

Jesus: Our Eternal Sacrifice

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Graham, and very good morning to you all. It is wonderful to be back to church again this Sunday morning, and I trust that God will bless all of us as we look to his word.

Let me test how well you were listening there. What was it that Graham said just before he introduced that last song and made reference to me coming and speaking?

Did anybody catch the little phrase? Graham, we're seeing if anybody was listening to a word you said. Come on, what did he say? He said, please remain standing, was his phrase.

Please remain standing. As we look at what's quite a big and very significant passage from Hebrews, I want you to bear in mind that phrase, please remain standing.

Because what we're going to be confronted by was an old system where people were trying to get right with God. But what was required was for the priests to remain standing.

[1 : 03] Okay? What was required was for something to be done time and time and time again. And they could never really sit and rest. Constantly they had to remain standing.

But look out for it as we read. Because what we're going to read is that Jesus didn't have to remain standing. Jesus in this passage did something once and for all.

And what we're told is that having done that once and for all thing, he sat down. Jesus was the one who was able to sit down.

Because the work was done. The task was complete. And unlike those who had to remain standing, he was able to sit. And at the heart of the message that I want us to hear this morning is an invitation from Jesus to us to join him in sitting.

To join him in resting on all he has done. Because I reckon many of us in our hearts and in our lives and in our attempts to be right with God, sometimes a bit like those priests of old and a bit like the instruction from Graham, remain standing.

[2 : 20] Not physically, of course. Many of us spend far too much of the time sitting around all day. I had a special birthday recently and my wife got me an Apple watch.

And such is our sedentary lifestyle that this watch reminds me every hour to stand up. Because apparently it does get a little bit frustrating if you're in a meeting that happens to go on for more than an hour and it starts to buzz and says, it's time to stand.

But this watch is constantly telling me it's time to stand. Well, the thrust of this message is that while that may be absolutely correct in terms of looking after our physical bodies, when it comes to our relationship with God, it's not time to stand.

It's time to look at all that Jesus has done. To rely completely on that. To rest on him. And him alone. And we can cease from all our struggles and strivings and standing.

And instead we can rely completely on him. That's a bit of context. I want us to read Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 9. We're going to read right through from Hebrews 9 to chapter 10 verse 18.

[3 : 29] Please stick with us and let's think as we read about all the different ways in which what Jesus has done are described. And then as we talk, we'll try and unpack some of these different, really rich descriptions of what Jesus has done.

Hebrews chapter 9. It'll be on the screen or do read it on your Bible if you've got it either physically or electronically. Hebrews chapter 9. We're reading from the NIV. Now, the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread. This was called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant.

This Ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the Ark were the cherubim of the glory, overshadowing the atonement cover, but

we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people, sorry, for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

[4 : 55] The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning.

This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They're only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

Verse 11, but when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands.

That is to say, is not part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood.

So obtaining eternal redemption, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them.

[5 : 59] So they are outwardly clean. How much more than will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it because a will is in force only when somebody has died. It never takes effect while the one who made it is living.

This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop and sprinkled the scroll and all the people.

He said, this is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep. In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.

[7 : 10] In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. It was necessary then for the copies of heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the most holy place every year with blood that is not his own.

Otherwise, Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as the people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. And he will appear a second time not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Chapter 10. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

[8 : 31] Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once and for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins.

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.

With burnt offerings and sin offerings, you were not pleased. Then I said, here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, my God. First, he said, sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them, though they were offered in accordance with the law.

Then he said, here I am. I have come to do your will. He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties. Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

[9 : 47] And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this.

First, he says, this is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds. Then he adds, their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. Amen. Well, there's a huge amount in those verses, isn't there? We could take all day or we could have a whole series seeking to unpack all that is there about the Old Testament arrangements and about their insufficiency and about the significance of the death of Jesus Christ.

I do want you to remember these passages and potentially go back to them. When you find that what we believe and teach in this church about the death of Jesus Christ is under question or under attack by those round about us.

Because there are many, many, many who will suggest that we are getting it wrong when we emphasize the once for all significance of the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 04] When we emphasize the necessity of his sacrifice as the only way in which sins can be forgiven permanently, absolutely, once for all.

There'll be many both without and within the broad sphere of Christianity who will question it. And I've found myself in discussions where powerful arguments can be made that perhaps suggest that we're making a bit too much of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as the only way in which sins can be forgiven.

If you find yourselves in those discussions, folks, do go back to Hebrews 9 and 10 and remind yourself of the truth of God's word that's set out here, which we'll only be able to look at ever so briefly.

But I think it will stand as in good stead in defeating some of the arguments that might come our way, which though superficially attractive, carry with them grave danger.

