

# Once for All

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.
- And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you?
- He said, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself. He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?
- The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate. And the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done?
- The woman said, The serpent tricked me and I ate. Broken relationships. Vertically with the living God.
- [ 1 : 01 ] Horizontally fractured relationships. Guilt because of sin. Because of a holy God. That's the scene in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3.
- In fact, it's the scene throughout the 21st century world. Because throughout our world, people seek to deal with the problem of sin.
- Of guilt. Of broken relationship with their maker. If you like, of how to connect with the divine.
- One secular commentator has expressed it this way. It is indeed amazing that in as fundamentally irreligious culture as the West, the sense of guilt should be so widespread.
- And midway through last year, 2006, you'll likely recall that the two richest men in the world made news, headline news. Bill Gates and Warren Buffett with fortunes of US \$50 billion and \$42 billion respectively.
- [ 2 : 13 ] And Buffett in fact gave a large part of his \$42 billion fortune to the Bill Gates Charitable Foundation. And at that time, Buffett said this, There's more than one way to get to heaven.
- But this is a great way. Good works. Earlier this month in January in India, about 2.5 million Hindu pilgrims braved a bit of cold and security concerns to gather on the banks of India's Ganges River for a mass ritual believed to wash away their sins.
- And organisers, in fact, expect that about 50 million people will bathe in the river's waters during the 45-day Kumbha Mela, which takes place every six years in the northern city of Al-Badad.
- Devotees believe that bathing in the Ganges washes away their sins and liberates them from a continuous cycle of birth and reincarnation.
- But if not India, perhaps you'd prefer to go to Hawaii and you could take part in a program called Soul Work Systemic Coaching. Its promises are actually pretty modest.
- [ 3 : 31 ] First and foremost, using techniques of traditional Polynesian healing. It promises that your guilt will be dissolved. Cost?

US \$7,500, five days, plus travel expenses. Rituals. All different types of rituals throughout the world across religions.

Rituals, good works. But interesting, particularly in the West, and no less so in the Australian media, there is prominence given to anyone who aggressively denies the very existence of God.

I mean, irrational bleatings, like those from Richard Dawkins, who I referred to two weeks ago. Irrational bleatings that absolutely belie the universal knowledge of sin and guilt for wrongdoing.

So how can we be fit for the presence of God? How can we be fit for heaven? It's actually one of the central themes of the letter to the Hebrews.

[ 4 : 43 ] And Hebrews chapter 10 verses 1 to 18 is one of the great sections in scripture dealing with the atonement. Christ's death and the benefits that flow from his death.

And this morning we're just going to focus on the first 14 verses. And in doing so, I'm reminded of Spurgeon's words. Though we repeat the theme of Christ's atonement 1,000 times, I'll make no apology.

So if you'd like to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 10, there are a few Bibles in front of you, page 976. The argument, and as you've listened to that read this morning, you might think, wow, that's a pretty detailed argument.

But the principal point of the first four verses is actually very straightforward. You see, the Mosaic law instituted at Mount Sinai prescribed repeated animal sacrifices for sin.

The very repetition of those sacrifices showed that they did not perfect the sinners. The animal sacrifices did not deal with sin decisively, finally, once for all.

[ 5 : 58 ] You see, if that had been the case, then there'd been no need for the repetition. So one way perhaps to think of the Old Testament sacrifices is like a temporary insurance covenant.

You know, you buy a car on a Saturday afternoon. Oops, I've got a ring, double AMI, RACV. You call up and you take out a temporary insurance cover note while you wait for the proper and final insurance policy.

You see, the law, indeed the Old Testament, was a shadow. The true form, the reality, the substance is the person, Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament, you could think of it, is Jesus' shadow. It's good. It is from God. It is anticipating something.

And the reality is Christ. Friends, when you think of shadows and realities, appreciate this. There is clearly a great gulf between a shadow and reality.

[ 7 : 08 ] But there's also a connection, isn't there, between the shadow and the reality. The shadow does not exist apart from the reality.

And so from God's perspective, the reality, which is Christ, casts its shadow forward through the Old Testament era.

That's from God's perspective. From a historical perspective, the reality of Jesus Christ, his death and his resurrection, casts its shadow back down through the centuries that led up to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

We read in verse 3 that the Old Testament sacrifices were a reminder of sin year after year. Now, these sacrifices, they did provide atonement.

Atonement, if you like, in the sense of being like temporary covers. Awaiting the final, unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ.

