

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 21 November 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Superior Sacrifice

Hebrews 10:1-9

We've probably all gotten a chuckle, at one time or other, from watching a child, or even a house pet, as he is discovering his own shadow. When I was growing up, I loved to watch our cats go crazy as they tried to catch their own shadows. (Sometimes I would "help" them to discover their shadows by flashing a torch around in a darkened room!) With our own kids, it has always been amusing to watch them, as toddlers, trying to catch their own shadow, or even running away from their shadows in fear.

Why are small children and animals intrigued by their shadows? Because they don't have the perception to realise that the shadow is not real. They don't know that it isn't a living thing. It has the *form* of a real thing, and it has the *outline* of that thing; but it is *not* that thing. When you see someone's long shadow in the afternoon sun, you know that someone is approaching: but it is only a shadow.

The Apostle Paul uses this very analogy in **Hebrews 10** in order to help us understand the reason for the Old Testament sacrificial system. The sacrificial system was a *shadow* of things to come. Particularly, it was a shadow of the saving work of Jesus Christ, which was still in the future. Just as a shadow is inferior to the object that casts the shadow (in fact, it is literally nothing), so the Old Testament sacrifices were inferior to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The theme of the book of **Hebrews** is that Jesus Christ is "**better**" than the people and ordinances of the Old Testament system. This morning, we will see the contrast between the inferior sacrifices of animals, and the superior sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The title of this message is *The Superior Sacrifice*.

Hebrews 10:1-4

I. The inferior earthly sacrifices (vv. 1-4)

In the first four verses of this chapter, Paul tells us why the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were inferior to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. There are several reasons why they were inferior. First, they were inferior because **they were merely shadows of Christ. (Read verse 1 again.)**

Nearly twenty years ago, I had a surgery that changed my life dramatically. A world-renowned abdominal surgeon named Dr. Lavery removed a large organ of my body, which was horribly diseased. In fact, if he had not performed this surgery, I probably would have died long ago.

Now, in the time that I knew Dr. Lavery, I got to know his features sufficiently enough that I probably could have recognised his shadow if he were approaching me from behind. However, if I wanted help with my disease, I didn't talk to his shadow: I had to talk to him!

Now, this may sound like a simplistic observation (almost to the point of being silly); yet, trusting in religious rituals to get you to Heaven is very much like trying to talk to a shadow.

Trusting in good works and religious rituals is just as pointless, and just as foolish, as trusting in a literal shadow. God Himself instituted the Old Testament sacrifices; but those sacrifices were only *pictures* of what was to come. To be saved from their sin, the people had to place their trust in the coming Saviour, and not in the rituals that God had commanded them to perform. The rituals were only shadows of the Saviour's future work on the cross of Calvary, and not the actual saving agent.

It is the nature of man to trust in rituals and objects for salvation, instead of in God Himself. Many Jews in Old Testament times placed their trust in their keeping of the rituals, instead of in the Redeemer himself; and, consequently, they missed Heaven. So it still is today. Many people who consider themselves "Christians" will wake up in hell one day because they trusted in the keeping of rituals, which were meant to be *pictures* of Christ's saving work (things such as the Lord's Supper and baptism); but they never trusted in *Jesus Himself*. How about *you*? Are you trusting in your keeping of external acts of righteousness...or in Christ?

John 1:10-13

The Apostle John says that salvation is "***not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.***" This means, first of all, that no one is born a Christian. Salvation is not "***of blood,***" or of family heritage. Each soul must make the personal choice to repent of his sin and believe on Jesus. This means, secondly, that no one is saved by his own righteousness. It is not "***of the will of the flesh,***" or of human efforts. This also means that salvation cannot be imposed upon someone by way of some ritual or ordinance. It is "***not of the will of man.***" No one can make you a Christian by sprinkling water or oil on you, or by dipping you in water, or by placing a wafer on your tongue, or by initiating you in some other religious ritual. Salvation is a gift of God, which must be received by faith in Christ alone.

Now, let's get back to **Hebrews**. (Read **Hebrews 10:1**.) In this verse, Paul says that the Law, with all its rituals, was merely a shadow, and "***not the very image of the things.***" It is important that we understand that word "***image.***" It is translated from the word *eikon*. (We get our English word "icon" from this word.) An *eikon* is "an exact representation" of something. It is the real thing. A likeness, on the other hand, is merely a likeness. For example, an extremely life-like wax statue of a person might be mistaken, at first glance, as the real thing; but it is *not* the real thing. A hologram can be so realistic, that whole crowds of people can be mistaken into thinking that the hologram of a person on stage is the actual person. Yet, it is only a likeness—a shadow! So it is with the Law. The Law couldn't provide anything even *close* to an exact representation of what Christ would actually do for us. The best earthly illustrations cannot truly describe the length, breadth, depth, and height of what Jesus Christ actually did for us on the cross.

