

Shadow and Fulfillment

Hebrews 9:1-14

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We come this morning to Hebrews 9:1-14. As we go into greater depth because of the preacher of Hebrews, we go into greater depth with regard to the work of the priests under the old covenant and how Christ is the fulfillment, the end of those practices, once and forever. So this morning I will tell you that this is slightly different than the way I would normally preach a text, because it is very visual in nature. So there will be several slides we'll be looking at together to give a little bit more context. So it may feel at first a little bit more like a Sunday school, but we'll move forward together. Fair enough? Okay. Hebrews 9. Hear now God's Word, as he gives to us what was the shadow and then the fulfillment of God's promises from all eternity.

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. [ESV]

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please, pray with me.

Now we ask that you, O Lord, would take this word, rich in detail. May you uncover it for us, because it has been plainly written, and we can begin to understand aided by your Spirit how and in what ways Christ is our great High Priest. But in studying it together, may you help us to arrive at a place of sincere gratitude and celebration. For Christ, who is our High Priest, has made once and forever a sacrifice that purifies us from all sin. And that we can walk in newness of life. Help us to see that this morning in greater detail. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So you will see in your outline this morning that I have not only titled the sermon "Shadow and Fulfillment," but that is indeed the outline for this morning's sermon. You'll see with regard to "shadow" in your outline—you'll see we're going to look at three things quickly, which is: the architecture, the activities, and the attributes of the early temple, and how and in what ways it both helps us understand who God is, but how it was ultimately a shadow as we look forward to the fulfillment.

But one key thing I want to remind you of. There is no way—at least I, after studying it these many years—I still read these passages, I still go back to Leviticus 16 of which this chapter is pointing to, and I get to the end of it, and I go, "This sounds insane." How do we make sense of what we read here in the twenty-first century? I hope to have some bridge-building exercises and illustrations for us to do just that, that perhaps we will not reach the conclusion that it is insane—but actually makes a lot of sense. But actually makes many of our activities look insane. Okay. Are you ready?

Let's look at a map. First I'm going to show you what is called the Exodus route. Now, I apologize for how small this is, but I've done the best I can. But I want you to see that here we have in Egypt where the people of God, Israel, were enslaved in Egypt. You will know that during the exodus, they fled as a part of their exodus from the Egyptian pursuers. And where they would end up is all the way down here, which is known as the Strait of Tehran. And this is where they would cross the Red Sea, what you then have is they then end up in a wilderness. Now, a wilderness not like we think of a wilderness covered with trees and so forth. This was a wilderness that would often be quite bare and desert-like. But a wilderness nonetheless is a place of great danger.

And so as they cross the Red Sea, what you would then see is, here, is they would end up at Mount Sinai as they were following Moses. And at Mount Sinai, here in lower Arabia, is where he received the Ten Commandments chiseled on stone, and all the instructions that he was given with regard to how God was to be worshiped, how he was to set up a tabernacle, its exact measurements, and so forth. The problem was, as you know, is that as Moses would continue to lead them, they would end up here. And as they would wander in this wilderness in their disobedience and turning their back on God, wondering how God was going to be faithful to them, God said, "You are a people who are stiff-necked, and you've turned your back towards me. And you have worshipped false gods instead of being faithful to me. This generation will not enter the Promised Land," which is just up here at the very top right of the map, where you see Jerusalem and Jericho. Jericho being just north and east of Jerusalem.

But here on the top right-hand corner, you'll see this word here. You'll see *Shateen*, which is where they were encamped. And from here, they sent out the twelve spies. And the twelve spies went into the Promised Land and brought back report, as you perhaps are familiar with the story and the narrative. It's that they brought back a report—ten of the twelve said, "We're going to be in deep trouble. We're never going to be able to conquer the people who are in the Promised Land, even though God has said we will take hold of it." Yet two said they would. One, of course, was Joshua.

But Moses disobeyed the Lord in a fit of anger, in deciding that he would use his authoritarian position and at will disobeyed God. And God said, "You will not be the one who will lead my people into the Promised Land." But it would be Joshua. So Joshua would lead the people of God across the Jordan and over here into Jericho. Now, around Jericho, thereabouts would be a plain—a plain which is called Gilgal. And in Gilgal was a wide-open plain surrounded by mountains. And it was here that they began to build what God has said they were to design: a tabernacle.

