

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part thirty-five

Sunday, November 26th, 2017 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2009

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD TO THE END OF IT

Hebrews 9:25-28 - "Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, [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. [27] And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] 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."

In just a few verses after this text our writer will pen these bright words of hope - **Hebrews 10:19-22** - "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

That, for sure, is a much prettier text than the one we're working through today. But they're related. And they're related as **cause** and **effect - root and fruit**. It's the less pretty verses in our chapter nine text that **create** the possibility of the **assurance** manifested in that chapter ten text.

Or let me say it like this. Without working through the logic of our chapter nine text you will have to find some hit and miss way to work up **feeling the assurance** of our chapter ten text. And the problem with that is our writer doesn't present that assurance in chapter ten as a **psychological** assurance. He develops it as a **doctrinal** assurance - a confidence and assurance built on the truth of Biblical revelation. You can't for very long just **work this assurance up in your emotions**. You **dig this confidence out of the Biblical text**.

Please let me spend a minute more on this introductory thought. This is a growing problem in the body of Christ. Christians are less and less diligent in their study of the Scriptures but still more and more anxious to have God touch and bless their lives and their families. They want to **know** God without the hard work of **learning** from His revelation. They confuse **grace** with **laziness**. They are craving an **unmediated** knowledge of God - a kind of **direct magical touch that will just happen to them** - while neglecting the **appointed means** of God's best blessing on their lives.

A deep, repeated, aggressively thoughtful digging in the Scriptures is God's appointed means of renewing the mind, transforming conduct, and enlivening worship. As Christians become less and less Biblically literate they are unintentionally losing the ability to know God and treasure Christ. They will be reduced to pretending delight in God. They will be reduced to pumping up whatever **feelings of love** they can by singing love songs to Jesus.

Please don't miss my meaning. I treasure expressive worship. I rejoice in **passionate** worship. I believe God fully intends the emotions He placed in our beings creationally to be **employed** in joyous worship. God desires **more** emotional engagement in our worship, not less.

But now to the most important point of all. God desires all of the God-given emotions engaged in my worship **indirectly** rather than **directly**. He desires emotional expression as **effect** rather than **cause**. He wants my emotions stirred by my **understanding of His Word** rather than just the **beauty of the songs**. He wants my emotional delight in Him tethered to what I have come to taste of His greatness through diligently feeding **on His Word**.

Now, remember where I began these ramblings. We read of the **full assurance and confidence** our writer says we have in coming to Jesus Christ, our great High Priest in **10:19-22**. And the question I asked then was **where does this confidence come from?**

The answer I gave was **it comes from digging into and understanding our text in Hebrews 9:25-28** - "Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, [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. [27] And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] 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.”

Finally, I said this chapter 9 text, while not as *pretty* as the Hebrews 10 text, is surprisingly the *source* of the confidence described in Hebrews 10. We *need* the discipline of mining out the gold in passages like our text this morning because confidence and joy and hope are *mediated* through hard Bible passages.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul meant in 2 Timothy 2:7 - “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”

That’s a fascinating verse. It makes us ask, “*So which is it?*” Does the *Lord* give understanding or is it the fruit of *our own* deep mental concentration. And the answer is, *Yes*. The divinely given understanding of the text is given through the human concentration and study of the text. That’s where we’re headed in the closing verses of Hebrews 9.

1) THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST HAPPENED LONG AGO AND WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL FOR THE LONG SILENT HISTORY SINCE THEN

Hebrews 9:25 - “Nor was it to *offer himself repeatedly*, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own....”

After outlining many *similarities* between the High Priest’s sacrifice for the sins of the people in the Holy of Holies and the Christ’s sacrifice on the cross our writer stresses a very important point of *difference*. The old covenant sacrifice - the sacrifice that *pictured* the meaning of Christ’s coming sacrifice - was offered for the people *annually*. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was offered two thousand years ago and has *never been repeated*.

