

**OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST JESUS, IS BETTER THAN ANY OTHER
HIGH PRIEST
Sermon for Good Friday, 2018
Hebrews 9:11-14**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 9:11-14: ¹¹ **However, Christ has come as a High Priest of the good things that have been done, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, which has not been made by human hands, that is, not a part of this creation.** ¹² **Moreover, not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood He entered once for all into the most holy place, when He obtained eternal redemption.** ¹³ **For, if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer that are sprinkled on people who have been defiled make them holy, so that their bodies are clean,** ¹⁴ **how much more will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, has offered Himself without blemish to God, make our consciences clean from dead works, so that we may serve the living God?**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Good Friday is a solemn day, a day where we remember how the Son of God suffered and died for the sins of the world. God's own Lamb was offered on the altar of the cross to take away the world's wickedness and guilt. Our sermon text for today refers to an equally solemn day - the Good Friday of the Old Testament - the great Day of Atonement.

On that day, the high priest of Israel entered the presence of God in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle to make atonement for sin. So holy was this day to the Jews and so solemn was the act of entering the presence of God by the high priest, that, according to Jewish belief, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place during the Second Temple period between the years of 530

BC and 70 AD, he did so with a rope tied around one ankle. This was so that if he was struck dead while in the Most Holy Place, his corpse could be pulled out without anyone else having to risk entering the place of God's presence.

May we also approach our God today with similar reverence of faith as we are reminded on this Good Friday, that Jesus, as our great High Priest, is better than every other high priest. He is better because He entered by a better sanctuary, He offered up a better sacrifice, and He inspires us to better service.

Our text today begins with a strange sounding phrase: **“¹¹ However, Christ has come as a High Priest of the good things that have been done.”**

In the days of the Old Testament, God's people were looking for good things to come. They had God's promises, but the fulfillment lay ahead, in the future. Remember when John the Baptist appeared, preaching and baptising? A delegation of priests and Levites came from Jerusalem to check him out and asked him if he was the One who was to come.¹ Of course he wasn't, and he said so, but Jesus was. With Jesus' coming, all the good things that were promised, **have been done**. That includes all that was foreshadowed by the Old Testament priesthood, its sacrifices and offerings, its rites and rituals, and the place where the Old Testament priests served.

The verses prior to our reading contain a bit of a review of the tabernacle and its layout. The tabernacle was just a small tent - a portable worship structure. It was divided into two rooms that were separated by a curtain. The first room of the tabernacle, the larger room, was the Holy Place. It contained an altar of incense, a golden lampstand, and a table on which the bread of the Presence sat. The Most Holy Place, which was hidden behind the curtain, was only half the size of the Holy Place, and formed a perfect cube. In it was the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence with His people. That gold-plated box had two angels on its cover; the tablets of stone, a bowl of manna, and Aaron's staff inside, and the cloud of the glory of the LORD hovered above it. No one ever saw that box - at least no ordinary person did. First of all, only the

¹ John 1:19

priests ever entered the tabernacle, and only the high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place by going through the Holy Place of the tabernacle. He would push back the curtain at the entrance to the Most Holy Place and enter into the presence of God.

With that ritual in mind, the writer of Hebrews calls to mind the work of Jesus and shows how much greater Jesus is than the Old Testament high priests. We are told that Jesus entered the Most Holy Place, the presence of God in heaven **“through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, which has not been made by human hands, that is, not a part of this creation.”** So, you can imagine the picture this formed in the minds of the first readers of Hebrews. They are thinking of a man passing through the Holy Place, pushing aside the curtain and coming into the presence of God in the Most Holy Place. But how did Jesus do that? The writer says it was **“through the greater and more perfect tabernacle.”** To understand what he means, we need to remember that the tabernacle or sanctuary was the dwelling place of God - that tabernacle was where God lived, but it was a shadow of good things to come - good things that Christ brought.

