

The Sufficient Sacrifice.
Hebrews 10:1-4

Matthew 9:1-13

Revelation 85:8-14

Responsive Worthy is the Lamb.

This morning we are going to start working our way through Chapter 10 of the book of Hebrews. As we read our passage this morning you will notice that this is actually a continuation of what we covered in chapter 9 last week. Talking about the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice in comparison to the old. If you thought we were going to be moving onto a new subject... well you were wrong :) I find it hard to believe that any Christian who is still holding to the idea of the old covenant laws being relevant toward us who are under Christ can go through this book and at least not question that view. For this entire book is about how Christ has replaced, and how he is the fulfillment of all of those which came before rendering them obsolete. Every step of the way through this book the Author has been disassembling the notion that anything from the old covenant is operable in the Christian today. Instructing this readers over and over that Christ is superior in all things, and that all things existed before pointed to him, prophesied of his coming, pointed to the need for redemption, and sanctification outside of ourselves.

So let us start this morning by reading the first 10 verses in chapter 10. So right away in the first 4 verses here we get this picture of Christ's priesthood and how it supersedes the levitical priesthood. This is a subject that has already been touched on here in this book but the Author returns to it, building upon it even more. The first thing that he points out, is that the law itself was a shadow of the good things to come, that is, the law was not the substance, the law was but a mere shadow of something else. Again we can see this idea of the progressive revelations of God's working through mankind. Revealing himself, and his nature, and man's need for redemption through various means, over various times. These series of shadows, such as Melchizedek, the nation of Israel itself, the temple, the law, the sabbath, the sacrifices, the list goes on and on, all of these things are just shadows of the good things to come, which is Christ.

Being a shadow of something already proves the incompetence of these things, their inability to do that which the substance of them can do. Much in the same way our own shadows are capable of doing nothing on their own, they can't touch, feel, grab, or effect anything, in fact that can't even move without us moving. I know it seems a silly analogy, but really I think it is an important one for that is exactly what the author here is saying by using the term shadow. They are but a dark reflection of what is to come, they only exist because of the substance, because of the thing in which they are connected to. Hebrews 7, talking about Melchizedek says, that if "perfection were through the Levitical priesthood, for under it the people received the law, what further need was that that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron. Remember Melchizedek was a priest, and a king, having no recorded lineage, he did not come from the tribe of priests, he was outside of that entire system...yet Abraham paid tithe to him, Abraham, the patriarch of Israel bowed to Melchizedek, honored him as one greater than himself, this priest and king outside of the lineage of Aaron.

And the Author went on, in chapter 8 talking of these Levitical Priests, the ones from the tribe of Aaron in whom the law was given to the people, verse 5 “who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. Again showing that the levitical priesthood, the law, and even the tabernacle were just shadows of something greater. They existed so that one can look toward their substance, the one in whom they were connected.. which again, is Christ for he has fulfilled, and completed all of these shadowy figures, they are his shadow cast so that we can get glimpses of him.

As one Scholar wrote, “the primary emphasis here is on the gulf that separates the shadow from the reality. Yet, there however a connection, for a shadow, though itself does not have substance, and does not exist apart from a substantial reality, therefore it may be said to presuppose the existence of the reality of which it is the shadow. It is as though within the antecedent purposes, the reality which is Christ cast its shadow forward over the unfolding drama of the preparation of the gospel, while, historically, that same reality casts a shadow back over those centuries that lead up to the advent of the Savior, a shadow which received definition in terms of law and priesthood, promise and prophecy. The true source of this shadow is discovered in the presence and work of the incarnate Redeemer.”

The next point the Author here makes is in verse 2, where he points out the repetitive nature of the old sacrificial system, which we see he has already mentioned in chapter 7 verse 27, again comparing Christ to the priesthood, saying “ For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens, who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, for for his own sins and then for the peoples, for this he did once for all when he offered up himself. And chapter 9, verse 24 says “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, not to appear in the presence of God for us, not that he should offer himself often, as the high priests enters the most holy place every year with the blood of another.