Now, all these years, some 45 years, finally they reached the Promised Land after they had crossed the Red Sea. After all that time, and that generation passing away, and now their children and grandchildren are traveling over into the Promised Land. They had all that time been traveling in tents in their tribes. And God would follow them and be with them with the glorious cloud of his presence. But here in Gilgal, it would be constructed a tent, a tabernacle for him. But just so you can see how very likely they were assembled and how they were instructed to assemble themselves—so here you will see the twelve tribes of Israel all surrounded as according to their instructions, how they were to be laid out. And in the center, you will see how here you have the tabernacle. And these right around were the Levitical priesthood and those who represented these tribes. And in the very center where you see the smoke rising of sacrifices, there is the tabernacle.

But what did the tabernacle look like? What was its construction? What were its architecture? So before you move to that slide, let me just say that this text tells us a little bit about that construction and that architecture. And what you will know is that there was an altar, which was called the Most Holy Place. And then outside the Most Holy Place, which was protected by a curtain, was the next place called the Holy Place. That was protected by a curtain. And then outside of that was a place where offerings were made, burnt offerings, and where they were to receive ceremonial washing. The only people who were allowed beyond this gate here, which you'll see the entrance curtain, were the Levitical priesthood right in this area.

And in this area what you have is the bronze altar, which is where they would offer the two goats which were referred to earlier today. The one was a goat which was offered for the sin offering. The other was a goat which we call the scapegoat, which the sins of the people of Israel—the hands of the priest were laid on the goat, and it was free to go into the land of Azazel. And it would receive the laying-on of hands and the sins of the people of God. It would go out into the wilderness. And of course, it would take the sins of the people physically and visibly away as a strong metaphor for what God was doing. And it would be separated from the people. But that goat, too, would meet its end in the wilderness.

But here is this brazen lever. Here is where the priest would have to wash himself—his hands, his clothes, and the like. Here, only the High Priest would go into this first curtain into the Holy Place. And inside the Holy Place was the lampstand and the showbread. Then into the Most Holy Place, and only once a year, first he would offer the blood of the sacrifice of the goat. There it would be offered first for his sins and then for the sins of the people. This is what is being described in this text. And only once a year, which was called the Day of Atonement. These regulations, this architecture of an altar, lampstand and showbread, a place to wash your hands, a place for burnt offerings—all of this was designed roughly about 40 yards of an American football field and was at the center of the area of Gilgal for God's people to reside.

This architecture, as we learn from the text, had rich symbolism and was clad in gold and rich ornamentation. All of this demonstrates that God is a God who is to be worshipped, not by our design, but by his. It also demonstrates that the glory of the ornamentation of all that was ornamental around the temple itself and the tabernacle was all to demonstrate that our God is a God who designs how he will be worshipped, but also is a reflection of his glory, of his power, and his holiness. It's important to remember, because this architecture is meant to tell us several things, which we'll get to in just a moment. But to hold here for this understanding, that this was designed by God, given to the people, and it was at the center of their existence.

What were the activities? Activities which we learn in this text. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, there were three central acts which were given. First among these activities was purification offerings. The purification offering was to cleanse the Lord's house. Why? Because Aaron the High Priest and his family were sinners. And because they were sinners entering into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place—because they were sinners, they defiled the real estate. And so there had to be purification offerings to bring about the ritual cleansing of the actual space of the building of the tabernacle. Incense

would have to be burned so that Aaron could not actually see the tabernacle that contained the Ten Commandments. Because to see it is the representation of God's presence. To actually see it, he would have lost his life. So these incense and these purifications rites were to cleanse the actual place, because Aaron was a sinner. And the people had sinned. And because God was present with them, their sin affected where he resided. And it must be purified.

Secondly is the offering of the goat. As a zeal goat, which was to bear, as one scholar calls it, "to bear the lethal burden for their sins." And then their sins were offered on the goat's head, and it was sent out. Now, something to be reminded—that the Day of Atonement was designed by God as a day of offering of sacrifices for unintentional sins. Meaning, there are sins that we willfully do that we're cognizant of. But because we're sinners and broken by our very nature, including the Israelites, there were things they were doing that they didn't know they were doing or that were unintentional. And so this day was a day of reminding them that while the offerings offered to them forgiveness, it also made them extremely aware and conscious of their guilt before a holy God. Which is why these offerings were given in very visible and tangible ways.

