

Week 7 Devotional™ Reading

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Hebrews

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The Time of Restoration

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. – Hebrews 9:1-10 ESV

In verse ten of this section of Hebrews, the author made an interesting statement. He referred to “the time of reformation”. The Greek word he used was *diorthōsis* and it means “a making straight, restoring to its natural and normal condition something which in some way protrudes or has got out of line, as broken or misshapen limbs” (Greek Lexicon :: G1357 (KJV) *Blue Letter Bible*). It could also mean to straighten thoroughly, rectify or restore. Some Bible translations refer to it as the “new order” or the time “when things will be put right”. But it is clear that the author is referring to the new covenant. The old way has been replaced by something new and improved. The author gives a brief description of the old way by listing some of the more important characteristics of the tabernacle and the worship that took place there. He mentions the Holy Place and the lampstand, table and bread of the Presence. He brings up the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, in which there was the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant. He includes the priests and the high priest, who were responsible for making sacrifices on behalf of themselves and the people. But he can’t help but remind his readers that “according to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (Hebrews 9:9 ESV). The sad reality was that the old covenant could never provide the worshiper with intimate access to God or the relief that their sin debt was taken care of.

The very fact that the average Jew could not enter the Most Holy Place but had to rely on the high priest to minister on their behalf, paints a picture of the inadequacy of the old way. It could not make the worshiper fully right with God or provide a personal experience of His presence. By these things “the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing” (Hebrews 9:8 ESV). As long as the tabernacle or the temple were still in use, the people would never fully experience the joy of access to and intimacy with God.

In John's gospel, he records an encounter Jesus had with the Jews outside the temple just after He had chased out the money changes. He made a bold statement. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19 ESV). Angered and more than a bit confused by Jesus' statement, the Jews responded, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" (John 2:20 ESV). Thankfully, John provides us with clarification. "But he was speaking about the temple of his body" (John 2:21 ESV). In this brief exchange, we are provided with a glimpse of the "time of reformation" to which the author of Hebrews refers. Jesus was the temple of God through which men would enter into His presence and receive a declaration of full acquittal for their sentence of death and complete forgiveness for their sins. In other words, they would be made right with God through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He is not only the high priest and the sacrifice, but the temple of God itself. He alone can provide access to the Father. Which is why, when He breathed His last breath on the cross we are told, "At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart" (Matthew 27:51 NLT). The barrier to God's presence was removed. Which is why Paul reminds us, "Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence" (Ephesians 3:12 NLT). And the author of Hebrews told us, "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Hebrews 4:16 NLT).

Blood Bought

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. – Hebrews 9:11-15 ESV

To understand this passage, it is essential to understand God's view on blood. For those of us living in the 21st-century, the very idea of a blood sacrifice is appalling and distasteful. It sounds barbaric and cruel. But you have to go all the way back to the book of Leviticus to get God's view on blood and its role in the sacrificial system He established for Israel. "And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you eats or drinks blood in any form, I will turn against that person and cut him off from the community of your people, for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible" (Leviticus 17:10-11 NLT). The blood was a symbol of life. Without blood, life would be impossible. So, when innocent animals were sacrificed on the altar of the tabernacle, they were acting as substitutes for the people of Israel. Their blood was spilled so that the guilt of the sinful Israelites could be atoned for. The Israelites, like all people, sinned regularly, and their sin, according to God's law, deserved death. So, God allowed an unblemished animal to serve as a substitute. But the atonement the Israelites received was temporary and incomplete. It could not fully cleanse them from sin. The life on an animal could never fully replace the life of a human.

So, the sacrificial system and the tabernacle were both symbols of something greater to come. And the high priest, who acted as a mediator on behalf of the people, was also a type or imperfect representation of someone else to come – namely Jesus. Ultimately, Jesus came to die. Yes, He was born of a virgin, grew up to be a man, performed miracles, taught His disciples, raised the dead, walked on water, and spoke often about His Kingdom. But His mission was to die – to shed His blood, to offer Himself as a substitute for the sins of mankind. The author makes this perfectly clear. "With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever" (Hebrews 9:12 NLT). The sacrifice Jesus offered was not made in the earthly temple and was not done using the blood of bulls or goats. He shed His own blood. It was just as He had told His disciples on the night they shared their final Passover meal together. "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people – an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you" (Luke 22:20 NLT). The blood of Jesus had to be poured out on behalf of all men in order for complete atonement to be made. Jesus was sent by His Father to be the atoning sacrifice,

just as John the Baptist had prophesied. “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV). The prophet, Isaiah, recorded these powerful words centuries before Jesus appeared on the scene.

