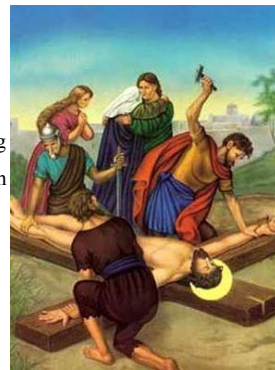


Micah 5:2-5a

Psalm 80

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-55

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I HAVE COME TO DO THY WILL, O GOD

Today's lesson in Hebrews 10 is toward the end of a section of the letter that compares the old and new covenants and explains why the sacrifice Jesus Christ made as our high priest is superior to all the sacrifices made, year after year, by the priests of the Old Testament. Several weeks ago we discussed v.1-4, which present a summary of why this is true, so we begin today by reviewing these verses.

Heb 10:1-4. *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. ³But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. ⁴For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.*¹

- *The law has but a shadow of the good things to come* (v.1). Note that v.1 says the law *has* a shadow, not *is* a shadow, of the good things to come. The NLT says the law was “*a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves.*” What in the law could be described as a *shadow* of the salvation offered today by God in Christ? According to the final words of v.1, what can Christ do that the law could never do? What evidence is given in v.2-3 to prove the premise in v.1, that living according to the law can't change permanently the hearts of those doing so?

In other words, we see in this that the OT sacrifices had a temporary effect on those who offered them. They were repeated annually. Imagine living under a system like this. It would be like living on credit. Every year you would bring your gift to the priest, who would offer it in payment for the sins you had racked up during the year. Then you would begin again, always preparing for the next day of atonement, on and on until the end, with nothing ever really changing.

At first, God was pleased with these sacrifices. They had at least the effect of reminding the people of their sins (v.3), which in turn caused them to attempt to obey God and live in peace with one another. Throughout the book of Leviticus (no less than 16 times), the burnt offering is said to produce “*a pleasing odor to the Lord.*” This was true especially when the sin was done unwittingly. God was always willing to forgive when a person became aware of his own sin, repented, and brought his atoning sacrifice for the priest to burn at the altar. See Lev 4:27-35 or 5:14-6:7, for example.

But as time went on, God ceased to be pleased – not with the sacrifices themselves, but with the way the people were offering them. Men began to think God required the sacrifices because he needed them, the way we sometimes believe God needs our own goods or services. God's reply is clear in Psalms 50 and 51: “*If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me ...*” (see Ps 50:12-23), and, “*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*” (Ps 51:17).

Men also began to see the act of offering a sacrifice as a social obligation, as some today view attending a church service – an obligation to be fulfilled while leading a worldly life. So God began to warn Israel about this through the prophets. Discuss Isa 1:12-13, “*When you come to appear before me, who requires of*

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV unless noted.

you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies -- I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly ...” The NLT version of Heb 10:3 says, *“Those yearly sacrifices reminded them of their sins year after year.”*

In short, the OT sacrifices were *but a shadow of the good things to come* because they never did, nor ever could, redeem the people and keep them permanently in a saving relationship with their God.

- *For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins* (v.4). Compare this saying with Chapter 4 of Leviticus, which gives detailed instructions for sacrificing bulls and goats to atone for sins. In each case, the priest sacrifices the animal on the altar and *“makes atonement ... and they (or he) shall be forgiven”* (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35). Discuss the difference between “atone for” and “take away.”

Under the old covenant, when the people gave sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, their sins were forgiven. But atonement doesn't *take away* – it doesn't *cleanse* a man or *free him from the bondage* of sin. Only the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Review John 8:31-36 which concludes, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”*

In the light of v.1-4, why does the statement, “Basic Christianity consists of learning all you can about Jesus and doing your best to obey his teaching” miss the mark? How would you restate it?

Heb 10:5-10. *Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; ⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,’ as it is written of me in the roll of the book.” ⁸When he said above, “Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, “Lo, I have come to do thy will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

- *He said, “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me...”* (v.5). This is what the Son said to the Father when he *“came into the world”* (v.5). The NLT helps to clarify v.5-7: *That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God – as is written about me in the Scriptures.’”* In other words, Jesus came into the world and offered his own body to replace all the sacrifices men had been making to atone for sin, in accordance with all the prophetic Scripture.

- *“A body hast thou prepared for me ... I have come to do thy will ...”* (v.5-7). The text in v.5-9 quotes Ps 40:6-8, *“Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire; but thou hast given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering thou hast not required. Then I said, ‘Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart’,”* with changes that make it sound Messianic. It is a difficult passage to interpret. However, the Hebrew for *open* or *opened* means to open in the sense of *digging* or *boring* a hole (Strong's #3738). This suggests a possible interpretation of the saying, *“a body hast thou prepared for me.”* In OT law, a Hebrew slave could marry another servant. However, at the end of his service, his bride continued to be the master's property. If the servant loved both his bride and his master, he could agree to remain in his master's service for the rest of his life, and keep his bride. In the words of Ex 21:1-6, *“... then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.”*

Jesus Christ did this. He *“emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross”* (Phil 2:7-8). Instead of having his ear pierced with an awl against a doorpost, he put his hands and feet against the wood of the cross and allowed them to be pierced with nails. Like the slave, Jesus surrendered his life to the will of his Master. Why? On account of his great love for the Master, and for his bride, the church. He gave up his life for you and all who come to him for forgiveness and cleansing from sin. *“And by that,”* our lesson concludes, *“... we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*