

Easter Sunday evening service

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 April 2025

Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[0 : 00] I'll please turn up Hebrews chapter 10. And we're just continuing our series, our evening series in the book of Hebrews. And we come to chapter 10 this evening, which means that we are less in question 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism and more in questions 40 to 44 that we affirmed earlier in our service.

And of course the issue is sacrifice. Sacrifice. A religion based around sacrifices, we might think, well, no thanks.

It sounds a bit barbaric. People say it's harsh. And a bit like we said when we talked a few weeks ago about the idea of priests, the idea of sacrifice feels a bit irrelevant to modern people like us. We think sacrifice doesn't really fit with the way we think about the world today. Except we see sacrifice everywhere.

It's maybe not animals in a religious context, but people sacrifice their health, their marriages, their children, their integrity, all on the altar of success or pleasure. When Rory McIlroy put on his green jacket last week, he talked about the sacrifices of his parents in order to get him to where he is.

[1 : 25] Judy Murray, mother of Andy, famously said that she used to dry tennis balls in the tumble dryer because they didn't have enough money to buy new ones when she trained Andy when he was a boy.

And of course, we tell those stories and we think those are good things. And it's not just these better known examples, is it? But whatever we devote ourselves to, whether it's our career, our children, our image, our health, it all requires us to sacrifice.

So the idea of sacrifice and basing your life around sacrifice may not be that irrelevant to us after all. Sacrifice in general is relevant to us, but I want to suggest this evening that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Hebrews chapter 10, verse 12, offered for all time, Jesus offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins.

That sacrifice is more relevant to your life than anything else, whoever you are and whatever you believe here this evening. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is more relevant to your life than anything else.

At a university convocation a few years ago, the erstwhile Jordan Peterson said this, It's never been a mystery to me why people are anxious and unsettled.

[2 : 50] I think the mystery is how it is that we can conduct ourselves so that that can remain under control. I mean, people deal with very heavy burdens in their life, you know.

You don't have to talk to someone for very long, someone you might be thinking is doing quite well in the world. But you don't have to scratch very deep beneath the surface before you find out that they have at least one serious problem that they're dealing with.

And so it's no mystery that people find it difficult to orient themselves in the world. The mystery is, well, what can we do about it? End quote. Questions of guilt and anxiety and failure and insecurity. Those questions are relevant to all of us because they are part of the human condition. And a version of this question, the mystery is, well, what can we do about it? What can we do about those things?

A version of that question drives so much of what we do in life. The things that we pour ourselves into don't deliver.

[3 : 54] What then? It can be disorientating for us. The success didn't fix the brokenness or the need to keep achieving. And so we're on that treadmill and we go and we go and we go and we achieve the things that we set out to do.

And still there is that sense, guilt, anxiety, failure, insecurity, whatever it might be. And that nagging sense that we just can't manage to be the people that we want to be in the world.

It remains. So how do we deal with this? That's the mystery. Jordan Peterson describes it as a mystery. Hebrews 10 clears up the mystery.

What we need for all of those things is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And this is a solution that actually works because it goes deeper than the surface issues themselves.

It goes to the very root of the problem. You see, in some ways, it's very reductionistic to say this, but it is true that we find this world unsettling.

[4 : 59] We find it disorientating because we have cut ourselves off from the God who made us and who made the world that we live in. And as I say, it is at the risk of sounding overly simplistic.

But all of our problems, every single problem that you have can be traced back to that point. Estrangement from God.

Now, there will be presenting issues on the surface. It will look different. But you can trace every problem back to that root. And Christ's sacrifice reconciles that breach.

We can't reconcile that relationship in our own strength, even if we wanted to, which we don't want to by nature. Because a holy God and sinful human beings cannot coexist. However, God has stepped into human history.

It's what we've been thinking about this weekend. God has stepped into history in the person of his son, the Lord Jesus, and he has done this in order to reconcile the relationship that we have broken.

[6 : 04] We've said it week after week. The issue for the first hearers of the letter to the Hebrews is that they know this. They know that this is the situation that they are in.

