

## “Our Great High Priest” | Hebrews 9:11-15

Several years ago, when our children were just coming into their teen years, we made a trip to Drumheller, Alberta. This was one of the many places I lived as I was growing up, so I proudly took the family on a tour of the town. I showed them where I went to Elementary school, where I lived in the town, and the small acreage where we moved to when I was in grade two. I pointed out our swimming hole at the river, the hills I climbed looking for dinosaur bones and the old abandoned mine where it was said you could be sucked into a pool of quicksand. I was the best tour guide ever...

So I was totally deflated when I looked into the back seat and found the kids were not looking at all these wonderful sites I was pointing out. They were sleeping! Even Lise was not terribly interested in my old haunts. Sigh...

So I am taking a big risk this morning as I take you on a tour of a most important historical site, the tabernacle of the Jewish nation. This was the place where sacrifices were offered to God, where the priests connected with God on behalf of the people and the place where the priests could enter into the very presence of God. Hopefully you will not be snoring by the time we finish our tour. Instead, I hope you will appreciate even more what Jesus did for you when he died on the cross of Calvary, a fact we commemorate today as we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Last week we talked about the Feast of Trumpets, the beginning of the Jewish New Year. We noted that 10 days after the New Year began there was a second Feast called the Day of Atonement. This will be our focal point as we tour the tabernacle – how the Day of Atonement was celebrated and what it meant. Most importantly we will discover how Jesus fulfilled all that happened that day so we do not have to perform animal sacrifices any more.

Let’s begin today at the conclusion of the matter. **Turn with me to Hebrews 9:11-15.**

To make sense of this passage we have to go on our tour of the Tabernacle (or Temple if you wish) on the Day of Atonement. If you want to read the original instructions, turn to Leviticus 16. This morning I will simply walk you through the day in summary of that chapter.

The High Priest would start the day with the usual sacrifices, and then go wash, and change out of his ornamental priestly garments and put on a plain white tunic. It was a simple garment so that he no longer looked like royalty but like a servant. He was coming before the Holy, all knowing God so he came with no glory in himself, no pretense, just humility.

The priest would then sacrifice a bull for his own sins. The priest was not to pretend he was above the people, but had to acknowledge that he was also a sinner needing God’s forgiveness and grace.

Next, the priest would enter the most holy place with incense, so that a cloud of smoke filled the most Holy Place. God was in that place, but no man could see God and live.

The priest would bring the blood of the bull sacrificed for his sins and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, the covering to the Ark of the Covenant.

The priest exited the Holy of Holies and two goats were brought to him. One would be the sacrifice for the sins of the people. "The wages of sin was death" was the message even in the Old Testament. The second goat was the Azazel, or scapegoat. The priest laid his hands on the head of the goat and symbolically laid the sins of the people on that goat. The goat was driven out of the camp to the wilderness never to return.

The blood of the sacrificed goat was taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. The priest would come out, and change back into his priestly garments and sacrifice two rams, one for his family and the other for the rest of the people.

This holy day was a Sabbath, and no one was allowed to work except the priests helping with the sacrifices. It was also a day of fasting and praying, seeking the forgiveness of God for the sins committed over the last year. Every year this ritual of sacrifices and sprinkling of blood would have to take place to cover the sins of the people.

Pause for a moment and think about that day. If we still lived under that requirement, we would be killing animals this morning instead of sitting in a sanctuary. We would be sending a goat out with the hopes it would not return for if it did, it brought back with it the sins we had confessed. The pastor would have his hands and garments covered in blood. It was a solemn day.

Why are we not still doing this? What changed for the people of God?

The answer is given in our passage from Hebrews 9. In fact, to get the whole picture you should read the whole book of Hebrews, but the verses we read today explain why we are not sacrificing animals this week to celebrate the Day of Atonement. The reason we no longer have to sacrifice animals is because a greater sacrifice was given. That sacrifice was Jesus.

We read how Jesus, our great High Priest, entered into the temple of heaven with a sacrifice – not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood. Through Jesus' death on the cross "eternal redemption" has been provided (according to verse 12).

Verses 13-14 tell us that the rituals of the past were only able to cleanse us on the outside. What Jesus did for us can cleanse us on the inside, where sin resides. The sinful acts could be forgiven under the old system, now the sinner can be made clean from the inside out!

Verse 15 tells us that this is the basis of a new covenant between God and man. The Old Covenant was based on the continual sacrifices of animals. The new covenant was formed through the one sacrifice of God's own Son, Jesus. This sacrifice was so great, so valuable that no other sacrifice need ever be made.

Looking further in the chapter we read:

**<sup>25</sup> Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. <sup>26</sup> Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.<sup>1</sup>**

What God is saying to us in the book of Hebrews is that we no longer need to sacrifice animals to draw near to God. We no longer have to offer gifts of animals to cover the sins we have committed. We no longer need to shed blood because of our sinfulness. That is all set aside because of what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary. He became the one perfect sacrifice that did away with all other sacrifices. All we need for salvation is found in Jesus.

We do not need sacrificial animals today. We do not need to kill any more animals. We do not need altars upon which we burn the sacrifices. We do not need to be sprinkled in animal blood today because of Jesus.

In chapter 10 we find these words:

**<sup>16</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”**

**<sup>17</sup> Then he adds:**

**“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”**

**<sup>18</sup> And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. <sup>2</sup>**

This is why we will not be gathering a bull, goats and rams for the celebration of the Day of Atonement this week. We do not need to. Jesus did away with that when he died for us. He is the perfect sacrifice.

So why even mention the Day of Atonement, or the sacrificial system? Why would there be several chapters in the New Testament devoted to explaining how this feast is fulfilled by Jesus? Why not simply command Christians to stop sacrificing and be done?

I believe the answer lies in the original purpose of the feast. It was a time for people to reflect on their lives, to confess their sins and seek the forgiveness of God. It was a day to draw near to God, acknowledging that as long as there is sin, we cannot draw near. God still wants his people to know him, to have a relationship with him, and he has provided the means for our purification through the death of Jesus. The big questions for today are, “Will we confess our

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (Heb 9:25–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (Heb 10:16–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

sins and seek God's forgiveness through Christ? Will we draw near to God, through repentance and faith in what Jesus has done for us, or will we keep God at a distance?"

Reading further in chapter 10 we find these words:

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.<sup>3</sup>**

This morning we come before the Lord's Table, and in taking of the bread and wine together we remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us. We remember his broken body and spilled blood so that our sins might be forgiven.

We also know that this is a time to draw near to God. Jesus invited us to His table. We are invited to draw near to God.

This morning we pause to reflect on the way Jesus fulfilled the Day of Atonement through his sacrificial death, and ask ourselves, what lessons are we to learn from this feast?

The answer is clear – if we desire to draw near to a holy God this morning, we must do so with “clean hands and a pure heart.” We too must come before the Lord in humility, confession, repentance and faith. Yes, Christians who have been saved through faith in Jesus must come before the Lord in humility and confession. Sanctified believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, must also come in humility and confession before God.

As the Corinthian church was preparing for Communion the Apostle Paul wrote:

**<sup>28</sup> Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup> For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. <sup>30</sup> That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. <sup>31</sup> But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. <sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.**

This morning I am not suggesting you are not saved, or that you lost your salvation. What I am saying is that Christians also must confess their sins, the children of God must walk in humility. Today I invite you to pray with the Psalmist, **“23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”**

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (Heb 10:19–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.