

May 31, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Hebrews
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Hebrews 9:15-28

1. In what way is God's covenant of salvation similar to human wills?
2. When was the first indication in human history that God required a blood sacrifice to cover sins?
3. What is the significance of blood according to God's covenant with Noah?
4. In what ways did the tabernacle and that system of sacrifices picture the reality in heaven?

JESUS DIED ONCE TO MAKE THE COPIES REAL Hebrews 9:15-28

One of our sons and his wife have a piece of furniture that looks very old. It looks like an expensive antique. In reality, the builder of the piece of furniture went to England where he took detailed pictures of this piece. The he came home, built the cabinet, covered it with a stain that made it look just like the very old original, put nicks and gouges it in, and even an old, aged bronze clock face. The giveaway is when you open the door on which the clock is attached, you discover that it is a modern battery operated clock. The piece of furniture is only a copy of the original. If you are a purist regarding antique furniture, you will not be satisfied with the copy.

The Old Covenant with the Law, the tabernacle, the priests, the furniture, and all the sacrifices were but a copy of a heavenly reality. Those things pictured God's plan for a final sacrifice for sin – a once-for-all-time sacrifice that covers sin past, present, and future. This letter written to Jewish people who had come out of the Old Covenant into the New Covenant by faith in Jesus Christ illustrates how easy it is for people to revert to personal works rooted in old rituals as a means for trying to please God.

The argument for them and for us is that Jesus Christ has done what only He, the perfect high priest, could do. He has taken His own blood into heaven, into the very presence of God, where, based on that sacrifice, He procures mercy for all who call upon His name in faith to be forgiven of sin. In this magnificent work, we should rejoice for eternity. Only Jesus Christ accomplished what must be accomplished to complete our rescue from sin in heaven.

Christ Guarantees Our Inheritance (vv.15-22).

Jesus Christ has inaugurated our inheritance that is promised in God's will (vv.15-17). This means that those people who God has called in every age are redeemed from their law breaking (v.15). That is a seriously important matter. The author here penned, *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (v.15).*

This statement, about transgressions under the first covenant being redeemed, brings up a question that Christians have asked for ages: "How were people in the Old Testament times saved?" We have to consider the fact that God gave the details of His Law in the "first covenant." In that God initiated the Old Covenant, He left nothing to doubt about what He requires. He is perfectly holy and sinless. He created us in His image to reflect His glory. His Law plainly reveals that no one reflects God's glory. Falling short of God's glory is not an insignificant thing – it is sin. Paul revealed through the Holy Spirit, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).* As if failing to do what God designed us to do is not

bad enough, that sin requires death. God's general principle is: *Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4).*

That means that all humans are under a sentence of physical death. But "death" in this sentence also refers to eternal spiritual death, separation from God, punishment in hell. Does that sound hopeless? My hope is in the Lord – just like the Old Testament saint's hope was. The sinners in every age, who were called to eternal life in every age, . . . *are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (Romans 3:24-25).*

In His divine forbearance, God showed grace to people in the past. He allowed faith in the future work of the Seed of the Woman to cover the offenses of sin committed before Christ came. Under the Old Covenant, the sacrifices of the animals' blood protected the people from God's justifiable wrath. Each year the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement held back God's wrath against the sins the people had committed that previous year. But those particular people who God called to salvation expressed deep and personal faith in God's promise to provide a sacrifice that would redeem them forever from the penalty of sin. Abraham is the classic example of this, *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3).*

Christ's sacrifice paid the price to cover the offense of the sins of everyone who trusted God under the Old Covenant to provide the final sacrifice, the final Lamb, the Seed of the woman to buy them out (redeem) from sin's penalty. This was God's eternal plan. There has been no new developments in the plan. He has made no changes to the plan. God called people to salvation when the Old Covenant (law) was in force. He saved them by grace as they expressed faith in God's promise to forgive their sins based on the final sacrifice for sins that He would provide. God calls people to salvation while the New Covenant is in force. He saves us by grace as we express faith in God's promise to forgive our sins on the basis of the final sacrifice already paid.

This, our redemption, is an amazing plan. It is a well-attested plan because our redemption is stated in the **Will** of God. *For where*

a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive (vv.16-17). The writer of this letter illustrated the great promise with a picture of human covenants. We know what those are like. We all have written wills – or should have. In our wills, we spell out how our assets should be distributed after our death.

"After our death" is the key phrase in this statement. A will is important, but it does not go into effect until after we die. Pat and I have a will. It states specifically that when I die, everything goes to her. It also says that after she dies, whatever (if anything) is left will be distributed according to our desires stated in the will. But, none of the beneficiaries of our estate will benefit until both of us are dead.

