

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Following Jesus...ESPECIALLY **when life gets tough!**

(Studies in the letter to the Hebrews)

Jesus' Perfect - and Perfecting! - Sacrifice Study #9

(Hebrews 9:16--10:18)

Introduction: Fixing "for now" or "for good!" ...

My grandfather, whom I loved dearly, and my father, whom I also loved and respected, had very different ways of fixing things.

My dad's dad was a World War I veteran. He had a hard life and never had much money. He fixed things "for now." It may be that fixing things "for now" was born of necessity. My dad fixed things "for good."

Dad would connect two pieces of wood with a solid dovetail joint, or with screws and wood glue. His fixes lasted. My grandfather's small farm was held together by bailing wire.

My dad used to get impatient with my grandfather for fixing things "for now," knowing that he would be the one to supply a more lasting solution.

You and I can fix problems "*for now*" knowing that the fix won't permanently solve anything. Or we can fix some vexing problem "*for good*" with a solution that lasts.

In our study of the letter to the Hebrews today, we'll see that by His death on the cross, Jesus fixed our sin problem "for good," replacing the bailing wire fix of the Old Covenant.

Today, we're following up Todd's message of last Sunday with another "better than" message. Todd highlighted that Jesus' ministry, His covenant, and His promises are better than those found under the old Mosaic system.

In Hebrews 9 and 10 we learn about Jesus' "better than" sacrifice. Our passage begins with a word about covenants.

The Superior Sacrifice of Jesus (9:16-28)

A Covenant / Will is Inaugurated by Death (vv. 16-17)

[16] For where there is a covenant, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. [17] For a covenant is valid only when people are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

Different shades of meaning

Throughout our studies in Hebrews, we've paid attention to the meaning of words.

When you're studying a two-thousand-year-old letter that was written in a different language (Greek) to a vastly different culture (first century persecuted Jewish Christians who were steeped in an Old Testament worldview), it's important to pay attention to words.

If we assume that the foreign, ancient author meant by a word he used what we who live in suburban San Antonio in 2024 mean by the same word, we could be off by a mile.

Take the word "covenant," a word we find in vv. 16 and 17.

The word "covenant"

In these verses, my version translates a Greek word (diatheke; *diaqhkh*) as "**covenant**."

In the ancient world this word could be used to describe what we would call today a contract.

To make a contractual agreement, as it is today, there was no requirement that the people entering into the contract had to die.

However, the same Greek word could also be used to describe a will, as in a “Last Will and Testament.”

A will is a type of covenant. And it IS the case that the directives of a will are carried out only after the one who made the will has died.¹

Context will determine which of the two meanings applies in a given case.² And context here tells us that the idea is that of a will.

The particular will in view here is what we call the New Covenant. It’s the covenant under which we live as Christians, and it deals with the kinds of things that a will typically deals with: Inheritances. Promising things to heirs. Stuff like that.

It was necessary for Jesus to die before the stipulations of the covenant about inheritances could take effect. Now, hold on to that thought as our author shifts his focus to another kind of covenant.

This was True of the First, Old, Mosaic Covenant (vv. 18-22)

The first / old covenant came with death and blood (vv. 18-21)

The nature of the old covenant (v. 18)

[18] Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood.

By “*the first covenant*” he is referring to the whole Mosaic system. It was not in any sense a *will*. It was much more like a contract.

¹ Hebrew scholars tell us that the Hebrew “berith” (usually translated *covenant*) is very similar to the notion of a Greek *will*.

² Paul uses the same word (diatheke; *διαθηκη*) to describe “will” in Galatians 3:15ff.

The first covenant did not require the death of Moses to be put into effect. But deaths were definitely a part of the establishment of the first covenant and of its ongoing work.

And our author goes to great lengths to point out the bloody nature of that first covenant.

The particulars of the old covenant (vv. 19-21)

[19] For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, [20] saying, “THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU.” [21] And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.

All the various dedications of the tabernacle took place just like Hebrews tells us here. They all revolved around the shedding of blood.

