

Hebrews 10:1-18
Sin & Sacrifice: The NT Reality
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Two weeks ago, I took a break from our study in Romans to examine, in preparation for the Lord's Table, Leviticus 4 - 6. It occurred to me, as I received a lot of very encouraging and positive feedback from many of you, I think a lot of people don't understand that Old Testament sacrificial system; they don't understand the reality of what was going on there, and so I think it was helpful, and many of you told me that, and I appreciate that. But as I got to thinking about that, I realized that I really finished at the end of the first half of the story, because I finished in Isaiah 53 by reminding us that ultimately Christ was to come and to be the fulfillment of all of those sacrifices. That's the beginning of the second half of the story, but it's not the end of the second half of the story. And so, this morning, I just want to come back to that theme because I think it's so important. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so I want us to look again at the sort of reality. We looked in the Old Testament at the pictures, at the types; and this morning, I want us to look at the reality that we find in the New Testament.

A number of you have heard me share that back in the year, 1996; I had the opportunity, the first time at that point, to travel to India. I've been there since, but that was my very first time there, and the most indelible memory of that entire trip was a visit to the Temple of Kali. Now Kali is one of the chief gods of the millions of gods in Hinduism. And just as we exited the temple and walked into the adjoining courtyard, suddenly a couple came up, wanting Kali to curse an enemy of theirs, and so they bought a temple goat for a sacrifice. And I stood there, not six feet from them, as a priest took a large knife, slit the goat's throat, and then cried out to Kali to curse the enemies of this man and this woman. It was a bloody mess, as you might imagine, and I was struck with the fact then that what I was witnessing was not the sacrifice to a false God, but as the apostle Paul describes it, since there are no other gods but the one live living and true God, and all the other gods of the nations are energized by demons; I was really watching the sacrifice to a demon.

But as I watched that spectacle unfold that day, my mind went back to the Old Testament. It went back to a time when animal sacrifices were a crucial part of the worship of the true God, but only as carefully prescribed by God, not to invite curses on others, but to hope for God's blessing on themselves.

You see the truth is God demands sacrifice from every human being. Let me say that again, God demands sacrifice from every human being. As we saw in Leviticus, the purpose of the first

sixteen chapters of Leviticus is to instruct the nation that sinful people, like we are, can only approach a holy God, like He is, through sacrifice.

In Leviticus 1 - 7, God prescribes five different kinds of sacrifice, two of which had to do specifically with sin. And all five of those sacrifices were to be a part of the worship of every child of Israel during every year. In Numbers 28 and 29, God requires four of those five types of sacrifices to be offered throughout every year as national sacrifices; so you had individual sacrifices, and the same sacrifices were to be offered on behalf of the nation.

Now the doctrinal realities that sort of undergirded this entire sacrificial system were these, one, God is holy. God is completely without sin; He is perfectly just; He cannot tolerate sin; He must deal with it; that's His nature. As He declares Himself, "I cannot, I will not leave the guilty unpunished." It's just not in God's character to be unjust.

Secondly, so He is holy and just; secondly, man is sinful. All of us, without exception, have sinned against that holy God. We have violated His Law; we have spurned His goodness.

Thirdly, the only way that sinful man, men and women like we are, can approach holy God is on His terms. That's what this sacrificial system was making clear, and His terms are always sacrifice. And let me say this bluntly; that is still true today; it's never changed. The only way any one of us can ever approach the holiness of God, the God who is innately holy and just, is through sacrifice; no longer through the sacrifice of an animal, but now only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's the message of Hebrews 10, where I want us to turn this morning; Hebrews 10.

Now, as we approach this monumental text, it's important that we sort of get a running start on the author's flow of thought. So, let's go back to the end of chapter 9, Hebrews 9; and in verses 23 - 28, I want you to note that paragraph, and I don't have time to walk you through it, but let me just give you a summary. In those verses, the writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus Christ died on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice. So then, when he gets to chapter 10:1 - 18, he tells us why Jesus's sacrifice was the ultimate sacrifice, and he does so by contrasting the sacrifice of Christ primarily with the sacrifice that was made on the annual Day of Atonement in the nation

of Israel, the day when the people's sins were atoned for, that day, that sacrifice that the Jewish people considered to be the ultimate sacrifice.