[ 8 : 12 ] And so the writer then refers to Psalm 40, our first reading, in verses 5 to 9. And he shows that, in fact, already in the Old Testament itself, it's plain that the sacrifices and those offerings of animals were not God's main plan for dealing with sin.

Because look at verse 4. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. You see, they were shadows. They pointed forward.

They pointed forward to the reality. And Jesus takes the words of Psalm 40 and he applies them to himself. So we read in verse 5.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

Like must be substituted for like. For those who are sports fans, you recall, perhaps in the recent Soccer World Cup, that a goalie was injured and he needed to be substituted.

[ 9 : 21 ] Well, if you recall that incident, they didn't send a forward out as a substitute. And I don't recall a goat being sent out onto the field.

Although you're possibly thinking some of the players might have played like that. Mankind is the pinnacle of God's creation. You can't put in a substitute of a bull or a goat for a man.

A man for a man. But not just any man. Substitute needs to be a sinless man. A sinless man who would perfectly do God's will.

God the Son. God incarnate. God in human flesh. And so you'll see if you look down in verses 7 and also in verse 9.

Jesus came to do his Father's will. Jesus didn't come and put down the Old Testament sacrificial system and the law.

[ 10 : 21 ] There is no conflict between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus came to fulfill. He came to complete. He came to bring to fulfillment a system that could, if you like, just be a preparation.

An education for the reality. The reality which is he himself. And so it's in that sense that burnt offerings were not God's ultimate desire.

And in fact, that's what the Old Testament says in Psalm 40. And then if you look down to verse 9, at the end of it, you'll see that Christ came to abolish the first in order to establish the second.

You see, God's will was that there was going to be a long age of shadows. The Old Testament era. The Old Covenant.

To prepare us to understand what Christ really did for us on the cross. And on the cross and then with his resurrection, inaugurating the New Covenant.

[ 11 : 32 ] Maybe one way to think about that from the old to the new is a very sort of simplistic illustration is to think of baby teeth and ask yourself, why is it that baby teeth fall out?

And the answer just simply is because the adult teeth push them out. And when they come, the adult teeth, the baby teeth are no longer needed. And that's a vivid but simplistic picture of the coming of the New Covenant.

Imagine if you then went and took your baby teeth and tried to stick them back into your gum. There's no room. They're forever being replaced.

The New Covenant perfectly achieves. What the Old Testament, the Old Covenant could only picture, in fact, could only shadow.

And it's by God's will. That is, by the Son dying on the cross for us, that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[ 12 : 40 ] That's what the writer of the Hebrews says in verse 10. Christ's sacrifice really could sanctify. And by sanctify we simply mean could set us apart unto God.

Could purify believing people. In late 2004 in the US, ambulances were stocked with a product called polyheme.

And polyheme is a synthetic blood substitute. It can be used in patients with any blood type. And in fact, it lasts longer than blood.

So it's got great advantages for trauma patients, accidents on the road, and in that transition time between the accident and getting to a hospital. And whereas the synthetic blood product is capable of sustaining life, at least for a short period, when it comes to the blood of Christ, there is no substitute.

You see, even 2,000 years of animal sacrifices weren't capable of producing what the blood of Christ alone accomplished.

[ 14 : 00 ] And perhaps, as you consider this passage this morning, perhaps in the past you've asked yourself, well, how is it then that those Old Testament people could be forgiven by the sacrifice of Christ?

And a way maybe to help in thinking about that is again to go back to the illustration of the insurance cover note. Because the cross of Christ had power to convey backdated forgiveness.

Retroactive cleansing. The Holy Spirit did save men and women through the Old Testament period. But their salvation was based on the future, on the future perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

People before the cross were saved by God's grace. Nobody has ever or will ever be saved apart from God's grace. And they exercised faith in the living God.

But the grace, it didn't flow from animal sacrifices. It came from the future sacrifice of Christ.

[ 15 : 11 ] Of which those ceremonies, those repetitive animal sacrifices, they were shadows. See, there is nothing or no one who can provide salvation other than Jesus Christ.

And so the cross operates both ways. Backwards and praise the Lord forwards. Because it picks us up. Full salvation is provided at the cross and nowhere else.

And the questions really then just sort of flow out of the text, don't they? On what is it then that you're relying to get to heaven? Because apart from irrational bleakings, that's what the world population keeps wrestling with.

Is it by good works? Reasonably common in the Australian culture. I mean, even billions of dollars of good works won't get you there.

And you're not going to get there by some form of religious ritual. The reality is that sin needs a once for all cleansing.

