
JESUS IS OUR SELF-SACRIFICING HIGH PRIEST
Sermon for the 4th mid-week Lenten Service, 2018
Hebrews 10:5-12

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon tonight is Hebrews 10:5-12: ⁵ **Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: “You have not wanted sacrifice and offering, but You have prepared a body for Me. ⁶ You have had no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. ⁷ Then I said: ‘Look! I have come (It has been written about Me in the scroll of the book). I have come to do Your will, O God.’” ⁸ First Christ says: “You have not wanted sacrifices, offerings, burnt offerings, and sacrifices for sin,” which are offered according to the Law, and “You have had no pleasure in them.” ⁹ Then He has said, “Look! I have come to do Your will.” He does away with the first, in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ By this will we have been made holy, through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. ¹¹ Every priest stands ministering every day, and repeatedly offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² However, when this Priest had offered one sacrifice for sins, which is good for ever, He sat down at the right hand of God.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When Abraham was taking his only son to the region of Moriah in order to sacrifice him to the LORD, Isaac asked, “*Look! We have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” (Gen. 22:7) With unwavering faith, Abraham assured his son, “*God will provide Himself with a lamb for the burnt offering, my son,*” (v.8). So it was; the Lord did indeed provide a ram that was offered to God in Isaac’s place.

Isaac’s question was asked and answered 2,000 years before the writer of Hebrews penned his inspired word of encouragement to a group of wavering Jewish believers, but the writer knew it would still be on the minds of his readers. The worship of Israel for 1,500 years had revolved around the

sacrifices that were offered at the altar of burnt offering, first in front of the tabernacle, and later in front of the temple. The author has gone to great lengths to convince his Jewish readers that, in Jesus, they have something better than anything Judaism had to offer. In Jesus they had a better High Priest - a great High Priest, a perfect and a compassionate High Priest who could sympathise with them in their weakness. But where was the lamb for the offering? If Jesus was truly the great High Priest, then He needed something to offer to God to atone for sin. Where was the lamb? That is the message of our reading this evening. We see Jesus once again as the great High Priest - great because He is a self-sacrificing High Priest. Jesus is Himself an acceptable sacrifice, and His was an accepted sacrifice.

It jumps out at you a little bit when you read that God did not want **sacrifice and offering** and that God **had no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin**. We all know that there were a lot of sacrifices in Israel. Every day, two lambs were sacrificed, one in the morning and one in the evening. Every Sabbath day, that number was doubled to four lambs. The first day of every month was marked by the sacrifice of two bulls, a ram, seven male lambs, and a male goat. In addition to these regular offerings, on festival days special offerings were brought. For example, on the Passover, 11 more animals were slaughtered and sacrificed. It is no exaggeration to say that rivers of blood flowed from the altar of burnt offering and that mountains of animal carcasses filled the courtyard where that altar stood, first in front of the tabernacle and later the temple.

Yes, God required sacrifices, but these offerings were never to be an end in themselves. The multitude of sacrifices was to be a regular proclamation of the people's sin and the grace of God. Each time the priests killed a lamb or goat or bull or ram, the message was proclaimed that the wages of sin is death. At the same time, God's grace was also revealed by the fact that sinful people were spared by the death of a substitute, and above all, those many animal sacrifices were designed to point ahead to the perfect Substitute whom God would send into the world, to bear the sins of the world and give Himself as an offering to God to atone for all sins.

It was only in connection with the coming Saviour that the many Old

Testament offerings had any value. The writer says in the verse preceding our text, “*For the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins,*” (Heb. 10:4), and earlier, our writer asked a good question: If those sacrifices could have actually taken away sins, wouldn’t they have stopped being offered?¹