So, the writer of Hebrews is going to compare Jesus's sacrifice with that great sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. Now he argues here in the first 18 verses of chapter 10 that there are three great reasons that Jesus's death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice. Let's look at them together.

First of all, in the first reason that Jesus's death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice is that it was a complete satisfaction. That's the message of verses 1 - 4, a complete satisfaction. Now foundational to understanding the Old Testament sacrificial system is the fact (listen carefully), that the required sacrifice was always for God and not for the worshipper. It was for God and not for the worshipper. We saw this in Leviticus, but let me just remind you. Go back to, keep your finger here, turn back to Leviticus, and let me just show you a few examples. Leviticus 1:9. Notice the end of verse 9 as he talks about the burnt offering, He says it will be "an offering by fire [Now watch this expression.] of a soothing aroma to the Lord." Go down to the end of verse 13, it's a burnt offering an offering by fire of "a soothing aroma to the LORD." Verse 17, the end of the verse, it's "a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD."

Now, just in the interest of time, go to chapter 4, because chapter 4 is talking about the sin offerings whereby human sin is forgiven. And in 4:31, the writer of Leviticus, Moses, puts it this way:

Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar [Notice this.] for a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, [a covering for him] and he will be forgiven.

That expression, "a soothing aroma to the Lord" is also used when it pertains to the national sacrifices in Numbers 28 and 29. I won't take you there, but let me just give you one example. Numbers 28, verse 2 says, "You shall be careful to present My offering ... of a soothing aroma to Me." Now that phrase then, "a soothing aroma to Me," defines the purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices, all of them. In fact, that expression occurs forty-two times in the Old Testament in conjunction with the instructions for sacrifice. What does it mean, "a soothing aroma to Me?" It literally means, "a smell that satisfies, a smell of satisfaction, an aroma that

calms or soothes my just anger against your sin,” that’s the idea. In fact, look at Genesis, chapter 8, you’ll see it in conjunction with Noah after the flood, Genesis 8:20 says:

Noah built an altar to the LORD, took of every clean animal and ... every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.”

You see that principle of it soothing the justice of God, His just anger against human sin.

Now, even to think about that, let’s be honest with ourselves, is a bit of a terrifying thought. I mean, think about this for a moment, your sin and mine, those sins that we sort of write off and take lightly, our sin greatly offends God our Creator. It’s pictured as stirring up His “just” wrath.

Now, don’t picture God as the person you unfortunately may know, who loses His temper and just sort of blows up capriciously for no reason. That’s not what we’re talking about. We’re talking about the pure and holy response of a righteous God to rebellion against His rule. That’s what we’re talking about, and that must be propitiated. The word means, “it must be satisfied.” His justice demands that every sin be punished and that must be accomplished. Now all the Old Testament sacrifices and their ultimate fulfillment, the sacrifice of Christ, then, listen carefully, were to God to satisfy His holy wrath against sin, to be a soothing aroma to God.

Now with that background, look at chapter 10 of Hebrews, in verse 1. “For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.” The Laws of sacrifice in the Old Testament were just like a shadow; they were not the, literally, the image or the icon. They were not the reality of the good things to come just like your shadow isn’t you; it’s just a kind of vague outline of what you’re like. In the same way, the sacrificial system, in the Old Testament, was a shadow; but the body, the reality, is the spiritual

blessings that come from Christ and His sacrifice. And that's because those Old Testament sacrifices couldn't fully satisfy God's just anger against our sin.

Notice what he says at the end of verse 1, they could never "make perfect." That is, they could never give us a perfect standing before God, and so they had to keep being offered because they were no lasting solution.

Verse 2, "Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" Now don't misunderstand, the Old Testament believer was, in fact, forgiven, and the Old Testament believer had a sense of that forgiveness; read the Old Testament and that becomes clear, right? They understood that there was forgiveness; they had that forgiveness, and they had a confidence, a sense of that forgiveness. So, why would he say that they had this "consciousness of sins with them?" Because Old Testament believers knew that their sins had not yet been objectively dealt with because of the constant repetition. And because they knew intuitively that an animal's death simply couldn't do that, and so the Old Testament believer had a "consciousness of sins," that is a lingering sense of guilt because they knew their sin had not yet objectively been paid for.

