

July 4, 2010 by Steve Brandon



A Better Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:23-28

1. Cleanses Heaven (verse 23-24)

2. Doesn't Need Repeating (verses 25-26)

3. Brings Salvation (verses 27-28)

This morning finds us at the end of Hebrews, chapter 9. It's a good time for a brief review. We have seen that the theme of the book of Hebrews can be wrapped up in these words: Jesus Is Better, So Press On! Over and over and over again, the writer is making this point: "Jesus Is Better." But, interspersed throughout these times, he inserts some warnings. He warns them: Don't Drift (2:1-4); Don't Harden Your Hearts (3:7-4:12); Don't Fall Away (6:1-8); Don't Set Jesus Aside (10:26-39); and Don't Come Short (12:15-29). Each of the warnings are a summons to "Press On!"

Let's look at the ways in which Jesus is better. He began in chapter 1 speaking about the revelation that God gave to the prophets. It came "in many portions and in many ways" (1:1). But, now, God's revelation has come in His Son, who is greater than any of the prophets, by far! (1:2-3).

In chapters 1 and 2, we see how much better Jesus is than the angels. He never called any of the angels, "son" (1:5). The angels are called upon to worship the Son (1:6). Jesus has a throne and will reign forever and ever (1:8).

In chapter 3, we see how Jesus is better than Moses. "For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house" (3:3). This is because Moses was a servant, but Jesus was a Son (3:5-6).

In chapter 4, we see that Jesus was better than Joshua, because Jesus provided a better rest than Joshua. "If Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that" (4:8).

And then, in chapter 5, we are introduced to Jesus, being a high priest (5:5), a theme which has continued right on through until our text this morning. And the point being made here is that Jesus is better than the high priests. It really comes strong in chapter 7, where Jesus is put forth as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which is, by nature, a perfect and everlasting priesthood. You can see the summary statement there in chapter 8, verse 1: "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (8:1).

In chapter 8, we see how Jesus has brought in a better covenant. "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second" (8:7). But, the second covenant is so much better that it has made the first obsolete (8:13). In chapter 9, the writer goes on to explain particular ways in which the New Covenant is better than the old covenant.

And then, we come to our text, which begins in verse 23. However, we really need to get a running start in the text, by starting at verse 18, where we are taken back to the days of Moses, when he consecrated the tabernacle and all of the vessels of the ministry.

Hebrews 9:18-22

Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the 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 which God commanded you." And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

And then, we get into our text. As I read it, I want for you to listen for the main point. In what way is Jesus better?

Hebrews 9:23-28

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Verse 23 takes us back to the previous section of Scripture. It's really a conclusion. When God established the covenant with Israel and with Moses, it was necessary for the tabernacle and all of the vessels of the ministry to be cleansed with blood, because, as verse 22 says, "According to the law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood." And so, the people had to be cleansed with blood. The tabernacle had to be cleansed with blood. All the vessels of the ministry had to be cleansed with blood--the lampstand, the table, the altar of incense. These were all copies of the heavenly things.

But, the contrast of verse 23 comes next: "But, the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." If you remember from our past expositions, we have talked about the heavenly tabernacle. We see Jesus seated as "a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (8:2). This heavenly tabernacle was the original from which the earthly tabernacle came. A few verses later we see that the priests serve "a copy and shadow" of the true, heavenly tabernacle (8:5). Somehow, in some way, the earthly tabernacle, complete with its altars and lampstands and holy place, is a representation of the greater, original tabernacle in heaven. Over in chapter 9, we see Christ "entering through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say not of this creation" (9:15). When Jesus was on earth, He never entered into the holy place. He was from the tribe of Judah. And yet, through His death, Jesus entered the perfect tabernacle in heaven. This qualifies him to be our heavenly priest (8:4).

This is what's being talked about in our text this morning. It was necessary for the earthy tabernacle to be cleansed. So also was it necessary for the heavenly tabernacle to be cleansed. But, the heavenly tabernacle couldn't be cleansed with the blood of bulls and goats as the earthly tabernacle was (9:19). It needed "better sacrifices," (which is the point of verse 23).

The word, "sacrifices" has been puzzling to me. I would have expected the word, "sacrifice." But, the writer said that the heavenly tabernacle was cleansed with better "sacrifices." Clearly, the writer didn't think that Jesus offered Himself several times. Indeed, later in the text, the author will point out the singular sacrifice of Christ. It's the theme of the first half of chapter 10, the single, sufficient sacrifice. The plural, "sacrifices" may be used here to represent the entire life of suffering that Jesus endured. Or, it may be used for the sake of contrast with the many sacrifices offered in the Old Covenant.

