

**HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part thirty-four**

Sunday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2007

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**THE POWER OF THE CROSS BEYOND ITS OWN MOMENT IN TIME**

**Hebrews 9:23-24** - "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. [24] 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."

The opening word of today's text is translated in the *ESV* as that old English word, "Thus...." - "**Thus is was necessary....**" (23). "Thus" is a **summation word**. It means our writer is **forming a conclusion** based on something said earlier. And the conclusion he's about to reach is based on his description just two verses earlier of the purification of all those places and instruments of sacrifice in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies under the old covenant:

**Hebrews 9:21-22** - "And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood **both the tent and all the vessels used in worship**. [22] Indeed, under the law **almost everything is purified with blood**, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

What our writer **doesn't** bother explaining in those two verses is **why** these inanimate objects needed purifying. Is he really asking us to believe a tent or a pan or a knife or a lamp could be wicked or sinful **in itself**? And the answer, I think, is no. Our writer is neither naive nor suspicious. Those material things **in themselves** are morally neutral and unresponsive. But they were all **used** by sinful people. They were used by idolaters and adulterers and Sabbath breakers and thieves and liars and ignorers of God. At the very best of times those instruments and rooms were all used by **covenant breakers**. They were used by nothing **but** covenant breakers.

Now we have to do the mental work of digging out the **meaning** of our writer's words in today's text. Remember all of these ideas as we open up our first point:

1) **THE CLEANSING OF THESE OLD COVENANT "COPIES" IS DESIGNED TO TEACH THE CHURCH SAVING ACCESS TO DIVINE GRACE IS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST**

**Hebrews 9:23** - "**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.**"

Remember, all of these sacrifices and worship procedures were commanded by God Himself. They were **His** idea. And yet **embedded in the procedures themselves was this reminder that the sinners engaged in this old covenant worship weren't cleansed by it**.

Do you see what is being described in our text? It's profoundly important and easily missed. Our text is embarrassingly blunt. Rather than the worshiper being made clean, the places and tools of worship became symbolically **contaminated** by the sinfulness of the worshipers.

So what is God teaching in these superstitious-looking old covenant rituals? He is graciously laying the early foundation of understanding our best efforts in religious devotion are stained with our innate sinfulness. We can't **step out** of our sinfulness as we make our approach to God.

Remember, our writer isn't talking about the **morally wicked** things we do in this text. He's talking about **our best** - our **Sunday-best efforts** - to please a holy God. He's talking about religious devotion that excludes or circumvents the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And he says, apart from Christ's sacrifice, we **fill up our religious journey with our own indelible sinfulness**.

This text smacks each of us with a choice in this nice Sunday morning church service. It bluntly states our approach to God must be exclusively Christ-centered. This is too religiously **counter-cultural** to just nod and smile through. Believing this text sets you against the crowd and marks you as a religious bigot. Don't hear it lightly. Think it all the way through. It's texts like these that would make our Lord say, "**Count the cost**."

Now for the second half of this verse. It's more difficult than the first.

2) **ONLY THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF CHRIST CAN EQUIP BELIEVERS TO ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF THE NEW COVENANT**

**Hebrews 9:23** - "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."

It *is* surprising to see our writer describe the purifying of "the heavenly things themselves..." (23b). We wouldn't think that could be necessary. I think our writer means for us to see the contrast between the kind of external cleansing of people and object in the old covenant sacrificial system and the kind of internal purifying offered through the sacrifice of Christ.

Let me explain. Our writer makes clear it is "...impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). There was a *kind* of cleansing divinely granted whereby sinners were *treated* as though those sacrifices actually changed the sinner. But they didn't. They were all "*shadows*" - so says our writer - of the real cleansing to come in Christ.

But in Christ *spiritual changes* - "*heavenly*" changes (23b) - are not only *pictured*, but *accomplished*. Only the sacrifice of Christ establishes the *ongoing transformation of the inner spiritual life* that could never be touched by any old covenant sacrifice.

This is the process our writer was describing earlier in **Hebrews 9:13-14** - "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, [14] 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."

But remember the way I worded this second point - "Only the sacrificial death of Christ can equip believers to enjoy the blessings of the new covenant." What I wanted to stress is there is *no natural affinity between my inward nature and the kingdom of God*. Nothing in my natural nature *inclines* me toward *loving* God.

Until I grasp this I will never treasure the power of the work of Christ on the cross. There is so much more than *forgiveness* provided in Christ's sacrifice. In my own natural condition there is nothing about the things of God that I would find *inviting*. I'm not *suited to them* and they are not *suited to me*. I would never be *pleased* with them, nor consider myself *blessed* by them.