God says, “*The person who sins is the one who will die,*” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). How foolish to think that the death of an animal could cover one’s sins! But eventually, many people in Israel failed to see their own sinfulness and failed to look ahead with faith to the Lamb that God would send into the world to suffer and die and spare them from the death they deserved. Pretty soon, the Jews began to think of their offerings as meritorious in themselves. They came to think that, by bringing an animal for sacrifice, they were doing a good work that would cause God to be pleased with them and look upon them with favour. So, their sacrifices were worthless in God’s sight - indeed, they were an abomination to Him - brought as bribes to buy His mercy and forgiveness. That’s what it means when our Lord says to God the Father, “**You have not wanted sacrifice and offering.**”

This is a message that we still need to hear today. God does not desire our sacrifices and is not pleased with our offerings when they are brought, as the Israelites did, with the thought of paying for our sins. Sacrifices and offerings still cannot buy God’s forgiveness nor bring peace to the troubled heart. To see that, just consider the sad end of Judas as we heard before. When he saw that Jesus was condemned to die, “*he was filled with remorse,*” (Matt. 27:3). He felt bad and his conscience tormented him. He may have wept bitter tears, but his tears and regret couldn’t bring him peace. Even when he took the thirty silver coins back to the chief priests and elders, he found no peace. For us to ever think that we can pay for our sins simply by being sorry for them - or by offering God an hour of worship or by bringing an offering of money or anything else we might do - is to forget that God has said, “*The wages of sin is death,*” (Rom. 6:23). The only way we could ever pay for our sins is by spending eternity in the torments of hell.

It was for this very reason - because our sacrifices were not pleasing to God -

¹ See Hebrews 10:2

that He provided His own Lamb for sacrifice. Listen as Jesus says, **“You have prepared a body for Me.”**

When Christ says this, we cannot but help think of the miracle of the incarnation. This is the mystery that John describes when he says, *“The Word became flesh and lived among us,”* (John 1:14). This is the mystery that we confess that Jesus Christ is *“true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary.”* Christ’s entrance into this world, His incarnation, suffering and death, was made in full agreement with the gracious counsel of the Triune God concerning the salvation of mankind. God the Father prepared a body for His Son so that His Son could have blood to shed for us on a shameful cross, blood that can do what the blood of beasts and good works and gold and silver never could do, blood that can purify us and every sinner from every sin because it is the holy precious blood of God’s one and only Son. Having a body, Jesus could now, by His blood, wash away our sins. Our great High Priest was offered as the one great sacrifice for sin. But was Jesus an acceptable sacrifice?

Each of the blood sacrifices in the Old Testament began the same way - with the worshipper presenting the animal for his sacrifice to the priest on duty for examination. The priest would inspect the animal for defects and reject any animals that failed to meet the requirement of physical perfection. When the priests during the time of Malachi accepted injured, crippled, and diseased animals, the prophet pronounced the Lord’s curse on both the priests and people.² A great King like the Lord deserved the best and demanded that only unblemished animals be offered to Him. But even the best unblemished animals offered on Israel’s altars could not truly take away sin - that’s why God’s only Son was born into this world, and now Christ says: **“Look! I have come to do Your will.”**

Here, the great High Priest presents Himself to God as the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world. The Son, assuming our human nature, declares His willingness to carry out the mission of mercy His Father had set before Him. Though the Saviour’s resolve to fully complete the will of

² Malachi 1-2

His heavenly Father was put to the test throughout His ministry - from the temptation in the wilderness to the Garden of Gethsemane - Jesus remained faithful to His heavenly Father. Jesus was unflawed by any sin. After inspection through His all-seeing eye, the Father declared Jesus to be His Son, "*in whom [He is] well pleased,*" (Matt. 3:17). Indeed, the inspection of God's Lamb was continued during His trials before Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. Pilate openly declared that He had examined Jesus and said, "*I have examined this Man before you and found Him innocent of the charges that you are making against Him*" (Luke 23:14). Inspected by God in heaven and in courtrooms on earth, Jesus was proved to be the Lamb of God, pure and holy. God's Son, who assumed the body His Father had prepared for Him, declared **"Look! I have come to do Your will."** Knowing full well that the road that began at the manger would end in a grave, God's Son came to carry out His Father's will to complete the gracious plan of salvation. Even though the prospect of it troubled our Saviour's sinless heart, He declared near the end of His earthly ministry that for this very reason, He had "*come into the world,*" (John 18:37). He had come to do His Father's will, and nothing would stop Him from completing that work. He went from the manger to the cross, and there He cried out, "*It is finished,*" (John 19:30). Jesus our great High Priest was an acceptable sacrifice - a lamb without a single blemish or defect of sin - as St. Peter says³, and His was an accepted sacrifice.

