

Merry Christmas! I can't believe that we're only four days away. Who's got their shopping done? Is everything wrapped? Is your heart ready? That one's a bit trickier. The outward stuff can be there: lights on the house, tree up and decorated, bits of décor all around the house, Christmas tunes playing, fireplace crackling, gifts purchased with all the bows in place, and cards in the mail, but sometimes our hearts lag behind. That's why our times together in these weeks leading up to Christmas are so important—it gives us a chance to slow down long enough to let our hearts catch up a little.

As we've walked through this Christmas series in Hebrews, we've been reminded that the Jesus who came at Christmas is superior to every and any other thing. He's greater than any of the prophets, even Moses. He's greater than all the angels. He is fully God and fully man so He perfectly represented God to us and perfectly represented us to God. And, because of all of that, we can rest because He's taken care of everything. Because Jesus came, we can have real hope and peace and joy.

We enjoy these things not just because a baby was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, but because of what He would ultimately accomplish through His death and resurrection. It's like Brian said a couple of weeks ago, "Christmas is special particularly because it's a prelude to Easter."¹ So, this morning, let me encourage you to slow down and let your heart catch up. We've already spent some great time in song and prayer. And, as we jump into today's text, invite the Lord to open your eyes, soften your heart and sharpen your mind so you can truly grasp the magnitude

¹ From Manger to Majesty: The Son's Solidarity. Pastor Brian Long.

of what He's done...for you. Ask Him to help you get your heart ready for some spectacular celebration and worship over the next few days.

Today we're looking at Hebrews 10:5-23 and talking about how Jesus' sacrifice makes it possible for us to freely draw near to God. If you haven't yet opened your Bible or pulled it up digitally, now's your chance.

Context

In the first four verses, the author drills down on how the sacrifices of the Old Testament were really limited in their ability to deal with sins. Verse 4 sums it up, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." The 'bulls and goats' language is pointing to what the Hebrew people called the Day of Atonement. We'll talk more about that more in a few minutes. For now, let's look at verses 5-10. I'm reading from the ESV. [Read v 5-10]

The Son's Superior Sacrifice (v 5-10)

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,

but a body have you prepared for me;

⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings

you have taken no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,

as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

⁸ When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second.

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The quoted section is actually from Psalm 40:6-8 which points to the coming Messiah. The author of Hebrews appropriately puts these words into Jesus' mouth; that's why we see "me" and "I" in these verses: Jesus is

speaking. Notice the second line, “but a body have you prepared for me...” This is God-in-the-flesh language. This is anticipation of Christ coming to earth more than 1000 years before Jesus was born! From Psalm 40, you can see Bethlehem on the horizon. And when the author cites this Psalm, his Jewish listeners would have known exactly what he meant.

Sacrifices fall Short

You may know how the sacrificial system worked in the Old Testament, but let me give you a quick refresher, just in case. When a person sinned, they kinked the relational hose with God. The relationship didn’t flow like it was supposed to. They weren’t able to relate to Him like the Lord wanted. God is holy, sin offends His holiness and keeps use from drawing close. So God gave the Israelites a way to restore relationship. The offender would select an unblemished animal from either the herd or flock and they would bring it to the priest. The offending person would place their hand on the animal’s head, symbolically placing their guilt upon it. The priest would slaughter the animal before the LORD and the blood would be sprinkled on the altar.² By doing this, the person’s sin was atoned for—it was covered—and relationship with God was restored. The sinner wasn’t judged and punished for their sin because the animal took the penalty in their place: one life substituted for another. Sacrifices like this happened almost every day. But these sacrifices didn’t necessarily change a sinner’s heart or discourage them from continuing to live in disobedience to God. Outwardly, things looked okay, but inwardly, not so much.