If you wish to *know* that your sins are forgiven, and that you are on your way to Heaven, then you must look to Jesus! Look to Him and live! All your "religiosity" won't atone for you. Jesus is the only one who can save you from your sins!

The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were inferior. They were inferior because they provided only a shadow of the real Sacrifice. However, this is not all. Paul gives us another

reason why they were inferior. The second reason why the animal sacrifices were inferior is that **they couldn't purge the conscience of sin. (Read verses 1 and 2 again.)**

Do you see the point that Paul is making? If the Old Testament sacrifices had made the people "*perfect*" (in other words, if they had actually caused the people to be right with God), then why would there have been any need to *continue* the sacrifices after the first offering had been made? The very fact that the sacrifices had to be offered again and again, year after year, was an indication that these sacrifices could not actually save the soul!

The sacrifices of the Old Testament were only symbolic. They brought nothing to completeness—including the conscience. If the sacrifices had been perfect, then the people who brought the sacrifices should have had "*no more conscience of sins*" after the first offering had been made. The first offering should have been the last. Yet, it *wasn't* the last, because it was imperfect. An imperfect sacrifice cannot produce a sense of "closure" to the conscience of the sinner.

What does this mean, then? Does this mean that Old Testament believers weren't *really forgiven* of their sins? No, believers of Old Testament times *were* forgiven, in the same way true believers are forgiven today. They were saved by the grace of God alone. God applied His Son's future sacrifice to their account, just as He applies it to believers today. However, in their conscience, there was still a sense of incompleteness. When they sinned, and offered a sacrifice for their sin, there was still a nagging sense that whatever was needed in order to remove their sin had not actually been performed yet.

Thank God, this is not the case today! The once-for-all Sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been made. It is not future; it is history. We *know* that the sacrifice that was needed to forgive our sins, and to cleanse our conscience, has been accomplished on the cross of Calvary. We know that we are accepted by God.

Christian, it doesn't matter what you may be going through. It matters not how bad the circumstances in your life may be. Paul wrote, "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*" He also wrote, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" Nothing compares to the blessedness of a purged conscience! Nothing compares to the joy of waking up every morning and knowing that your sins are still washed away by the blood of the Lamb, and that one day you will stand redeemed before your Saviour, in body, soul, and spirit!

The sacrifices of animals were inferior because they were only a shadow of reality. They were inferior because they couldn't purge the conscience of sins. Lastly, they were inferior because **they couldn't actually forgive sins. (Read verses 3 and 4 again.)**

The very fact that the Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated annually showed that the animal blood didn't actually forgive sins. If the sacrifices had really forgiven sins, it should have covered *all* sins—including sins committed in the future. If it had been able to do that, then there would have been no more need of offerings.

However, this wasn't the case. The sacrifices only served to remind them, year after year, of their sin, their guilt, and their need to have their sins truly and finally removed.

By the way, contrary to popular thought these days, guilt *is* a good and necessary thing. If you don't have a sense of guilt, you will never realise your need to be saved from your sin. This is why children should be chastened for wrongdoing, as God commands. Godly chastening instills in children a sense of shame and guilt for their wrong.

Of course, the world teaches us just the opposite. In a child-rearing advice blog called "Ages and Stages," the author writes:

"Tantrums come in many shapes and sizes. Whether she screams through every aisle of the grocery store, or stomps to her room after any hint of 'No,' discipline can be tough at this age. Find ways to set necessary boundaries and calm tempers using **positive** discipline tactics **that are guilt-free.**"

The world doesn't like to hear the word "guilt." Why not? Because sinners don't like to acknowledge that they have a sin problem that separates them from God! God, on the other hand, says, "You *are* guilty; and your guilt has condemned you." **Romans 3:19** says, "***Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***" The sacrificial system was designed to *teach* us that we are guilty. The fact that an innocent lamb had to die for people's wrongdoings taught them that "***the wages of sin is death.***" Yet, the sacrificial system could not *take away* that guilt; and the believers who lived in Old Testament times knew this. David certainly knew this to be so!

Psalm 51:1-10, 16-17

Clearly, the Old Testament offerings were insufficient to forgive sins. David knew this. Moses knew this. Jacob knew this. Abraham knew this. However, these Old Testament saints also knew that something "better" was coming!

This brings us to our second point. Not only does Paul talk about the inferior animal sacrifices: he also tells us about...