[ 16 : 29 ] And that can only be accomplished by Christ. There's this massive difference also between what those priests in the Old Testament period did.

And the great high priest, Jesus himself. And it's spelled out for us by way of contrast in verses 11 and 12. And every priest stands day after 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 at the right hand of God.

Look at the contrast just in those two verses. On the one hand, there are many priests. And there's Christ alone. There are many sacrifices.

But there's a single sacrifice of himself. There are repeated sacrifices. There's one offering for all time.

[ 17 : 30 ] And notice also another contrast. The priests were standing. And Christ is seated. Seated at the right hand of the Father.

This is symbolic language. And the symbol tells us a number of things. It tells us that the work of sacrifice is done.

Think back to the tabernacle. And then the temple that replaced the tabernacle. You won't find any lounge chairs in the tabernacle or the temple. The work of sacrifice was never completed.

Secondly, Christ's seating shows that the Father is completely satisfied with Christ's work. He's in a position of honour and authority. And so thirdly, Christ and his Father is the sovereign ruler over all his enemies.

That's why we read in verse 13. Since then, he has been waiting until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet. You see, everything, everything that Christ died to accomplish will be accomplished.

[ 18 : 44 ] He's already the great winner. And it's at his return, the certainty of Christ's return, that the victory will be pressed home and consummated. There is nothing, there is no enemy who can hinder the culmination of God's plan for men and women, indeed for the whole of the cosmos.

And as we reflect on those verses up to verse 13, I trust that you're encouraged. Trust that you're encouraged because the writer of this letter, writing to Christians in the first century, was writing to strengthen them.

He was writing to encourage them in their faith. Well, in verse 14, the Holy Spirit instructs us that by Christ's single offering, we have been made perfect.

It's a word that's used a number of times throughout the letter. So perfect, would that mean perhaps sinless? And we don't need to look up any theological dictionary to know that it doesn't mean sinless.

Because we only have to examine our own lives. You see, perfect, as it's used in the book of Hebrews, means, has the sense of complete, of being made whole.

[ 20 : 05 ] Think of it this way. Christ has suited us for relationship with the Father. So we've read in verse 10 that we have been sanctified.

Sanctified, that is, we've been set apart as sacred to God. And that happened for each of us when we trusted in the Lord Jesus.

And that state of being set apart, something that happened at that time, then has continuing results. We continue to be set apart unto the Lord.

Well, now we read in verse 14 that we've been perfected. We've been made whole before God. We've been equipped for relationship with the living God.

And that state, again, that state of being made perfect when we accepted the Lord Jesus, continues to have present day effects for us, for every believer.

[ 21 : 07 ] In 1983, a lady by the name of Carla Faye Tucker helped to kill two people with a pickaxe. And she was so animalistic in her behaviour that she actually laughed through that crime.

She was found guilty. She was imprisoned. And on death row, Carla became a born-again Christian. You might say, well, of course. But those who knew her at the time said this.

You can't question the legitimacy of her conversion experience. And Carla Faye Tucker became the first woman executed in Texas since the American Civil War era.

And as she lay strapped on a gurney, she delivered her final message to those who were gathered to witness her execution. And she said, I'm going to be face to face with Jesus now.

I love all of you very much. You see, no matter how black your sin, the blood of Christ can cleanse it and make it as white as snow.

[ 22 : 15 ] No matter how inhuman your nature, the Holy Spirit, the power of the Holy Spirit can transform it from bitterness to tenderness and faith.

So for all who are trusting in the Lord Jesus, we read that we have been perfected. We have been made whole before God.

It's great news. But I want you to notice particularly the end of verse 14. Because we read there that we are sanctified. And at the risk of grammar on a Sunday morning, the tense of that verb is in fact present.

When you think, well, then how could we sort of amplify that meaning? Well, one way would simply to say this is the sense of timeless. That is, people have been cleansed from sin.

It's the idea we've been sanctified back in verse 10. But there's something more here. Because present tense has the idea of being sanctified, of being transformed.

[ 23 : 24 ] So what's the picture? We have been made perfect. We, that is, those who've put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we've been made perfect.

We've made complete. Fit for communion with God. Fit to come into his presence. Come into his presence with confidence, with boldness. But always with reverence.

We have been made perfect. But living in this fallen flesh, there's a lot of unfinished business, isn't there?

A lot of unfinished business, but at least in my life, of being transformed into Christ-likeness. You see, the very ones who have been perfected, that's you and me if we've trusted in the Lord Jesus, are the ones who are being sanctified.