Because if we're relying on anything other than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the means of our salvation and as the only way to get right with God, then we're in dangerous territory indeed.

[12 : 06] First 10 verses of chapter 9, 9, 1 to 10, are basically setting out then the arrangements that the people of God, the Israelites, had been subject to for many, many, many years since they were instituted in this first covenant that Graham talked to us about last year, last week rather.

And briefly what they're setting out is that of course there were ways put in place where people could enter God's presence, but they were highly restrictive. And indeed in terms of that most holy place, that inner sanctuary where the ark was and where God's presence was most fully known, only one person could go, only the high priest.

And he could only go only once every year. And he could only go following the shedding of blood. It was incredibly restrictive. And verse 8 says that what was the purpose of all of this?

It was in many ways to show that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed. And verse 10 refers to things that were put in place until the time of the new order.

So it was an arrangement that was necessary and that was helpful for the people and that goes on to be unpacked in various ways as all this animal blood was shed. But it wasn't the real lasting thing.

[13 : 33] As I read that, it reminded me a bit of Dundee at the moment. I don't know if any of you have been to Dundee recently. I think it's a city that's becoming more and more beautiful.

But as you try to navigate your way along the waterfront in Dundee, there's this incredibly complicated temporary arrangement of roads. And you never really know where you are.

And if you're suddenly about to come to a dead end, and if you're suddenly about to turn the wrong way, or if you're suddenly about to find yourself going over the bridge and ending up in St Andrews. Now why is there this incredibly complex temporary arrangement in Dundee?

It's because there's so much development going on, and there's about to be what's going to be a magnificent new arrangement. That V&A; museum that's going to appear resplendent on the waterfront of Dundee, along with lots of other things that will allow that city to really shine in all of its glory.

But meanwhile, we've got this incredibly complex, necessary, but somewhat frustrating and somewhat tedious temporary arrangement. Well, I don't know.

[14:36] Maybe you can critique my theology a little bit. But as far as I'm concerned, the closest I can get to understanding those first few verses is Dundee. Okay? But what we get to as we read on from verse 9 is not the temporary arrangement, but the permanent arrangement that God has put in place for each of us to enter in so that we don't need to rely any longer on the temporary arrangement.

And it's that permanent arrangement that we need to really focus on and spend our time on. And in that permanent arrangement from verse 11 of chapter 9 right through to verse 18 of chapter 10, we hear through many different ways the significance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Now, there is one word that appears an awful lot as we read through chapter 9, verse 11 onwards. Graham last week talked to us about just saying what you see.

And there, Graham, the word you kept seeing was covenant, wasn't it? Yeah? Okay. Did anybody see one word being repeated time and time and time again as we read from verse 11 onwards of chapter 9?

Blood. Blood. Thank you. Blood is there at least 12 times. Blood. Blood. Blood. Blood. Blood. Blood. Time and again, you do. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

[15:54] In about 10 of the references to blood, it's a focus on the blood of animals. And in two of the references to blood, it's a focus on the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I've discovered whenever I'm speaking, if I get anything vaguely to do with medical stuff, I need to consult one of the 35 doctors in our church.

And I always get much more insight from them. And so I consulted David and asked him about the significance of blood. I'm sure many of you could write a PhD thesis on the significance of blood. But I was reminded that blood is absolutely essential for life. The blood that is coursing through your body just now is absolutely crucial for you to have life.

But the other thing that I didn't realize until I had my short medical lesson is that blood is also absolutely essential for removing impurity in the body.

So constantly blood is not only giving life, blood is also taking away all of the bad stuff. And without stretching it too far, I think as we read here, we see that that was part of the reason for the shedding of blood.

[17:06] Blood of animals was shed in order to both cover up or remove or clear for some time the sin of the people. But then we see the massive significance of Jesus' blood.

And I'd like us to look at that first of all. Let's read again verses 13 to 14. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Okay, so that blood was shed and it did perform a purpose. It made them outwardly clean. How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God? And sorry, there's one other reference to the blood of Jesus that I should have read again. And it's verse 12. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood.

So obtaining eternal redemption. Verse 12 and verse 14 are the two verses in that passage where we read about the significance of the blood of Jesus Christ.

[18:33] Shed in verse 12 to obtain eternal redemption. And verse 14, the blood of Christ, he offered himself to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death.

I've got four angles to offer to you this morning on the death of Jesus Christ. Four things which I think we need to understand from this passage about the death of Jesus Christ.

And the first is that through his death, he makes us clean. Crucially, those sacrifices offered by the animals, we're told we're able to make them clean outwardly.