There was one day in the year that was uniquely special to the Hebrew people. It was the highest of holy days and was called the Day of Atonement. This day was distinct because it was the ONE day a year when Israel’s sins could actually be cleansed not just covered by blood sacrifices (Leviticus 16:30). On this day alone, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, the innermost part of the Tabernacle, behind the

² Read about all the different offerings in Leviticus 16.

curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, where the Ark was kept, over which the visible manifestation of God's presence would dwell. So this was the one time per year where the high priest would literally enter into God's presence. He would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal on the Atonement Cover, where God's presence rested, to atone for the sins of the people. When you think of Atonement, think At-One-Ment; being reconnected with God. But there was another animal involved: a living goat. The high priest would rest both hands on that goat's head and confess over it all the sins of Israel, putting all the guilt on the goat. That animal was then led out of the city and was released into the desert (Leviticus 16:21-22). This was the one day a year when sin left the camp. They not only had their sins covered, but removed.

The problem was, as the writer of Hebrews highlights, the sacrificial system didn't work because sacrificing a bull or goat couldn't do what really needed to be done: [Animal sacrifices couldn't] cleanse a guilty conscience and make someone holy. Outwardly, a person would be okay, but on the inside, they were still burdened by their sinfulness. They knew they were just a day away from another sacrifice. People could go through the motions, pretending to be sorry for their sin, but their hearts were cold. They weren't obedient to God's will. They didn't worship truly. That's why God didn't want what they were bringing. He didn't want their offerings; He wanted *them*.

Do your will...

Which is what makes verse 9 so powerful. "'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He does away with the first in order to establish the second." Jesus came to do away with the sacrificial system so that, through His obedient sacrifice, He could make people holy. It's God's will that His people be made holy and only through Jesus sacrificing His body could that be accomplished—once for all.

Pause for just a moment. Slow it down. God wants His people to be holy. The sacrificial system couldn't do the job, but it pointed to Jesus, the One

who *could* get the job done—once for all. Once. For *all*. That includes you. Wherever you've been, whatever you've done, Jesus gave His body as a sacrifice for *you* so that you could be made holy, get close to God and know Him intimately. He wants *you*. If you don't yet have a relationship with God, I'm going to give you an opportunity to change that near the end of our time today. This could end up being your best Christmas ever!

I'm sure you noticed it, but I want to draw attention to the sense of finality in verse 10: "And by that will we *have been sanctified...*" It's a done deal. Because of what Jesus did, we have been set apart to God. When you trust Jesus, that's a completed action—you belong to God. Once for all. Even in the ups and downs, the failures, the repeated, can't-seem-to-get-past-it, sin. You've been consecrated to God and Jesus' superior sacrifice made it happen.

Priestly Contrasts (v 11-14)

Now, look at verses 11-14 with me. [READ]

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

A few weeks ago, Doug kicked off our Christmas series, and he said, "In the temple there were no chairs. Why? Because the work of sacrifice was never finished. But Jesus—after making purification for our sins—sits. Not because He is tired. Not because He needs a break. He sits because the work is complete. Salvation is accomplished. The Son is enthroned."³ Every single day, people came to the tabernacle or temple with sacrifices and offerings. And every tomorrow they did it again. Every year came the Day of Atonement. The priests' work was never done because OT sacrifices couldn't take away, or permanently cleanse, sins.

³ From Manger to Majesty: The Son Revealed. Pastor Doug McNett.

"[T]he work of Christ is [like]...the Day of Atonement. Christ is depicted as the high priest who entered into the Holy Place to offer sacrifice. The sacrifice Christ offered, however, was not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood."⁴ Jesus was our substitute, our atoning sacrifice, taking our sin upon Himself: One life substituted for another. He took our punishment—He satisfied God's wrath. But, unlike the Day of Atonement, Jesus' sacrifice doesn't need repeating. God's wrath was satisfied through Jesus' atoning work once for all.

The blood of Christ covers and cleanses our sin: Cleanses! It doesn't hide our sin. Instead, it envelopes and removes it! Jesus, the One born in Bethlehem, makes the way for us to be connected to God again. What Jesus secured for us was an eternal redemption. Jesus' single, perfect, once for all time, sacrifice fulfilled the Father's will and perfectly positioned us to be in the presence of God like no OT sacrifice ever could.