That’s the bare description of the facts. Our writer means for all of us to squeeze out the *meaning* - the *application* - of those facts. Is it a *good* thing or a *bad* thing that Christ’s sacrifice is separated from Christians today by such a *long, silent period of history*? Does this make faith in the value of the cross *hard* or *easy*?

Certainly in one sense it makes current faith more difficult. Not one of us has ever witnessed a crucifixion. Has anyone even *been* crucified in the last century? We never *saw* our Lord die. So there is no way to place trust in the death of our Lord with the help of an act of *memory* - “*This do in remembrance of me....*”

Think about it. I’m staking my sole hope for eternal glory on an event I have never seen and can’t possibly remember.

So the struggle of faith is obvious in one sense. Yet, strangely, our writer doesn’t treat this long gap of history since the crucifixion as a *bad* thing. In fact, he treats it as the most wonderful feature of the death of our Lord.

Here’s his Spirit-inspired logic. The long silent history since the cross of Christ doesn’t mean His death is *currently irrelevant*. It means it is *permanently effective*.

Think about the difference. The effect of the annual sacrifice of the old covenant High Priest was only beneficial until the *next sin* was committed by the one bringing it. The sins of the *past* year were treated as covered, true enough. But what about the first sin indulged in *after* that sacrifice? A fresh tab of standing guilt before God opened the very next day. The *sinner’s conscience* was relieved only until the next sin manifested itself and he was instantly reminded of his guilt. Then he or she simply waited for next year.

This is where the *nature* of Christ’s single sacrifice shines. Because it is *perpetually effective* it is, by definition, *unrepeatable*. And the whole New Testament pushes this fact into our understanding - 1 Peter 3:18 - “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit....”

Bring this understanding to the sacrifice of Christ. Treasure the long gap of history since its occurrence. This is not its *weakness*. This is its *glory*. And our writer can’t wait to unpack this further.

2) THE POWER OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE REACHES FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD TO THE END OF IT

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."

This is a very involved verse. The "**he**" at the beginning of this verse is **Christ**. And the next important phrase to notice is, "**...since the foundation of the world**." What does that mean? Why does our writer move from the event of the **sacrifice of Christ** to the time of the "**foundation of the world**?" The two don't seem related.

But then we remember our writer's main point about the **unrepeatability** of Christ's sacrifice - how it transcends its own brief moment in time. And what we are witnessing is our writer's way of pushing the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice in **both** directions - **past and future**.

The implication of that phrase, "**since the foundation of the world**," is clearly that the sin problem has been around since then - since the creation of the world and the fall of Adam and Eve. And our writer's point is if the atoning power of Christ's sacrifice had a quick expiry date - like that annual high priest's sacrifice in the old covenant - then Christ would have had to be sacrificed many times since the foundation of the world - over and over again. Our writer will prove the silliness of that idea in **verse 27** in just a minute.

The point to note here is to glory in the unfolding of our writer's argument. Sin was here from the foundation of the world. And, equally implied, God the Son was **present** at the foundation of the world. And yet, there was **still** only one effective sacrifice for sins. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross has a redemptive, atoning **reach** right back into every sinner since the foundation of the world.

This, as our writer has said over and over again, is the only event that gave all those old covenant sacrifices the **appearance** of actual effectiveness. Christ's single sacrifice was the event through which **all those divinely commanded old covenant sacrifices could be treated as though they could provide forgiveness when our writer clearly states they could not (Hebrews 10:4)**.

The other important phrase in **9:26** is in the last half of the verse - "...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."

Think about that phrase, "**...at the end of the ages...**" We know it doesn't mean the end of **time** because our writer writes as one **living** in the end of the ages. He said the "**end of the ages**" began with the incarnation of the Christ. So that word "**end**" doesn't mean end of **existence**. He's writing about the **end of God's redeeming plan - the goal of the whole old covenant - the fulfillment of all those sacrifices**.

This is the same **end** the Apostle Paul described in **Galatians 4:4** - "But when the **fullness of time had come**, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...."

