

A Better Sacrifice

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Date: 17 August 2003

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 17th of August 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled A Better Sacrifice and is based on Hebrews 10 verses 1 to 18.

Well please be seated. And you may like to have open the Bibles at page 976, Hebrews chapter 10 and this is continuing our sermon series on the letter to the Hebrews.

And let's pray that God helps us to understand and apply what we read here. O God, our Father, we thank you that you speak to us in the words of scripture and pray that you'll speak to our hearts and minds now that your words will take deep root in our lives and bear much fruit for your glory.

Amen. Well I gather that wedding days can be quite stressful days. Not least for the bride it seems to me.

[1 : 12] Certainly not for the minister who takes the wedding. It's not usually a stressful day although occasionally there are some difficult people in weddings so it is stressful. The closest I've come to getting married was being a best man.

And it wasn't at all stressful let me say. It was quite easy really. We slept in. The groomsmen and I refused to play golf. And we had a late breakfast.

All we had to do really was clean the shoes. And that was about it. It was a fairly easy day. And the best bit of it was hiding the golf club so that our friend who was getting married couldn't take them on his honeymoon.

And putting confetti in his car. And that was about it. And I didn't lose the rings. But for the bride it seems to be a very stressful day. So I'm told.

They have to get up in the early hours of the morning to get their hair done. Their make-up done. Their nails done. Their shoes cleaned. And the dress made sure that it's all right. You know etc. Etc.

[2 : 11] Etc. On and on it goes. But at the end of it all again so I'm led to believe the father of the bride according to the protocol says my dear you look perfect.

And then if the groom's not drunk then when the bride arrives at the front of the church sometimes he says the same sort of thing. You look perfect.

Well one day each of us will arrive in the presence of God in heaven. And we'll stand before almighty God who sees not only the clothes that we wear but our hearts, our souls, our consciences, our insides.

And God who himself is perfect in holiness will say to us you are perfect.

How can we sinners be perfect in the presence of God almighty? not just forgiven but morally cleansed within and perfect in the presence of God.

[3 : 29] is that a dream too good to be true? Too far fetched to believe? Well as we've seen in the last three weeks in the Old Testament there were all sorts of sacrifices and rituals and jobs for priests to do in order to bring the people close to God to see their sins to see their sins atoned for by sacrifice.

But none of that was able to perfect the worshipper. The person who came with the sacrifice of an animal a bull or a goat or a lamb.

Indeed the repeated nature of the sacrifices of the Old Testament showed that it was unable to perfect anybody. It would ritually make them acceptable to offer sacrifices a sort of external cleansing but it did nothing on the insides and nothing on the heart.

And if a sacrifice could have made the worshipper perfect then no other sacrifice of course would be needed. But indeed the sacrifices were needed year by year on the Day of Atonement day by day whenever sins were committed and so on.

But they do not and did not perfect the worshipper. And that's in effect what we've seen over the last couple of weeks and it's summarised at the beginning of chapter 10. Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities it can never by the same sacrifices that are contained continually offered year after year make perfect those who approach.

[5 : 19] Otherwise would they not have ceased being offered since the worshippers cleansed once for all would no longer have any consciousness of sin. The argument is that if those Old Testament sacrifices could perfect somebody then they would have stopped because the person being made perfect by them would no longer need to make sacrifices.

But of course the very necessity for repeated sacrifices day by day and year by year in the Old Testament system showed that Old Testament sacrifices did not perfect anybody.

And so the writer goes on in verse 3 but in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. In fact far from taking away sin and shoving it away and dealing with it once for all the Old Testament sacrificial system actually brings sin to the surface puts it before the face of the worshipper the one who brings the animal to be sacrificed it's a reminder of sin not in fact a declaration that sin's gone far away from memory and consciousness and the reason that it was so ineffective is that as verse 4 says it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The animal sacrifices offered some temporary atonement some ritual acceptance in the structures of the Old Testament sacrificial system but it was unable the blood of animals was unable to take away sin fully finally decisively once and for all.

on the Day of Atonement once a year in about our September-October period as the Jews call it today Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement there were two atonement animals one slain and its blood spread in the sanctuary of the tabernacle or temple of the Old Testament we've seen reference to that in recent weeks the other not killed there but sent away away into the wilderness away to who knows what fate in the English translations it came to be called the scapegoat but the very necessity for the scapegoat to be sent away not killed its future in a sense unknown showed the ineffectiveness of the Old Testament Day of Atonement rituals the seriousness of sin was too great for animals for animals to bear and the necessity of repeating the Day of Atonement sacrifices the next year and the next year as well as the ongoing daily monthly and regular sacrifices showed that they could not finally and decisively deal with sin and they could not perfect the worshipper so the ritual itself in the Old