The point here again showing the incompetence of the old system requiring constant sacrifices for they were unable to accomplish what was truly needed, being themselves only shadows of the greater sacrifice to come. This repetitive nature of the old sacrifices conflicts with the finality of the sacrifice of Christ. If these sacrifices offered the redemption that was needed, there would not no reason for them to be continued daily. Any action that must be repeated over and over in itself shows that it is inconclusive, it doesn't accomplish much for as soon as it is done, it is needed to be done again.

This repetitive nature of the sacrifices, only shows that they were imperfect, and not only that, unable to accomplish what truly was needed. Again, they were mere shadows of the substance of Christ. So we seen the argument here in this passage this morning applies this same logic to the law itself, for he says the Law having a shadow of the good things to come, can never with these same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. The law did not create perfection, keeping of the law did not make one perfect before God just as the sacrifices could not truly offer atonement for sin, for if they did, as verse 2 says, they would they not have ceased to be offered? Their repetitive nature itself argues for their own inadequacy to bring about a permanent removal of sin and its consequences. That being said, the other side of that point is when the perfect sacrifice comes, it is not simply added to, or on top of all that came before, but again replaces it.

As Aquinas said regarding the nature of the sacrifices, “because they did not cease constantly to offer the same sacrifices, it is a sign that they were not being cleansed.” We can see this as well in the teaching of Christ himself in Matthew chapter 9. which we read this morning, specifically for this point in verse 12, he says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, that I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” So in the same way that someone who has been cured from an illness is no longer in need of a physician, because he is no longer even aware of any illness, the author here is making the point that if the worshipers had been cleansed they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. What the author means by no longer having any consciousness of sin, is not that one is not aware of his sin, but it is the guilt of it that is removed under the sacrifice of Christ, which is something the blood of bulls could never accomplish. As verse 13 and 14 of chapter 9 said, “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Cleared our conscience from dead works, from the law, for the law brings with it condemnation, and the works of the law are death, but Christ has come, and fulfilled them, has taken the punishment of them from us, laid them upon himself and died, so that we may live. Our conscience can be clear knowing that it is on Christ lays the eternal punishment of our sins, not on the blood of some animal, but on the very Son of God himself who was sent for this very purpose. And in his sacrifice he accomplished that which all the others could not, he once and for all made atonement for sin. It is his blood alone that purifies us from the dead works of the flesh, so that we may serve the living God in the spirit.

Another aspect of the levitical sacrifices was the in the fact that they served as a repeated reminder of sin. The yearly Day of Atonement sacrifices whole purpose was to cleanse the people of Israel of their trespasses, as we saw in chapter 9, they were sacrifices offered on behalf of the people of the sins committed in ignorance. Sins that they may not have been aware that they committed. The fact that these Day of Atonement sacrifices were offered by the high priest, year, after year, after year also points to the fact that they were also imperfect, for if they accomplished true redemption and atonement they would not have been needed to be repeated every year. So, one can conclude that the purpose of these sacrifices was to serve as a reminder of sin, even of sin that they were not aware of. Which is sort of interesting of you think about it, what does that say about sin in our lives today? Remember last week I asked the question after reading Paul's lists of sins? I asked, Do you see yourself in this list? The reality is yes, we all can, and...there may be sins committed that we are unaware of, or that have been committed in ignorance.

So what does that say about us, and being justified before God? If it were even possible, one could follow the law to the very letter, and yet still be condemned. A person could believe that they are doing everything right, and still be sinning in their ignorance. This puts mankind at a dire state does it not? That even that which we are unaware of condemns us, the fact that there can be sins that we commit and never even notice is kind of a scary thought, And if that is not enough, know that God remembers such sins, for in the last days we will be judged, standing before the most holy, and mighty God, exposed for the vile wretches that we are...but there is hope, which is found in the promise that if we are faithful to repent, he will be faithful to forgive, and in that forgiveness he says that he will remember our sin's no more. Let that sink in a moment, God, will remember our sins no more....so the scene I just described, is not what God's children will experience, for we are covered by a righteousness

not our own, the blood of the one true lamb of God who was offered for atonement once and for all.