In the first chapter of his Gospel, John remarked, *“The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son – He is full of grace and truth,”* (John 1:14). The word for “lived among us” in Greek² is simply the verbal form of the word used here in Hebrews for “tabernacle.” John’s words could be translated: “The Word became flesh *and tabernacled among us.*” What he means is that what the tabernacle of the Old Testament symbolised - the dwelling of God among His people - made a reality when Christ came into the world. Jesus Himself confirmed this when after cleansing the temple in John chapter 2, He challenged His enemies saying, *“Destroy this temple! I shall raise it in three days,* (v. 19). When His

² σκηνώω

enemies objected that it had taken Herod 46 years to build that temple, St. John explains that Jesus was referring to His own body (v. 21). In the assumed human nature of Christ, a body not made by human hands as was the tabernacle, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, God Himself truly did come to live among us. St. Paul says the same thing in Colossians chapter 2:9 when he says, “*For in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.*” This statement is a key doctrinal statement of the New Testament that deals with the person of Christ. Very simply, yet very powerfully, it tells us that Jesus is both God and man in one person. It tells us that all the characteristics that belong to God dwell in Christ, not only as the Son of God but also as the Son of man. When Jesus took on a human nature, the fullness of the Godhead was actually contained within His person and within His body.

Indeed, compared to the Holy Place of the tabernacle through which the Old Testament high priests passed to enter the presence of God, Christ entered God’s presence through a far better sanctuary: the sanctuary of His own body - the body the eternal Son of God assumed in order to serve us as our Saviour from sin. It was only in that perfect tabernacle - the body that housed the Holy One of Israel - that Jesus could live as one of us under God’s Law and obey it perfectly. It was in that perfect tabernacle that our great High Priest died for us under God’s wrath on the cross, and it is to the cross and the sacrifice the great High Priest offered there that the writer directs us next when he writes, “**not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood He entered once for all into the most holy place, when He obtained eternal redemption.**”

Again, we must think back to the ritual God commanded for the Day of Atonement and to the sacrifice the high priest offered for his own sins and for his family and then for the whole nation of Israel. It was an annual festival, repeated every year. That in itself should have told the people of Israel something about the *limitations* of those sacrifices. They could make it possible for the high priest to enter God’s presence, but only on one day and then he had to leave. Something like that happened to the people too. Our reading talks about “**the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer**

that are sprinkled on people who have been defiled (to) make them holy, so that their bodies are clean.”

The writer is referring to a cleansing ritual performed with the remains of a heifer that had been slaughtered and burned along with some wood and fragrant perfumes. These were all burned to ash. The ashes were mixed with water, and then the mixture was sprinkled on people who had become ceremonially unclean by coming into contact with a dead body.³ The writer means to say that by that washing, the people could come into the courtyard of the tabernacle and worship there, and by the blood of the bull and goat slaughtered on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was able to come into the presence of God. However, the high priest could only stay there for a short time before he had to leave, and the people were only made clean outwardly and ceremonially. Outward defilement was involved, so outward cleansing was offered. But that was all! These sacrifices did nothing to get rid of sin's more serious defilement of the soul. Jesus is better.

When He offered on the altar of the cross **the greater and more perfect tabernacle** of His body, in which the fullness of God's glory lived, He entered into the presence of God once and for all. He didn't have to repeat that sacrifice annually. As He died, our Saviour cried, *“It is finished.”* No further offering needed to be made for sin. He had obtained an eternal redemption. From the first sin of Adam to the last sin that is committed before this present world passes away, every sin has been paid for. The Greek word for “redemption” speaks of a ransom, a price paid to free someone held in slavery. That is what Jesus accomplished by His death - He redeemed once and for all a world held captive by sin, death, and hell. The Apostle Peter says exactly the same thing when he writes, *“¹⁸ For you know that you have not been redeemed with perishable things, with silver or gold, from the worthless lives you had handed over to you from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a spotless and unblemished lamb,”* (1 Peter 1:18-19).

