

## Eternal Redemption

## Hebrews 9:11-14

Last week I told you that I attended the Administrative Committee meeting in Indianapolis. What I neglected to tell you was on Friday night we were invited to a gala retirement event for Bishop T. Garrett Benjamin, the retiring pastor of Light of the World Christian Church, formerly historic Second Christian Church of Indianapolis. The event was a black tie affair with well-known preachers, speakers and area politicians. We were all invited, but after my numerous travel mishaps this summer I decided that the \$100 per person event was not within my budget. Dr. Sharon Watkins and her husband Dr. Richard Lowery attended along with our General Church moderator, Regina Morton. They reported that it was indeed a grand event. But as great as the event of worship and celebration it was pale in comparison to worship and praise of heaven.

This got me to thinking about worship and its historic purpose. William Barclay in his commentary on *The Letter to the Hebrews* says in order for us to understand the passage that I just read in our hearing we must understand the Hebrews understanding our worship. When we try to understand this passage, we must remember three things which are basic to the thought of the writer to the Hebrews. First, religion is access to God. Religion's function is to bring the worshipper into God's presence. Second, this is a world mire pale imitation and imperfect copy of the real world which is currently beyond our reality. So the function of all worship is to bring the worshippers into contact with the eternal realities. To aid in this Moses and the people of Israel build a tent, called a Tabernacle while they were in the wilderness. So worship of the Tabernacle was

meant to bring the worshippers into contact with the eternal realities; but the earthly Tabernacle and its worship are pale copies of the real Heavenly Tabernacle and its heavenly worship; and only the real heavenly Tabernacle and the real heavenly worship can give access to reality. Third, there can be no religion without sacrifice. Purity is a costly thing and access to God demands purity. Somehow person's sin must be paid for and their uncleanness cleansed. With these ideas in mind the writer to the Hebrews explains to his readers that Jesus is the only High Priest who brings a sacrifice that can open the way to God and that sacrifice is Jesus himself.

To remind his readers and help them understand his point, he refers to some of the great sacrifices which the Jews were in the habit of making under the earthly Tabernacle worship or old covenant with God. First he mentions the sacrifice of bullocks and of goats. In this he is referring to two of the great sacrifices on The Day of Atonement. The bullock was offered by the High Priest for his own sins and the scapegoat, on which the people placed their sins, was led away to the wilderness bearing the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:15, 21, 22). He also reminded them of the sacrifice of the red heifer. This strange ritual is described in Numbers 19. Under Jewish ceremonial law, if a person touched a dead body, they were unclean. The person was barred from the worship of God, and everything and everyone they touched also became unclean. To deal with this there was a prescribed method of cleansing. A red heifer was slaughtered outside the camp. The priest sprinkled the blood of the heifer before the Tabernacle seven times. The body of the animal was then burned, together with cedar and hyssop and a piece of red cloth. The resulting ashes were stored outside the camp in a clean place and constituted a purification for sin.

The writer to the Hebrews tells of these sacrifices and then declares that the sacrifice that Jesus brings is far greater and far more effective. The ancient scholars said the new tabernacle which brought men and women into the very presence of God was the body of Jesus. John said it this way: "One who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The worship of the ancient tabernacle was designed to bring men and women into the presence of God, but that it could do only in the most shadowy and imperfect way. The coming of Jesus really brought men and women into the presence of God, because in him God entered this world of space and time in a human form and to see Jesus is to see what God is like.

The great superiority of the sacrifice Jesus brought are seen in three ways. The ancient sacrifices cleansed a person's body from ceremonial uncleanness; the sacrifice of Jesus cleansed the soul. In theory all sacrifice cleansed from transgressions or breaking of the ritual law; it did not cleanse from sins of the audacious, bold, arrogant heart and that sins because it makes selfish choices of disobedience. In the case of the red heifer, it was not moral uncleanness that its sacrifice wiped out but the ceremonial uncleanness because of touching a dead body. A worshipper's body might be clean ceremonially and still their heart be torn with guilt and shame. One might feel able to enter the tabernacle and still feel far away from the presence of God. The sacrifice of Jesus takes the load of guilt from a person's conscience or sense of right and wrong. The animal sacrifices of the Tabernacle worship and old covenant could still leave a person in estrangement from God; the sacrifice of Jesus shows us a God whose arms are always outstretched and in whose heart is only love.

The second way that the sacrifice of Jesus is superior is that the sacrifice of Jesus brought eternal redemption. The idea was that men and women were under the dominion of sin; and just as the purchase price had to be paid to free a man or

woman from slavery, so the purchase price had to be paid to free a man or woman from sin.

Lastly, the sacrifice of Christ enabled a man or woman to leave the deeds of death and to become the servant of the living God. That is to say, he or she did not only obtain forgiveness for past sin, but enabled one in the future to live a godly life. The sacrifice of Jesus was not only the paying of a debt; it was the giving of a victory. What Jesus did puts a person right with God and what he does enables a person to stay right with God. The act of the Cross brings to humans the love of God in a way that takes away our terror; the presence of the living Christ brings to us the power of God so that we can win a daily victory over sin, and have eternal redemption.

Westcott outlines four ways in which Jesus' sacrifice of himself differs from the animal sacrifices of the old covenant.

(i) The sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary. The animal's life was taken from it; Jesus gave his life. He willingly laid it down for his friends, you and me.

(ii) The sacrifice of Jesus was spontaneous. Animal sacrifice was entirely the product of law; the sacrifice of Jesus was entirely the product of love. We pay our debts to some we owe because we have to; we give a gift to our loved ones because we want to. It was not law but love that lay behind the sacrifice of Christ.

(iii) The sacrifice of Jesus was rational. The animal victim did not know what was happening; Jesus all the time knew what he was doing. He died, not as an ignorant victim caught up in circumstances over which he had no control and did not understand but with eyes wide open.

(iv) The sacrifice of Jesus was moral. Animal sacrifice was mechanical; but Jesus' sacrifice was made, through the eternal Spirit. The sacrifice on Calvary was not a matter of prescribed ritual mechanically carried out; it was a matter of Jesus

obeying the will of God for the sake of humanity. Behind it there was not the mechanism of law but the choice of love.<sup>1</sup>

The Old Covenant rituals could not change a person's heart. This means that the emphasis was on the external ceremonial cleansing. So long as the worshiper obeyed the prescribed regulations, he or she was declared clean. It was "the purifying of the flesh" but not the cleansing of the conscience. The ministry of the New Covenant is internal. "I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10). This work is done by the Holy Spirit of God (2 Cor. 3:1–3). But the Spirit could not dwell within us if Jesus Christ had not paid for our sins. Cleansing our consciences cannot be done by some external ceremony; it demands an internal power. Because Jesus Christ is "without spot [blemish]" He was able to offer the perfect sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

The writer wished his readers would give up all thoughts of returning to Old Covenant rituals. Their consciences ought to be perfectly free from any need to engage in such things and, retaining their confidence in the perfect effectiveness of the Cross, they should hold fast their profession and serve the living God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 101

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Heb 9:11

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:801