

Hebrews 9:1-28

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[0 : 00] Please turn up Hebrews chapter 9, page 1005 if you need it in the church. If you need it in the church. Where do you look for meaning?

In your desire to matter in the world or to be connected to reality, where do you look? And what do you do with your weaknesses and your failings?

When you feel stuck in those patterns of behavior that you wish that you could change, but they just seem to have a hold over you and it doesn't feel like you can make any progress.

What do you do? How do you cope with those feelings of guilt or shame? Those things that you've said or done in the past that you regret and you can't chase them from your memory.

We can easily drift along in life and we can pursue whatever vision of the good life that we're into without actually asking these questions. Where do we look for meaning?

[1 : 01] What do we do with our failures? How do we deal with those feelings that seem to pull us back and make us struggle? We can chase after our vision of the good life without actually getting an answer.

But the problem with that is that they are the sorts of questions that one way or another nag us in the quiet moments. Those moments when it's just us and our thoughts and they come back to us and they make us uncomfortable.

Because if we're honest, we're not sure if there are answers, actually. We're not sure if there are answers to these questions that affect how we live well in this world. And one way that our contemporary culture, certainly where we live here, one way that we've sought to address these questions or deal with them, we haven't addressed them actually, to deal with the fact that they keep coming up, is to fill our lives so full of distractions and busyness that we never actually have to address them.

You see, busyness keeps the deep thoughts at bay. But even so, you will look somewhere for meaning. You will do something with negative feelings.

Because those feelings are part of what it means to be human. What do you do when you fail? However busy you make yourself, you've got to be able to answer that question.

[2 : 28] Where do you take your feelings of guilt when you mess up? Our culture in this day prizes the virtue of authenticity. We're told we need to be true to ourselves.

Be true to ourselves no matter what. We should accept our failures as part of who we are. They're no big deal. They're just part of who we are. They're part of the story, as it were, that we're in.

And we should simply not allow, we're told, guilt to control us. When guilt comes up in our minds, when we feel it, when we feel that sense of shame, we need to tell ourselves that it's nothing.

And we should ignore it. And we should be true to ourselves. It's just part of who you are. Don't worry. Keep going. But we know, don't we? It's never that simple. What if we've messed up really badly?

And we actually have a good reason to feel guilt. You should feel bad about that angry outburst with the children. You should actually feel bad about the shameful stuff that you look at online.

[3 : 30] That lie that you told about your colleague that destroyed their reputation in the office. What do we do with that? Well, the passage that we're looking at this evening gives us an answer.

And the good news is that it's an answer that goes further and deeper than any of the questions, any of the answers that our culture might offer. Because it's an answer that doesn't simply tell us what to do in those situations, but it changes who we are.

And the answer, quite simply, is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ related to those very real, very everyday issues?

Hebrews chapter 9 tells us. That's the point that our author is making as he develops what he said to us last time in chapter 8, contrasting the old covenant and the new covenant that Christ brings in. Last week, if you were here, you remember we saw that Jesus was a better priest who mediates a better covenant. And this week we see what that priestly work actually accomplishes.

[4 : 33] Look back at chapter 8, verse 3. We were told last time that it is necessary for priests to have something to offer. That was fundamental to their work of offering gifts and sacrifices.

Chapter 8, verse 12, the blood of goats and calves to carry out their duties. Sorry, 9, verse 12, the blood of goats and calves to carry out their duties.

And so that is with Christ. But again, going back another chapter even further in this letter, chapter 7, 27, we're told there, Jesus has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. Chapter 9 is dealing with the significance and the supremacy of his sacrifice. And what we'll see is actually that it starts in a similar point to last week.

So in contrast to the old covenant, Christ's sacrifice is better than anything under the old covenant. It is better, first of all, because of where it happens. Point number one, it's better because of where it happens.

[5 : 43] Old covenant worship, 9, verse 1, happened in the earthly sanctuary. Where 9, verses 1 to 5, there was a carefully constructed tent, tabernacle. This portable structure, it had the holy place where the priests ministered day after day, offering sacrifices for the sins of the people, following, verse 6, the ritual duties.

And then once a year, the high point, the day of atonement, when the high priest entered the most holy place where God symbolically dwelt. It was represented by the ark that had the Ten Commandments.