At any rate, I believe that this is the point of the passage, the better sacrifice that Jesus offered. In keeping with the theme of Hebrews, I have entitled my message this morning, "A Better Sacrifice." There are three reasons why the sacrifice of Jesus was a better sacrifice than those of the Old Covenant. They form the three points of my message today. First of all, the sacrifice of Jesus, ...

1. Cleanses Heaven (verse 23-24).

That's the point of verse 23.

Hebrews 9:23

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The earthly tabernacle was cleansed with the blood of animals. The heavenly tabernacle was cleansed with the blood of Christ, which was better. But, a question naturally comes to mind. "Why does heaven need to be cleansed?"

I know when our children need to be cleansed. When they have food on their faces or filth on their fingers, it's very obvious. Sometimes they even smell dirty! But, was heaven defiled? Was it polluted? Why did it need to be cleansed? Some say that it was, pointing out that the demons and the spiritual forces of wickedness are in the heavenly realms. That's what defiled heaven. So, Christ needed to come and clean it up. While there may be some truth to that, the difficult thing is that such an idea is foreign to the context of our passage.

I think that the best way to think about this is to think of what took place in the Old Covenant ritual, which came in verses 18-22. There, the reference was to the consecration of the earthly tabernacle, making it ready for use. It's not so much that the earthly tabernacle was dirty. Actually, it was clean. It was brand new when these events took place. Rather, the idea here is that Moses sprinkled the tabernacle and the vessels of the ministry to consecrate these things to God and to prepare them for sacred use.

This, is what I believe is the point of Christ cleansing heaven. It wasn't so much that heaven was polluted or defiled. Rather, His sacrifice is what made it prepared for sacred use. Apart from the blood of Jesus, our presence in heaven would make it a dirty, defiled place. But, the sacrifice of Jesus cleansed heaven to allow us to enter! This is what verse 24 is saying, ...

Hebrews 9:24

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Here we see Jesus described as entering the holy place. Not the earthly holy place, but the heavenly one, which is exactly what verse 23 is talking about. And then, we see that His role in heaven is "to appear in the presence of God for us." Jesus is in heaven on our behalf! He is our Advocate (according to 1 John 2:1). He is our lawyer, who pleads our case before the judge. Or, to say it using the terminology of Hebrews, Jesus is our high priest. He is the one who goes to God on our behalf. He is the one who intercedes for us. He is the mediator between God and man. He is the one who took our sin upon Himself upon the cross. He is the one who brings the blood of His sacrifice to the Father as a propitiation for our sin. He is the one who claims the merits of His blood. He is the one who prays for us.

We don't often think about the role of priests. We don't have priests at Rock Valley Bible Church. But, we need to think about priests, because we have a priest. His name is Jesus. Jesus is our priest. This means that we have someone that we can go to in our trouble. It means that we have someone who has an inside track to God. It means that we have help in our relationship with the Lord. For your encouragement, let me tell you a few things about the priesthood of Jesus.

a. He is a sympathizing high priest.

Hebrews 4:14-15

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus knows of our weaknesses. He has experienced the weakness of the flesh. He can "deal gently" with us (5:2). Jesus knows of the temptations that we face. And Jesus conquered them, so He can give us help to overcome the temptation.

b. Jesus is a perfect high priest.

Hebrews 5:8-9

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

Now, I know that these are hard verses. How can Jesus learn obedience? How can Jesus be made perfect? The key is that He learned obedience by experience. He learned obedience by experiencing suffering and continuing on with His obedience. He was made perfect through experience. Not that he wasn't perfect before, rather Jesus was fully refined and completed through the process of living in human flesh. How unlike any other human high priest we might have. Jesus is the perfect, obedient high priest.

c. Jesus is a sinless high priest.

Hebrews 7:26

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

All of these words speak about purity of Jesus Christ. He is holy, totally different and distinct from us. He is innocent, totally without sin of any kind. He is undefiled, and He has never been stained by sin in any way. He is "separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." As much as Jesus is one of us, there is a very real sense where Jesus is totally different than we are. And this is a good thing. Because, in the mediatorial role of Jesus, He doesn't come to God as an inferior being, pleading on our behalf. Rather, He comes to God as an equal, who has lived among us and can plead our cause. Jesus is in heaven "for us."

Second, the Sacrifice of Jesus is better, because it ...

2. Doesn't Need Repeating (verses 25-26)

Look at verses 25 and 26.

Hebrews 9:25

nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.