Verse 3, "But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year." Read the Old Testament and you'll discover that the list of sacrifices is exhaustive and exhausting. In fact, just take the national sacrifices; forget all the individual ones; if you add up the number of national sacrifices that had to be offered every year, it was about 1200 animals. Then you add all the ones by individuals. In fact, some historians estimate that 200,000 animals were sacrificed every year in Israel at Passover alone. And then the year ended, and it all began again.

What was the Old Testament believer to learn from the fact that he had to continually offer all those sacrifices? Well, verse 3 says they served as a reminder of sin. You see, that the sacrifices on the annual Day of Atonement and the entrance by the high priest into the holy of holies, with the blood of that sacrifice, reminded all the people that their sins separated them from God. They couldn't go in there; only the high priest could. Only one man could enter God's presence only once a year. It was a reminder of that separation; it was a reminder of sin. That's what the animal sacrifices did.

They also reminded him that someday there would have to be a true substitute, not merely a picture or type. So, why was all this repetition necessary? Very simply, because animal blood

cannot expiate sin! Look at verse 3 there was a reminder of sins in those sacrifices year-by-year. Verse 4, because, here's why, "it is impossible [Notice that word.] it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin." An animal can never be an adequate substitute for a human being made in the image of God.

Now I think many Christians have a serious misunderstanding about the nature of Old Testament sacrifice. Please understand this; God never declared sinners to be righteous in the Old Testament because they offered sacrifices. What have we been learning in the book of Romans, in chapter 3 and in chapter 4? Old Testament believers like Abraham were declared righteous on the basis of ? Faith! Their faith in the promises of God ... that He would find a way to deal with their sin through the Messiah who would come. That was the basis on which they were declared righteous. So, sacrifices then, at their root, were merely an external expression of an internally held belief.

In fact, my favorite example, keep your finger here, turn back to Luke 18. I don't want to take long here because I don't have long, but I want you look at Luke 18, one of my favorite stories Jesus told. This is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Verse 9 of Luke 18, Jesus "... also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." In other words, they were looking at their own actions, their own merit, as if that was going make them right with God. If I do enough good things, and I avoid enough bad things, then I'm going to be right with God. They trusted that they were therefore righteous because they had tried to do that, and (And this is how it always works with self-righteousness.) they viewed others with contempt.

So, verse 10, "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." Now the tax collector, you understand, was the off scouring of society. Here was a Jewish man who had sold himself to the Romans. He was part of the tax franchise system; he was essentially extorting money from his own countrymen and getting rich by doing so. They were usually accompanied by the worst of criminals; you know, knuckle crackers and extortionists and prostitutes and everything else went along with this crowd. He was a tax collector.

The other guy is called a Pharisee. Now, you've got to dispossess yourself of the 21st century Pharisee because that has become, because of the New Testament, a bad?? word, right? You call somebody a Pharisee; you've just really slurred their character. That wasn't true in the first century. The people hearing Jesus tell this story would've heard, when you heard the word

“Pharisee”, they would’ve heard the most spiritual person you know. Okay, so that’s how you have to read story.

So, you’ve got the most spiritual person you can imagine or the one you think is spiritual, and you’ve got the lowest of the low. So, verse 11, “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself; ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’” You see how you he trusted in himself that he was righteous. He didn’t do certain things, and look at what he did, verse 12, “I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get;” [I am religious. He was justifying, he trusted in himself that he was righteous; viewed others with contempt.]

But then in verse 13, you have a tax collector, standing some distance away. By the way, this man would’ve been a pariah in that society; he couldn’t go to a synagogue; he couldn’t worship with the people of God; he could show up at the temple because even Gentiles were allowed there. “But, [he,] ... standing some distance away, [You just see this sense of his contrition. It’s like, “I don’t deserve to be near God. I’m not getting any closer than this or I deserve to be struck dead, and] unwilling [even] to lift up his eyes to heaven.” It’s not because it was wrong; a lot of people in Scripture look up when they pray; Jesus did. It’s because he’s admitting his total sinfulness and unworthiness. “But [he] was beating his [chest.]” This guy is truly broken about his sin against God. And notice what he says. “God, be merciful to me, the sinner.”

