

## HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part thirty-eight

Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2019

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### THE TWO GREAT FOCAL POINTS OF AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN FAITH

**Hebrews 10:11-13** - "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. [12] But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet."

There is a mental block at work when we read of these old covenant priests and their sacrifices over and over again in the book of Hebrews. That is always the danger of written repetition. What the writer intends as *emphasizing the important* can be read by readers as *a boring lack of new thought*.

This world of priests and animals and sacrifices is too far removed from us to feel real. The whole account feels dark and violent and religious only in a superstitious sense. And when we try to bring our brains to *feel* the situation these accounts picture we have to overcome a time/culture gap that feels as wide as an ocean.

Try hard today - work with me - to bring just the first sentence of our text into a living experience - **Hebrews 10:11** - "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins."

*Relate* to that man or woman bringing that animal to the priest for sacrifice. It's morning. The sun is just coming up and it's still chilly outside. You wake up and remember the *first* thing you need to do is collect that lamb or goat. You have to do this because if there's one thing you remember about yourself it's your own sinfulness.

That's what this morning's trip to the tabernacle is all about. You are *forced* into facing your sinfulness because this trip is *commanded* by God. And you know you have to *obey* God. You know you have to bring a sacrifice because in so many other areas of your life you know you don't *always* obey Him perfectly. And all those sins stand and need a solution.

You take the lamb. You give it to the priest. The priest kills the lamb and burns much of it. You wait. You can't leave until the sacrifice is finished and the priest comes back *out* of the holy place. You wait for him to come *out* because you know he's not allowed to stay in the holy place because he's as sinful as you are.

When it's all done you leave with a sense of relief. There is a certain satisfaction that you have *obeyed* the command of God with this daily sacrifice. Obedience is the only thing makes you come in the first place. But by the time the sun starts to set in the west - that *same* day - the *evening sacrifice* has to be brought, prepared, and offered. Again.

And so on and on it goes, morning after morning, evening after evening, sacrifice after sacrifice. You can't help but go to bed at night - freshly returning from the evening sacrifice - with the feeling this is never finished. By the time you open your eyes again you will have to select another goat or lamb and collect it for the morning sacrifice. Every day the same. The very repetition leaves you with the feeling that, while you may have obeyed the command of God, *nothing is changing*.

On top of all this repetition there are nagging questions in the back of your head. What possible *connection* can there be between the death of a *goat* and the removal of *human* sin? You understand sin requires punishment. In addition to your own *conscience* you have the *sacred Scriptures*. You've read the writings of Moses where God cautioned the very first pair of sinners in the garden that in the day they sinned they would die.

You can process that much. And your present sacrifice would all make some limited sense if the *goat* had sinned - and if God *cared* about the morality of goats. But you know you're taking that goat for sacrifice because *you* are the sinner. And you can't help but wonder what good is the death of a *goat* to satisfy the justice of God for *human* sinfulness?

What I'm describing here really happened. These were real *people* bringing these sacrifices. What's more, they were people desperately *trying to please God*. They were doing what *God told them to do*.

All of this is the inner soul of that opening verse of our text - **Hebrews 10:11** - "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins."

Don't just *read* those words. Sense the emotional heart-beat in them. Our writer wants us to *feel the perplexity* in what God is setting up in the old covenant system. He's purposely creating an inward mental and moral *tension* - a kind of *divinely given frustration mixed with shadowy expectation*. He's forcing the right *questions*. Behold God *setting the stage*.

You may not have realized it, but today we are beginning to wrap up the **theological section** of the book of Hebrews. We will finish this section next Sunday. Like many New Testament letters - in fact almost **all** of them - Hebrews follows the Spirit-inspired pattern of laying down a **doctrinal foundation** first and then following it with **practical application**.

Surprisingly, the theological section is almost always the **longer** of the two. The intent behind this pattern is disciples of Christ are not only to be people who **do** certain things - as the pushers of **red letter Christianity** would have us believe - but disciples are to be people who know **why** they **think** like they do and **believe** like they do and **act** like they do.

Don't rush past this. Don't get impatient with the Spirit's pattern for changing our minds and hearts. Truly disciples are to be **doers** of the Word. But the heart of the new covenant (as we will see in a minute) is we are not to be just **bare doers**. We are not **cold-hearted doers**. We are to be **understanders, lovers, and then doers**. We obey as those who are **aware** and **delighted** and **devoted** as **sons** and **daughters**, not just because God cracks the whip - **Psalm 100:2a** - "**Serve the LORD with gladness!**"

The theological section of this letter to the Hebrews comes to a close right at **verse 18** of this tenth chapter. And our writer obviously has some wrap up points he wants restated before moving on to the next section:

1) **THE REPETITION OF SO MANY SACRIFICES - DEVOUTLY OFFERED - WAS A REMINDER NO AMOUNT OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY CAN ATONE FOR HUMAN SIN**

**Hebrews 10:11** - "**And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.**"

Consider this. We have in this text a **tabernacle designed by God Himself**, a **dedicated priest** who did nothing but follow the most detailed instructions for purity, and **repeated offerings of perfect sacrifices** brought every morning and every night. And not a single sin was cleansed. Not even one small sin.

Were these people all just mistaken in their concept of sacrifice, as Brian Zahnd and so many others are so glibly teaching? Or was God up to something? What are we to learn here? If I were merely **told** sin could only be atoned through the death of God the Son there is some chance I would believe it. But God is more gracious than merely giving me some bare statement of doctrinal truth. He **illustrates** and **proves** the exclusive atoning power of Christ by providing thousands of verses of **examples** of extremely devout people using every means possible to atone for sin **apart from** Christ's death on the cross. And no cleansing is found. Not ever. Not once.

