

## Sunday 05 April 2009 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

### **Palm Sunday 2009 - The Work of Christ Hebrews 9&10**

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#### Intro

Heaven & eternal things series + Palm Sunday & start of Holy week

- This time next week – **celebration**. Now – **We focus our minds & allow our hearts to feel the impact & truth of Holy Week and the cross.**
- The headline is that Jesus' life, death and resurrection **makes a way for us** to live in freedom & relationship with God on earth and into eternity
  - That's what Christianity means – life in all its fullness, followed by life after death!
  - TODAY we're going to spend a short time reflecting on HOW the bible explains that is possible.
    - Its no good you telling your neighbour 'Jesus died for you' but not being able to answer their next question 'why and how?' "err.... That's what the vicar said" won't do!

**The cross of Christ is the centrepiece of Christianity.** It's the central event of the bible. It's the central event of human existence – our calendar revolves around it, many of the world's nations are founded on a Christian basis.

The cross achieved for this world, as well as you and me, many many things, which reverberate past a single day 2000 years ago.

- Much we may never understand, but there is a call for us as Christians to be people of the cross – to go deeper and grow in our understanding
- And as a result, to change the way we live
- So next 2 sermons focussing on the cross and its impact for you and me

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- The last few sermons on heaven have renewed our hope, they've given us a taste of the good things to come, they've reminded us that we should be living NOW in the light of heaven (we'll look at that further after Easter)
- Our lives now on earth take on a different significance when we realise that we are free, in relationship with God and given multiple and increasing gifts and blessings **IN ORDER THAT** we can make a positive difference in our world now, and by doing so, store up our inheritance in heaven too.

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#### Atonement

This Palm Sunday, we stand ahead of Holy Week, which remembers the final busy week of Jesus' life, before his death, resurrection and ascension. The OT and NT use a host of images to explain the significance of the cross, which we remember this Friday.

- Because this year KC is holding a Passover celebration meal, I want to focus on the image of Jesus as a sacrifice.
- A sacrifice which achieved something immeasurably significant.

Sacrifice is one of the Bible's models & images of what is called '**atonement**' – that is, atoning, making up for, putting right, making amends, for a wrong situation.

All of the images & ideas of atonement in the bible (both OT & NT) build up a picture, they're all complementary, they all add to our understanding. But we can't cover them all in one sermon!

- Redemption – paying a price to redeem humankind and the world from their previous state
- Liberation – freedom from the condition of sin and into fullness of life
- Reconciliation – humanity brought back into relationship with God and each other
- Forgiveness – the timeless power in the cross to achieve forgiveness for us from God
- Victory, and Jesus as the ultimate victor (one for Easter Sunday)

### Examples

Today we're reflecting on sacrifice.

#### EYAM

- Quaint Derbyshire village in the peaks near us. Of course, its also famous around the world for being a village of self-sacrifice during the Great Plague in England in the 1660's
- In 1665 the plague came up from London with some traders and entered the small village with devastating consequences. 75% of its 350 inhabitants eventually died of the plague over 16 months
- But it's famous because the village chose to keep the plague to themselves.
- They voluntarily quarantined themselves, cutting themselves off and being fed food and supplies by outsiders – left for them at the village boundary stones.
- And by doing so, the people of Eyam saved the surrounding villages, towns, cities and thousands of people from infection and death.
- It's a rightly famous true story of self-sacrifice, taking on terrible affliction even in healthy people who could have escaped, in order to save others.
  - I wonder how many people would make the same kind of self-sacrifice today?

#### 9/11 Firefighters

- Perhaps a modern equivalent is the fire-fighters of New York City when the twin towers were ablaze on 9/11.
- They knew as their fire trucks approached the base of the buildings what they were facing. White-hot fire, hundreds of people inside the 2 towers.
- The fire-fighters didn't hesitate, they didn't stop nearby and have a quick union meeting to decide if this work assignment met health & safety regulations.
- They went in, and up, and out, and saved and helped and in some cases carried other civilians out of the towers to safety.
- And unfortunately, several hundred (346) fire-fighters died when the towers collapsed on top of them in the line of duty.
- That is serious heroism and self-sacrifice, and while its in the line of duty for fire-fighters, its still a rare event in the world.

### Sacrifice      **[POWERPOINT – opening page again]**

The Apostle Paul says this: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom 5:6-8 in reverse order)

I've chosen to focus on the image of sacrifice this week, because as well as the crucifixion on Good Friday, the Passover festival remembers the sacrificial lamb from the Jewish heritage.

- We're going to eat lamb, and remember how spotless, flawless lambs were used as an animal sacrifice suitable to atone, to make-up for, the sins of the people of Israel before God long ago.