[8:17] Testament shows that it was ineffective its forgiveness was limited to unintentional sin limited in time and it did not cleanse the heart and the soul and the conscience if you read through the Old Testament if you were a Jew of Jesus Day or earlier times if you were a Jew of the Day of the Writer to the Hebrews of this letter you could probably almost be excused for falling into a trap a serious trap of thinking that God wanted sacrifices that God took delight in sacrifice the sacrifices were commanded in the laws given originally to the people through Moses back in the books of Exodus Leviticus and Deuteronomy sacrifices were embedded in those original laws and if you read through the Old Testament and count up the sacrifices that were offered that should have been offered there are hundreds and thousands of them and the same in Jesus' day and the same most probably in the day of the writer to the Hebrews and you could almost be excused for thinking that God somehow wanted you to keep offering sacrifices and took delight in them but they were never commanded for God's delight he never took joy in a sacrifice being offered and though at times you get statements like the aroma was pleasing to

God it was not the top priority of what God wanted for what God wanted in the laws of the Old Testament in Jesus' day in the writings of the Hebrews' day in our day our lives lived in obedience to his laws that's what delights God not the sacrifices they're commanded by God as a concession to the fact that human beings sin they're commanded as an aspect of God's mercy to provide an ongoing way for sinners to have a relationship with God through Old Testament times but his priority has always been not for sacrifice but for obedience so early on in Old Testament history the prophet Samuel made it clear to King Saul to obey is better than sacrifice King David the next king understood that when he wrote Psalm 51 the sacrifice acceptable to God is a contrite heart but the prophets knew that the people got it wrong the people thought so often that they could make

God happy just by keeping on killing animals and then go off and live the lives they want to live and so the prophets consistently railed against such a mistaken and imbalanced sense of priorities the long book of Isaiah begins in chapter 1 with Isaiah saying that bringing your offerings and sacrifices is futile because your hands are full of blood and one of his contemporaries Amos the same sort of thing I despise your sacrifices he quotes God as saying I'd rather see justice and righteousness roll down and another contemporary Micah the same sort of thing what does the Lord require sacrifices the abundance of sacrifice not at all but to do justice love kindness and walk humbly with your God and another psalm that says the same thing also by David is psalm 40 quoted here in this chapter sacrifices and offerings you have not desired but a body you've prepared for me in burnt offerings and sin offerings you've taken no pleasure then I said see

God I have come to do your will oh God in the scroll of the book it is written of me the writer of this letter takes the words of Psalm 40 written 1000 BC by David and puts them on the lips of Jesus Jesus has come to fulfill that psalm and those words of that psalm show that God delights not in sacrifice but in a life of obedience and Jesus not only knew that that's what delighted God but he fulfilled it by living the very life of obedience that God required and delighted in you see the effective sacrifice is the life of an obedient person that is what is acceptable to God one who does God's will in life and that is why Jesus self offering of himself in death on the cross was so acceptable to God and more powerful than the death of a dumb animal because it was an obedient human life fully acceptable to God almighty and in coming to offer his life an obedient life as an offering to God in death

Jesus does away with all the Old Testament sacrifices verse 9 says see I have come to do your will and he abolishes the first the Old Testament sacrifices in order to establish the second that his death Jesus perfect life offered in death does away with Old Testament sacrifice and is the one sacrifice for us so verse 10 goes on to say it is by God's will or purpose that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all what the Old Testament sacrifices could not accomplish Jesus perfect life offered for us does accomplish it sanctifies us once for all begs the question then have we been sanctified are we sanctified people one thing you see to say that we are forgiven by Jesus death that's almost a common place in the vocabulary of

[14 : 21] Christians today and true it is but are we sanctified well often our response to that might be well we're in the process of being sanctified we're not yet sanctified but day by day and year by year as we go closer to that final day when we arrive in God's presence we're being sanctified but the language of the letter to the Hebrews is that we are already sanctified Christian people that is that we are set apart and have free and complete access to the presence of God by the death of Jesus for us we are already fit for prepared for made perfect for the presence of God though here we are still on earth as sinful people like a bride being made perfect for her groom on her wedding day the writer to the Hebrews is saying not that we are yet to be prepared or perfected for