That's there in verse 13. But when it comes to verse 14, we're told that he can make us clean through and through. He can cleanse our consciences, verse 14, from acts that lead to death.

If you look up at verse 9 of chapter 9, it says that those gifts and sacrifices were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. They were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings.

[19 : 48] So there's a real distinction in this passage between being outwardly clean and being thoroughly cleansed right into the heart. When I was speaking to John about it earlier in the week, the illustration that came to mind was that idea of, in some ways, if this nasty stain appears on your carpet.

And you make various attempts to get rid of it. I don't know if some of you had the experience where you get this wonderful product which claims to be able to remove all stains. So you spray it and you work away on it.

And it seems as though you've had a great result. Because at the time, you cannot see that stain any longer. What happens? You come back to it a few days or a week later.

And the stain is reappearing. So the cleaning has only been, in some ways, superficial. And I know the most tempting thing for us to do in that sort of situation is eventually just put a rug over it. Just cover it up. And that way we won't see the stain any longer. And it feels to me that both of those things are a bit similar to what was going on in that old arrangement.

[20 : 55] There was some sort of temporary covering of the people's sin. But ultimately, the animals needed to be killed again and again and again. Because there hadn't been that thorough, deep cleansing.

The signs of sin and all that dirt would come back again. And what God wants us to understand about the death of Jesus Christ, when we take him at his word, when we rely on the fact that he died for us and he gave his life as a sacrifice for us and bought our redemption, is that what he offers us is the prospect of being absolutely, completely, permanently clean.

And I wonder if some of us look at our own hearts and lives. Even those of us who have been following Jesus for a long time and you say, Paul, you don't know what I've been getting up to in recent days or weeks or months.

I'm not clean. And we feel the sense of our own guilt and shame. Well, what we're invited to do this morning is come to the cross of Jesus Christ and see that when he died, in the words of verse 14 of chapter 9, he offered himself to God to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death.

Why? So that we may serve the living God. It's not God's will that we would focus on all of the sin that has been committed. But having repented of it, and yes, we need to repent of it time and time again, we would accept that his death is sufficient to cleanse our consciences.

[22 : 29] Not just to cover it for a time. There's no need for a rug to be put over it. But through relying alone on the death of Jesus, we can know what it is to be absolutely clean.

Let's carry on. Verse 15. For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. Now that he has died, not this time to make us clean, now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

So point one, he died so that we can be clean. Point two, he died so that we could be free. So the language here is the language of captivity.

It's a language of kidnap, isn't it? He died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

So the image that seems to be conjured up in our minds is that idea that we have been taken kidnap, and that we are no longer free at all to do what we would naturally want to do, or to do what we are made to do.

[23 : 38] And a huge ransom price has been put in order for freedom to be obtained. And that in ways that we will never fully be able to understand in this life, the death of Jesus Christ is described here as the ransom.

He died as a ransom, allowing us to be free. And isn't it true that we know that through sin and Satan and all that he tries to do in us and in this world, we have been taken captive in ourselves. We are far from home and far from where we would need to be. But this morning, any who have not yet come to Jesus Christ, could I say from this verse that we are offered freedom from that captivity?

Because the ransom price has been paid, Jesus has died, and we are allowed through trusting in him to walk into freedom, in order, as chapter 10 will go on to say, to love God and to serve God,

and in order to have that hope of heaven.

As I was reflecting on this, I was reminded of that brilliant old film, and indeed I watched a little bit of it last night, of the story of Brooks in the Shawshank Redemption. Do some of you remember that story, that great film, the Shawshank Redemption, where Brooks, who had been a prisoner for so long, was finally set free?

[25 : 05] And there's some moving scenes as he emerges from that prison, and as he's there in his suit and tie, but as he just struggles with that whole sense of freedom, he doesn't know what to do or how to cope with freedom.

And he ends up in this kind of horrible situation where nobody's in touch with him, where nobody is contacting him, where he's in unpleasant accommodation, in a job where he's just being criticised, and he ends up taking his own life, such as his inability to cope with freedom.

But this morning, we are reminded that Christ, through his death on the cross, not only died to make us clean, but died to set us free, and we're invited to live in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We're not invited to be uncertain about what to do with it, or to long to be back in captivity, but to live as those who are free, who are free to follow, love, and serve God.

We need to continue. Not only does his death mean that we are clean and that we are free, but let's read chapter 9, verse 28, and get another insight into what Jesus' death is all about.

[26 : 17] We'll actually read from verse 26. The middle of verse 26 says, He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

If we've learned that through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are clean and we are free, I think verses 26 to 28 will teach us, along with some of the other verses here, that we are forgiven.