- And that the blood of lambs was daubed on every Israelite's doorposts in Egypt just before the Exodus to mark them out as God's people,
- and protect them from the judgement that came on Egypt for holding God's people in bondage as slaves.

### **The idea of a sacrificial lamb follows into the NT.**

- IN a number of places, the writers put 2 and 2 together, and realised that part of **what Jesus did** in his death and resurrection, **was like a sacrificial lamb**.
  - Jesus is described by his cousin John the Baptist at the start of his ministry as 'the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (John 1:29).
  - And later, in Revelation there comes the image of a lamb seated on the throne, vulnerable and humble yet king at the close of human history. (Rev 7:10)

### **Jesus is our lamb, willingly sacrificed on our behalves.**

- Taking the punishment, the atonement due to humans on himself –
  - so that, like the villagers who lives near to Eyam, or those saved from the fires of 9/11 – **so that we might walk free.**

### Reading: Hebrews 9:14-15, 24-28; 10:19-26

<sup>9:14</sup> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

<sup>24</sup>For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. <sup>26</sup>Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup>Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup>so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

<sup>10:19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### Unpack

There are lots of **images here which refer to the way Jews sacrificed in the temple**, several thousand years ago. So I want to **deal with them quickly, so that they don't confuse us** and we can concentrate on the main points of this passage.

- v14 – now it's the blood of Christ, not a real lamb, that is offered to God.
  - And Christ was unblemished in life and soul, just as the animal sacrifices had to be
- v24 – “a man-made sanctuary, a copy of the true one.”

- This refers to the Temple in Jerusalem (read the earlier section of Ch 9 for details),
- within the inner sanctuary there was a small room called the ‘Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place’ which symbolised the very presence of God, separated by a curtain/wall from everything else.
- Once a year only, the High Priest was allowed by law to enter, and on the altar, to present an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish nation,
- to symbolically make up to God for the fact that all humans are sinners, and fall short of the glory of God

The Jewish Priest would make atonement for the sins for the people, once a year, every year.

**There is an important difference in OT Hebrew translation of word *atonement* and the NT Greek use and understanding.**

- The OT Hebrew *atonement* = *covering* (kippur) = for **once a year** the sacrifice was sufficient
  - Like paying your car’s tax disc – its gets them off your back, but you know the bill will arrive again next year.
- NT Greek = understanding is *taking away* (permanently) (Hew 10:3-4; 18)
  - Like standing trial for a crime and being acquitted – in many countries the law says you can’t ever be tried again for that crime. Once you’ve been acquitted its wiped off your record – not guilty and never going to be
- V9:25 – **Now the atonement is not a one-off, but permanent.** The injury, the problem, is taken away.
  - **Now its Jesus who is the sacrifice, offering his own blood shed on the cross.**
  - He no longer has to do this year after year – it’s a one-off perfect sacrifice.

v.10:19 – so now, **because Jesus has made a way, you and I can enter ‘the holy of holies’ in other words, the presence of God, all the time and freely.**

- Jesus has become the High Priest for everyone, not just the Jews.
  - **He achieves entry into the life and presence of the Trinity for anyone who wants it.**
- And Christians are washed and sprinkled –
  - not with animal blood which never really works – **because its external.**
- **We are washed in our hearts, in our heads, in our spirits for eternity – through the work of the cross.**

Folks – this is massive! If you haven’t already worked this out, and sadly many millions of people haven’t – then listen up...

- **No action you can do can bring you peace with God.**
  - **You can’t do it!**
    - No amount of good works, no amount of praying on your knees,
    - however much money you give away, punishing your body,
    - abstaining from one thing, taking up another thing....
  - **These are all external actions.**
    - And the bible says that external actions can never put you in right relationship with God.
    - **They can’t bridge the gap that sin creates.**
- **Because God doesn’t look at the outside, he looks at the inside. The heart, soul and spirit of a person.**

- **The only way you can be at peace with your creator is to allow HIM to bridge the gap for you**
  - Jesus died so that you and I don't have to
  - Jesus became sin, so that you and I can become Sons (REF)
  - Only God himself is capable of bridging the gap and bringing us back into relationship with Himself.
    - That's why the Trinity was willing to take a massive hit on our behalf.
- **All you have to do is believe it, accept it and start to live like you believe it.**
- **You can't earn salvation, but can accept it.**

**Am I saying we shouldn't live Godly lives and do good works – of course not!**

- And nor is this passage in Hebrews.
- But that kind of life can **only be effective and Godly** if you have **first given your life away to Christ** and **accepted his free gift** of salvation through his death on the cross.

That is one of the fundamental truths of our human condition, and we've got to get our heads around it.