It was covered by the mercy seat. And in there, the high priest offered a blood sacrifice for himself and for the people. Daily, weekly, yearly sacrifices.

And yet, God still remains separate from the people. In fact, we're told, 9, verse 8, that the pattern of old covenant worship actively served to show precisely that point.

The way to God was not yet open to everyone. The tabernacle and the regulations, they had no lasting power. As we saw last week, they were only a copy or a shadow.

[6 : 51] Do you remember? We said about the shadow and the reality. And they were just a shadow of the reality that is in heaven. But look at 9, verse 9. According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

That is, until the time of the new covenant. But now in the coming of Jesus, the new order has come. The time of reformation has come.

The shadow has given way to reality. The copy is now obsolete. Look at verse 11. But when Christ appeared as the high priest of the good things that have come, and through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places.

So, this sacrifice is of a different level of value. For the old covenant priests, it was goats and bulls. But Christ, the sinless Son of God, verse 14, offers himself unblemished to God.

He doesn't minister in an earthly tabernacle made with hands, but in the holy places, in the heaven of heavens, in the very presence of God.

[8 : 11] The whole earth belongs to God. But heaven is his dwelling place, his throne, his sanctuary. And this is where Christ has gone once for all.

And here's the wonderful thing. He brings absolutely everyone who is united to him, with him, into that place. As we said last week, the big issue for the Hebrews is the temptation to return to the old forms of worship, to the old sacrificial system.

Back in the day, I was an estate agent for a time. And when I was doing that job, I would sell, sometimes I would sell land to people. I would sell a plot of land for them to come and build on. And often what they would do is they would come and they'd put a caravan on that land. And then they would build a house. Living in the caravan, they'd build the house. The caravan was fine as far as it went.

They could live there. They could get on fine in the caravan. But it was always intended to be temporary. It was always intended to be something that they lived in for a time.

[9 : 20] And once the house was built, the caravan was either demolished or taken away on a trailer. There was certainly no question that the people would continue to live in the caravan when this house that they'd built was now ready to be lived in.

There was certainly no question that once they'd moved into the new house, they would then say, do you know what? Let's go back to the caravan. And the author here in Hebrews is telling this group, don't go back to the caravan.

It served its purpose. And it's now obsolete. Take it away on a trailer. Go to and stay with Christ. Because He has offered Himself for you in the very presence of God.

That's the reality. Don't stop with the shadow. That's the permanent thing. Don't stop with the temporary. There is no power in the temporary now to do business with God.

Of course, the same is true for anything that we might be tempted to pursue in our efforts to find answers to those questions that I mentioned at the beginning. However hard you try, whether it's religion, whether it's church attendance, whether it's penance for sin or social projects or lifestyle gurus, name your place that people go to look for answers to those questions, none of these have the power to bring you to God because none of them penetrate to that reality.

[10 : 50] Only the sacrifice of Christ can do that because of where it happens. In heaven, in the presence of God. Well, that's a bit more on what we talked about last week.

Christ's sacrifice is better because of where it happens. But then secondly, it is also better because of what it achieves. Point number two, because of what it achieves. The point that the author is pressing in verse 11 and following is the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice.

And he teases out what this actually means for those who trust him. And I'm going to walk us through a few of these. The first is this. We have access. We have access.

One of the key things that the old covenant rituals taught was that access to the presence of the living God was restricted to a few special people. But remember, when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple, which was the tabernacle's successor, was torn in two from top to bottom.

This showed the world. Verse 8, the way into the most holy place where God dwells has now been disclosed. There is only one way to God, and that way is Jesus.

[12 : 01] But all who come to him are welcome there. When I was a boy, our family would often go and visit friends on the coast, a small town on the coast.

And near where we stayed, there was an impressive house up on the hill. And it had big gates and lots of space around it. And it had a lovely, impressive view over the sea.

And sometimes I would be out walking, and I would pass by when the gates were open. And I could see in. And I could see this great house. And I could see the children's toys on the grass.

And maybe the cars. And sometimes there were even people moving around, and you could see them. And then the gates would close. And I knew that I was on the outside.

Several years later, many years later, a friend that I'd got to know over the intervening years said to me and a few of his other friends, would you like to come to my holiday home on the coast?

[13 : 06] My family have a place up there. Would you like to come? And we all got in the car and headed off. And as we drove towards the coast, I realized where we were going.