The background to this verse is the Day of Atonement. On the 10th day of the 7th month of the Jewish calendar, the high priest would sacrifice a bull, and take its blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle it upon the altar to atone for his own sins. Then, he would sacrifice a goat, and take its blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle it upon the altar to atone for the sins of the people.

This was repeated every year in the nation of Israel. Year after year, the high priest would sacrifice a bull and a goat and sprinkle their blood on the altar in the Holy of Holies. The only time they didn't offer these sacrifices was when they had no temple (as in the 70 years of exile). But, as soon as the temple was rebuilt, they began again. The only reason why it isn't done today is because the Jews no longer have a temple, the land where it should rest in Jerusalem is controlled by the Muslims. Still today, Jews across the world celebrate the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) every fall.

But, the sacrifice of Jesus is better than the Day of Atonement, because His sacrifice doesn't need repeating. That's the point of verse 25, "nor was it that He would offer Himself often." The sacrifice of Jesus was once. When Jesus was about to breathe His last, the apostle John records that He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). He didn't say, "I'll see you next year, when we can do this all over again." No, He said, "It's done! My work is finished!" And if the single sacrifice of Jesus wasn't sufficient, then He would have needed to suffer again and again and again. That's what the first half of verse 26 says, ...

Hebrews 9:26

Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world.

How often would depend upon the worth of His sacrifice. The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was efficacious for a year. If the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient for a decade, then Jesus would have needed to return every 10 years to die upon the cross again. If the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient for the sins of a generation, then Jesus would have needed to return every 40 years or so to die upon the cross again. If

the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient for the sins of a century, then Jesus would have needed to return every 100 years. And this repeated suffering would have been necessary from the dawn of time, from the days of Adam until now.

But, the good news of the gospel is that the single sacrifice of Christ was so excellent that it atoned for the sins of all who have ever believed - from Adam to the last person standing. He came at the consummation of the ages. He came in the fullness of time, and sacrificed Himself once for all! Such are the glories of the gospel of Christ. Jesus no longer needs to suffer.

Quite to the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church believes that Jesus continues to suffer. He continues to suffer in the Mass, which is celebrated daily in the Catholic Church. It is no accident that in Roman Catholic Churches, Jesus still hangs upon the cross. It's symbolic of His continued suffering. But, the great reality is this: the sacrifice of Jesus was entirely sufficient. He no longer needs to suffer!

Having said that, there are some ways that Jesus suffers. He suffers with those who suffer in the church. Perhaps you remember the words that Jesus had with the apostle Paul, when he was on his way to Damascus. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). In other words, to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. There is such unity in the church of Christ, that when the church suffers, Jesus suffers. He doesn't suffer bodily. Nor is He sacrificed again. But He suffers. His suffering is the suffering of a parent watching a child suffer through a terminal illness. What parent doesn't feel the pain? So, likewise, Jesus suffers, but not bodily. This is because of the greatness of His sacrifice! Look at the last half of verse 26, ...

Hebrews 9:26

... But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

The emphasis here in verse 26 is the finality of the sacrifice of Christ. We see this in the word, "once." When we get to chapter 10, this theme is going to be prominent. Hebrews 10:10 says, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." In Hebrews 10:12, we hear, "But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." And, "For by one offering He has perfected from all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14). And Hebrews 10:18 tells us, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin." Such is the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. It only needed to be offered once! It doesn't need repeating.

I trust that you know what the difference is between renting and owning. Do you? When you rent your house, you make monthly rent payments. When you lease your car, you make monthly lease payment. But, when you own your house, you don't need to make any payments on it. And when you own your car, you don't need to make any payments on it. The amount is paid once, and the transaction is finished.

When it comes to the sacrifice of Christ, His work is finished. He doesn't need to continue making payments. He purchased our sin upon the cross. The Scripture often uses this terminology. The word, "redeemed" means "to purchase." Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us." Ephesians 1:7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood." Hebrews 9:12, "[Jesus] entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Jesus bought us. What Jesus bought, He owns. He doesn't need to make any payments. Rather, to use the phraseology here in verse 26, "He **put away** sin by the sacrifice of Himself." What Jesus has put away isn't coming out again.

Think upon this! Meditate upon this! It is glorious! Jesus has "put away" our sin." It's not going to see the light of day again! Jesus is done with our sin. We don't need to fret or worry that it will in any way harm us again.

