**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (25): The Book Of Better Things**

**“Nothing But The Blood Of Jesus”**

**Hebrews 9:11-22**

**June 23, 2024**

There are a lot of things about the Christian faith that are offensive to the politically correct mindset. The teaching that salvation is available only through faith in Jesus Christ – and cannot be found in any other non-Christian religion – is *especially* offensive. The same is true for the doctrine of hell. It’s simply dismissed as barbaric and cruel, something that is totally incompatible with the notion of a loving and merciful God.

The same can be said about the necessity of a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. The concept of a substitutionary atonement, in which an innocent person suffers a violent death and sheds His blood in the place of guilty men and women, thereby obtaining their forgiveness of sins, is just plain offensive. For many, it runs contrary to anything that a loving God would ever do – especially when this innocent person is His own dear Son!

Yet this is the pervasive theme in the Word of God, which becomes more than evident in the verses before us today. According to Hebrews 9:12, it is by means of “*his own blood*” that Christ secured for us “*eternal redemption*.” In Hebrews 9:14, it’s “*the blood of Christ*” that cleanses “*our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God*.” In Hebrews 9:22, we are also told that “*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*.”

As we know from last week’s study, the Old Testament priests offered numerous sacrifices. But the blood of bulls and goats were ineffectual, simply because they were never able to “*clear the conscience of the worshiper*” (Heb. 9:9). They only dealt with “*external regulations*” and ceremonial purification, not internal heart changes. Yes, they had their place, but only “*until the time of the new order*,” or “*the time of the restoration*” (v. 10). In fact, those Old Testament sacrifices served as an “illustration” (literally, “a parable”), pointing forward to that time.

In the verses before us today, our author takes his argument one step further. He tells us how Christ has established this new order and what that means for the members of the New Covenant community. In strong contrast to the blood sacrifices of the Old Covenant, he first presents a glorious summary of the high priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus (vv. 11-14). Then in verses 15-22, he explains the need for the shed blood of Jesus.

**A. The Summary of Christ’s High Priestly Ministry (9:11-14).** In this first paragraph, our author draws our attention to three glorious truths concerning Christ’s priestly ministry on our behalf. They stand in strong contrast to the ministry of the Old Testament priests, as indicated by the first words of verse 11, “*But when Christ came*” . . . .

1. Our Savior Serves in a More Perfect Tabernacle (v. 11): “*But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, not a part of this creation*.” As opposed to the earthly and temporary tabernacle of the Old Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ ministers on our behalf in the heavenly tabernacle, namely, in the very presence of God Himself.

2. He Ministers on the Basis of a Far Superior Offering (v. 12): “*He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption*.” As opposed to the high priest of the Old Covenant, who had to offer animal sacrifices year after year after year, Jesus offered up Himself “*once for all.*” And in contrast to those ineffective animal sacrifices, Jesus shed His own precious blood, and thereby obtained “eternal” redemption from sin, not merely annual redemption.

3. His Shed Blood Is Far More Effective than that of Animals (vv. 13-14). “*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God*!’” This is another example of our author’s use of the lesser to the greater argument (Cf. 2:2-3), by which he emphasizes the incomparable greatness of Christ and His saving work for us.

Here, we are introduced to the power of the blood of Jesus. In strong contrast to the Levitical sacrifices, His sacrifice is designed to “*cleanse our consciences*” from sinful “*acts that lead to death*” (more literally, “*from dead works*,” ESV, NASB). As a result, we are no longer held in the deadly grip of our past sins! Forgiveness through the cleansing blood of Christ *sets us free* to “*serve the living God*.” Simply stated, the goal of forgiveness is service!

**B. The Need for the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ** **(Heb. vv. 15-22).** Having just spoken of the power of the blood of Christ (vv. 13-14), our author proceeds to develop this thought. He first explains the *effects* of the death of Christ (v. 15). Then he illustrates why death is necessary for a valid covenant (vv. 16-17). Finally, he shows how God’s institution of the old order through Moses *prefigured* Christ’s atoning sacrifice (vv. 18-22).