³ Numbers 19

Because it is the blood of a better sacrifice, it has more power to cleanse. Unlike the blood of animals that made the priest outwardly clean to enter a symbol of God's presence and the ashes of the heifer mixed with water and then sprinkled on the unclean person that made him clean outwardly, the blood of Jesus cleanses the conscience. The blood of Jesus is the good thing foreshadowed by many centuries of animal offerings to God. It truly takes away sin and makes the guilty conscience clean. Look at your Lord Jesus: The One who was made to be sin for us, the Lamb on whom God laid the sins of the world is seated at the right hand of God. A sinful priest couldn't stay in the Most Holy Place - he would have died - but the sins Christ carried to the cross are gone. His blood, the precious blood of Christ, purifies us from every sin. It isn't just an outward cleansing that makes it possible for us to come into this house of God, but a place in God's heavenly house has been prepared where one day, we will live forever. When we understand that - how much greater Jesus is than every other high priest, how He entered by a better sanctuary (the tabernacle of His body in which the true God lives), how He offered up a better sacrifice (one that cleanses us completely of our sin and guilt) - then we will be inspired to better service to God.

Our writer lists a third and final reason that Jesus is the great High Priest, and it is that Jesus inspires us to better service than every other high priest ever could. He says it this way, ¹⁴ **how much more will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, has offered Himself without blemish to God, make our consciences clean from dead works, so that we may serve the living God.**"

Something happened over all those centuries of Old Testament rituals that the high priests of Israel performed. It was something bad. Instead of inspiring God's people to look forward in faith to the One who was to come and the good things He would bring, the priests and the people they served began to look at those rituals as an end in themselves. They thought that by doing the work and going through the routine, they were *earning* God's favour and making themselves pleasing to God. Yet it was quite the opposite. Our writer states in chapter 11 verse 6, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*"

God's prophets in the Old Testament warned against such empty rituals devoid of faith. "*These people,*" God said through Isaiah, "*come near to Me with their mouth and honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me,*" (Is. 29:13). The sacrifice of God - the sacrifice that pleases Him - is a broken and contrite heart, as King David writes.⁴ Without that, burnt offerings and sacrifices are worthless.

Earlier, in chapter 6, our writer calls such works acts that lead to death, (6:1). Literally, he calls them dead works. Those are works that are inadequate in the sight of God, those are works that are done to earn God's favour, and those are lifeless rituals and rites that are done to bribe God and buy His favour. As God refused Cain's sacrifice, so He rejects all such dead works. No, it is Jesus' blood that inspires us to better service, that cleanses our consciences from sin, and that relieves the soul of its guilt and fear of punishment. It is blood that inspires us to serve the living God in a way that pleases Him, and that means living for God and serving Him from day to day, at work and at play, at home and away, not because a heavy "I have to" drives us, but because a *joyful desire* makes us want to serve God. All those good works that are worthless and filthy, stinky rags in God's sight when done to buy His favour, become precious and approved by God when done only out of thankful love by people inspired by the love of God who first and best loved them. Such were the works of the widow and her two small copper coins in the temple,⁵ Zacchaeus and the money he returned to his victims,⁶ and all those who on the Last Day will hear the King say, "*For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink... anything you have done for one of My brothers here, even the least important of them, you have done for Me,*" (Matt. 25:35, 40).

Such service is a good and pleasing sacrifice to God, and more and more we will bring it when we see the glory of Jesus our great High Priest, who is great

⁴ Psalm 51:17

⁵ Luke 21:1-4

⁶ Luke 19:1-10

also for this reason: He is better than every Old Testament high priest. He is better because He serves in a better sanctuary - the body of the incarnate God - and because He offers up a better sacrifice of His holy body and precious blood which cleanses us outside and in from every sin and which inspires us to better service of God.

May you all have a holy and solemn Good Friday, as we ponder such a great sacrifice given for us. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY

O God the Father Almighty, we praise You for Your eternal wisdom and mercy, in which You ordained that Your Son should be the sacrifice for our sin. We praise You that, by His being lifted up on the cross, He draws all people to Himself, taking away their iniquity, and granting them peace.

In this holy hour we thank and praise You for His sacrificial love, for His perfect obedience, for His patience in suffering, for His willingness to endure even the cross, and for His submission to death.