The third activity was burnt offerings. These burnt offerings were offered again for the same reasons, but by these means were to symbolize how these offerings were given to the Lord, and he would, as it were, witness and actually smell how the people of God were mourning because of their sin. So what does this tell us? We have the architecture. We have the activities. What does it tell us? I want you to hear the attributes that this whole practice demonstrates for us.

First and foremost, can you go back to the slide just before this, please? Over against every other religion, God was not a God that was found to be in secret or that he stood far off, and these offerings were given so that the gods would not come down and crush. That is not the God of the Bible. These offerings were not given to keep him from wrath and coming down. No, what this passage tells us is that our God from the very beginning was Emanuel, God With Us. Why? Because this demonstrates for us, as this text illustrates, that if my people are in tents, I too will dwell in a tent in their midst. My presence will be with them. Our God is with us. And he dwells with his people.

Secondly, it tells us because of the level of detail and the craftsmanship and the artisans that were necessary for building this, maintaining it, taking it down, traveling with it—all of it tells us just how beautiful our God is. And he is worthy of worship, honor, and respect. He is glorious. Because watch this. Can you go back to the final slide? Thank you. So here, what we see is this. It's that the people of God, just like you and I, were to walk out today, we can see the clouds. We can see the sun. But we can't see to the utter ends of the universe. The people of God surrounding the temple could see the offerings were being offered. They could see the smoke. But what they couldn't see—even, indeed, what the High Priest Aaron couldn't see, even if he went into the Most Holy Place, he could not physically witness and see God's presence. What does that tell us? That God is ultimately so glorious, though he is with us, yet he is so *other* than who we are. It tells us that our God is glorious in the fullest sense of that word. He is imminent, meaning he is close. But he is also eternal. He is unapproachable in his light. It's to tell us that our God is glorious.

But I must say also, this whole system tells us that our God has wrath on sin. And that his wrath must call for payment for sin, the sacrifice for sin. But notice this. God does not do away with his wrath willy-nilly. He offers a way to deal with it, and that was through sacrifice. And through his grace, he announces his wrath against sin, but also the way to remove his wrath and to receive forgiveness. Which leads us to the last attribute among many others, in that our God is gracious. This is a picture of God's grace—his presence, his glory, his wrath, but his utter desire to invite the people of God to say, "This is how you are forgiven. This is how you are renewed. This is how you know you belong to me. This is how the world knows. In this valley, this is how the world knows that I said you are my people and I will be your God."

Now, doesn't this sound a little crazy when you look back on it, when you read the text? The offering of goats and blood and having to do ritual purification? Of course it does, in some sense. Because we tend to think of it from twenty-first century eyes. We tend to think, as Westerners, we look back at it and go, "That is so crazy old." But only the west looks cockeyed at the idea of offering animals as a means of offering that which is valuable to someone as a sacrifice to something which is more important. Now, we don't offer animals. But think about it for any given Sunday in the fall. In places around the United States—I know you're going to think "not me," but just hold with me for just a moment—there are people who dress up ritually. They paint their faces. They do things to food that should not be done. They do massive gatherings of tribes of football fans, college and professional. They have songs that they sing. They have marches that they do. They have rituals that they say. They have rocks that they touch, towels that they touch only then. And they go into a stadium. And they scream at the top of their lungs. Why? Because they are identifying. And then when one of their greatest, be it Aaron, of their team enters into the Most Holy Place of the end zone, then with great ritual dancing, the whole place of fans rise up in worship and hollering, *hallelujah!* The Ravens—is that their names?—the Ravens have finally scored! Right? You get what I'm saying?

If we were to rewind the tape and we were to say to our brethren way back when, "Let me tell you about what's going to happen. Now, we don't offer animals. Well, we sort of do—hot dogs and stuff—but that's another part. Don't eat that. Well, you can't eat that, actually, because you're Israelite. But that's beside the point. The reality is, we spend thousands, millions, and billions of dollars in this country to do the kinds of things that to another generation would be utterly insane. And yet we think of ourselves as reasonable, educated, modern, and progressive.

When seen in that light, we have to be careful of generational arrogance. We worship. We have our high priests. We have our sacrifices. We have our rituals. We've just convinced ourselves that it's a little less crazy than this sounds. But it's not. When you recognize, if we take God on the merits of who he declares himself to be, as a God of holiness, a God of grace, a God of wrath who offers forgiveness, this takes on a whole new light, and it changes the way a people react. When they were freed from slavery, when they are freed from sin, when they are offered forgiveness and renewal, that God takes on a whole new picture.

