

Hebrews 9:11-10:18
(Psalm 49)
“Perfect Sacrifice”

Introduction

The author of Hebrews has been presenting Jesus Christ as the perfect fulfillment of all that religion promises, but can never deliver. This morning, we hear him present Christ as the perfect representative sacrifice for human rebellion and wickedness, for all that we are and all that we have done that separate us from a holy God. The emphasis is on the difference between visual excellence and moral excellence, between appearance and reality, between flesh and spirit. But the lesson goes deeper, exposing the crucial difference between self-love that sacrifices others, and self-giving love that sacrifices one's self.

One of the most striking illustrations of this latter lesson is found in John's gospel, chapter 13. Jesus loved others, and so sacrificed himself. Judas loved himself, and so sacrificed Jesus. Peter thought he was like Jesus and promised to follow Jesus into danger and even to death. He did not realize that he was still like Judas, and would run away from Jesus when his life was threatened. Only grace could restore Peter, put the old, self-centered, proud fisherman to death, raise him to life united to Christ, clothe him in Christ's righteousness, fill him with Christ's Spirit, and send him into the world as an apostle of grace – all this through the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

This morning, let's examine our hearts in the light of this text, realize anew our need of the righteousness that comes from Christ alone and the full sufficiency of what he has done, and find our confident hope in him alone.

Body

1. Christ's sacrifice is perfect because of what it is (9:12-14).

Our culture values externals. We are a visual culture, obsessing over physical beauty and rewarding those who have it or fake it, and treating as of less value those who do not. We know better, yet as a culture bombarded by images and sounds, we respond viscerally to what attracts us and recoil from what does not.

The old covenant sacrifices were “spotless” externally, but had no intrinsic moral worth to make atonement for human sin and rebellion. All they could do was serve as pictures and promises of what was coming. The spotless lamb could be called beautiful or a perfect specimen, but could not be spoken of as morally perfect.

But Christ was bruised and battered, far from externally spotless, when he offered himself for us. His was the moral perfection of a perfect life of perfect loving service of God and humanity, a life of infinite worth and value, offered in our place. Thus, he satisfied completely and forever the righteous requirements of holiness.

2. Christ's sacrifice is perfect because of what it does for God (9:15-10:9).

Christ's sacrifice is first of all directed, not toward us, but toward his Father, who sent him in love to redeem us. Christ fulfills the propitiatory nature of atonement in turning aside God's wrath toward human rebellion and sin.

This was completely different from the sacrifices offered in other religions. There, the gods demanded that humans offer sacrifices that would turn away the wrath of the gods. But the God of the Bible says, "You cannot offer what you most need and what my holiness requires. I myself will provide the sacrifice." Thus, in the Bible, this sacrifice is ultimately an expression – not of our love of God or fear of God – but of God's loving kindness towards us

However, Christ's sacrifice not only propitiates. It also reconciles: It restores us to fellowship with God. One of the great themes of this book is that in Christ we now have access to the very throne room of God. We are no longer alienated, but have been brought near and are restored to the intimate friendship with God for which we were created.

3. Christ's sacrifice is perfect because of what it does for us (10:10-18).

It deals with our past: justifying us by paying sin's penalty.

It deals with our present: sanctifying us by giving us the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in joyful obedience.

And it deals with our future: promising to glorify us in the Father's presence forever.

Conclusion

So, what have we to fear from our past, present or future? Remember the vision granted to John on the island of Patmos (Revelation 5:5-6): When John looked to see the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah, who alone was worthy to bring God's will to pass, he looked and saw instead a slain sacrificial Lamb receiving the worship of heaven and earth, all "honor and glory and blessing" (5:12). Against all earthly appearances, don't ever forget that the most powerful thing in heaven and earth is self-sacrificial love. It is with such love that we have been perfectly redeemed.

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