Now if you have a footnote in your Bible, it says something like this out there for the word merciful, “propitious”. It’s the word that means “to be propitiated, to satisfy the just anger of God.” He says, “God, let your just anger against me be propitiated. Let it be satisfied.” Now why he say that? Well, because there were two times in the first century you went to the temple to pray. It was at the time of the morning sacrifice, and it was the time of the evening sacrifice. So, as he’s praying, what’s happening further into the temple are the sacrifices being made. And what this man says is, “God, I am a wretched sinner. I don’t deserve to get close to you; I don’t deserve to look up at You, but, God, let your justice against me be satisfied in the death of that sacrifice, be propitiated to me the sinner.”

Notice what Jesus says, “I tell you, this man went to his house justified [Declared right with God; just in a moment, he’s right with God because he acknowledges his sin; he puts his faith in

God's promise of forgiveness through sacrifice] rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Let me just say, if you're this morning without Christ, that's God's requirement. He never receives any sinner proudly standing up, but He receives every sinner who comes completely bowed down by his sin. That's what God demands of you. If you want Him, if you want to come to Him, you want to enjoy this, you've got to humble yourself before Him, admit your rebellion and turn to His way.

So, the Old Testament believer, then, what I want to get from the story, go back to Hebrews 10; what I want to get from this parable Jesus told is we understand that the Old Testament believer was to see, in each of the sacrifices for sin, the satisfaction of God's wrath on his behalf. There was no real relationship, however, between a person's sin and that animal sacrifice; it was only symbolic; it was only typical. Their faith was not in the death of an animal; it was in the fact that, one day, God would provide a sacrifice that would forever deal with sin.

You say, "How I know that?" Well, there are a number of reasons; let me give you one. What's the worst sin by a believer in the Old Testament? David, right? Adultery and murder! True believer commits adultery and murder, and he lives in that adultery for nine months before he is confronted. In his repentance for those sins in Psalm 51, listen to what David writes. He says to God, "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering." Now, he's not saying God didn't want sacrifice anymore; because later in that same Psalm, he says, "I'm going to offer it." What he's saying is, "What God wants [And he goes on to say it explicitly.] What God wants from the sinner is a broken and a contrite heart," not sacrifice. The sacrifice only atones when there is "a broken and a contrite heart, (before) God." So, David understood that animal sacrifice could never truly deal with his sin.

Now, I want you look at the first four verses of Hebrews, and I want you to get the application. What the Old Testament sacrifices didn't accomplish, Christ's sacrifice on the cross did. So, here's what, if you're a Christian, here's what His sacrifice did accomplish for you. First of all, if you're in Christ, the cross has cleansed you. Look at verse 2, "having once been cleansed." Those sacrifices didn't; Christ's did, cleansed you; you're clean. John 13:10 says your heart has been given a permanent bath. Acts 15:9 says God has cleansed your "heart by faith."

Secondly, through the sacrifice of Christ, Christ has removed your need for that constant sense of guilt. This has to do with your emotions and your conscience, your feeling of guilt. Verse 2

says, “worshippers, [who have] been cleansed ... no longer have [to have that] consciousness of sins.” In other words, you no longer need to have a consciousness of, or a guilt for sins that you have confessed and forsaken, sins that have been cleansed. Don’t let Satan come and accuse you to yourself; remind yourself of the gospel. If you have repented and believed in Christ, if you have turned from that sin, if you have confessed it and expressed a willingness to forsake it, then it is forgiven, no longer a consciousness of sins.

And the third part of the application of these first four verses is this, Christ has provided you with a perfect standing before God. Notice verse 1, you are now made perfect. What is he talking about? He’s talking a perfect standing before God, verse 14, “He has perfected [you].” This again has to do with your standing; you stand before God today, Christian, as if you were as perfect as Jesus Christ. That’s your status; that’s your standing. This means the cross is a complete satisfaction! In the Old Testament sacrificial system, millions of animals died, but not one time, not once, was the just anger of God against that person’s sin satisfied.

And think about crucifixion; thousands of people were crucified by the Persians and then by the Romans; but what made Christ’s sacrifice on the cross unique was this, only He drank the cup of the just wrath of God against sinners. That’s why you remember back in Romans 3:25, Paul says this, “God displayed [Christ] publicly [He’s talking about the crucifixion.], He displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation, [as the satisfaction of His just wrath] in His blood through faith.” That “propitiation” word, that’s the same word that the tax collector used, same family of words, God, be propitiated to me the sinner. Christ did that. He satisfied the wrath of God. Isaac Watts’s old hymn, that we really don’t sing anymore, puts it this way:

Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altar slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.
But Christ the heavenly lamb takes all our sins away,
A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.

