**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (27): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Superior Sacrifice,” Part One**

**Hebrews 10:1-18**

**July 7, 2024**

Throughout our studies we have seen that Hebrews is highly repetitive. Unlike Paul’s letters, for example, the author of Hebrews is constantly presenting a single theme with only slight variations along the way. That theme, of course, is that Jesus Christ is better! He is infinitely superior to and greater than everything that preceded Him in the Old Testament.

In the first three verses, we saw that Jesus is better than the Old Testament prophets (1:1-3). We also saw that He is superior to the angels (1:4-14), and that the salvation He secures for us is far superior to anything the Old Testament law could provide (2:1-18). In chapter 3 we were told how Jesus is better than Moses, Israel’s national hero (3:1-6). From there we saw that the “rest” Jesus offers is greater than the “rest” that came through Joshua, when he led God’s people into the promised land of Canaan (3:7-4:13).

At the end of chapter four, our author began his lengthy exposition of Jesus’ high priesthood (4:14-16). Then in chapters five, six, and seven, he explained that Jesus is greater than Aaron and all of Israel’s high priests, because He comes from a better priestly order than Levi. In chapter eight he explained that Jesus has established a New Covenant which is far superior to the one that came through Moses. In chapter nine we saw that Jesus ministers in a better sanctuary, and that He offered Himself as a better sacrifice than all of the Levitical sacrifices. Unlike the blood of bull and goats and rams, His blood cleanses us from the guilt of sin once and for all.

What now follows is the *conclusion* to our author’s exposition of Christ’s high priesthood and His superior sacrifice for sin (10:1-18). There is little in these verses that he has not already said; and yet there is still much for us to learn and from which to benefit. It’s a section that can be easily divided into four parts (as noted by the paragraph divisions in our English translations).

*First*, the author explains the inadequacies of the Old Testament sacrificial system (10:1-4). *Second*, he quotes from Psalm 40:6-8 in order to demonstrate how Jesus accomplished what the Old Testament system could not (10:5-10). *Third*, he points to the exaltation of Christ as the evidence of the superiority of His once for all sacrifice (10:11-13). *Fourth*, he once again explains how the superior promises of the New Covenant apply to the church today (10:14-18). The focus of this morning’s study is the first two of these sections (10:1-10).

**A. The Inadequacies of the Old Testament Sacrificial System (10:1-4):** “*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and no longer would have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*.”

Here's our first question: If the law of Moses was ordained by the Lord, and if it was in force for hundreds of years, and if many sincere people brought their offerings to the Lord and were blessed, then why were those Old Covenant sacrifices inadequate? The answer is found in verse one: “*The law* (together with the Levitical priesthood to which it was linked, Cf. 7:11) *is only a shadow* (or foreshadowing) *of the good things to come* . . .”

The “*good things to come*,” of course, refers to Jesus Christ and all that He has established for us in the New Covenant. Nothing in the Old Testament law could ever provide anyone with the “*realities themselves*.” Everything in that sacrificial system was a picture or type of those spiritual realities that God would give us through Christ. “*For this reason*,” says our author (v. 2), that entire system was only temporary; it could never – “*by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year*” – accomplish anything that was permanent. It could never make any worshiper “perfect.”

The point is unmistakable: The very repetition of those sacrifices day after day, and the one that was offered on the Day of Atonement year after year, *demonstrates the inadequacy* of the Old Testament sacrifices. If any of those sacrifices for sin was perfect, and could finally and forever cleanse the human heart of guilt and condemnation, then it wouldn’t need to be repeated. “*If it could*,” our author asks, “*Would they not have stopped being offered*?” (v. 2).

In verses 3 and 4, the focus is on the Day of Atonement that came every year, “*year after year*.” That Day was not only an “*annual reminder*” to the people that their sins had not been fully removed; it was also a constant reminder that *God still remembered* their sins. Why? Because “*It is impossible*” for the blood of animals to take away sin! In the words of Wiersbe, “The annual repetition of the ceremony was evidence that the previous year’s sacrifices had not done the job. True, the nation’s sins were *covered*, but they were not *cleansed*. Nor did the people have God’s inward witness of forgiveness and acceptance.”

That leads us to another important question: If the blood of bulls and goats could never “take away” the sins of the people, then how were God’s people saved during the time of the Old Testament? **A.**  It wasn’t by works, or by obedience to the law of Moses. It was by faith in the One to whom those sacrifices pointed! Their only hope was to look *forward* to and trust in what those animal sacrifices typified and symbolized, as foretold by the Old Testament prophets (Cf. Isaiah 52:13-53:12). *That* was how a person living during the time of the Old Testament was saved! It’s the same way we are saved today – only we look back to what Christ has already accomplished on Calvary’s cross.

**B. The Provision of the Superior Sacrifice (10:5-10).** The “therefore” of verse 5 introduces this next stage in the author’s argument: Because the Levitical sacrifices were powerless to take away the guilt of sin, another provision had to be made. So, the author now quotes from Psalm 40:6-8 (LXX), in which he sees the words of David as coming from Christ Himself.

1. The Quotation of Psalm 40:6-8 (10:5-7): “*Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God*.”

In Psalm 40, David is speaking about himself. He is acknowledging that what God ultimately wants isn’t the blood of bulls and goats and rams, but obedience from a willing heart. The “scroll” to which he refers most likely is the personal copy of the law that the king was to take at the time of his enthronement. It served as the covenant charter of his administration (see Deut. 17:18-20; 2 Kings 11:12; Cf. 1 Kings 2:3).

In the verses that are quoted, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) reads, “*a body you have prepared for me*,” whereas the Hebrew says, “*Ears you have dug for me*.” The reason for the change in the text has best been explained by Leon Morris: “Most likely the LXX gives an interpretive translation of the original Hebrew. It may be expressing the view that the body is the instrument through which the divine command, received by the ear, is carried out. Or it may be taking a part of the body (the “ears”) as meaning the whole body.”

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author sees David’s obedience as *typified* in the life and ministry of Jesus. Therefore, he applies this quote to our Savior’s obedient submission to the Father in coming to earth (“when Christ came into the world”). At that time, a body was prepared for Him so that He could willingly offer up Himself as a once for all sacrifice that was fully adequate to make a final atonement for sin. (Clearly, our author believes in the eternal pre-existence of Christ as the second person of the Trinity!)

**2.** The Explanation of the Quotation (Heb. 10:8-9): “*First he* *said: ‘Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them’* (*although the law required them to be made*)*. Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second*.” Here our author divides his quotation from Psalm 40 into two parts. The first deals with animal sacrifices under the Levitical system, which were closely connected with “the law.” Yes, David says, the law demanded the ritual of animal sacrifices; yet God was not primarily interested in the ritual.

The second part of the quotation sets up the contrast with the Messianic servant, who presents Himself to God as willing to do what the law could not do. Clearly the way of the Levitical sacrifices and the way of Christ’s sacrifice are *not* complementary systems. They can’t exist side by side, for the one excludes the other. Hence, our author’s conclusion: “*He sets the first aside* (the Old Covenant) *to establish the second* (the New Covenant). No compromise is possible between the two.

**3.** The Result of Christ’s Obedience (10:10): “*And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*.” An Old Covenant worshiper could only be purified from *ceremonial* defilement, each and every year. But a New Covenant saint is cleansed from all sin inwardly and restored to God’s favor continually. As we have already seen, the once for all sacrifice of Christ cleanses “*our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God*” (Heb. 9:14). May we never forget that the fruit of forgiveness *is* service!