This is what Paul was getting at when he wrote these words to Titus in **Titus 1:15** - "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled."

Don't misread this verse. This verse isn't teaching "*beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*" This is a verse describing the change that takes place through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It's describing the *inward difference between the "unbelieving" and those inwardly made "pure" through Christ*. The unbelieving *can't find beauty in spiritual* - "*pure*" - *things*. And our writer in Hebrews is restating nothing but the sacrifice of Christ can "*purify heavenly things*" (Hebrews 9:23b).

Now we are more ready to re-read with a fuller understanding our writer's words in **Hebrews 9:13-14** - "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, [14] 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."

3) **THE POWER OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE CONTINUES LONG AFTER ITS OWN MOMENT IN TIME**

**Hebrews 9:24** - "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."

There are *two conclusions* our writer wants drawn from this verse:

- a) *Christ is now in the presence of Father God* - "...now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."

The fact that our writer *locates* our Lord so specifically may seem natural to our religious ears, but I think there is something more shocking we're meant to consider.

The only reason we're so comfortable with the Incarnate Son in the presence of God is we don't usually appreciate the depths of Christ's identification with sinful humanity. This is the One of whom the Apostle Paul said He was *"...made to **be sin** who knew no sin...."* (2 Cor.5:21), and there was *"...laid on him the iniquity of us all...."* (Isaiah 53:6).

Don't dodge the hard question. How would one who became the sum total of the combined sin and filth of fallen humanity ever enter into the presence of heaven and the very throne of Father God? I say don't dodge this hard question because there is great hope found in answering it. We **should** ask this question.

The fact that our writer places this loving **sin-bearer** at the right hand of our Holy God should force us to ask, **where did all those sins go?** Did God just ignore them all in His very throne room? Not likely.

No. We're meant to see that those sins - **my sins** - are **gone**. In precisely the opposite fashion of those old covenant sacrifices that couldn't **remove** sin (**Hebrews 10:4**) our writer is making clear that Christ's sacrifice **"put away"** sin - **Hebrews 9:26** - **"...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."**

The early church prized this truth. You can almost hear the aged Apostle John re-echoing the very same words - as though this was a constant theme of remembrance and celebration - **1 John 3:5** - **"You know that he appeared in order to take away sins...."**

I said there were **two conclusions** our writer wanted drawn out of **verse 24** - **"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."** The **first** was our divine **Sin-bearer** is at the right hand of Father God because He has **removed** the sin He bore forever. Now the **second** conclusion:

- b) ***The power of Christ's sacrifice continues beyond its own moment in time - "...now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf"*(24:b).**

There is a theme our writer will develop more fully in the remaining verses of this chapter, but just lifts the lid off right here - **"now to appear...."** What does that mean? When is **now**?

I know it seems a silly question. There are no excluded moments in **"now."** There is no moment in time - there is no situation in your life - there is no moment of failure or sin for which it can be said, **"Right now His priestly ministry isn't effective on our behalf."** Never.

Rejoice in happy hope in this truth. Whenever a humble heart draws near to God the issue of the sins that separate and threaten judgment are eternally **removed**. The cross happened long ago but the Lamb of God is there **now - right now** - for you.

This is forever the fight of faith. If you had been there - right at the moment of crucifixion - and had you been blessed with a deeper understanding of the **meaning** of that atoning event - if then a bleeding Christ had put His hand on your shoulder and said, **"Never doubt the seriousness of Father God's heart in pardoning your sin. All of this you are witnessing is for you. And it is enough. Let this moment give to you confidence and hope and a grateful heart for divine grace. Let it remove all doubt forever."** - if that had happened to you **right at that moment in time** you would have it etched on your mind forever.

But it didn't happen that way for you. It didn't happen that way for anyone but a small handful **right at that moment**. For many it did dawn in their hearts powerfully shortly after. The New Testament rings with the thrill of this redemptive understanding.

But we weren't there at all. We never saw it and probably can't even imagine it that accurately. Hence the need for **gospel faith**. We constantly draw our minds back to the cross we never saw physically. We obey our Lord's command and re-awaken faith around the Lord's Table. We study the gospel revealed in the New Testament. We even take the time to plough through the weighty, complicated letter to the Hebrews.

And we do it all to remember this is all just as true and just as potent and just as present **now** as it ever was at any other time in history.

Remember - this is your hope. The power of Christ's sacrifice extends beyond its own moment in time.