Who are in that process of being made holy. Of becoming more Christ-like. Well, how do we sort of put all of that together? One way perhaps to do that is to look back at verse 2.

[ 24 : 38 ] So the old covenant sacrifices could not cleanse the worshippers perfectly. We read, they had a consciousness of sin. They had a consciousness of sin, but we're new covenant worshippers, aren't we?

Christ has established the second. He's established the new covenant. By his death and his resurrection. He's offered the final, the once-for-all sacrifice.

And his sacrifice cleanses completely. So, question. Should we conclude then as new covenant Christians?

That we should not feel guilty about sin in our life? Perhaps this morning, as you've joined in corporate worship, as the Holy Spirit has spoken to you through his word, as we've sung songs of praise together, as we've prayed, you've become aware of sin in your life in the last week.

I know that's the case in my life. Perhaps, as you sit there, your conscience is bothering you. And now, but having considered this passage, you perhaps say to yourself, look, I'm a child of God.

[ 25 : 57 ] I'm a disciple of the Lord Jesus. I have been perfected through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. I shouldn't feel like this. So, again, is it right for a Christian to feel guilty?

Well, let me encourage you to look at the passage again. You see, as a believer, when we sin, we are not cut off from relationship with Christ.

And the reason why we're not cut off from relationship with God is because of God's new covenant commitment of forgiveness that still operates in our life.

One offering, Christ's death on the cross, that led to our total cleansing. So, as believers, we're in fellowship. Think of fellowship as we're in partnership with God.

We're perfect. We're complete before him. We're cleansed, forgiven for all time. That's what the text says, isn't it? But we also know that a particular sin of thought, of word, of some deed, a sinful deed in our life, is one for which Christ had to die as a sacrifice.

[ 27 : 20 ] So, friends, something is drastically wrong in our life as Christians if we're not concerned by sin. If we're not concerned by sin in our life.

Repentance, that we spoke of two weeks ago, repentance and confession are integral aspects of a healthy spiritual life. And so, how appropriate it is that when we come together weekly in corporate worship, that we confess our sins.

Of course, there's a danger that familiarity breeds insincerity. But that's no reason to stop corporately confessing that there are aspects of our lives, both individually and as a church.

There are aspects of our lives that are out of step. And we need to agree with God about this. And having so agreed, turn from them.

The reality, of course, is that something does happen when we sin. It's not broken fellowship with God.

[ 28 : 29 ] But it is a forfeiture of joy. In sinning, we lose a certain intimacy, a warm-hearted experience, a sense of nearness to God.

And scripture speaks of that experience as lost joy, not as lost fellowship. So, on this Sunday morning, January the 28th, 2007, I've got the great privilege of sharing God's word with you.

And sharing it from one of my favourite chapters in all of scripture, Hebrews chapter 10. If the Lord Jesus is your saviour and Lord, then God promises us that we've been perfected, that we've been made completely adequate to be in relationship with a holy God through the single offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And if the Lord Jesus is your saviour and Lord God promises us that we've been set apart, we've been set apart unto God. It's an established fact.

The promise is that our sins have been forgiven. We've been cleansed. You see, objectively, before God, we're not guilty. We are not guilty because of Christ's sacrifice.

[ 29 : 54 ] Positionally, think of it that way, we are right before God's eyes because of Christ. Subjectively, though, sin in our lives does impact the joy of our fellowship with God.

It impacts our sense of intimacy. Positionally, right with God. Practically, we're in a process, aren't we?

We're in a process of transformation. A process of being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. And we're sanctified by the Holy Spirit as we repent and confess our sins.

As we allow God's word to literally soak into our lives. Indeed, as we come together in corporate worship.

So what a great encouragement it is for imperfect sinners like me, perhaps one or two of you as well, that we know for by a single offering, Christ has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

[ 31 : 13 ] So over these last two years, it's been a great joy for Cheryl and myself to serve with you. With you. You and us. God's family.

God's family. We could think of God's family as simply sinners saved by God's grace. Perfected. Set apart. Accomplished facts.

But being transformed by the Holy Spirit. Promoting the gospel together. And awaiting the return of the Lord Jesus. So the writer to the Hebrews concludes chapter 9, the previous chapter, with these words.

So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time. Not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly awaiting for him.

And friends, that's my prayer for you. That those words will continue to be at the very heart of the church that meets at Holy Trinity Doncaster.

[ 32 : 23 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.