Earlier, I said that verse 25 has its eye upon the Day of Atonement, when the bull and goat were slaughtered. Did you know that there was another animal involved in the Day of Atonement? It's a live goat that's set free. When the high priest had finished sprinkling the blood in the Holy of Holies he offered up the live goat. He would "lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he [would] lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness" (Lev. 16:21), by presenting the goat to a man who would take the goat deep into the wilderness and release it. Where it went, nobody knows! It was gone!

Such is the picture of verse 26. Jesus Christ "put away" our sin. He took it way out into the wilderness, where we can never find it again. The Psalmist said, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:12).

The sacrifice of Jesus is better, because it Doesn't Need Repeating (verses 25-26). Well, there's a third way that the sacrifice of Jesus is a better sacrifice. The sacrifice of Jesus is better because it ...

3. Brings Salvation (verses 27-28)

Hebrews 9:27-28

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment

This verse puts forth our future: death.

Come he slow or come he fast,
It is but death who comes at last. [\[1\]](#)

Life expectancy here in America may be 78 years, but, the mortality rate is 100%. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:2, "[Death] is the end of every man." Death awaits us all. It's that event on our day-timers that we never really plan for, but one day, it just shows up.

From our stand point, it just shows up, but from God's standpoint, it comes as planned. See, God knows that day. In Psalm 139:16, David said, "In Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them." By divine appointment, we will die. And yet, sadly, there are many who live life without taking this into account.

Perhaps you remember the parable that Jesus told of the rich man, whose land was very productive (Luke 12:16). Since he couldn't store all of his grain in his barns, he tore them down to make bigger ones, so that he might live at ease, eat, drink and be merry for many years (Luke 12:18-19). But, God addressed him in this parable and said, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" (Luke 12:20). He made no plans for his death, and was called a fool by God!

There are many today who are fools and don't plan for their own death. Death awaits us all and the reality is the each of us is only a heart-beat away from meeting our Maker. That's what happens after you die. Verse 27 says, "after this comes judgment." After you die, you will stand in the courtroom of heaven and face the Lord. You will be judged. Jesus described the judgment in really simple terms.

Matthew 25:32-33

All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

The sheep will inherit the kingdom and obtain eternal life (Matt. 25:34, 46). The goats will depart into the eternal fire where they will face eternal punishment (Matt. 25:41, 46). There will be no second chances. The emphasis here is upon the finality of it all. You die once, and then comes the judgment.

But here is where the sacrifice of Christ is better. Because, within the judgment comes the salvation through His blood, which could never take place in the Old Testament sacrifices (Heb. 10:1-4). Verse 28, ...

Hebrews 9:28

so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

The sacrifice of Jesus comes in the first half of verse 28. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, He bore the sins of many. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He, Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." The salvation comes in the second half of verse 28. Christ will appear again for salvation. This verse is talking about the second coming of Christ, when He comes again to bring His children to Himself. He is going to come and save us. He is going to come and rescue us. In that day, Jesus isn't going to be concerned with sin--He already dealt with that in His first coming. Rather, Jesus will be concerned with salvation. He is going to save those who are His.

When Jesus comes back, He's going to have an eye to save us. There is a certain sort of person that Jesus will save. He will save those who "eagerly await Him" (verse 28). Are you eagerly awaiting that moment? Psalm 130:6 says, "My soul waits for the Lord, more than the watchmen for the morning. Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning!" The watchman waits because he's tired and he wants his shift to be finished. Do you know this feeling?

Our family is eagerly awaiting our vacation. Each summer, we make an effort to visit grandma and grandpa in California. In the past we have always flown to visit them. However, with seven tickets, it's getting a bit pricey. This year we are driving out. It has created a whole new level of anticipation, because there is so much more to prepare for our trip. My wife has even set out a box of stuff that needs to go with us to California. It has been so consuming that our six year old daughter has even asked us, "Why are you always preparing for our vacation?"

Do you have such a desire for the return of Jesus Christ? Can you relate to the apostle John, who said, "Come, Lord Jesus"? Or, is life too easy and pleasant for you that you have no genuine desire for Christ's return? Such a desire is indicative of those who know the Lord.

When Paul was nearing the end of his life, he wrote to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul was anticipating receiving "the crown of righteousness," which is a reference to the righteousness that all who believe in Christ will receive upon entering heaven. And it's clear that this crown isn't only for Paul. It's also for "all who have loved His appearing." Loving and longing for the return of Christ is a sign of your genuine faith in Him. Do you have it?

Now, what allows Jesus to save those who eagerly await Him? His better sacrifice! All of the sacrifices in the Old Testament were ultimately useless, because they could never take away our sins! Christ's sacrifice is better than all of the Old Testament sacrifices--it puts away our sins!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 4, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Sir Walter Scott.