So that when we stand before the Holy, mighty, and just God on the day of judgement it will be the blood of his Son that he sees, not our sins, what a glorious promise we have in this new covenant, under this new high priest who makes intercession for us in the very presence of God. So again, what this tell us, is that we are unable, incapable, no matter how hard we may try or even seem to desire to fulfill God's law. So, we needed a righteousness outside of ourself, and we needed a sacrifice which is able to cover such sins, not yearly but once and for all.

The final verse that we are looking at today, is verse 4, which talks about the ineffectiveness of the levitical sacrifices to truly offer atonement, in fact it says, that it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. The reality here is that if these sacrifices had actually taken away the sins of the people there would be no reason for the Messiah to come. This gets into the purpose and the importance of the incarnation of Christ. For animals are not a worthy atonement sacrifice for man. Animals lacking the knowledge, and capability to offer themselves, to be willing participants, as Philip Houghton put it, "an animal, lacking both volition and rationality, it is passive and inarticulate and therefore incapable of the spontaneous declaration, as verse 7 here says, Behold I have come, to do your will oh God. Only man, who is rational, volitional, articulate, and responsible being can truly serve as the proper equivalent and substitute for man, hence the necessity of the incarnation so that Christ may offer himself in the place of our fallen humanity."

But it also needed to be more than a mere man, for mankind by its very nature is fallen, so to be the perfect sacrifice, it must be one who is worthy, one who himself is not condemned, but instead offers himself in the place of those who are condemned. The guiltless, taking the punishment for the guilty, otherwise it is not a true sacrifice, but instead just a doling out of just punishment upon the one. So that is why the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, being both God, and man is important for he must be both perfect, and man, otherwise the sacrifice is no better than that of the bulls and goats, unable to accomplish atonement. But as we know, Christ was the perfect sacrifice, prepared for us, which was foretold by the prophets, and revealed by the Levitical sacrifices. The one in whom God said, he is well pleased, the one in whom he said, this is my son, hear him and the sign of this, is the resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ shows that he not only conquered death itself, but the curse and punishment of sin as well. Christ who took our sins, who died, was resurrected and vindicated as the Lord of Life, the one who lives forever, the one who is the eternal high priest and in whom has fulfilled the promises of God so that his children may have an everlasting salvation. A salvation that is not conditional upon our works, is not conditional upon yearly sacrifices, but an everlasting sacrifice that rests upon our everlasting savior. So I guess that brings up the question then, if the blood of bulls and of goats did not accomplish an atonement from sin, wasn't it just an illusion that would create false hopes? Well, to answer that we must first remember that it is God who ordained these sacrifices, they were by his design, to fulfill his purpose. But in light of everything we have been studying we see that their purpose was not to bring atonement, but instead to teach and show the high price of sin, that sin is a matter of death. I think we tend to forget that, in fact we make light of sin in our society today, but Israel had a daily reminder that the wages of sin are death.

Just as the law itself did not bring righteousness to those who were under it, the sacrifices did not bring atonement. They were pictures to teach a larger truth, they were a progressive revelation into the nature of God and his holiness, and the reality of man's sinful wretchedness. God had been revealing this to Israel through the prophets, he told them of the Messiah, the one to come, the lamb of

God.

Even Abraham's account with Issac on the mount was prophetic, when he told his Son, that God would provide the lamb for the sacrifice. So, when God instituted these levitical sacrifices, it is not as though Israel is without blame to not recognize that these were in the interim As Paul said about the law, that it was a tutor, until Christ would come. So it was with the sacrifices,, they were to reveal the reality of sin, and point to the need for the atonement brought on by another. They were a tutor, pointing to the coming sacrifice of God's provided lamb. This should have even been realized at that time, it is not as though the law and the sacrifices changed in the new testament, it is what they have always were meant to be, as Paul argued that salvation is by faith, apart from the law, for Abraham was saved by faith, some 430 years before the law was given. So why the law? To expose sin, to show that all of mankind is condemned before God. Why the sacrifices? To expose the punishment of sin, and point to the sacrificial Lamb of God who would come, and die, in our place, who would take the punishment for our sins, even the sins committed in ignorance, or that we were not aware of. Christ's atonement covers it all, so that we may be presented before God righteous, and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. worthy is this lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory, and blessing.