So, the first reason that the cross was the ultimate sacrifice is the fact that: it is a complete satisfaction.

The second reason that the writer of Hebrews identifies here is that: the cross is a perfect substitution. We see this in verses 5 - 10. Now before we look at those verses, let me just remind you that the Old Testament sacrifice was always substitutionary. Again, if you weren’t here when we looked at Leviticus 4 - 6, I encourage you to go back and listen, but let me just

remind you of this, if you had been an Israelite in the Old Testament, you would've understood that you were offering that sacrifice in your place.

You say, "How did they understand that?" Well, here's how it would have worked. Imagine for a moment you live in Old Testament Israel; you want to offer a sacrifice for some sin you've committed. You know you're guilty before God; you want forgiveness, so here's what you would've done. First of all, you would have identified and brought, to the forecourt of the temple, a perfect animal without blemish, without spot; and then, once it became your turn, you got to the front of the line, you would have taken that animal that you brought, and you would have put your hands upon the head of that sacrifice with the implication being that it was now your representative; it stood in your place. You might even have confessed your sins over its head in the sense that you are transferring your guilt to that animal.

And then, as I mentioned (and this is where a lot of you would've gotten off the boat), the priest would have handed you the knife; and with your own hand, you would've slit that animal's throat; you would've slaughtered it. And then as the blood began to pour out of that animal, the priest would have been there to catch its blood in a bowl, and he would've walked over to that great altar at the temple, and he would've taken that blood of that now dead animal and splattered it across the foot of that altar. And then he would've taken the specified part of the animal, and he would've laid it on the altar to burn; and as it burned, it rose as a soothing aroma to the Lord. You see the point of the entire process and especially the laying of your hands on the head of that animal made it clear that that animal was you; that animal was dying in your place. The sacrifice was substitutionary.

But there's a catch. The catch is this; ultimately, God is only satisfied with a perfect, voluntary human sacrifice. Now as soon as I say that, we're a bit repulsed by that. The whole idea of human sacrifice immediately causes us to pass into the revulsion. A number of years ago (you may have seen the story), police in eastern India arrested a couple who had sacrificed their two sons; unthinkable, their two sons 7 and 9, to please their gods in order to gain luck and prosperity. As soon as we hear that, we're just absolutely repulsed by it and we should be. But understand this, God doesn't find the idea of human sacrifice always repulsive, mostly repulsive, but not always; because that's exactly what He demanded of Christ. What's repulsive to God is when human beings disregard His plan to offer only the perfect God-man, His own Son; and

instead, try to appease their false gods by offering themselves or their own children. God finds all such human sacrifice repulsive, and it's clearly forbidden.

But He intended that the sacrifice of His Son as a human, in our place, would perfectly fulfill and replace the animal sacrifices. You say, "How?" Remember God's justice has to be satisfied. Where there is sin, it has to be punished. Our sins call for death. Either we had to die, or somebody had to die for us; that's the justice of God. Think about that for a moment. Either you had to die and be punished forever by God, or somebody, who was worthy, had to die in your place. Look at verses 5 - 7:

Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

Now, what's going on here? You'll notice that's all caps in our Bibles. That means it's a quote from the Old Testament. Specifically, it's a quote from Psalm 40:6 - 8. And the writer of Hebrews quotes this as the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came into the world, incarnate. Notice, when he comes into the world, he says, and then the quotation mentions four of the five Old Testament sacrifices. Notice what he says in verse 5, "these, God did not desire." And in verse 6, "He has not taken pleasure in them." Now, notice the contrast with those Old Testament sacrifices we learned about in Leviticus. Verse 5, "A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED ... ME." In other words, Christ's Own body would be the sacrifice that God desires and that would please Him. And verse 7, "I HAVE COME ... TO DO YOUR WILL." It's Jesus's perfect obedience that made Him the perfect sacrifice.

Now, when you get to verses 8 - 10, you have the author's commentary on that quotation from Psalm 40. And notice what he says. Here's the writer of Hebrews; we don't know who it is; my favorite guess is Apollos, but regardless. Verse 8, "After saying above, 'SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*' (which are the ones offered according to the Law), then He said, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.'"