And I started saying, Oh, I used to go here when I was a boy with my family. And there's this beautiful house up on the hill. And when we were there, I would often look in the gates, but the gates would close.

I was like, you know, it was one of those beautiful places. Lovely, lovely house. And we turned around and into the street and drove right up to the gates. And I realized this was his holiday house.

He reached behind the sun visor and pressed a button and the gates opened. And then we went. And I've stayed there many times since. This place that had once been off limits to me was somewhere that I now had access.

How was that the case? Because I knew the son of the owner. And because I was with the son, I was welcome. When we went in, the gates opened.

[14 : 11] We went straight in, in through the front door, into the living room, sat down, made ourselves at home. Because Christ serves in heaven.

Because he, verse 24, entered not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

All who are united to him by faith have full access into the presence of God. Because you know the son and are connected to him, you have access.

This is a key aspect of Christ's high priestly work that our author keeps returning to. Through Christ's sacrifice, if you know the son, that relationship that was once out of our reach is off limits no more.

We've been reconciled to God. So this evening, if you're in Christ, can I say God is not distant from you. However your experience of him in this particular moment might feel, whether it's because life is tough or because things aren't going the way you want or because it feels like your prayers aren't being answered, God is not far away.

[15:31] In Christ, the gates have opened and you're in his presence. So whatever you're going through at the minute, lean in. Don't walk back. Lean in. He is not far off.

So first of all, we have access. Secondly, can you see we are redeemed? We are redeemed. Verse 12, He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood.

Thus, securing an eternal redemption. Animal sacrifices, they could only make you ceremonially clean. The old covenant couldn't reach any deeper than that.

The blood of a thousand animals couldn't deal with sin, but Jesus' sacrifice goes deeper. Through his blood, we are redeemed. In his death, it's like he has gone to the slave market with an infinite means to pay, and he has paid every debt, purchasing us out of bondage to our sin, out of bondage to our sin into eternal life.

Do you understand that in Christ, you're no longer under Satan's control? The chains have been broken. They no longer shackle you to your sin like before. Whatever marked your life before Christ, it no longer has a hold on you.

[16:45] Yes, it has a pull, but it doesn't have a hold. That shame, that guilt, the folly, the stupidity, the wickedness, all of it has lost its power.

Now, you still may bear the scars of sin. That might be sin that you committed or sin that was committed against you, but that no longer defines you. That is no longer who you truly are, because your sin has been removed, and you are free.

Christ has purchased you. He has redeemed you. If you are in Christ, that is really true of you. I know some of you struggle with the past in very painful ways.

Because of the things that happen, you have come to view yourself perhaps as damaged goods. Perhaps even think of yourself as damaged beyond repair. You have sought help, and you have been told that you just need to take control of these negative emotions and not let them steal your joy.

And so you have gone away, resolved to be as positive as you can. You have gritted your teeth. Try and be positive. Remind myself, I need to be positive. But it doesn't seem to work. It certainly doesn't seem to work in any lasting way.

[18:00] And you are right. It doesn't. Not in any lasting way. The problem is, you don't need, you don't actually need a better version of this life.

You need a whole new life. And that is precisely what Jesus' sacrifice has won for you. His body was broken.

His blood was shed. And it was offered up in the heavenly tabernacle to purchase your freedom from sin, to purchase your freedom from death, and to liberate you for eternal life.

We're redeemed. Thirdly, we're cleansed. We're cleansed. The blood of goats and calves was effective for the ceremony.

So look at verse 14. How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

[19:02] Guilt. If you think about it, guilt is one of the currencies of our day. See, if I can make you feel guilty about something, I can control you. So there are lots of things that we're being made to feel guilty about that we don't need to feel guilty about.

It is fascinating to me that at a time when our culture is so keen to tell us that we're free to live whatever life we want to live, if we fail to embrace a particular vision of life, well, we are wicked people.

We're bad, and we should feel bad, and we should feel guilty. We should be ashamed of ourselves. Christ liberates you from all of that false guilt kind of nonsense.

You are where you are because the sovereign God of all the earth put you there. You were born into the family you were born into under the hand of a sovereign God. You shouldn't feel guilty

about any of it.

You have what you have because God has given it to you. You don't have what you don't have because He's kept it back. If He's given you a huge blessing, thank Him.