They need the sacrifice of Christ in order to be reconciled to the God who made them. But they're tempted to walk away from that reality. They're tempted to go back to their old religious system. And the plea of this letter is that they don't do this. Don't go there because Jesus is better. Way better. And here the author is making the point again.

Jesus is better. Way better. In regard to sacrifices. And again, he's contrasting the old and the new. And he starts by pointing out, first of all, how the old is limited.

Point number one, when it comes to the old sacrificial system, the old is limited. It's limited in two ways. First of all, it's limited in its effect. Verses 1 to 4.

[7 : 02] For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers have, once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins. But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. We heard in chapter 9 how the old covenant priests entered the tabernacle day after day in order to make sacrifices, first for their own sins, then for the sins of the people.

And then once a year, the high point of the sacrificial system was the day of atonement, when the perfect lamb was sacrificed, recalling God's rescue of his people at the Passover.

We think about that. The whole thing feels very exhausting. Verse 11, have a look. Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

[8 : 06] Day after day, sacrifice after sacrifice. Day after day, sacrifice after sacrifice. And all of this repetition, it sounds exhausting, but the need for the repetition reveals the central problem with it.

These sacrifices were only a shame. 10 verse 1, make perfect those who drew near. With being cleansed, verse 2, and take away sins, verse 3.

The old covenant sacrifices did what a shadow does. What does a shadow do? It presupposes the existence of a reality that creates the shadow.

So it's pointing to the reality beyond themselves. But those shadows didn't do what only the reality could do.

They reminded the worshiper of their sinfulness, but they couldn't do anything to deal with that sin. There was no cleansing of the conscience. There was no removal of sin. There was no deep transformative change.

[9 : 17] Now that doesn't mean that the system failed in some way. Not at all. This was the purpose that it was designed to serve all along. So it was limited. Secondly, then, if it was limited, first of all, in its effect, it was limited, secondly, in its intent.

In its intent, verses 5 to 10. Verse 5, consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Here, the author depicts Christ quoting Psalm 40, speaking to the Father, referring to the intent of the old covenant sacrifices.

He uses four different expressions. Four sacrifices. Do you see that? Sacrifices, offerings, burnt offerings, and sin offerings. And he uses each one of those to cover the whole gamut of Old Testament sacrifices and to highlight what was required by the law of God.

And he's saying, Even though they were offered according to the law, verse 8, and therefore according to God's will, these sacrifices were never intended as a way to please God or gain access to him.

The limited nature of the old covenant isn't something that we can only see from the perspective of the New Testament. Even back in the Old Testament, that is obvious.

[10:35] In the Psalms, in the Prophets, Jeremiah 31, which we saw back in chapter 8, and is referred to here in verse 16, shows how the old covenant always anticipated the coming of the new.

The shadow always pointed to the reality. And it is clear that God takes no pleasure in the sacrifices for their own sake because a better sacrifice is required.

The real sacrifice that the shadow is always pushing us to see. Christ's sacrifice always took priority over the bulls and goats. And this is why when Christ says in verse 9, you see verse 9, And behold, I have come to do your will.

God does away with the first, animal sacrifices, in order to establish the second, the once for all sacrifice of Christ. Now, the limits of the old covenant highlight a number of important things.

The first is this. They remind us that sin is always, ultimately, a heart issue. Sin isn't simply the bad things that we do.

[11:48] But sin flows from who we are. It is a moral issue rather than simply a behavioral issue.

That is why no amount of blood, sacrifice, or ceremony, or religion could resolve the problem.

Those things existed at a surface level. We needed to get to the heart. Secondly, if it was impossible for the old covenant system, ordained as it was by God to deal with our deepest problems of sin and guilt, then nothing else that we try will resolve the problem either.

However hard we try, if this system that was ordained by God was limited in its effect and its intent, if that was not able to deal with the heart issue, well then nothing we try will resolve the problem either.

And we are trying very hard in our culture. Here are the episode titles of two of the biggest podcasts at the moment. This is just a selection from over the last few months.

Unpacking the mystery of consciousness. How to find the love of your life. How to take control of your own destiny. Why modern women feel more lost than ever. The art of unlocking your inner peace.