Now watch the end of verse 9; nothing could be more important than this statement. "He takes away the first in order to establish the second." "He takes away the first [That is the Levitical

sacrifices.] in order to establish the second.” What’s the second? It’s the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ. That is a monumental statement of divine fulfillment. Jesus’s sacrifice of His own body replaces and fulfills all of that previous sacrificial system. And the New Testament, by the way, everywhere agrees with that. I could give you quote after quote, just let me give you two. Ephesians 5:2, says, “Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, [Listen to this. This is Old Testament language.] an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” That’s the Greek equivalent of a “soothing aroma” to the Lord; that’s what Christ did. First Peter 1, verses 18 and 19:

... you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

Christ, in the sacrifice of His own body, completely demolishes that Old Testament system. He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

Now look at verse 10, “By this will [that is, by God’s decision to offer Christ as the suitable sacrifice for us,] we have been sanctified.” Now, notice the word “sanctified” is put in the past tense; this is not that process of daily sanctification where we’re made more and more like Christ. Instead, this is the once for all change in our status before God. At the moment of salvation, your status was changed; you were set apart for God. How was that permanent change in our standing accomplished? Notice verse 10 goes on to say, “through the ... [sacrifice] of the body of ... once for all.”

Now we’re ready to see the contrast. I want you want to think about the contrast here. There are three of them. The Old Testament sacrifice was an unwilling death, right? That animal didn’t volunteer. There were no sheep holding up there, you know, their little hooves saying, “Me!” It was completely involuntary. That’s the Old Testament system. The cross was completely voluntary. Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us.

Look at the second contrast. The Old Testament sacrifice was the death of an irrational animal not made in the image of God. The cross was the death of the perfect, rational, obedient God-man.

And the third contrast, in the Old Testament sacrifice, the animal died at the hand of a man. The cross, Christ ultimately died at the hand of God Himself as Isaiah 53 says, “It pleased Him to

crush Christ.” Why did Jesus have to die? Ask the average Christian, and they’ll give you the right answer. It has something to do with sin. That is the right answer, but what is the relationship between His death and our sin? That relationship is defined in one word, “substitution”. What is substitution? It’s simply “the act of taking the place of another.” We use that word all the time. When I played football, you know, guys would come in as a sub, a substitute; he’s playing in my place. That’s what we’re talking about. It was impossible that an irrational animal could substitute for a person made in the image of God. But Christ volunteered to take our place.

Back in October of 2006, you read and heard, as I did with horror, the story of that lone gunman who took over a one-room Amish schoolhouse in rural Pennsylvania. By the time the ordeal was over, that wretched man had shot ten girls between the ages of six and thirteen, and then taken his own life. It’s a tragic story of sin and depravity. But there’s also an amazing point at the heart of that story; because I don’t know if you read about it or not, but I was struck with the heroic actions of one of the older girls in that school. Two of the survivors of that shooting told their parents that a girl name Marion Fisher, 13-year-old student, when it first began to unfold in that classroom, she walked up to the gunman, and she said this, “Shoot me, and leave the other ones loose; let the other ones go.” She believed that by sacrificing herself, maybe there was a chance that he would allow the others to live. He shot her and killed her; and then sadly, he went on to shoot the others as well.

But what I want you to see with that picture of Marion Fisher going up to that gunman and saying, “Take me instead of them,” that’s exactly what Christ did for you. He volunteered, Christian, to be your substitute. He had you in mind; He offered Himself for you. He said to the Father, “Let me die for his sin or her sin, and let them go free, forgive them.” As the perfect Son of God, unlike the animals in the Old Testament sacrificial system, Jesus Christ was a sinless, voluntary, human substitute for us. He was a perfect substitute. So, the cross was the ultimate sacrifice because it was a complete satisfaction; it was a perfect substitution.

And the third and final reason is this: it was a permanent solution. I love verses 11 - 17. Here’s the author of Hebrews conclusion; Christ’s one sacrifice atoned for all the sins of every believer for all time, and that makes continuing Old Testament sacrifices completely unnecessary.