Now, you might ask, “*Why blood?*” It’s a good question because we don’t require blood in 2024 contracts.

But we do hear comments like, “*The negotiations of that contract were bloody.*” And “*We had to make sure that everyone had skin in the game.*” Contract-making was and is serious business.

The blood involved in the making and keeping of the first covenant affirmed the seriousness of the covenant / contract.

The priest took the lives of animals to establish the covenant. And the death of animals was a regular part of the ongoing outworking of that covenant.

The party making the covenant with God (the people of Israel) offered blood to show that they were committed to carrying out the stipulations of the covenant.

That’s why we read about blood and sacrifice so frequently in the Old Testament.

This is [almost] always true (v. 22)

As the author of Hebrews writes, **[22] And almost all things are cleansed with blood, according to the Law, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**³

Sure. Some things were purified by fire (Numbers 31:22-23) or by water (Exodus 19:10) or by grain. (Leviticus 5:11-13)

But these were the exceptions. The rule was that things were dedicated to God by blood. Purification by blood was the rule. Sin was dealt with by the shedding of blood, the giving of a life.

Now we shift from thinking about the old Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant put into effect by Jesus.

This is True of the Jesus' New Covenant (vv. 23-28)

The holy place Jesus has entered (vv. 23-25)

Earthly and heavenly realities (v. 23)

[23] Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed⁴ with these things, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Last Sunday, Todd helped us see from Hebrews 8 (v. 5) that the Old Testament tabernacle that the Jews carried around with them in the wilderness was a copy of the real-deal tabernacle in heaven.

And it turns out that just as the earthly tabernacle was purified by blood (9:21), so the heavenly tabernacle was also purified by blood.

³ Some translations of this verse render it, "One might almost say..." I prefer the translation as given here, "...almost all things are cleansed."

⁴ The mention of "cleansing" here is not to suggest that there was uncleanness or sin in the heavens (as in a reference to Satan's presence.) The reference is to dedication. Only the blood of Jesus could suffice to provide for such a heavenly dedicatory cleansing.

However, since Jesus' New Covenant is a better covenant than the Mosaic Covenant, it - the heavenly tabernacle - needed to be dedicated with a better sacrifice.⁵

That "**better**" sacrifice was the blood of Jesus which He shed on the cross when He gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

Christ's presence and work in the heavenly Holy Place (vv. 24-25)

[24] For Christ did not enter a holy place made by hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; [25] nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year by year with blood that is not his own.

Directions for making the earthly tabernacle were explicit and detailed. Craftsmen built it, "**just as the LORD commanded Moses.**"

But when Jesus entered the presence of God in heaven - the heavenly tabernacle - there was nothing handmade about it.

The whole setting, the environment, the realm of the heavenly tabernacle, was of God.

Jesus entered that tabernacle as its High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek. He gained entrance by virtue of His having died for our sins. And He offered a profoundly different sacrifice than the earthly priests did.

Under the first (Old) covenant, lots of different players were involved in the offering of sacrifices: priests, Levites, animals.

⁵ The word "**sacrifices**" is plural. Since the author of Hebrews makes a very big point of Jesus having offered Himself ONLY once, why the plural? Perhaps, the plural represents the enormity of the singular sacrifice of Jesus? Or does the plural represent other sacrifices made by Jesus (like prayers; Hebrews 5:7)?

But in the heavenly tabernacle, Jesus IS the covenant. He is both the High Priest who enters the heavenly holy place AND He is the willing sacrifice.

The once-and-for-all death Jesus died (v. 26)

[26] Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

The Old Covenant showed sin's seriousness by the countless sacrifices. But those sacrifices were all unwilling, dumb animals.

The New Covenant is better because the sacrifice of Jesus was singular. It only happened once and only needed to happen once.

And it was infinitely more serious, more weighty, more valuable because Jesus was both morally perfect and perfectly willing.⁶

One sacrifice of this quality was sufficient to not only "cover" sin,⁷ but to "**put away**" sin. By Jesus' sacrifice, sin was finally and completely done away with.

Our author brings this first part of his message to us to a close with comments about a coming event.