[20 : 07] If He hasn't, trust Him. But don't feel guilty about where He has you. Christ liberates us from all of this invented guilt, silliness.

He liberates you from the crushing weight of cultural opinion. But our culture is much less clear that there is also such a thing as legitimate guilt. I said that at the beginning.

Verse 14, do you see? The author reminds us that our sin ensnares us in, it says, dead works. It is literally acts that lead to death. So guilt is real.

And we know this because our conscience tells us this day and night. We can be ticking along fine. It's not your experience. You're ticking along fine and then you remember something that you said or did in the past.

It could be even a long time earlier and your heart sinks. You get agitated. You feel bad. The word that damaged another person's reputation. The comment that crushed someone.

[21 : 03] That hatred or lust or greed that led us to use that person rather than treat them as an image bearer of God. In all the ways that we've not loved God or our neighbor as we should, our conscience condemns us.

That guilt is real. It is legitimate. We try to deal with it. But whatever we try, whether it's ignoring it or trying to be good or moral in some way, we can't. Like the old covenant worshiper, with all of the blood of bulls and goats, we can't remove the stain ourselves.

Think of guilt. Think of it like a tumor inside your body. If you pretend it's not there or you ignore it, you'll keep getting the symptoms. If you try to deal with it yourself, you'll not get anywhere.

Just ask Steve Jobs. It's only when you allow the doctor to insert the knife and open you up that you have any hope of getting better. Take your guilt to Jesus, the great physician.

Allow him to open you up and cut out the sickness in order to cleanse you and make you well. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only thing that goes deep enough to cleanse our conscience, to deal with our guilt.

[22 : 15] And if you put your faith in him, whatever your past, whatever it is that sticks when somebody talks about your past, that thing that gets traction and makes you feel that way, whatever it is, on the basis of verse 26, have a look, verse 26.

His once-for-all sacrifice, you can sing with confidence. His blood can make the farthest clean. His blood availed for me. Do you know what it feels like to be clean on the inside?

Well, that is what Christ does for us. I say that knowing that those who have come to Christ for this cleansing can still struggle to get beyond the past.

It's often one of the reasons that people give up. Hebrews found it too hard to persevere because of the pressure culturally to keep going and the drawback to all that was familiar. We sometimes feel that that sense of the past is too much for us and we just give up.

But where else would you go? Because this is actually the accuser doing his work and what he's telling you isn't true. It's not true. And you know that because you've been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

[23 : 33] That's an objective reality in history that stands over your life. Anyone who would come to the Lord Jesus can be saved.

Whatever you've done. And if your faith is in Christ, and perhaps you feel that sense of guilt growing, sing to yourself another hymn when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within.

What do you do when you feel like that? Upward, I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin. Every single last one. It was all nailed to the cross.

Access, redemption, cleansing, and then briefly, what else does it achieve? Well, it achieves the fact that we have a certain future. We have a certain future. Verse 15. Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Therefore, that is on the basis Christ's sacrifice, he now mediates a new covenant, so that those who have come to him in faith might have an eternal inheritance. The author goes on to develop how Jesus' high priestly work fulfills Jeremiah's prophecy mentioned in chapter 8.

[24 : 57] But the big point is that, as one commentator puts it, because Jesus is the first of many sons and is himself the heir of all things, chapter 1, verses 2 to 4, he opens the way for others to receive their promised inheritance.

The death of Christ makes the inheritance intended for all of Christ's brothers effective.

This is how you know that you can be sure of that inheritance in the future. In Christ, you receive life for eternity, and so your future is secure.

In the struggle of the Christian life, when trials come, when you're persecuted for following Jesus the way the Hebrews were, it is tempting to think that you can't keep going, and so you give up and drift away.

When you feel that sense of guilt from the past, you think, I can't get beyond it, and you give up and drift away. But there is an inheritance that has been won for Christ's people that is worth enduring whatever it is in order to receive.

[26 : 03] It is the full experience of living in the presence of God. It is the unfettered joy of being redeemed from sin, the contentment and satisfaction of a clear conscience and a pure heart.

The experience of this is what all who have come to Christ in faith will inherit. So wherever you are this evening, let me tell you, keep going. Keep going.

How do you connect with reality? How do you deal with weakness, failure, and guilt? How do you find security for the future in this uncertain world? Look to, trust in, hold fast to the sacrifice of Christ for you.

Let's pray.