Look at verse 11; now, before I read this, remind yourself the book of Hebrews was written at some point probably in the mid to late 60’s A.D. while the temple was still standing. It was

destroyed in 70 A.D. So, this was going on; this was still happening day after day. Watch what he writes:

Every priest stands daily ministering an offering time after time ... sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He (That is Jesus Christ.) having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

Now you obviously see the contrast between standing in verse 11, which implied the high priest's work wasn't done. Listen, there were no chairs in the holy of holies; there were no chairs in the holy place. Why? Because their work was never finished! Jesus sat down, which implies that He had completely, finally, permanently dealt with human sin. The priests of Israel offered literally hundreds of thousands of animal sacrifices, but never, one time, did the death of one of those animals ever take away a single human sin, not even a little one, because the death of an animal could never appease the offended justice of a holy God.

But notice verse 14, here's Christ, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time [That is, He's given us a perfect standing before God forever.] those who are sanctified." Those, maybe, those who are being sanctified; this may be a reference to ongoing sanctification. But regardless, notice the point of verse 14, "He has [given us a perfect standing] for all time." Christ satisfied the wrath of God, for every sin, of every person who will ever believe, for all time, through one sacrifice.

Think about this for a moment, Christian, you will never be judged for a single sin you have ever committed. Why? Because, God judged every one of them, without exception, in the body of Jesus Christ. For those six hours, He treated Jesus as if He had committed those sins you committed. It's done; it's paid for, one offering forever; that's the gospel.

Now notice verse 14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." That implies final, permanent forgiveness; and if that sounds too good to be true, which frankly, at times, it sounds too good to be true to me, I'm sure it does to you. Well then, the Holy Spirit wants you know this is true.

Notice verse 15, "And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us." He wants you to know this is true for notice what he writes in verse 16. This is what He says in the New Covenant: "THIS IS THE

COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM.”

In other words, here’s a new legally binding promise from the Holy Spirit to every person who believes in Jesus Christ. If you will repent and believe, He will change your heart; He will give you a new power to obey; that’s what He means by those pictures there in those verses, and He will forgive your sin forever; that’s where he goes in verse 17.

Then he says here’s the rest of the New Covenant promise. “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.” That is the Holy Spirit’s promise to every person who believes in Jesus Christ.

Now, where there’s that kind of forgiveness, the Old Testament sacrifices are unnecessary; they’re even obsolete, and that brings us to verse 18 in the application. Now where there is forgiveness of these things, if you have that kind of forgiveness where God promises there’s been this sacrifice that’s fully cared for, and you’re never going to have them brought up against you again forever, then verse 18 says, “there is no longer any offering for sin.” Why do you need sacrifices when you’ve had “The Sacrifice” that’s forever dealt with sin?

Now how do we apply this? Let me very quickly just say that I think there are three groups of people in this room today. And I just want you identify where you are, in which group? And let me just speak to you briefly.

First group, maybe you are painfully aware that, while you’re attached to Christianity (or you’re here in a Christian church this morning, maybe you claim to be a Christian, maybe you haven’t), you’re painfully aware that you don’t truly know God, that you still wear and bear the guilt of your sin, and you are painfully aware that you have not been changed, that you are the same person you have always been, and you just keep on manifesting your heart even when there’s some latent longing not to be that way. You’ve seen that reality about yourself. Let me just speak honestly to you. This is the message of Leviticus; this is the message of Hebrews. Like the rest of us, you are a sinful person, and God is still holy; and the only hope that you or I have of approaching God is through sacrifice, the only hope. If you try to come to Him on your own, you will be treated just like the Pharisee in Jesus’s’ story, trying to justify yourself, make

yourself out to be righteous. You have to come like the tax collector, beating your chest saying, “God, let the sacrifice of Jesus Christ stand in my place.”

But if you’ll do that, I promise you, God will receive you because that’s the kind of God He is. But you have to humble yourself; you have to acknowledge your sin. You have to be willing to leave it. But if you’ll do that, then He will forgive you. If you will turn from your sin, confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, He will cleanse you, forgive you, and He will treat you as perfect as His Own Son. He will accept the sacrifice of Christ in your place. I plead with you to do that today.

There’s a second group here. Maybe this is your group. Maybe you know you’re in Christ. Maybe you’ve done what I just described, but you have neglected the means of grace in your life; you’ve neglected your own personal holiness; you’ve fallen on your face, and you’ve been giving in to some of the temptations that were a part of your old life before Christ. You’ve sinned against the Lord; you’ve sinned against His sacrifice. Listen, you too can experience forgiveness; if you will turn from your sin, you will find Jesus Christ our Lord more than willing to receive you, to welcome you back. But just like in the previous case, you must humble yourself. You must be willing to turn from that sin and come back to Him. You can find forgiveness at the cross; just turn from your sin back to Christ.