Things to come (vv. 27-28)

[27] And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment, [28] so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

⁶ Jesus is not only the Testator, but He is also the Mediator of the will. Only Jesus is able to fulfill both roles because He died AND is now alive.

⁷ This is the sense of "atonement" in the Old Testament. Hebrew "kippur" is "to cover" not to "put away" or to "do away with."

The author's point here is that as certain as it is that judgment is coming for every person, so it is certain that Jesus is coming again.

Jesus is not going to stay seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3) forever. He's coming back. And we who believe in Jesus should be excited about His return.

The first time He came to earth, He came to die on a cross for all sins for all time. He provided forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe in Him.

His return to earth will have everything to do with "salvation." But it will have nothing to do with sin-bearing.

Remember that in Hebrews, the word "salvation" refers to a deliverance into a rich inheritance with Jesus in His coming kingdom.

Jesus' purpose for coming back to earth is to bring THAT inheritance salvation to those who eagerly await Him, who have faithfully followed Him.⁸

What a tremendous encouragement to follow Jesus now, knowing that if we have done that we will hear "*Well done!*" from Him on that Day.

I won't move into the second section of this passage without touching on one other reality that our passage highlights.

Nobody gets out of this life alive. All of us here today and everyone you know who is not here will die. And following death, there is judgment.

The judgment has already been rendered - "*Not guilty!*" - for those who believe in Jesus. But for those who have not believed in Jesus, judgment equals condemnation.

⁸ In 2 Timothy 4:8, the Apostle Paul tells us that there is a specific reward / crown for those who eagerly await Jesus' appearance.

This life is the only opportunity we will have to come to Jesus for the eternal life that only He can give. To face God's judgment without Jesus is to enter eternity without God and without hope.

So, to anyone here today who has not seen Jesus for the perfect, willing sacrifice He is, see Him for that now. See Him who died for your sins on the cross as the Savior He is.

Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul to the Christians living in Rome. **[Romans 5:8] But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Jesus died for you. And He didn't wait for you to get good or to try hard or to measure up to die for you. He died for you when you were still in rebellion against God.

Now, He simply asks that you come to Him, believing that He is the only One who could give you what you desperately need: Life. Eternal and abundant. So, today, believe. Receive the gift He died to give you. Become a son or a daughter of God today by faith in Jesus.

We now come to the conclusion of our time together in Hebrews for this morning. Having shown Jesus' sacrifice to be the ultimate expression of love, he now shows how Jesus' sacrifice is the final solution to our sin problem, replacing the first covenant's bailing wire "for now" fix.

Let's listen now to a remarkable comment from the Jewish writer of Hebrews about the Mosaic system.

The Once and For All Sacrifice of Jesus (10:1-18)

The Old Covenant Sacrifices Could NOT Bring Perfection (vv. 1-4)

The limitations of the Old Covenant Sacrifices (vv. 1-3)

The Law is a shadow (10:1a)

[10:1] For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the form of those things itself...

Last week, Todd used the term "obsolete" to refer to the Mosaic Law. And today, we've been referring to it as the "**first**" covenant, which has been replaced by the "**New**" covenant. The Law is outdated. It has run its course. It's yesterday's news.

Now, we add the thought that the Law was unsubstantial, like a shadow on the sidewalk.

There's nothing to a shadow. It's only the absence of light. A shadow isn't really a thing. And that's a more dismissive comment than we would have expected from a Jew.

We typically think of the thing preceding the shadow. But in this case, historically, the shadow came before the real thing.

The Law of Moses and the whole Old Covenant system outlined the system that was coming and prepared for it.

But the Law was not the thing, and it didn't actually do what the thing - the New Covenant - would do. Here's more about the nature of the Old Covenant Law.

The Law doesn't perfect the worshiper (10:1b-3)

[10:1b]... For the Law...can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually every year, make those who approach perfect.⁹ [2] Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? [3] But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

Those words force us to think about how the Old Covenant sacrificial system actually worked.