God but that we are sanctified perfected for God now undergirding all of this is the emphasis on the completeness of the sacrifice of Jesus for us in the Old Testament the sacrifices needed to be made day by day week by week year by year repetitive one after the other no sooner had you offered a sacrifice if you were a priest than it was time to offer the next sacrifice a bit like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge you start on one side by the time you get to the other side the paint's peeling on the first side it's time to start all over again like the saying a woman's work is never done it's like our laundry every Friday you've got to do it again even if you've got the flu so verse 11 says every priest stands day by day at his service offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins but when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down so the priest has to keep standing because he's got to keep offering sacrifices in one sense his job is never done because there are always sins to be sacrificed for there will always be the next day of atonement to offer the atonement sacrifices as well but in very clear contrast when Jesus died and rose and ascended to the right hand of God he sat down yes a mark of his majesty and authority a mark of the worship that is due to him but a mark of the completeness of his work no more sacrifices does he need to do or to make it's done once for all time for all people for all sins and so he sat down how do we know that he sat down the writer quotes psalm 110 another psalm of

David which says that he has sat down at the right hand of God and since then has been waiting until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet that's the time in which we live now the time from when Jesus ascended after his resurrection 2000 years ago until he comes again is the time when all those final enemies of Jesus are being put under his feet as a footstool for him and so the result of all of that the result of Jesus final complete and total sacrifice for us verse 14 by a single offering Jesus has perfected for all time those who are sanctified perfection is ours because of Jesus Christ more than just being forgiven we are perfected in Christ and like a bride who's made perfect on her wedding day for her husband to be we are perfected in

Christ for God and it's Jesus self offering that perfects us not just a superficial wearing nice clothes type perfection but a perfection of the heart the soul the mind the conscience our insides that Old Testament sacrifices could never touch but the death of Jesus is powerful enough to change us and this is an eternal perfection not a perfection for a day or a season but a perfection that will last forever will never spoil fade mar will be taken away we are perfected for all time by the perfect death of Jesus I met a man once who told me that he was perfect and in his language that meant that he was no longer a sinner I was rather astonished by this claim that this man was a sinner and although he told me that he left his wife but he was still perfect and still a sinner I thought that was doubly strange I found him in a second-hand bookshop which didn't strike me as strange but anyway and I thought to myself though I didn't try this I remembered that one of the great 19th century

Baptist preachers in London Spurgeon once also was confronted by a man who claimed to be perfect and sinless Spurgeon was apparently a very big man and what he did was with all his force he stomped on I shouldn't have done that on the foot of the man who claimed to be perfect and the language that came from that man's mouth showed that he'd lost his perfection and his sinlessness very quickly well I didn't try it on this man in the second-hand bookshop and I wonder what would have happened if I did we must not misunderstand what the writer is saying here he is not saying that we're sinless now after all we are I know all too well that I am but he is saying that now here now on earth we are perfected in Christ in God's eyes we are seen in Christ the perfect one and we are seen by God as perfected in Christ fit for the perfect one fit for the king fit for the heavenly king ready and prepared for him these are the better promises that the writer was speaking about in chapter 8 these are the better promises that the Old

[21 : 16] Testament looks forward to as we also saw two weeks ago in chapter 8 in fact the writer returns to those same Old Testament promises in the next couple of verses quoting again from Jeremiah as he did in chapter 8 this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days says the Lord I'll put my laws in their hearts and I'll write them on their minds that's part of the better promise that the new covenant will deal with the heart and the mind and not just the externals and then he goes on to say I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more no more remembrance of sin people often say that our job as Christians is to forgive and to forget what's easier said than done it's not easy to forgive I think often it is impossible to forget but it's not our job to forget though it is our job to forgive I remember some particular sins against me that have hurt very significantly to my heart I will never ever forget them I cannot unless I reach the advanced stages of dementia but I can forgive and it is my job to forgive as God has forgiven me that is

I no longer take those sins into account when I continue the relationship with the people who wronged me and that's what God is on about in the ancient courts the king would have a record of those who committed crimes or misdemeanors that's the language of God saying I will remember their sins no more not that God has got an advanced stage of dementia though he's old enough it is God expunging from the record our sins our misdemeanors and so he relates to us as perfected people people who do know sin because they're forgiven and they're wiped out from the book completely gone the page torn out or if you're like me the pages many plural torn out sin is totally finally completely fully dealt with in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross unlike the Old