Maybe you’re in a third category. You’re a believer here this morning, and while you’re not perfect, you say, “You know, I am walking in obedience to the Scripture. I’m trying to follow my Lord. I’m trying to do what I’m supposed to do.” Then I hope this passage encourages you.

Your sin, my sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,
Our sin not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross, and we bear it no more.
Bless the Lord, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

This ought to be a great encouragement; this is what’s happened for you. He took your place, and the justice of God is fully satisfied.

In July of 1941, a man escaped from Bunker 12 in the infamous German prison camp of Auschwitz. The remaining men of Bunker 12 were let out as was customary; and for an entire day, they were made to stand in the sun without food or water. But the man was not found; he had actually mounted a successful escape. That was tragic for the men who were left because to discourage escapes, Auschwitz had a rule that for every one man who escaped, ten would die in

retaliation. Eyewitnesses to this event reported that Carl Fritz, the Commandant of Auschwitz at the time, screamed at the rest of the inhabitants of Bunker 12, “The fugitive has not been found. You will all pay for this. Ten of you will be locked in the starvation bunker without food or water and you will die.”

The guard began to call out the names of ten men who’d been chosen to die because of the escape of the one. One of these ten men was a Sergeant. He had been arrested for assisting the Polish resistance. And as his name was called out, just in a natural response in anguish, he called this out, “My poor wife, my poor children, what will they do?”

Suddenly and unexpectedly, another prisoner, a man by the name of Maximilian, stepped silently forward; he took off his cap, and he stood before the Commandant of Auschwitz, and this is what he said, “Let me take his place. I’m old; he has a wife and children.” And to everyone’s amazement, the Commandant actually accepted the offer. Maximilian and nine others were sent into the starvation bunker. And a number of days later, they all died, and their bodies were thrown in the ovens of Auschwitz. The Sergeant lived. The Sergeant, whose life was spared, later wrote these words; I want you to hear him.

I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on, the immensity of it. The condemned, I, the condemned, am to live, and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me, a stranger. I was saved.

In 1995, that Sergeant, whose life was spared that day at Auschwitz, celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday. For over fifty years, every morning that he opened his eyes, he was confronted with the reality that he was alive because someone else volunteered to die in his place.

That’s the Old Testament sacrificial system. It reminds each of us that our names were on the divine list of those appointed to eternal punishment, and not capriciously, but justly; that’s what we earned; it’s what we deserved. Our only hope was for a substitute, someone to step forward and to satisfy God’s just wrath against our sins in our place. And that’s exactly what Christ did. And every day from now to eternity and into eternity you and I should be comforted with the reality that we live because the eternal Son of God volunteered to take our place.

Do you understand what was happening outside the city of Jerusalem that day 2,000 years ago on that Friday so long ago? Jesus offered the sacrifice to end all sacrifices; He laid down His Own

life for us! And it was the ultimate sacrifice because it was a complete satisfaction; it was a perfect substitution, and thank God it was a permanent solution.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these precious truths that are at the very center of our faith. Lord, how can we ever thank you for Your love, for Your grace? We know this was Your plan. You didn't spare your Own Son, but You delivered Him over for us all. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that You would volunteer to stand in the place of wicked rebels like we are; that You would love us so much to do so. Holy Spirit, thank you that You have applied these truths to our hearts; and that in the New Covenant promises, You have given us assurance that our forgiveness is complete and permanent. We love You! Help us to embrace these core truths of the gospel and to live in the light of them. May we, like that Sergeant, open our eyes every day with the reminder that we live spiritually because our Lord died in our place, and You raised Him from the dead.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ. Help them to see; help them to see their desperate condition; that they are like the rest of us, sinful; that You are still holy, and that the only way they ever have any hope is sacrifice, the sacrifice of Your Son, initiated by You on behalf of all who will believe. May they turn in faith to Christ today? May they find themselves like that tax collector, somewhere alone today, beating their chest, and crying out to You, "May Your wrath against my sin be propitiated by the death of Jesus Christ for me?" Thank you, oh God, that You will hear such a cry, and may You hear many from this congregation today.

We pray in Jesus's name, Amen?