God also has a **will**, and by that we are not referring to His divine purpose or desire. The Greek word used here is *diatheike* which describes an arrangement or the record of one's desires for the final disposition of one's estate. But the same Greek word is found in this text translated by the English word "covenant" where it refers to the agreement that God has spelled out by which we have fellowship with Him through sins forgiven. Then, we must wonder, does the use of the word **will** require that God has to die before the stipulations of His **will** go into effect as the word is used in reference to us humans? When we understand that the **will** referred to here is God's stipulations for the heirs of eternal life, the answer has to be "Yes."

This is where the stumbling block stood for the ancient Jews as well as for many people today. They could not imagine a Messiah who would suffer and die. They still struggled with the idea that their obedience to the law was necessary but a dead Messiah was not. So too many people today struggle with the simplicity of faith in Christ for sins forgiven instead of the performance of rituals and works which earn forgiveness of sins. In fact, it is this idea of the violent death of Christ in order to enact the inauguration of God's will that drives liberal and modernist religious teachers to call Christianity a slaughter-house religion.

Whether our faith is criticized is not the issue. It is not only true but necessarily true that God's plan for salvation requires blood sacrifice. That is why we find fourteen references to blood, death, suffering, and sacrifice in this short text (vv.15-28). For a person to trust or believe in only those things or truths he can explain is not the

exercise of faith. Most people do not understand the physics involved in a jet, that weighs 875,000 pounds when loaded with 600 passengers, flying through thin air. I never try to calculate the weight of luggage and passengers as I am sitting in my seat waiting for the jet to lift off from the runway. I, like most of the other passengers on board, just assume that it will happen. Then why do most of those passengers refuse to trust God in the necessity of shedding blood in order to inaugurate the stipulations of His covenant for forgiveness of sins?

In accordance with God's Law, His *will* was inaugurated through the sacrifice of blood (vv.18-22). The Law affirmed the principle of blood sacrifice. Our text states, *(18) Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. (19) For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, (20) saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."*

When God gathered the people born in Abraham's lineage at Mt. Sinai, He created the nation of Israel by giving them His Law, which established His covenant with them. In that setting, even before the tabernacle was built, God required that this covenant be inaugurated by the shedding and sprinkling of blood. By that time, God had already given the Ten Commands (Exodus 19-20). He called Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders to come up into the mountain to worship Him from a distance (Exodus 24:1). Then He called Moses into closer fellowship (v.2). After that spectacular event, they all returned to the people where Moses told them all of God's rules. In response to hearing God's stipulations, the people replied, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do"(v.3). That was agreement with God's covenant.

Now let's read the rest of the story. *And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD*

has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:5-8). Was there anyone present in that setting who did not understand that the shedding of blood was necessary for ratification of the covenant? At a later time, when they had built the tabernacle, the furnishings, and all the utensils for worship, the priests also sanctified them by the shedding and sprinkling of blood. *And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship (v.21).*

Why did God require this strange splattering of blood? God's plan for removing sin's penalty has always required blood sacrifice. The author of this letter stated that eternal principle in verse twenty-two. *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (v.22).* And so it has been. When Adam and Eve sinned, God responded by covering them with the skin of animals whose blood was shed to provide a temporary and symbolic covering for them (Genesis 3:21). Abel and Cain understood the symbol of shed blood as the acceptable sacrifice (Genesis 4:4). God made a covenant with Noah which was confirmed by the shedding of innocent animals' blood. The story stated, *Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar (Genesis 8:20).* In that setting, God established an important principle. The life principle is in the blood (Genesis 9:4). Therefore, shedding blood is serious business – especially a human's blood because God made us in His image (Genesis 9:6).

Likewise, God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to: 1) Build a nation through Abraham's seed; 2) Give a particular piece of land to that nation; and 3) Bless the entire world through Abraham's lineage (i.e. Messiah, the final sacrifice for sins). God confirmed that covenant by a blood sacrifice. The picture of that sacrifice is significant. God required Abraham to cut in two a heifer, a female goat, and a ram. In accord with the ancient rite of the *berith* (confirmation of a covenant), God walked between the pieces of the sacrifice. Most people would think that is very gross and unnecessary. But in the outworking of God's plans and purposes, the nation of His people shed the blood of multiplied thousands of animals to picture the covering over of sins.

It was all temporary protection from God's wrath until He provided the one acceptable, complete sacrifice He promised. The people heard God's Law, the stipulations of the first covenant. They promised to keep their responsibilities in the covenant. They didn't. So the priests continually offered blood sacrifices to ward off God's wrath. Each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered the required sacrifice of unintentional sins and unknown sins for the whole nation. And no one gained a purified conscience because the final sacrifice for sins was yet to be offered.

Jesus Christ Completes the Copies (vv.23-28).