Help us to see, in the darkness that accompanied His dying, in the shaking of the earth, and in the splitting of the rocks, how great an evil was done by sinful people, how great a life was ended, and how great a death was inflicted. But through the tearing open of the veil of the Temple, and the opening of the graves of the saints, show us our sure entrance into the heavenly Holy of holies.

We thank You, O Father, for all that Jesus Your Son, our Lord, has done, for all that He has suffered, for all that He has given us, and for all that He has promised us.. We bow in adoration and offer our prayers from the depths of grateful hearts. We join with the angels and with all Your redeemed people of every race, tribe, nation, and language in raising our song of thanksgiving: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise for ever."

As we remember our Saviour's passion, grant that we may treasure the things that belong to our salvation. As we remember His suffering, make us ready to

pass through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God. As we remember His wounds, equip us to cope with every painful struggle. As we remember His crucifixion, teach us to crucify our worthless passions and desires. As we remember His death, help us to be ready to place our spirit in Your hands. As we remember His burial, help us to remember that He has transformed the graves of all His believers.

We rejoice, O Father, that we have received Your mercy and seen Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Give us Your continuing grace through Him who died and rose again for us, and who reigns as the Lamb on the throne for ever and ever. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

¹³ “Look! My Servant will be successful. He will be high, be lifted up and be highly exalted. ¹⁴ As there have been many who have been horrified because of You, — since His appearance has been more disfigured than any other man and His form more than any other human being, — ¹⁵ so He will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For they will see what they had not been told and will understand what they had not heard.”

^{53:1} Who has believed our Message? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² He grew up before Him like a young

shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him. He had nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we thought of Him as nothing. ⁴ Surely, He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted. ⁵ However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed. ⁶ We

have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.⁷ Although He was oppressed and afflicted, He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and, as a ewe is silent before those who shear off her wool, so He did not open His mouth.⁸ He was taken away through oppression and without justice. As for His generation, who considered that He was cut off from the land of the living? Because of the rebellion of my people He was struck down.⁹ He assigned His grave with wicked people but was with a rich man in His death, although He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it was the will of the LORD to crush Him with suffering. When You make His life a sacrifice for guilt, He will see His off-spring. He will have a long life, and the will of the LORD will be successful in His hand.¹¹ Because of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied.

“Through His knowledge, My righteous Servant will justify many and bear their iniquities.¹² Therefore, I shall divide Him a portion among great people, and He will divide the plunder with strong people, because He poured out His life to death and was numbered with wrongdoers. Nevertheless, He has carried the sin of many people and intercedes for the wrongdoers.”

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us cling to what we confess!¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin.¹⁶ Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it! ...

^{5:7} During His days in the human nature, Jesus offered prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to the One who could save Him from death; and, because He feared God, He was heard.⁸ Although

Jesus is the Son, He learned obedience from the things that He suffered.⁹ When He was perfected, He also became the Source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.

John 19:17-30

¹⁷ Jesus went out, carrying His own cross, to the place that was called “the Place of the Skull,” which is called “Golgotha” in Aramaic.¹⁸ There they crucified Him with two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate also wrote a notice and put it on the cross. It read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

²⁰ Therefore, many Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The notice had been written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

²¹ Therefore, the High Priests of the Jews told Pilate, “Do not write: ‘The King of the Jews,’ but: ‘He said, “I am the King of the Jews”!’”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His outer garments and divided them into four parts,

one part for each soldier, and also the undergarment. The undergarment was without a seam, woven from the top in one piece.²⁴ Therefore, they said to one another, “Let us not tear it but let us throw dice for it, to decide who will get it!”

This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled that says: “They divided My outer garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.”

So, that is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Jesus’ mother, His mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing near the cross of Jesus.

²⁶ Therefore, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, there is your son.”²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, “There is your mother.”

From that time on, this disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, knowing that everything had now been finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

²⁹ A jar full of sour wine had been placed there. So, they put a sponge

full of the sour wine on hyssop and
lifted it to His mouth.

³⁰ When Jesus had taken the sour
wine, He said, “It is finished.”

Then He bowed His head and gave
up His spirit.