⁹ There are several places in Hebrews that give us reason to believe that the temple rituals are still taking place. This is one of them and it argues for a date for Hebrews before AD 70 when the Herodian temple was destroyed by Rome.

The annual repetition of sacrifices tells us that there was something about those sacrifices that never quite fixed the people's problem with sin. It was a bailing wire fix.

The image is of the annual Jewish Day of Atonement. (Yom Kippur)

On that day, the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place and offered sacrifice for the people's sins. He did this every year.

But it was not as if each year's sacrifice was sufficient for a year's worth of sins, and that would be followed by another offering on the next Day of Atonement to cover for that year's sins.

No, the point of each year's offering on the Day of Atonement was to deal the people's sin. All the sins anyone had ever committed.

And that annual sacrifice dealt with all of a person's sins, for a year. But that covering was fragile. It grew brittle. It wore out.

And that is what made another sacrifice necessary the next year and the next and the next.¹⁰

Or, as v. 1 puts it, the Law could never make those who approach "*perfect*." The work was never done.

God's will from the beginning was that there would one day be a sacrifice for sin that would do away with sin once and for all.

But the Old Covenant's sacrifices could never do that. Why?
The ineffectiveness of the Old Covenant Sacrifices (v. 4)

[4] For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.¹¹

¹⁰ It seems apparent to me (and to others) from Leviticus 16, that all of the people's sins were dealt with every year, not just with the sins of the past year. See Leviticus 16: 16, 21 30 "all...sins" - especially v. 34.

¹¹ The Old Testament worshiper felt his distance from God, as symbolized by the veil in the tabernacle and by the sacrifices of amoral, unwilling animals.

Morally neutral, innocent but not holy, unwilling animals couldn't and didn't finally take care of the sin problem. If those sacrifices could have accomplished this, they wouldn't have had to be repeated. The repeated sacrifice of animals highlights the inadequacy of the whole system to accomplish God's will.

The Law was God's bailing wire "*fix it for now*" solution, put in place until the final Fixer - Jesus - came for fix our sin problem "*for good*."

Christ's Sacrifice Perfects New Covenant Worshippers (vv. 5-18)

God's will fulfilled by the death of Christ (vv. 5-10)

God's ultimate will (vv. 5-9)

[5] Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

**"YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED SACRIFICE AND OFFERING,
BUT YOU HAVE PREPARED A BODY FOR ME;¹²**

[6] YOU HAVE NOT TAKEN PLEASURE IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND OFFERINGS FOR SIN.

[7] THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME

(IT IS WRITTEN OF ME IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK)

TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

[8] After saying above,

"SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND OFFERINGS FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE IN THEM" (which are offered according to the Law),

[9] then He said,

"BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

¹² Literally, the Hebrew reads "*Ears You have dug for me.*" One way to understand this is that God had given the psalmist / Messiah the capacity to hear and to obey God. Or it could have been a figure of speech known as *synechdoche* (the use of an inclusive term to stand for a broader term) where "ears" stood for "body." If it is a figure of speech, Jesus' incarnation is in view by which He could offer Himself as the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins. This is my view.

This is a quote from one of David's psalms (Psalm 40). David was referring to himself in the psalm. And the point here is that the Old Covenant (under which David lived!) never did all that God desired.

God's will was not fully carried out by the Old Testament rituals. But, by applying Psalm 40 to Jesus, we see that all of the Mosaic sacrifices were pictures of what Jesus would, in fact, do.

God "**prepared a body**" for Jesus in the birth at Bethlehem when the Son became man (v. 5), so that Jesus could do the will of God, giving Himself as a morally perfect, perfectly willing sacrifice for us.

Our ultimate best (v. 10)

[10] By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

All of God's will was accomplished when Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

It was exactly this that Jesus had in mind when He said from the cross, **[John 19:30] "It is finished!"**

And by God's grace through faith in Jesus we "**have been sanctified**" - which is the author's way of saying redeemed, justified before God, or what we often mean by "**saved**"!¹³

This is who you are who have come to God by faith in Jesus. You are eternally holy and set apart for God. Secure forever. Forgiven and accepted by God in Jesus.