3) **THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST FOR SIN IS NO MORE REPEATABLE THAN PHYSICAL DEATH IS REPEATABLE**

Hebrews 9:27-28 - "And **just as** it is appointed for man **to die once**, and after that comes judgment, [28] 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.**"

The unrepeatability of Christ's sacrifice is compared to the physical death of the human race in general. People can only die **once**. There is no possibility of dying again and again. And the logic of **verse 27** is laid down immediately in those two opening words, "**...just as...**"

Our writer's argument is founded on something we all know to be undeniably true. Everyone dies. And everyone dies only once. And we are told to **consider this**. We are meant to notice the repetition of that same word, "**once**," both in **verse 27 and verse 28**. Just as surely as people only die once Christ died only once. In His complete humanity it could not be otherwise.

But there's another fact presented in **verse 27** - "And **just as** it is appointed for man **to die once**, and **after that comes judgment...**" Just as **surely** - though not as **visibly** - as death happens to everyone there will be a time of **judgment after**

death.

This is the subject that drives into the last verse of this chapter:

4) **IT IS THE VERY NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH THAT IT LOOKS IN TWO DIRECTIONS TO EVENTS IT HAS NEVER WITNESSED**

Hebrews 9:28 - "...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."

Christ's death is more than just a revelation of patient love for evil-doers. It is God's appointed means for facing divine judgment with confidence and safety. His sacrifice removes the guilt we would all naturally carry into judgment after death. To miss this aspect of Christ's death (as does **Brian Zahnd**) is to deny the thematic weight of the entirety of Scripture.

There is something else in **verses 27 and 28**. Taken together they cover the time span from the **"foundation of the world"** (27) to the **second coming of Christ** (28). In other words, the sacrifice of Christ effectively reaches far **back** in time **before Christ actually died** and far **ahead** in time long **after Christ actually died**.

In other words, God has so set the cross in the center of history so that **all humanity** will have to reach into its power by **faith**. We share in the same **kind** of faith with those who died under the old covenant in this respect. All of those **"heros of faith"** mentioned in chapter 11 died **not actually witnessing the source of their redemption and hope**. And you and I weren't there and so can't reach the cross through **memory**.

Here's what I'm getting at. Many Christians lose heart because they refuse to accept the terms of the walk of **faith**. Faith is the **fundamental condition** of following a Christ who is now physically **absent** from our sight.

And what our writer is emphasizing in this whole text is this is not a new battle. It has **always** been the fight of faith. From the foundation of the world God's people had to offer sacrifices they **knew** didn't remove the problem of sin from their hearts. Old Testament saints died their appointed deaths **not receiving** the object of their faith - **Hebrews 11:39** - **"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised...."**

Then Jesus came that first Christmas. But it's easy to romanticize those times. When Jesus walked this earth **most people** didn't embrace the kind of kingdom He offered because He didn't **look** like the world's Redeemer. He was **"despised and rejected of men."**

Now Jesus is **ascended** and **absent** from the physical senses of the entire church and the Apostle Peter says people constantly miss the **meaning** of His absence - **2 Peter 3:4** - **"They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."**

This is the venture of faith. It is fully weighted with solid reason and history and revelation. But it was never intended to be the same as **physical sight** in this fallen world. And if you miss God's plan here you will beat yourself up for being a terrible Christian simply because you never understood at the **beginning** of your Christian walk that you always have to work your way through the struggles of a walk of faith in our **absent**, but **soon coming**, Lord.

5) **THERE ARE NO SAVING ALTERNATIVES TO OBEDIENT TRUST IN THE ATONING SACRIFICE OF CHRIST**

The theology behind the bold statement of **Hebrews 10:26** is being laid out for us in today's text. The soon to be stated conclusion is wrapped up in one verse we will study in future weeks - **"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins."** No other sacrifices are being offered. There is no other remedy for sin or hope in the face of divine justice and judgment. No other hope remains outside of Christ. Trust in His shed blood today. There are no other options.