[13:06] Millions of downloads. Or try this. The secret of living without fear and anxiety forever.

The psychology of why people don't like you. I may have listened to that one.

We think to ourselves, why are millions of people downloading this? They're doing it because maybe these people have the answers. Maybe these answers, these talks, these podcasts, these experts, will be able to give me the answer to these problems.

And the ones I listened to were fascinating. They were full of common sense. But the solutions that they prescribe can't ultimately achieve what they're striving for. Because they don't deal with the problem of the heart.

They don't get under the skin. They don't get beyond behavior modification. And of course, in any of these podcasts where spirituality is introduced, it's talked about as a personal discipline.

Something that you can do. That you add on to your life in order to keep control of things. Or create calm in some way. Or give order to our lives. It's all about what we do to fix ourselves.

[14:16] That's why, that's another reason why Jordan Peterson comes up short as well. Jordan Peterson's really popular because he puts his finger on many of the cultural problems we face.

But his solutions will only work up to a point. Because like all these other ones, they don't go deep enough to reach to the heart. That is why we need Christ.

That's why we need Christ. And the author of the Hebrews here makes that abundantly clear with the contrast. And here's the contrast. If the first point is that the old system is limited, the second point here is Christ is perfect.

Point number one, the old is limited. Point number two, Christ is perfect. Christ is the agent of the good things we're told about in verse one.

Which are the things that we heard about last time in chapter nine. If you remember, atonement, redemption from sin, cleansing. He can actually, and does actually, verse one, make perfect those who draw near.

[15:21] He makes us perfect. How does he do it? Well, first of all, through his perfect obedience. That's verses five to ten. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book. As I said earlier, these verses depict the Son addressing the Father when he comes into the world.

All of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is involved in the redemption plan. The Father prepares a body for the Son. The Spirit creates that body in Mary's womb, and the Son assumes that body. And all of that happens in order for the Son to do the will of God. The author here is giving us a window into the hidden things of God, and when Christ comes into the world, the eternal plan is carried out perfectly.

Jesus embraces the will of God in order to be a suitable sacrifice for men and women, a fitting sacrifice for those who could never be made perfect by the blood of bulls and goats.

[16:32] In the face of the agony of the cross, as he prayed in Gethsemane the night before his death, Jesus cried out to God, if there was any other way to perfect sinful men and women, if there was any other way that a guilty conscience could be cleansed, if there was any other way that sin could be decisively dealt with, to show it to him, but then he said, yet not my will, but yours be done.

Behold, I have come to do your will, O God. So, verse 10, by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Sanctified here means set apart for God. That was the goal of the old covenant sacrificial system. It marked God's people out as belonging to him. So they were told, Leviticus 20, verse 7, to sanctify themselves.

That is to observe the external actions that set them apart from others. Mark them out as a distinctive people. But because Hebrews is concerned with heart sanctification being made perfect, drawn into the presence of God, and because we know that the religious system can't do that, it's limited.

The language here is different. You see that? Through Christ's obedience to the will of God, we have been sanctified. He has done it for us. It's not something that we've got to go and do for ourselves.

[17:58] We can't. He has done it for us. He was faithful where we were unfaithful. He was obedient where we were disobedient. And his faithful obedience culminated.

Then in the second aspect of his perfection, and it's this, it's his perfect offering. First of all, we see his perfect obedience, but then also his perfect offering. Look at verse 11. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting for that time until his enemy should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. The old covenant priests are described as standing because their work was never done.

Making sacrifice for their sins, for the sins of the people, for their sins, the sins of the people. Their work was never done. Their sacrifices were never sufficient. By contrast, Christ, see his posture?

[19:07] He's seated. And that shows us actually a number of things, three things in particular.

First of all, because of the perfection of his offering, his work of dealing with sin is finished. No further sacrifice is required to deal with your sin.

Secondly, he is now ruling in heaven as he waits for his enemies to be subdued and he claims his inheritance in full. And thirdly, he has sanctified definitively those who have been set apart as his. All of us who have put our faith in the atoning death of Christ have been and will be redeemed. But, more than that, it is through this offering that Christ establishes the new covenant and brings those promises to bear in the life of all who believe.

