

Hebrews 9:11-14 Jesus Our Great High Priest Is Better Than Any High Priest Good Fri. 3/30/18

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's grace and peace, won for us by Jesus, our great high priest, belong to us through faith in Jesus. Amen

We heard God's Word regarding the meaning of Christ's sacrifice in Hebrews 9:11-14

Through Your Word help us grow knowing Your love and grace in Your new covenant. Your Word is truth!

Dear people of God redeemed by Christ, the Great High Priest,

Good Friday is a solemn day. Today, we remember how Christ, the Son of God, suffered and died for the sins of the world, for our sins. Our reading from Hebrews refers to an equally somber day: the Good Friday of the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement. On that day, Israel's high priest entered the presence of God in the Most Holy Place to offer a sacrifice for the people's sins to turn away God's anger. Today, may we also approach our God with reverent faith as we are reminded that

Jesus our great High Priest is better than any high priest.

First, our Great High Priest enters by a better sanctuary. Our reading begins with a strange sounding phrase: "*Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here.*" (v.11) In the Old Testament, God's people looked for good things to come. They had God's promises, but the fulfillment lay ahead. When John the Baptist appeared, a delegation came from Jerusalem to ask him if he was the One who was to come? He wasn't, but Jesus was! With His coming, all the good things promised by God also came. That includes what was foreshadowed by the Jewish priesthood, sacrifices, rituals, and tabernacle.

The verses prior to our reading describe the tabernacle. It was a small portable tent for worship. There were two rooms divided by a curtain. The first was the Holy Place, which contained an altar of incense, a golden lampstand, and a table with fresh bread. The Most Holy Place behind a curtain contained the Ark of the Covenant. That little gold-plated box had two angels over it; and inside the Commandments of God on two tablets of stone. Over the ark was the cloud of the glory of the Lord. Once a year the high priest pushed back the curtain and entered the Most Holy Place into the presence of God.

With that ritual in mind, the writer of Hebrews recalls how much greater the work of Jesus was. He entered the Most Holy Place of heaven by, the writer says, a "*greater and more perfect tabernacle.*" (v.11) The Bible shows that the O. T. tabernacle was a type of Christ Himself. We read in John 1. "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son....*" (vs. 14) The word for "*made his dwelling*" is a form of the Hebrew word for "tabernacle." What John meant was that if God was present with His people in the physical tabernacle, how much more He was present when His Son came into the world! Jesus told the Jews: "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*" (John 2: 19) He was referring to His body. Paul says the same in Colossians 2, "*In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*" (vs. 9) If we want to truly see God and His mercy, we need to enter through Christ!

Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit with a perfect body. With that perfect body He kept God's law without fault. With that perfect body our He died for us on the cross under God's wrath. Hebrews describes the sacrifice: "*He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*" (v.12)

Second, Jesus offered a better sacrifice. Thinking back to the Day of Atonement and to the sacrifice the high priest offered for himself and for the people, it happened annually. This showed its limitations. If the sacrifice was complete, it would only have been done once. The people also went through a ceremony of cleansing by using the "*blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer*" to make them outwardly clean so they could worship. (v.13) Some sacrifices were burned to ash. The ashes were mixed

with water, and then sprinkled on the people along with a mixture of blood and water. By that washing, the people could come into the courtyard of the tabernacle and worship. But Jesus is better.

He offered on the altar of the cross His perfect body in which the fullness of God lived! He didn't have to repeat that sacrifice annually. At death He cried, "It is finished." No further sacrifice was needed for sin. He had won eternal redemption. Every sin was paid for. The Greek word for "redemption" means to pay a ransom to set someone free. By his death, Jesus redeemed a world of people held captive by sin, death, and hell. Peter wrote, "*It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ.*" (1 Peter 1:18, 19)

The blood of Jesus is the good thing foreshadowed by 14 centuries of animal offerings. It truly takes away sin and makes the guilty conscience clean. Look to Jesus: the one who was made to be sin for us, the Lamb on whom God laid the sins of the world. He is now seated at the right hand of God to plead for us. His precious blood purifies us from every sin. In Him, we will one day enter heaven to live with Him forever. When we understand how much greater Jesus is than every other priest, then we will joyfully respond.

Third, Jesus inspires us to better service. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was the greatest and final high priest needed to serve God. So, however we serve God, it isn't to win His praise, but offer our praise to God for His gracious salvation. Hebrews states, "*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who ... offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*" (v.14) Sadly, over all those centuries of Old Testament sacrifices, instead of inspiring God's people to look forward in faith in the coming Savior, the people began to look at the rituals as an end in themselves. They thought that by making sacrifices they were earning God's favor and making themselves pleasing to God. That was impossible. *Hebrews 11: 6* states, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*" God's prophets in the Old Testament warned against empty rituals devoid of faith. King David was right when he said, "*The sacrifices of God ... are a broken and contrite heart.*" (Psalm 51:17) Without faith in God, their sacrifices were worthless.

As God refused Cain's sacrifice, he rejects all works done without faith in Jesus. But Jesus inspires us to better service. His blood that cleanses our consciences from sin, guilt, and fear, and inspires us to serve the living God in ways that please Him. We are Christians not only for an hour on Sunday. We serve God daily at work and school, at home and away, because Christ's sacrifice for us makes us want to serve God. All our imperfect thoughts, words, and actions, become precious to God when done out of love by faith in Christ. Jesus will commend the works of those who trusted in His forgiveness, "*I was hungry and you gave me something to eat . . . thirsty and you gave me something to drink . . . [for] whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*" (Matthew 25:35, 40)

We serve our Lord, not to earn His favor. In Christ, the greatest high priest, we have all the favor from God that we need. Jesus lived a perfect life to make up for all our imperfections. He was the perfect sacrifice to take away our sins that we may confidently approach God with our concerns and with our praise. Let us pray: "Take my love, my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its treasure store; Take myself, and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee." (ELH 444) Amen.