This progressive nature of God's plan of redemption is designed to confront any human pride that might reach for grace **outside of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross**. This revelation is structured for people who **invent religions** to please their gods. It's for people who think the purging effect **purgatory** can somehow deal with the residue of sin remaining at death to prepare us for the presence of God.

This is the reason our writer never tires of saying exactly the same thing over and over in slightly different words:

**Hebrews 10:11b** - "**...offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.**"

**Hebrews 10:12** - "**...But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins....**"

**Hebrews 10:14** - "**...by a single offering he has perfected for all time....**"

**Hebrews 10:18** - "**Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.**"

For all who would look elsewhere for pardon and peace with a holy God our writer is willing to risk this monotonous repetition. For that soon coming day when all will stand accountable before our creator God there is no source of joy or hope outside of absolute trust in the work of Jesus Christ, God the Son - His death for our sin.

2) **FAITH IN CHRIST ALWAYS INVOLVES TWO ASPECTS, NOT JUST ONE**

**Hebrews 10:12-13** - "**But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.**"

Our writer is selecting his words very carefully in these two verses. He's describing **two** results of Christ's sacrifice,

not just **one**. There is something **completed immediately upon** Christ's death and there is something **resulting after it**.

- a) **What happened immediately is all other searches for redemption came to an end.** There is nothing to add to this **"single sacrifice for sin"**(12). And the evidence of that is revealed in Christ's **sitting down** - **"...he sat down at the right hand of God...."**(12).

That this contrast is intentional in the mind of the Spirit-inspired writer become more obvious when **verse 12** is coupled up with **verse 11 - Hebrews 10:11-12** - **"And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. [12] But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...."**

Just to be clear, our ascended Lord isn't **seated** because His **ministry** has ended. It hasn't. He is seated because there are no more **sacrifices** to be offered.

The **restlessness** of the old covenant priesthood - constantly on the go - constantly getting ready to prepare the **next** commanded sacrifice - **that** restlessness has turned to **confident rest**. This great **Priest** of trusting faltering people like I - **this** Priest, unlike all those priests under the old covenant, never **leaves** the immediate presence of God.

This is more than symbolic. Read all those lists of furnishings in both the tabernacle and temple. There are no **chairs** in either the holy place or the holy of holies. **That's because no one can stay there**. No matter how many sacrifices are offered by how many priests, **no permanent access to the presence of God was available**. The whole old covenant system was designed to remind participants of **distance from God** rather than **access to God**.

The sacrificial death of Christ changes all of this. He is permanently **seated** in the holy presence of Father God. His is not an **in and out** priestly ministry.

And here's why this matters to you and to me. Christ's death didn't just place **Him** in Father God's presence. It **opened up the way** into Father God's presence for those devoted in trust to Him. And here is the most potent proof of that fact in the entire Bible:

**Matthew 27:50-54** - **"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. [51] And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. [52] The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, [53] and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. [54] When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"**

Notice, the earthquake isn't what tore the curtain. **First** the curtain is torn and **then** there is the earthquake. That torn curtain - that curtain that was the great **"Keep Out!"** sign to the holy place - that curtain was torn - set aside - by the holiest Being in the entire universe. **Access is being vividly pictured for repentant sinners to come and stay and live in God's gracious presence.**

I said earlier saving faith rests in **two** aspects of Christ's work, not just one. And we've been looking at the **first** and most **immediate** result of Christ's sacrifice. Now on to the **second**, and still to be **completed** object of faith:

- b) **As surely as my sins have been cleansed and forgiven, my enemies will be permanently defeated - Hebrews 10:12-13** - **"But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet."**

I'm aware my point (b) slightly modified the wording of **verse 13**. Our writer talks about Christ defeating **"his enemies,"** not, as I said, **"my"** enemies. But I did it on purpose. I want to make the point that just as surely as **my sin**, in a very real and profound way, became **His sins**, so **my enemies** become **Christ's enemies**. I find great hope and comfort in that.

There are enemies aplenty in this present world. And if my final victory over them depended on my own strength and determination I would be without hope ***even if my past sins were cleansed and forgiven.*** But Christ's place of present ***authority*** supplies more than ***forgiveness.*** It stands my present life in ***certainty and confidence.***

The greatest enemy I face is the great tempter and accuser of my soul, the Devil. And he stands, though still active, as already condemned to destruction - **Colossians 2:15** - ***"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."***

Then there's the great enemy of ***death.*** Do you see death as ***your*** enemy or ***Christ's?*** True enough, I still have the enemy of death, stalking all mankind with apparent victory. But our writer of Hebrews tells me Christ isn't panicked about this enemy. ***My*** enemies are now ***His*** enemies (**10:13**). And maybe, just maybe, we start to see why our writer calls these enemies ***Christ's*** enemies. I mean, there's a rumor afoot - with pretty solid evidence to boot - this enemy too has gone down in defeat through the work of God the Son.

One Easter morning the first breezes of the day began blowing through a tomb that had been sealed shut just the night before. That Risen Man, the incarnate Christ, my High Priest, seated at the throne of the Father, He has already defeated the enemy of death.

Yes, we have to wait to see this all brought to completion. This is the second aspect of faith in Christ Jesus. I will still face that enemy, as will you and yours. But you will know that enemy when you see him. He's already in prison garb. He's already mortally wounded with only a little time left. Christ is just ***waiting*** with not an ounce of worry, until this enemy too is just a footrest for His death-defeating feet.

**1 Corinthians 15:25-28** - ***"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death. [27] For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. [28] When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all."***