He has 'perfected' those who are being set apart to God. Jesus has done the work. Jesus has accomplished, for us, what we could never do on our own. He made us holy, cleansed us, purified us, and made us able to be in the presence of God. In other words, God made it possible, through His perfect sacrifice, for you to be made holy and able to enjoy His presence now and forever. That's a gift, friends. We didn't earn it. We don't deserve it. *He* is both the Gift and the Giver. And we, just like Christmas morning, just receive the gift with gratitude.

Our Great High Priest fulfilled the will of God and sat down at the right hand of His Father. His work was finished. He's done it all. We just need to trust Him.

A New Promise (v 15-18)

Check out verses 15-18. The author underscores the finality of Jesus' work and the change that comes because of it. [READ]

⁴ Erickson, Millard J. *Introducing Christian Doctrine, Third Ed.* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 2015), 287.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,
¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,"
¹⁷ then he adds,
"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."
¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

In verses 5-7, Christ was the speaker from Messianic Psalm 40. Now we're hearing from the Holy Spirit the need for a new promise, a New Covenant, and a once for all forgiveness of sins. The author pulls this text from Jeremiah 31 to highlight, because of Jesus' perfect, final sacrifice, that there will be a New Covenant between God and His people. "Unlike the Old Covenant, which was based on adherence to the law, the New Covenant is based on grace and faith in Jesus Christ. It offers forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, enabling believers to live in accordance with God's will."⁵ That's why verse 16 says, "I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds." The New Covenant not only involved planting God's laws in the hearts of people—with the will and power to carry them out—it also came with the assurance that their sins were forever scrubbed from God's record, never to be used against them.⁶

Under the Old Covenant, and the sacrificial system, there were daily and annual reminders of sin. But under the New Covenant, there is no more remembrance of sin because Jesus has taken care of our sin once for all. Christ's sacrifice was final, and with it came a new way of living with God.

⁵ "Understanding the Old and New Covenants." BibleHub, 12/16/25, https://biblehub.com/topical/u/understanding_the_old_and_new_covenants.htm.

⁶See: Bruce, FF. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1990), 332 for more thorough description.

Let Us... (v 19-23)

So, in light of all this, look now at verses 19-23. [READ]

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Now that Jesus has taken care of everything through the perfect and final sacrifice of Himself, we get to live differently. He has given us a new way to do relationship with God. Because of Jesus, we can get close to God. Because of what Jesus has done, when we trust Him as our Leader and Forgiver, we are made clean, purified, made holy, set apart for God. We can walk right through the curtain into the most holy place where God dwells and rest in His presence. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence..." Because of Jesus, we are welcomed at the very throne of God because He's made us fit to be in God's presence. There's no more fear because our penalty has been paid. We no longer have to hold onto our sinful ways of thinking and living (though sometimes we do, out of habit). But the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us to empower us to live each day in obedience to God (which is His will) to transform and shape us to look more and more like Jesus. OT sacrifices could never do that! They could never change the heart of a person. But the once for all sacrifice of the One who came at Christmas can...

I remember the day I gave my life to Jesus. I was a 21-year-old Chico State student. Through a series of amazing events choreographed by the Lord, I found myself alone in my room, on my knees, and saying out loud, "Lord, I don't even know if You're there. But, if You'll take me, I'll serve you for the rest of my life." And immediately, I felt like I could breathe for the first time in my life. I had been cleansed and set apart for God. I didn't

know what I was doing. I didn't say the 'right' words, but God knew my heart, and He moved in. And I have never been the same. I wasn't changed because of *me*. I was changed because of what Jesus did. Now I get to be close to God. I have the privilege of enjoying an intimate relationship with the One who made me for Himself and loves me best and most.