II. The superior heavenly sacrifice (vv. 5-9)

Having pointed out the inferiority of the Old Testament sacrifices, Paul now contrasts those inferior sacrifices to the *superior* sacrifice of God's Son. Let's read **verses 5-9. (Read verses 5-9.)**

Once again, Paul is quoting from the Old Testament to back up what he is saying. What we've just read is a prophecy of the Messiah from the book of **Psalms**. Let's take a look at that passage.

Psalm 40:6-8

Brethren, the idea that animal sacrifices were not sufficient to forgive sins, and that a perfect Sacrifice was therefore needed, is not some radical idea that the Christians “invented” because they wanted to “set up a new religion.” In this famous Old Testament Scripture, which was written 1,000 years before Christ’s birth, we find that the sacrifices and offerings of animals were *not* what God truly desired. This statement is coming from none other than King David! This same thing was stated by other Old Testament prophets, as well. Let’s see what Isaiah said about it.

Isaiah 1:11-18

The insufficiency of animal sacrifices was not some new “Christian” idea. Throughout the Old Testament, God made it clear that the sacrifices of animals could not actually wash away sins. Something complete and perfect was needed in order to take a person’s sins, which were like scarlet, and to make them as white as snow; and the sacrifices of lambs weren’t it! Yet, if sacrifices couldn’t take away sin, then why did God require them? Why the shedding of all that blood? It makes no sense whatsoever--*unless* the blood of those animals was intended to point to the blood of a future Sacrifice—a *true* Sacrifice. Jesus Christ is that Sacrifice. He is ***“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”***

With this in mind, let’s look at the first way in which Christ’s sacrifice is superior. Christ’s sacrifice is superior because **it required only one body.**

(Read Hebrews 10:5 again.) In these verses, Paul is quoting from **Psalm 40**; and as he quotes it, he makes it clear that this is a messianic prophecy. These aren’t simply the words of David; these are the words of the Son of God, who was speaking through the pen of His servant David. Here in **Psalm 40**, Christ Himself is speaking in the first person. Through the pen of King David, the Son of God is telling us about what He would do in the future, when He would come down to earth and take on human flesh, and die for our sins.

Please look carefully at what Christ is saying. He says that the Father did not really desire the sacrifices and offerings of animals. He had another plan--a perfect plan. Instead of requiring the endless offerings of animals, God would require only *one* body for a Sacrifice. It would not be the body of a bull, a goat, a lamb, or a turtledove, either. It would be the body of a perfect Man. It would be a body that God would prepare especially for His Son. Remember, Christ is the one who is speaking to His Father in this passage; and as He speaks, He says, ***“A body hast thou prepared me.”*** The sinless Son of God, who is always perfectly submissive to His Father, says to His Father, ***“Lo, I come....to do thy will, O God.”*** His Father’s will was to give His Son a human body which could be offered up as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

Because the body of Jesus Christ is all-sufficient to forgive sins, the sacrifice of animals is no longer needed. Once that perfect Sacrifice was made on the cross, the entire Old Testament sacrificial system could be set aside, and done away with! That is precisely what Paul says in **verse 9**. He says, ***“He taketh away the first [meaning, the Old Covenant] that he may establish the second [the New Covenant].”***

God never really delighted in the sacrifice of animals. To be sure, God *did* require sacrifices of the Old Testament saints; but the animal sacrifices weren’t the thing that took away their

sins. They were never *intended* to be the thing that would take away their sins. It was God's plan to provide His Son with the perfect body, so that He, as the perfect Man, could be the perfect Sacrifice for man's sins.

However, this wasn't a one-sided arrangement. It was the *Father's* will to do this; but the *Son* was also in perfect *submission* to do His Father's will. The Son *willingly* said, "**Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.**"

This brings us to yet another way in which Christ's sacrifice is superior. Christ's sacrifice is superior in that **He, the true Sacrifice for sins, was willing and obedient to the Father.** (Read verses 5-7 again.)

When the lambs were taken to the altar to be sacrificed, they had no choice in the matter. They weren't "obeying" their masters when they went to be slaughtered; they were simply herded to the slaughter. Now, in some respects, the demeanour of the animals was a *picture* of Christ's obedience. The relative non-resistance of a young lamb as it went to the slaughter was a picture of Christ's willing obedience to His Father. Isaiah prophesied of this truth.

Isaiah 53:7

Of all animals on the face of the earth, lambs are probably the most docile and unresisting to slaughter. This is why God chose the lamb to be a picture of His Son. Yet, even the most docile lamb had no *understanding* of what it had been chosen to do. Christ, on the other hand, knew very well what His Father had appointed Him to do; and He humbly obeyed His Father. There is one phrase in **Psalm 40** which especially demonstrates Christ's obedient spirit.