He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people. He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave. But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord's good plan will prosper in his hands.
– Isaiah 53:7-10 NLT

Jesus came to earth in order to take on human flesh and do something no other man had ever done: Live in complete obedience to God. Paul tells us, “Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8 NLT). His perfect obedience made Him the perfect sacrifice. He was the “spotless lamb”. So, His blood was an acceptable sacrifice to God for the sins of man. His atonement was permanent, not temporary. His death was able to “purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14 ESV). No longer do men have to carry around a sense of guilt and apprehension because they worry whether they have done enough to please God. They don't have to wonder if their sacrifice was acceptable. They don't have to live with a sense of impending doom because they of their inability to stop sinning. The sacrifice of Jesus covered the sins of men completely and permanently. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2 ESV).

Because of what Jesus has done, we can serve the living God, both in this life and in the life to come. We have forgiveness of sins. We have been made right with God. We have the assurance of our salvation and the promise of eternal life. Not based on anything we have done or will do but based solely on the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

He Died. We Live.

For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and 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 that God commanded for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.— Hebrews 9:16-28 ESV

All throughout this section of his letter, the author has been attempting to establish the superiority of Christ's sacrifice. His death ushered in a new and better covenant. The shedding of His blood was necessary for that new covenant to replace the old one. The author reminds his readers that the original covenant God made with Israel was also inaugurated with blood. Moses sacrificed unblemished animals and sprinkled their blood on the book of the law, the people, as well as the tabernacle and its contents. For, as the author writes, "under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22 ESV). In the same way, the new covenant went into effect when Jesus sacrificed His life and allowed His blood to be poured out as a spiritual offering to God on behalf of sinful mankind. As Jesus told His disciples at the last supper, "this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many" (Matthew 26:29 NLT).

The sacrifice of Jesus was better and more effective. He "appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26 ESV). And His sacrifice was not offered in some tabernacle made with human hands, but it was accepted by God Himself in heaven. "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24 ESV). Jesus did something no other sacrifice had been able to do. He died and was brought back to life by the power of God's Spirit, which signified that His sacrifice had been acceptable by God. Jesus did not cease to exist after death, but His earthly body died. It remained in the grave for three days until God, through the power of His Spirit, raised it back to

life. When Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, they fully recognized Him because He was, in a sense, His old self. His body even carried the holes left by the nails in His hands and feet and the wound from the spear in His side. As the author makes clear, Jesus was not going to have to die again. His sacrifice was fully sufficient. "...he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began" (Hebrews 9:25-26 NLT).

Paul would have us remember the incredible nature of the power that raised Jesus back to life, because we have that same power available to us in the form of the indwelling Holy Spirit. That power not only brought the body of Jesus back to life but raised Him back to heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. — Ephesians 1:19-21 NLT

And just as Jesus came the first time in order to die for the sins of mankind, He is coming a second time to complete what He began. We all still face the reality of death. It is inevitable and inescapable. But the author of Hebrews gives us the good news regarding the death of those who have accepted Christ as their Savior. "And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:27-28 NLT). Jesus is coming again. And to all those who have placed their faith in His substitutionary sacrifice, He will provide victory over death. They will receive new, resurrected and redeemed bodies, free from pain, suffering and sin. Those under the old covenant who depended on the blood of animals to cleanse them from their sins, received a temporary atonement. They lived to sin again. They enjoyed forgiveness for the moment but would eventually be required to offer another sacrifice. And they had the constant presence of their guilt before them and the fear of death facing them. But because of Jesus' death, those of us who call Him Savior no longer live with the condemnation of sin or the fear of death. We are forgiven. We have a promise inheritance. Our future is secure. Because we have placed our hope in a better sacrifice.