things for yourself. Don't rely on me or just a Sunday morning. Don't rely on your favourite preacher on you-tube either. You need to check out what is being said is true. You need to know why and what you believe so that you will have a defence when anyone asks you about the hope you have within. You need to look around at the signs of the times, and realise God has place you in this time for a purpose. What is that purpose? Time is not your friend, but Jesus is, so go to him.

Amen.