Our Lord brought to completion heavenly copies through one action (vv.23-26a). All of the details of the ceremonial law are but a copy of what is already in heaven. *Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites (v.23a).* The word, "thus" refers back to the discussion about the "copies" that are purified. The picture and the lesson teaches that the price for forgiving sin is very high. Remember that God's eternal principle is that *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* That truth was pictured for centuries under the old covenant. When God introduced and ratified the covenant, He required that purification be demonstrated by all things being splattered with the blood of a sacrifice (vv.18-21).

How would you have responded if you had been one of the people in the crowd that day when the old covenant was ratified? Here was Aaron the priest taking the bowl full of blood and splattering some on the altar of sacrifice, some on the book of the covenant, and then throwing it on the very people who had declared, "All that the Lord has said we will do!" No wonder liberal thinkers call this a "slaughter-house religion." What was this all about? It was simply an illustration, a pointed illustration, that purification from sin comes only through the blood of a substitute sacrifice. It was a vivid picture of God's blueprints, God's law of order and requirements, that is forever established in heaven.

For eternity, God's plan is that sin will be forgiven only on the basis of the value of the shed blood of the acceptable Substitute. The priests pictured this heavenly reality day after day and especially the high priest did on the Day of Atonement. Though the tabernacle and

all that was involved in that worship was holy, the people associated with it were impure and needed forgiveness for their sins in order to approach God for fellowship.

But how do we explain the second half of this verse that says that heavenly things are also purified, *but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these (v.23b).* How is it possible that anything in heaven would need purifying? There are only about nine different theories that attempt to explain this statement. We will settle for one of the best explanations. The term *heavenly things* is contrasted to the earthly things which are copies. Heavenly things are spiritual things. The old covenant dealt with the obvious things, the earthly things, the physical things. The new covenant deals with spiritual things. That is why God writes it on the hearts of the people who come to Him for salvation.

Jesus Christ's bloody sacrifice inaugurated the New Covenant that Jeremiah had promised (Jer. 31:31-34). The author of this letter quoted it earlier in the letter: *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Hebrews 8:10-11).*

It isn't a sinner's religious activity, rituals, or personal sacrifices that need purifying. The sinner needs a new heart in order to enjoy fellowship with God through Christ. This is the new birth Jesus explained to Nicodemus (John 3). The spiritual part of man is what enters heaven and the presence of God immediately upon death. That part of us must be purified with a better sacrifice than the blood of bulls and goats. Only the blood Christ can allow us to have heavenly fellowship. John explained it like this. *That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1John 1:3). But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1John 1:7).*

Jesus Christ's sacrifice completes the transaction in the original setting (vv.24-26a). He has entered into the presence of God for us.

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (v.24). As our high priest, Jesus Christ has entered into the most Holy Place into heaven. The earthly tabernacle with the holy place, most holy place, altars, ark and furnishings were but pictures of God's temple in heaven. Heaven is the presence of God. No one knows where it is. No one knows exactly what it is. But we know that God is there, and we know that God has chosen to illustrate it to us by earthly tabernacle and stuff. Our hearts are cleansed from sin only because Jesus Christ entered into the original Holy of Holies – into heaven itself.

Jesus Christ, our high priest, entered God's presence once with His own blood. *(25) Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, (26a) for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.* He only had to enter God's presence once because He took with Him the once-for-all-time sacrifice of His own blood. Jesus Christ has suffered for sins one time because His offering was so valuable.

Jesus came to earth once to pay for sin. He will come to earth a second time to complete the promise. Our Lord appears twice in order to bring all things to completion (vv.26b-28). He appeared once in order to remove sin's penalty. *But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (v.26b).* Jesus appeared one time for all time at the culmination of the ages. That is not to say that when Jesus paid the price for sin that all ages came to an end. Rather, Jesus Christ's appearance for the purpose of paying the redemption price for sin is the culmination. All the ages center on this one grand event. Sins past, present, and future are paid for in this one appearance. Once He paid the redemption price, Jesus abolished sin's tyranny or authority over those who are purified by His sacrifice.

So, too, our Lord will appear again to rescue those who wait for Him. Humanity illustrates this "once-for-all" principle. A person dies once. After death comes the judgment. There is no way to change the evidence on which the judgment is based after we die. *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (v27).* Likewise, Jesus offered the acceptable sacrifice for sins once for all. *So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many,*

will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (v.28). Even as a person dies one time, so Jesus died once to bear the sins of the many. Notice that He did not bear the sins of all which is universal salvation.

Only those who accept His sacrifice for their sins by faith will be forgiven. And because we are forgiven, when Jesus Christ appears the second time, it will be for rescue. People who will be rescued from eternal punishment (the penalty for sin) are eagerly waiting for Him. Do you look forward to Christ's return? Do you anticipate eternal rescue? Do you trust Jesus Christ and His sacrifice alone to save you?