And there's a little negative in there that I think is really important in verse 28. Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

So it's clear that as Jesus died on the cross, what was he doing? He wasn't just demonstrating love. He was dying to bear sin.

[27 : 35] And it takes us back to the Old Testament situation where we read of the scapegoat, where the sins of the people would be laid on this goat, and the goat would be sent into the wilderness, away from the people.

And the image was of this goat that was bearing the sins of the people and so was banished. And as the goat disappeared, so I guess the image was that people's sins were taken away because someone else was bearing sins and so people could know the reality of forgiveness.

Chapter 10, verse 17, quoting from the Old Testament, we read God's promise when he says, their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. I wonder if we are living this morning in the good of the fact that Jesus died and in so doing, he has taken away our sins.

He has promised that he will remember our sins no more. And in the place of bearing our own sins, he offers us complete and absolute forgiveness.

[28 : 59] You know, when people offend in this country and go on at times to serve a period of imprisonment, it's very, very difficult forever for that offending to be totally forgotten.

And those, I've spoken to a number of those who have gone through our criminal justice system and they speak of the fact that even when they have emerged from prison, time and time and time again, they are reminded of all of the things that they did.

And that it seems that we're not very good at absolute forgiveness. We've got a piece of legislation called the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, which in theory is intended to allow people to really leave behind all their offending and know what it is to be truly rehabilitated.

But if you're to look at that piece of legislation, there's a set of exceptions that go on for pages and pages and pages and pages. Because we reckon that when people have offended, it's impossible really to allow them to be totally free and forgiven from it again.

And so if that individual wants to go onto a job of working with children or wants to go on a job of working with vulnerable adults, then there's an exception. And they are required for a certain period of time or in some cases for a whole lifetime to declare again that they committed that offence in the past.

[30 : 16] And they're reminded of it because we judge as a society that it's not safe to allow that person to completely forget about their offending. And maybe some of you here have experienced that personally or are still personally experiencing that pain of things being done in the past never really being forgiven.

Maybe it's the case in terms of a breaking of the laws of the land or maybe it's the case of hurts that you've caused others and you know that that hurt has never been forgiven and that you're still being counted as guilty and is in some ways falling short because of what you've done in the past.

Well, I want us to come to God's word this morning and to see in God's word that while there may indeed be lasting consequences in this life for some of our actions and we may not be able to get away from that either through those whom we've hurt or through what we've done against the law of the land.

We come and through Jesus' death on the cross no matter what we've done we're told that if we rely on it we are forgiven. And more than that we're told we don't need to keep declaring those things that have been done in the past.

There's no schedule of exceptions because what God has said in chapter 10 verse 17 is their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. So when we approach God we don't approach him constantly recalling all of the sin and failure in the past.

[31 : 38] We come relying on the fact that through Jesus we are forgiven we are clean we are free and God has promised that he will not remember that sin. And so if we rely on him why do we feel that we should keep recalling it?

That we should keep living under the weight of guilt of that sin in the past. And in saying this I'm not trying to belittle the significance of sin far from it. That's why it took the death of the perfect spotless son of God to die on our behalf.

But let's not continue to dwell on it or to feel the guilt of it but rather rejoice in the forgiveness that God offers through the death of Jesus Christ. There's a final angle and it's a truly remarkable angle into the death of Jesus Christ.

And it takes us into chapter 10 and I'd like to read to you just chapter 10 verse 10 and then we'll read 12 to 14 once again. Chapter 10 verse 10 By that will of God we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And then in 11 we read about the priests and I've made reference to their constantly standing and offering their sacrifices. Chapter 12 sorry verse 12 when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

[33 : 00] And then get verse 14 let's not leave today without letting verse 14 sink into our hearts and minds for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

we're clean we're free we're forgiven and according to this we are perfect. You say you don't know what's been going on in my life I'm not perfect.

I look in my own heart and life and I say I'm not perfect. And then I look at verse 14 and yes it does point to the future it does point to the thing that has not yet happened.

It does talk about those who are in a process those who are being made holy. And there are other verses in this passage that talk about what will happen in the future.

Chapter 9 verse 28 talks about him bringing salvation to those who are waiting for him a future hope. But let's not get out of the way let's not get away from the fact that for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

[34 : 14] Through Jesus God looks at us and sees us as perfect. Closest I can come to illustrate it I suppose is by thinking about my own glasses.

As I look around I can now see hardly any of you. I know there are blobs in front of me but I wouldn't be too sure as to whether any of you have life or not.

but I put on my glasses my eyes haven't changed but I put on my glasses and suddenly I'm able to see a room with many bright living active human beings and some others as well.