Look at verse 16. This is the covenant that I will make with them. After those days, declares the Lord, I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. Then he adds, I will remember

their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

Why is our culture anxious and unsettled? Because we know that we aren't able to control our appetites and our desires. Whether it's food or drink or some more sinister impulse, we're not able to control ourselves.

[20 : 28] Or whether it's the way anger or lust or the like seem to have this hold over us. What ends up happening? It leaves us feeling weak and insecure and we look around and it seems to just be worse because when we look around, everybody else seems like they're all over it.

They've got life tied up. Why do we struggle with fear and guilt? Because we know that we have skeletons in our closets.

Things in our lives that we're ashamed of. Things that we've said, things that we've done that we feel guilty about. Now as long as we deny that guilt and keep up appearances, we think we're okay. We think we can get by in life. But truth is we're struggling. That nagging reality of guilt is wearing us down. But also we live in fear of people finding out that the front that we put up isn't real.

We worry that people will discover we're a fraud. What if they see the person that I present to the world isn't actually the real me? The social media is a performance. It's not reality.

[21 : 30] What if they find out that I don't have it all together and I'm actually a mess? That makes us anxious. Fearful. There is only one answer and the answer is the new covenant promise that comes to us on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice.

To that guilt Christ says, I will remember their sins no more. I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

whatever you have done whatever it is Christ's sacrifice deals with it. You are forgiven.

You are reconciled to God. As we saw in chapter 8 it's not that God has amnesia but that he decides not to recall your sin against you.

And that's every sin. Not just the small ones. Every sin. Not just the ones that we don't mind talking about. Every sin.

[22 : 37] And the matter is closed. He doesn't bring them up again. So what does that mean? It means we can be done with guilt. We can refuse its hold on us and enjoy the freedom of knowing that the God who made us for himself delights in us.

How does God feel about you today? How would you answer that question? He delights in you. I know that some of you need to hear that this evening.

Like you need oxygen in order to stay alive. The God of all the earth delights in you because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. If I was less socially aware I'd get you to chant it back to me.

That's how important it is. And we can get beyond anxiety. We can get beyond insecurity because we know that we're accepted by the one who defines reality and in whose acceptance we can be ourselves.

We can be ourselves with all of our faults because he is the only one whose opinion really matters in the world. It's a bit like if you know the king accepts you. If you know that King Charles accepts you and is delighted that you're coming to Buckingham Palace does it matter what the security guards think of you?

[23 : 52] Does it matter what the people at the gate think of you? Of course it doesn't. The king of the universe says I delight in you. It should transform all kinds of anxiety and insecurity.

And then to our weakness. Look Christ says this I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. Sometimes we think well that's great that he feels that way about me.

That's great that I can be done with my past. That's great that I don't need to feel insecure anymore because I'm accepted and loved by the king of all the earth. But what happens then? I just keep falling back into those same old sins again and again.

Well he gives us his spirit to change us. I will put my laws not on stone on the outside but in their hearts. I will write them on their minds.

He transforms us on the inside. He transforms our thoughts. He gives us new desires. We're no longer actually controlled by our sinful nature because we get new hearts.

[25 : 03] Hearts that love what is good. Hearts that are able to resist sin. We don't do it perfectly of course because the old man remains. But even though that is a reality I hope you know that in Christ you don't need to sin.

You have the resources to resist temptation. Sin is a terrible terrible master but in Christ its tyrannical reign is broken.

you are no longer a slave to those desires. You can say when that temptation comes your way no not today. And in the strength that he supplies you can stand.

It's not easy but it is possible. So what can we do about guilt and anxiety and insecurity? What can we do about those feelings of failure and fear?

Take them to Christ. Take them to the one who through his perfect obedience and his perfect offering has dealt with them all. There's no mystery.

[26 : 14] Go to Christ and go only to Christ because only he can forgive our failure and only he gives us the power to change. Go to Christ.

Christ. That's what we're going to do when we come to the table in a moment. We need to do that each one of us in our experience. We need to resolve in our heads and in our hearts he is the one to whom we go nowhere else.

Go to Christ. Let's pray.