And this was just the shadow. Just the shadow. As this text describes, after going through and seeing the ways in which these preparations and the work of the high priests and the unintentional sins of the people—all of this could not correct their conscience. Why? Even though forgiveness was offered, they were still very conscious of their guilt. It could not transform the conscience, which is why it was a shadow. And now we hear of the fulfillment. In verse 8, it simply says to us:

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

What does this tell us? It tells us that Christ is now able to do what all of that activity could not do. That on behalf, finally, on behalf of others, a sacrifice was offered from one who is pure and sinless. He offered a sacrifice not for himself, but purely for others—for you and for me. He did so not by going into this

tabernacle or this temple, but rather, he did by his death. He entered into the Most Holy Places of the most holy of places: heaven itself. And offered that blood of his sacrifice that we would receive a new conscience. Not just forgiveness, but new minds, new hearts, new ways of living, new ways of understanding. And he says here, “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Here's the reality. Do you and I any less have unintentional sins than the people of Israel? Absolutely not. We unintentionally sin. We do things we ought not to, and we leave things undone that we ought to do, and we're not even aware of it. The question is, do we walk around with a conscience of guilt? Or are we able to go again and again to be reminded of the gospel—that Christ's sacrifice, not once a year but once and forever, as the ultimate Day of Atonement, this would never be necessary again? We do not have to send anyone on our behalf as a real sincere person to offer anything to God because of our sins. Christ has gone before us as the High Priest, once and forever. He's taken all of our sins—all that we have committed, all that we will commit, intentional and unintentional. And that blood has been offered. That sacrifice once and forever. And our conscience can be purified.

Does that mean that the presence of sin is not still here? Yes, it is present. But do we then have to get down on our knees every Sunday or every time we feel really broken by our sin and grovel our way back to God? Do we have to sit down on a Monday morning or a Sunday afternoon and read our Bibles and go, “But God, now I'm *really* serious about this. God, I want you to see. I'm going to start praying more. Fifteen minutes a day.” Or, “I really need to wrap my mind around all the nature and the depth of the gospel. I have to get this right before I can really get it.” Thanks be to God—no, no, and no. It is never by our activity, our righteousness, our intentions, our motives, that will ever make us pure. Never. Only one sacrifice can do that: Jesus, and him crucified. He's gone into a place designed not by human hands but by the glory of God. And he has offered himself. And he says, “It is finished. You can be forgiven. You can be made one with me. You can be reconciled to your Holy Father once and forever. Not again and again. Not groveling.”

So what should this do to us as a people? We don't have to march out of here by last name or by blood or zip code or achievement. We don't have to have someone going before us. You don't need me to come before the Lord. Christ as our High Priest has done that. What is required of us, then? If our conscience through Christ can be purified, if we have been offered to the Lord as his people through the blood and sacrifice of Christ and his resurrection, then what is called of us? We become a people not laden with guilt, but a people infused with gratitude. If the people of Israel at the end of the Day of Atonement, on the tenth day of the seventh month, celebrated and praised God for what they had just witnessed, the offering of their sins—if they could celebrate that knowing that a year from then they're going to have to do it again, how much more then ought we not to be a people of celebration and gratitude? Amen?

In a few moments, we're going to be singing a hymn together. I know I'm overtime, but almost done here. We're going to be singing a hymn called “Arise, My Soul, Arise.” I want you to hear the words.

Arise, my soul, arise,
shake off your guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice,
in my behalf appears;
Before the throne my Surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above,
for me to intercede;

His all redeeming love,
His precious blood, to plead;
His blood atoned for every race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds He bears;
received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers;
they strongly plead for me:
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

My God is reconciled;
His pardoning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child;
I can no longer fear
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

We are to be a people that arise and celebrate, rejoice, and give thanks. How much more has the fulfillment through Christ achieved for us? Dear sinner, your Savior has died for you. Dear sinner, forgiveness and newness is for you. Dear sinner, celebration and gratitude—may it pour forth from all of us for his glory and his glory alone. Let's pray.

Lord, help us to be a people this morning of great joy, humility, gratitude, and love. For we are a people saved by grace through faith. And this is not of ourselves; it is a gift of God. We thank you for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was offered on our behalf and is now our High Priest once and forever. Make us a people, then, O Lord, of your work, of your handiwork by your Spirit. Make us a church increasingly of joy and celebration for nothing else, and based on nothing else, and for nothing else than the glory of Christ our Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.