1. The Effects of the Death of Christ (9:15): “*For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant*.”

We have already been told that Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6), which was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34). But now the *basis* of God’s promised New Covenant is made clear; that basis is Christ’s sacrificial death. As “the mediator,” Christ is the “go-between” between a holy God and sinful man. Just as Moses was God’s agent in establishing the Old Covenant, so Christ fulfills that role in a far greater way.

“*For this reason*,” our author explains, Christ mediates the New Covenant so that “*those who are called*” (the effectual call of the elect) might receive the promised “*eternal inheritance*” (the lasting benefits God promises through the New Covenant, 8:8-13). Since the sacrifices under the Old Covenant could *not* take away sins,it was left to Christ to offer the only sacrifice “that really effects what the old offerings pointed to but could not accomplish” (Leon Morris).

Here Christ’s death is viewed as “*a ransom*” – the price that was paid to release someone from captivity. In this case, the death of Christ sets His people free – or “redeems” them – from the bondage of sin. But those redeemed by the blood of Christ are not *only* believers of this present age; they are also believers who lived before the coming of Christ, whose sins were “*committed under the first covenant*.”

2. The Need for One’s Death to Validate a Covenant (vv. 16-17): “*In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when someone has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living*.” The word that is translated “covenant” (v. 15) not only means “an agreement” between two parties; it can also mean a “last will and testament.” By employing the dual usage of this word, our author proceeds to compare a “will” with a “covenant.” If a person writes a will, that will is not in force until he or she dies. Only then does the beneficiary receive the “promised inheritance.” In the same way, it was necessary for Jesus to die so that the terms of the New Covenant might be put into effect (i.e., Jer. 31:31-34). If we are a child of God through faith in Christ, we are heirs of the promise (Heb. 6:17); but we wouldn’t inherit anything unless Christ died!

3. The Need for Christ’s Sacrifice as Illustrated in The Old Order (vv. 18-22): “*This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every command to the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep’* (a reference to Exodus 24:3-8). *In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle, and everything used in its ceremonies* (references to Ex. 40:9-15; Lev. 8:10-24; 16:14-20). *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*” (Lev. 4:7-34; 8:15; 17:11).

When Moses was given the law, he was commanded to write those words down and put them in a book, which became known as “the book of the covenant” (Ex. 24:4, 7). Then he read this book to all the people in order that they might respond to the challenges of Yahweh, which they did. The blood of the animal sacrifices was then sprinkled on the altar he had built, and on the people, which became an official sign of the covenant treaty. That sprinkled blood symbolized the cleansing of His people, so that they could enter the covenant with their sin atoned for.

The cleansing with blood, which marked the inauguration of the first covenant, also marked the inauguration of the place of worship. The tabernacle and all the furniture and its many accessories were also sprinkled with blood. Why? Because under the Old Covenant sprinkling with blood was the accepted way of cleansing. It was *God’s* way of teaching the people of Israel (and us today) that no one can approach Him, and worship Him, until the penalty for sin has been paid and the justice of God has been satisfied. “*In fact*,” says our author, “*the law required that nearly everything was cleansed with blood*” (there were a few exceptions for the poor Israelite who didn’t have enough money to purchase a lamb or a goat.) And finally, he says, “*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*.” Why? Because the entire Levitical system constantly looked for blood as the means of putting away sin and impurity.

Therefore, since God has ordained that forgiveness of sin is through the *shedding* of blood, and since cleansing comes through the *sprinkling* of blood, it is absolutely necessary that blood be shed and applied to our hearts if the New Covenant is to be in force. That’s why we who are members of the New Covenant can sing without any reservation or hesitation; “For my cleansing this I see – nothing but the blood of Jesus; For my pardon this my plea – nothing but the blood of Jesus” (Robert Lowry, 1876). That’s the power of “the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb,” our Great High Priest and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been set free from the guilt and bondage of sin so that we may serve the living God!