Psalm 40:6

When David wrote, "***mine ears hast thou opened,***" he was referring to the law for indentured servants. Under the Old Testament Law, a man who was in debt had to pay off his debt by becoming a servant to his creditor. However, the creditor could exact no more than seven years of service from his servant. At the end of the seven years, the servant was free to go. Yet, if the servant had come to love his master, and didn't *want* to leave him, and desired to stay with him, he had the choice to do so. A hole was made in the lobe of his ear, as a sign that he had willingly made himself his master's servant forever. His ear was "bored through" (or "opened"), in order to show that he had chosen to serve His master for the rest of his life.

Now, if you compare **Psalm 40:6** to **Hebrews 10:5**, you'll see that there is one difference. Let's read those two verses. (Read **Psalm 40:6** and **Hebrews 10:5**.) Do you see the difference? As Paul was quoting **Psalm 40:6**, he replaced the words "***mine ears hast thou opened***" with the words "***a body hast thou prepared me.***" Why did Paul do this? Because the Holy Spirit led him to do so! Through this change in wording, Paul is explaining the meaning of **Psalm 40:6** more fully. Paul is showing us that Christ, just like an indentured servant, was *obedient* to His Father; and His obedience required that He be willing to become a man, and to receive "***a body***" which would be fit for sacrifice.

By the way, Christian, do *you* have the same spirit of obedience that your Lord had? Do *you* have the attitude of an indentured servant? Is your attitude "I delight to do *thy* will, O God. I

will serve you all my days”? Or is your attitude, “I’m your servant, Lord. You can count on me! Well...*except* if you command me to witness to someone. I don’t ‘do’ the witnessing thing, you know. I’m just not a people person”?

There are many things that Christians have trouble surrendering. For some, it is attending church faithfully, every time the doors are opened. For some, it is tithing and giving to missions. For some, it is reading the Bible daily, and having “family altar.” For some, it is taking time to have real communication with God in prayer. Some believers, for one reason or another, stop short of receiving biblical baptism. For some, being enthusiastically involved in the ministry of the local church is a real struggle. For many Christians, giving up sinful habits, worldly music, worldly movies and books, and other things that grieve the Lord, is something that they struggle to relinquish. Some Christians have trouble with giving up a grudge, or a bitter attitude toward one who has wronged them. Still others have trouble giving up their own ambitions, and being willing to do whatever God calls them to do. Many Christians have trouble with surrendering that which is dearest to them (such as giving up their own children to be pastors or missionaries). Do you find yourself struggling with any of these things, Christian? If so, look to Christ for your example! His ears were opened to His Father’s will. He willingly took on a body so that He might become our Sacrifice for sins. Cannot we offer our bodies as *living* sacrifices for Him?

Philippians 2:1-8

This should be the desire of every child of God! Every day, Christians should strive to be more like the ultimate “indentured Servant,” the Lord Jesus Christ. Every day, we should die to self, and allow Jesus Christ to control every aspect of our lives.

Yet, we fall far short of that ideal, don’t we? Even at our best, we “miss the mark” of perfect obedience to God. That is why Jesus Christ, the faithful Servant of Jehovah, submitted to His Father’s will, took on a human body, and died for us. Because we could not pay for our own sin debt, He paid it for us. He did it only one time; and in that one sacrifice, He paid it all.

Conclusion: Many people come to church with the expectation of hearing something that will make them “feel better.” For that reason, they are disappointed when they hear a “doctrinal” message (such as what you’ve heard this morning) instead of a “therapeutic” message. However, I have news for you, folks: God’s Word isn’t “therapy”! We cannot possibly find the answers to our needs (in fact, we can’t even rightly understand *what our real needs are*) without being instructed in the teaching of God’s Word!

Christian, are you going through problems in your life? Then you need this doctrine from **Hebrews 10!** Perhaps you need to be reminded of the guilt that your sin incurs, and of the fact that Christ *removed* that guilt. Perhaps you’ve grown calloused about your sin, and unthankful for what Christ did for you.

Perhaps you need to take a good look at the pattern of our Saviour’s *obedience* to His Father. Christ didn’t save you so that you could live your life any old way you want; He saved you so that you could have the power to live a life of obedience to God. Peter said that “***Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.***” Maybe you are saved, but you haven’t really been living like an “indentured servant” to God. Maybe the thought “Am I becoming more like Christ?” doesn’t enter your mind often. Christian, if you want joy in your life, then submit yourself wholly to the Lord!

Maybe you’re unsure that you are on your way to Heaven. Perhaps you are trusting in “shadows” which cannot actually save you—things such as church attendance, baptism, communion, and so on. My friend,

none of these things, good though they are, can save you! *No* good work can save you. If you are relying on these things to get you to Heaven, then you are lost, and you need to place your trust in Christ alone. Please don't put it off: come to Him today! Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of salvation.