- there is no longer a need for us to go back to the old ways, the old ways of desperately trying to please God – like the sacrifice of animals for a year's respite.
- **You need to learn to live in your new identity –**
  - as clean, holy, without blemish, being perfected, being made holy (hew 10:14)
- **We rely on Jesus, we acknowledge Jesus, we thank God for Jesus, we chose to live for Jesus in response to the extraordinary truth of the cross.**
  - Romans 6:23 explains this: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
  - And Hebrews 9:28 says "he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

### Recap

So let's take a look at the big picture that this passage teaches us:

**The cross is both 'for us' and an element of 'instead of us'**

- **FOR US** – achieving for humankind, something which we are powerless to achieve on our own merit, or in our own strength
  - Redemption, reconciliation, freedom, life in all its fullness, peace with God
- **INSTEAD OF US** - substitution – the Trinity and Jesus takes on himself the implications of human rebellion & detachment from God.
  - The famous phrase 'Jesus died for you' means this.

### Avoid incorrect understanding of the word punishment

**Avoid the caricature of God vs Jesus, or God punishing Jesus.** It's simply not like this – because the whole of the Trinity is involved and it's **much less a punishment** than a massive sacrifice.

- There is a danger that you might view God the Father as **inflicting pain, punishment, retribution onto the Jesus the Son.**
  - But that isn't the right way to look at it. The Father, Son and HS are not separate beings, they are one and the same. 3 in 1. **{POWERPOINT OF 3 interlocking circles}**

- So its not helpful to imagine that the Father inflicts punishment onto the Son, in isolation, like an executioner chops of another man's head
- In fact, it's the other way around.
- The amazing truth of the cross is that the **Trinity takes onto and into itself, the punishment due to humankind.**
  - **God isn't giving-out punishment, he's soaking it up into himself**
    - rather than allow humanity to face the full consequences of sin - rebellion against Godly ways.
- That is a far more powerful picture – it shows the immense depth of love which the Trinity has for this world.
  - (1 John 4:10) – “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his **Son** as an atoning sacrifice for our **sins**.”
  - **The cross shows the Trinity is not angry, and not indifferent, but is very much love. Willing to pay the biggest price. To take it on himself, rather than us.**
  - Is 53 – ‘the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed’ (v5)
    - That's why Jesus is sometimes called ‘the wounded healer’ (Moltmann)

CD – Eoghan Heislip Wonderful Story CD Track 1 ‘This is our story’

([http://www.kingsway.co.uk/Shop/Sections/Items/Item.aspx?item\\_id=107193](http://www.kingsway.co.uk/Shop/Sections/Items/Item.aspx?item_id=107193) sample)

### Evidence that demands a response

I hope that as you listen and read this passage in Hebrews you will feel welling-up within you a real joy and a lot of thanksgiving.

**It really is an extraordinary thing that the God of the universe has made a way for you and I to live at peace with him and to experience the realm of heaven breaking into our everyday lives, and impact the lives of those around us.**

### **The cross of Christ makes such an impact that it demands from us a response.**

What Jesus achieved on the cross is not detached from you and me. Don't think that you are not involved in the process. Sure, you can't earn it. But we are **invited to receive it** and more than that, **to live out these truths in everyday life.**

- Its not barcode Christianity – we work out our salvation.
- Faith will lead to works, or it won't be faith. (James 2:17)
- We live differently in response to the power of the cross
  - and we're empowered to do so, by the HS dwelling in us

Provision for being a friend with God is initiated FROM GOD not humankind, but does involve an active response from humans. (*Propitiation – the initiative comes from God*)

- Hew 9:14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

READ AGAIN Heb 10:22-25

<sup>22</sup>let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we

may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

#### IDEAS

- So – **what is the hope that you profess?** (I hope I little clearer even in the last few weeks)
  - QUICK OUT LOU if time
- In light of this hope, let's spur each other on to a life of good deeds furthering the kingdom of God
- Allow yourself to be inspired again this Easter – by the sacrifice of Jesus, and the freedom on offer to all who believe

Ask yourself – what I am willing to sacrifice to God out of humble and grateful heart?

- Not because I must, but because I may.

#### Into communion

We're going to conclude the service by sharing communion together – rich in the symbolism of the body and blood sacrificed for us.

- One of the points of communion I love is how it concludes in hope.
- It's not a deathly serious event.
- As we get to grips with the depth and amazing truth of what Jesus achieves on the cross,
  - **we should be drawn towards being full of praise,**
  - **thanks** for what is already ours in Christ,
  - **hope, perseverance,**
  - **and a resolution** to live for Jesus every day – in the power of his spirit. (hew 10:19-25)

#### CLOSE & START COMMUNION (Eoghan's CDs track 1 & 4 or Jonny)

- <sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Heb 4:14-15)
- Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup>And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Heb 13:15)
- **BENEDICTION**
- May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup>equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:20-21)