

## Hebrews 10:5-10 Christmas Is a Time for Sacrifice! Advent 4 Dec. 20, 2015

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Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice for you! Today we read from the book of Hebrews 10:5-10 as the author describes the value of Jesus' sacrifice. These are Your words heavenly Father to help us trust in Your Son who saved us. Your Word is truth.

Dear Believers, declared by God to be holy through the sacrifice of Christ,

Christmas is a favorite time of the year for many of us. We have family gatherings. We share gifts with people. We sing praises to our loving God for sending His Son. There are so many positive things at Christmas. But, these things don't just happen on their own. To gather with family, people must travel and make time in their busy schedules. To offer gifts to others, people must be willing to sacrifice money and spend time in crowded stores to find the right gifts. Our salvation did not just happen either. It took God's planning and the total humble commitment of His Son. We sacrifice time or money. He sacrificed His life!

### Christmas is a time for sacrifices!

**Our sacrifices are not enough.** Sometimes when we offer gifts that we have bought or made, the recipients don't appreciate them. Perhaps the gifts don't fit the people or they already have better gifts. The writer to the Hebrews describes the sacrifices made by Jews in the Old Testament. *"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire... with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased."* (v.5-6) God was not pleased with the sacrifices because He is holy and the offerings of people are always imperfect. What people bring doesn't fit with Him. God expects all offerings to be flawless and exactly as He demands.

Have you read the story by O. Henry called The Gift of the Magi? There was a poor young couple. It was Christmas Eve and they wanted to buy gifts for each other but they had no money. The wife had long lovely hair. She decided to cut it and sell it so she could surprise her husband by buying a chain for his pocket watch. Her husband also went out and sold his watch so he could buy a beautiful set of hair combs for his wife. When they met each other that night, they knew that their sacrifices, as thoughtful as they were, did them no good. So, if we only come to God with our own actions and words, as noble or thoughtful as they may be, if they are without faith connecting us to Christ, our sacrifices will do no good with God!

**Second, Christ's sacrifice was acceptable to God.** You might wonder, "If God was not pleased with the animal sacrifices that the Jews made, then why did He command His people to make them?" There were three reasons: First, in verse 3 the author wrote, *"Those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins."* Every sacrifice reminded the people that they were imperfect and needed a substitute to turn God's anger away from them. The second reason for the sacrifices was to remind them that the blood of the imperfect animals was not enough. That's why the Jews had to make sacrifices for century after century. (v.1)

The third reason was that all the sacrifices pointed to the work of the coming Savior, whose sacrifice would be complete. You've probably heard the saying, "If you want it done right, do it yourself." That is what God did. He sent His Son to make the sacrifice we could not complete. The author quoted Jesus, *"A body You prepared for Me.... Here I am – it is written about Me in the scroll – I have come to do Your will."* (v.6-7) Jesus' sacrifice is the reason that we are celebrating Christmas. God sent His Son to become a human baby who grew, experiencing all the troubles and temptations just like us. Throughout His life, Jesus obeyed God's will with perfect love and never sinned.

And His sacrifice of serving was not wasted as O. Henry's earlier example of the young couple. Jesus' perfect life is just what sinners needed. Because Jesus perfectly offered Himself to die on the cross, God accepted His sacrifice. The author wrote, *"By that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* (v.10) In Christ's forgiveness God sees us as holy. Paul wrote, *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...."* (Ephesians 5:25-26) John also wrote about this amazing change. *"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins...."* (1 John 3:4-5)

**Third, we can only be saved through Jesus.** Many of us have known this truth for many years: We are saved only by God's grace through faith in Christ and in His work alone. But, that has been called into question. I heard last week on the news that the Vatican has put out a doctrinal statement, with the blessing of the pope, that Christians no longer need to tell Jews to believe in Jesus. It stated that the Jews have the Old Testament; and so they have the same God as Christians. Can this be true?

What do the Jews believe about Jesus? At best they consider Him as a false prophet. But, most believe that He deserved to die because He called Himself the Son of God. Even though Jesus performed many miracles at His time, raising a man from the dead, the Jews refused to believe in Him as the Christ. How can they be saved without Him? Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6) The Bible states, *"There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...."* (1 Timothy 2:5-6) Jesus said, *"Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."* (Matthew 10:33) And again He said, *"He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."* (Luke 10:16) We can't truly know God and be saved by Him without Christ. There is no other way!

The statement made by the Vatican completely contradicts the saving truths of Scripture. It is not only in the New Testament; the promises about Jesus are clearly in the Old Testament, too. Hebrews quoted Psalm 40:6-8, which King David was inspired to write, but Hebrews states that Jesus said these words. There are so many O. T. verses: from Genesis 3:15 where the woman's Offspring would crush the devil's head, to Psalm 22 which described the suffering of Christ on the cross and the very words He spoke, to Isaiah 42 where the Christ is described as performing miracles, to Isaiah 53 where Christ's suffering for the sins of all people is described, and to all those types of sacrifices which pointed ahead to Jesus as the Savior. After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to two of His followers who didn't recognize Him and were still saddened by the news of His death. He said, *"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself."* (Luke 24:26-27)

Jesus is the only way to be saved. It doesn't matter what denomination people call themselves, if they don't have Christ as their Savior, they have no blessing from God and will suffer eternally. On the other hand, whoever takes God's Word to heart and believes in Jesus will be saved. Jesus said, *"My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day."* (John 6:40)

So, Christmas is only a few days away. Many of us will probably still be making sacrifices to visit people, to prepare for Christmas with family and friends, and to buy the perfect gifts for people. But, there can be nothing greater than Jesus' sacrifice – how He humbly lived and died to save us. It is just what we need! The news of Jesus is the best gift that we can share with others. We have the privilege to speak about the true reason that we celebrate Christmas: Jesus, who was sacrificed, now is our living Savior! Amen.