Because of what Jesus has done, once for all, let's get close to God. And let us hold unswervingly to the hope we have in the finished work of Jesus because it all rests on Him, not us. Sometimes we live like it all depends on us. If that's true, we're toast. If it all depends on me, I'm in big trouble. On my own, I'm a dumpster fire. I will never be holy. I'll never be the man God designed me to be for His glory. I will remain in bondage to my sinful ways. But my faith, my hope, my obedience isn't anchored in *me* or *my* ability. It's anchored in Jesus and what He's accomplished once for all. Because of Jesus, our hope is secure. "...[H]e who began a good work in you will bring it to completion..."⁷ He's taken care of everything so, like Dillon said last week, let's rest in Him.

Takeaways...

So what do we do with all this at Christmas time? Here are a few things to take with you into your holiday week: First, remember that Jesus is superior in every way. He's better than the priesthood, prophets (even Moses), angels, and He brings the superior covenant. Next, remember that the One born in Bethlehem became like us to save us. He perfectly represented God to us and perfectly represented us to God. Third, remember that Jesus has taken care of everything; so rest in Him. Fourth, let go of guilt. Jesus took every bit of your sin with Him to the cross—everything you've done and everything still to come. He didn't come to remind you of your sin, but to deliver you from it. Your guilt doesn't honor Him. It suggests that you're unwilling to let go of the sin that God's scrubbed from your record. I'm not saying take sin lightly. I'm saying, receive the gift of His cleansing forgiveness with gratitude, and let go of

⁷ Philippians 1:6.

the guilt. Finally, rest assured in your salvation. Like I said, Jesus' sacrifice covers all our sin, past and present. "No sin is too great or too long in duration for Christ to forgive. Our stumbling does not negate the work of Christ."⁸ We must continue to say 'yes' to Jesus moment by moment. We're talking about obedience for a lifetime, one day at a time. Some days will be better than others. He has given you His Spirit to guide and empower you—so it's not about you white-knuckling it. Allow Him to work in and through you, even on the bumpy days, because "he who promised is faithful." Your salvation is secure, not because of your performance, but because of His.

Salvation Opportunity

Some of you don't yet have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus and what He has accomplished—once for all. You've heard that Jesus has taken care of everything. You realize that Jesus gave His body as a sacrifice for *you* so that you could be made holy and get close to God. You understand that the Jesus who came at Christmas ultimately came to die as your atoning sacrifice so that you could be perfectly prepared to be in God's presence—not just someday, but right now.

Like all of us, you know you didn't earn or deserve His forgiveness. It's a gift to you from the One who made you and loves you. *He* is both the Gift and the Giver. All you need to do, just like you do on Christmas morning, is receive His gift of forgiveness with gratitude.

So here's the opportunity and I'm going to ask you to be bold. If you want to receive the gift of forgiveness that Jesus offers through His perfect sacrifice on your behalf, and you've never done that before, just raise your hand. Let your raised hand be the sign that you want to receive the gift of Jesus this Christmas.

If that's you, let me encourage you to make the simple prayer on the screen your own. Just say, "Jesus, I know what You have done for me and

⁸ Guthrie, p 339.

I'm grateful. Right now I place my faith in You and I give every bit of myself to You. I'm holding nothing back. Purify me from my sin and make me the kind of person You designed me to be for Your glory. Fill me with Your Spirit and empower me to live for You every day. And as I celebrate this Christmas, open my heart and mind to all that it truly means because of You. Amen."

(Celebrate new followers. Encourage people to complete Connect card. Bring to me or take to Welcome Booth.)

Wrap

When we started this morning I encouraged you to invite the Lord to open your eyes, soften your heart and sharpen your mind so you can really embrace what He's done...for you. How's your heart? I hope you're even better prepared for some stunning celebration and worship over the next few days. Let me pray for you.

Pray

Thanks and gratitude for all You've done. Help us to live in the fullness of what Your once for all sacrifice accomplished. Help our celebrations to come out of the overflow of our "wow" for all You are. And may the quietest places of our hearts make You smile as we gather with family and friends and we rest in You.