The first readers of Hebrews were familiar with the ritual involved with the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament. For years, they watched as the priests offered animals for the sins of the people they represented. The Old Testament priests were distinct from the sacrifices they offered - they did not offer themselves. But Jesus the great High Priest is different. Jesus is, in the words of hymn 282, "*Himself the victim, and Himself the priest,*" (v.2). Lowing cattle, bleating sheep, and cooing doves could not redeem the souls of sinners from the torments of hell. Could Jesus? Was His an acceptable sacrifice? On the cross, Christ declared that He had carried to completion the work of redemption He had come to do when He cried out, "*It is finished.*" The empty tomb in Joseph's garden on the third day is God's declaration that Jesus'

³ 1 Peter 1:18-19

redeeming work was indeed finished. As the writer of Hebrews says, **“By this will we have been made holy, through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.”** Christ came to do His Father’s will and completed that work. He paid for the sins of the world with His once-for-all sacrifice and won peace for us with God.

Our writer has an interesting way of making the point that Christ’s sacrifice was an accepted sacrifice when he compares the work of Jesus to the priests of Israel. He says, **“Every priest stands ministering every day, and repeatedly offering the same sacrifices... However, when this Priest had offered one sacrifice for sins, which is good for ever, He sat down at the right hand of God.”** The Old Testament priests were never finished. They offered sacrifices repeatedly year after year⁴ because the blood of beasts could never cleanse the guilty soul of sin. So they stood there at the altar and performed their religious duties for centuries. Then came Jesus the great High Priest and offered Himself once for all for the sins of the world, and then, **“He sat down at the right hand of God.”** When Jesus bowed His head and died, His redeeming work was done - He could look from the beginning of the world to its end and see not one sinner left to be saved, not one sin left to be paid for. By His resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Father, God has assured all people that His Jesus was both Lord and Christ - God’s Son and the world’s Saviour - and His work was finished completely. Christ’s self-sacrifice was accepted by God as full payment for the sins of the world.

It is good to keep the fact of our Lord’s accepted sacrifice before our eyes. Judas was not the last sinner to find that sin often sleeps but then wakes up to terrify and torment. His sin seemed small - a little greed, a little helping himself to a few coins from the treasury. Sin slept. Even when he conspired with Jesus’ enemies for a few more coins, sin slept. But when he saw Jesus condemned to death, his sin awoke with a vengeance. The chief priests of the Jews had no consolation to offer – *“What is that to us? You should see to it,”* they said. But our great High Priest did have consolation to offer - even to Judas. Judas himself confessed Jesus to be an acceptable sacrifice – *“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood,”* (Matt. 27:4), he said. Tragically, he

⁴ Hebrews 10:1

refused to believe that Jesus' sacrifice was the sacrifice accepted by God to pay for sin and cleanse the conscience from guilt.

May God keep us from the "little sins," - the little greed, the little theft, the little lust, the little hatred. But should we fall into those sins and they wake up to haunt and torment us, may God open our eyes to see and believe what Judas rejected: Jesus our great High Priest offered Himself for the sins of the world, and His sacrifice was accepted by God! He sat down at the right hand of God - no further price is demanded, no more sacrifice required. Forgiveness is purchased, and salvation is free. Believe. Rejoice. Live at peace here through Jesus until you live with Him in His perfect peace forever.

Yes, Jesus is our great High Priest who offers the greatest sacrifice - Himself. He is Himself the victim and our priest. May we by faith lay our hands on the head of God's faultless Lamb and believe Christ has paid for our sins with His precious blood forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.