Testament sacrifices that were just a shadow and a model of the one to come that could not touch the heart but the sacrifice of Jesus perfects us now for those who've been here this week and the last three you may think this is really a fairly long and rather convoluted argument in Hebrews chapter 7 to 10 in many respects you're right although our knowledge of the Old Testament is so shallow by comparison to the original recipients of this letter that we probably find the argument a little bit harder than the original recipients did but the argument that we're followed in these weeks has a couple of key purposes one key purpose is that this argument though at some level deep and a little bit heavy or perhaps even obscure is to show forth in fullest dazzling light the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ for what the argument of these chapters is telling us is that Jesus

Christ is worthy of the fullest glory because his death was so powerful that it can change our insides our hearts minds souls and consciences that Jesus death was so powerful that it can perfect us for the presence of God that Jesus death was so powerful it could deal with all sin for all people for all time that Jesus death was so powerful that it brings us to the heavenly throne room of God himself and the power of Jesus death comes from the power of an indestructible life as we saw in chapter 7 verse 16 and the power of an indestructible life comes from the powerful perfect obedient life because Jesus was perfect obedient fulfilling the words of psalm 40 as we see in today's passage then death could not hold him down and his life was indestructible and therefore his sacrificial death was powerful enough to do those things for us and bring us perfect into the presence of God there is the fullest glory attributed to the Lord

Jesus Christ and to his death and that's certainly a key reason why the writer writes this letter but he writes it for pastoral reasons too for us here on earth today and we'll see more of that next week in the next section of chapter 10 there is a day soon approaching when you and I will stand in the heavenly presence of God we will not seek to hide from God on that day unlike Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit will not be embarrassed on that day as they were ashamed in that garden of Eden will not fall to the ground trembling with fear woe is me a man of unclean lips as Isaiah the prophet did when he had a vision of God in the temple of Jerusalem we will stand we will stand in the presence of God because Jesus

[27:15] Christ is seated before us we will stand because Jesus Christ's work was completed and finished when he died for us on the cross and he rose and descended and sat down his job done fully finally totally completely for us so that we may stand perfected in the presence of God we will stand there perfected and sinless no lingering lusts no pangs of pride no more selfish thoughts no more snide remarks no more greed or envy in our minds or on our tongues no more anger no more arrogance it is hard to imagine that day I find it is a hard to imagine me being so transformed into sinless perfection on that final day that I will still be me and yet this is a wonderful truth that Jesus powerful death is powerful enough to change me into perfection without sin on that day when

I arrive in heaven's doors perfected by the power of Jesus Christ Charles Wesley longed for that day when he wrote these words in a hymn finish then thy new creation pure and spotless let us be let us see your great salvation salvation perfectly restored in thee changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place there to cast our crowns before thee lost in wonder love and praise but friends the language and argument of this passage is even better than that the argument we have been tracing is not about us being made perfect then in the future standing on that final day in the presence of God though that is true and a glorious truth to long for and yearn for but the argument we have been following these weeks and today is even better for by the powerful death of the

Lord Jesus Christ you and I Christian believers are perfected now for the presence of God you and I now are fit and ready for fellowship with God without a mediator without a curtain without rituals and priests and sacrifices anymore it's all abolished and done away with by the death of Jesus Christ so that you and I now here on earth sinners though we remain are fit and ready for fellowship with the holy God who made us and this universe there's no need now to shy away from God to stay away from God to hide with embarrassment from God because of Jesus powerful death for us you see the full glory of Jesus Christ and his death for us is seen not just that one day we'll stand sinless and perfect in heavenly throne room of God Almighty though we long for that day the glory of Jesus Christ is that here now on earth you and I are fit and perfected and ready for fellowship with the holy God today those sinners we remain like a bride perfected for her husband Jesus death has perfected us here today now for fellowship with the holy God so though we may long for that final day in the words of

Charles Wesley here on earth we can rejoice in the perfected presence of God that we're made for what offering shall we give or what atonement bring to God by whom alone we live high heavens eternal king for all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could never give the conscience beast or wash away its stain but Christ the heavenly lamb takes all our sins away a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they so in faith I lay my hand upon his head divine while as a penitent I stand and there confess my sin so I look back to see the weight he chose to bear when hanging on the cross for me because my guilt was there believing we rejoice to know our sins forgiven we bless the lamb with heart and voice and join the praise of heaven you