That's the way it is for those who approach God by the new way of Jesus. But that was definitely NOT the way it was for those who approached God through the old covenant.

The perfecting of the sanctified came via sacrifice (vv. 11-14)

[11] Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins...

That's the old system. The priests were never finished. They never got a break. Always one more offering, one more sacrifice. And the worshiper never had confidence that his or her sins were finally put away, never had a peaceful conscience, never had security.

How sad is this! And how amazing is this!!

[12] but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, [13] waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES ARE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.¹⁴ [14] For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.¹⁵

The superior sacrifice of Jesus is on full display here.

From His death on the cross comes complete acceptance before God. Sin is not simply covered until the next sin comes along. It is "**put away.**" (9:26) by Jesus' "**one sacrifice.**"

As the author says. It's "**perfect.**"

The Old Testament witness to this truth (vv. 15-18)

[15] And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, [16] "THIS IS THE COVENANT WHICH I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, DECLARES THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEARTS, AND WRITE THEM ON THEIR MIND," He then says,

¹³ As we have seen in Hebrews, the term "sanctify" does not describe progressive growth in Jesus. It describes an accomplished act in which we become "holy" (the word we translate "sanctify" means "to make holy") forever. This is the way the word is most commonly used in the New Testament to describe a Christian (a saint / holy one). See 1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 6:11.

¹⁴ The theme of Jesus' subjugation of His enemies is not out of place here as the author has been alluding to this throughout his discussion of Christ's death. At 9:15, and 9:28, subjugation of enemies ties in with our inheritance.

¹⁵ Again, believers in Jesus are those who are sanctified. Not those who are being sanctified.

**[17] "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS
I WILL NO LONGER REMEMBER."**

[18] Now where there is forgiveness of these things, an offering for sin is no longer required.

Most of this is a quote from Jeremiah 31. That chapter is famous for containing the most detailed prophecy of Jesus' New Covenant we have in the Old Testament.

It is a description of a covenant God will make with His people - who will be both Jews and Gentiles!

That covenant that will make for inner cleansing and transformation, not just external, the actual indwelling of God's Spirit in human hearts, and the complete removal of the guilt of sin which opens the door to unfettered worship, praise, and service.

All this that Jeremiah predicted was accomplished when Jesus offered a better sacrifice - Himself! - for you.

Conclusion:

Imagine the impact this meditation on the superior sacrifice of Jesus over those old covenant sacrifices would have had on a first-century Jew who was being tempted to revert to Judaism to escape persecution for following Jesus.

He or she would have been reminded that there is nothing better than following Jesus because there is no one better than Jesus!

Wouldn't that Christian have seen the beauty of the Jesus way, seen that everything they had been looking for in life was to be found in Him, and determined, again, to live for Jesus?¹⁶

And what about us who may be tempted to stop following Jesus, or to slow down in our Jesus-following ways for any one of a number of reasons? Can't we see that we find everything we really long for in Him?

All that came before Jesus foreshadowed Jesus. History reached its climax in His story.

What the Old Covenant commanded and the rituals that Moses and the Jews followed for fifteen hundred years were pictures of the reality fulfilled in Jesus.

So...

...you long to know that you are completely forgiven - look to Jesus.

...you dream of having real and lasting security - look to Jesus.

...you're tempted by the lure of a lesser loyalty - look to Jesus.

...you are looking for a purpose in life bigger than yourself - look to Jesus.

...you long to know that you're really and perfectly loved - look to Jesus.

Believe in Him and He'll give you the eternal life Jesus died to give you. Follow Him and He'll lead you into the fulfillment you were redeemed to enjoy.

¹⁶ Christians who were contemplating a return to Judaism were considering going back to something God had replaced with something better: the way of Jesus. It would not be surprising if the Jewish opponents of Christianity were urging the Jewish Christians to abandon Jesus, using His crucifixion as a major reason for

rejecting Him. The author turns that reasoning around and uses the cross as the "crux" of the reason to hold on to Jesus.