

10. Jesus, Our Sacrifice and Salvation

Texts: Hebrews 9 and 10.

Quotes:

- “I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved—the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced!” John Adams, letter to Thomas Jefferson
- “The Christians say, that among the ancient Jews, if you committed a crime you had to kill a sheep. Now they say ‘Charge it. Put it on the slate. The Savior will pay it.’ In this way, rascality is sold on credit, and the credit system in morals, as in business, breeds extravagance.” Robert Ingersoll
- “Now that Old Testament system only helped if it was thought about, if it was understood as the prophets understood it, if it led people to repentance and faith and willingness to listen. I believe the same is true of the cross, and the heavenly sanctuary. If watching Jesus die, and if considering His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, does not lead us to what Micah says in 6:8 and Hosea says in 6:6 and Amos says and Isaiah says and Jeremiah says, and David said in the fifty-first Psalm—if the whole system and the actual dying of Jesus, and what He’s doing now, does not lead to truth in the inner man, to repentance, conversion, and rebirth, and a willingness to listen and a constant trust, then it is of absolutely no avail to us at all. And Hebrews spells this out in such specific terms...” A. Graham Maxwell, tape series “Hebrews.”

Introductory questions

What is the meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice? What issues and questions does Jesus dying on the Cross answer? What is the link between sacrifice and salvation? Is there any inference that Jesus is executed by God? Why does Jesus die? What was it “for”? How would you explain the difference between the Cross and a pagan sacrifice?

Discussion ideas

Many “atonement theories” have been proposed. Each may have some element of truth, but inevitably every one has problems, especially when pushed to extremes. For example, the “ransom theory” has Biblical support, but breaks down when you ask to whom the ransom was paid, what was the currency, who agreed the contract and so on.

Similarly with ideas of “substitutionary atonement.” We can all affirm that “Jesus died for me.” But how this exactly is accomplished can lead to some major errors. For example, is it not a denial of justice, divine or otherwise, to assert the legal interpretation that Jesus substitutes for the death penalty imposed on others? What is *just* in killing one for the crimes of another? Instead of upholding law and justice, as many maintain, such an idea does the exact opposite. No human court would accept such a transfer, and God’s justice is surely higher than ours. The idea that God executes his Son to satisfy himself or some concept of justice is appalling.

Note that nowhere does Scripture say that Jesus was punished as our substitute. Jesus certainly experienced the consequences of “being made sin,” but that is a very different concept to judicial and substitutionary execution. Hebrews 9:28 is typical of the Biblical statements that state that Christ bore our sins, demonstrating the consequences of sin—death and separation

from God. But this is an intrinsic consequence of the self-destructive nature of sin, not the imposed penalty of an offended deity.

What about the blood? Explaining the role of blood in the sanctuary ceremonies, Paul comments that this was ineffective in removing sin (10:4). Applying the image and symbol, he affirms that Jesus took his own blood and achieved salvation for us (9:12-14). Paul uses the blood interchangeably with the death of Jesus (see for example 10:19), and the blood symbolism is really a shorthand for Christ's life and death, the whole mission of Christ.

The lesson speaks of the centrality of blood. But actual blood does not work (see above). And when it comes to the historical account of Jesus' crucifixion there is little mention of blood. Salvation is not in the physical blood, but in Jesus' giving of himself to and for us. (Note also the misquote of Hebrews 9:22, which actually says "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.")

Ellen White Comments on Jesus, Our Sacrifice and Salvation

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. GW 315.2}

Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast. If our salvation depended on our own efforts, we could not be saved; but it depends on the One who is behind all the promises. {AA 552.2}

No one who believes in Jesus Christ is under bondage to the law of God; for His law is a law of life, not of death, to those who obey its precepts. All who comprehend the spirituality of the law, all who realize its power as a detector of sin, are in just as helpless a condition as is Satan himself, unless they accept the atonement provided for them in the remedial sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is our atonement--at-one-ment with God. {6BC 1077.5}

Extra material

Chambers Universal Learners Dictionary defines "atone": "To do something good to show that one is sorry for doing something bad." It's clear that there's been a great shift from its first meaning of one-ness and the state of "one-ment." Tyndale, who introduced the word in his 1526 Bible translation, saw it in its simple meaning. Jesus came to make us one with God: "One God, one Mediatour, that is to say aduocate, intercessor, or an atonemaker, between God and man." "One mediatour Christ,..and by that word vnderstand an attonemaker, a peacemaker." (Tyndale, Works, p.158, p.431, cited in *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, art. *atone*.) The original meaning also comes through in the various early Bible commentators. Note Udal's comment on Ephesians 2:16 which makes the intended meaning of *at one* crystal clear: "And like as he made the Jewes and Gentiles at one betwene themselves, euen so he made them bothe at one with God, that there should be nothing to break the attonement, but that the thynges in heauen and the thinges in earth should be ioined together as it wer into one body." [While it is clear that such writers were no great spellers—even spelling the same word differently in the same line as it took their fancy—the intention is obvious. Atonement (or attonement!) is state or situation of being at one—agreement, unity, harmony.]

11. Jesus, Our Assurance

Texts: Hebrews 11

Quotes and Definitions

- **Faith:** “Believing what you know ain’t so.” Mark Twain. “An illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable.” H.L. Mencken. “The effort to believe what your common sense tells you is not true.” Elbert Hubbard. “Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge of things without parallel.” Ambrose Bierce.
- “If the work of God could be comprehended by reason, it would no longer be wonderful, and faith would have no merit if reason provided proof.” Pope Gregory I.
- “And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And he was buried and rose again; the fact is certain because it is impossible.” Tertullian.
- “Of course, say the true believers, religion rests on faith, not intellect. But if all you need to do to prove I am wrong is to have faith that you are right, then no discussion is possible.” Philip D. Harvey
- “The deepest sin against the human mind is to believe things without evidence.” Thomas H. Huxley.
- “If the Lord had meant us to have faith, he’d have given us lobotomies.” Zlatko.

Introductory questions

What does faith really mean? Does Hebrews 11:1 encourage “blind faith”? What role does evidence play in our faith? Is it true that if we were sure, there would be no need for faith? What is our assurance based on? What generates faith—is it some emotional experience, is it some cold dogma? How do we put these issues together and have the right understanding?

Discussion ideas

This is the great “faith” chapter. Past examples of those who have placed their full confidence in God are presented. Yet as we review these examples, some questions come to mind over the specifics of the lives of these “faith pioneers.” It’s clear that not everything they ever did could be commended as great examples of trust in God—for example Abraham’s identification of his wife as his sister, Noah’s drunkenness, Jacob’s duplicity, Joseph’s arrogance, Moses’ anger, and so on. The important aspect that Paul is emphasizing is their confident trust in a trustworthy God. It is not some mysterious thing we have (“faith”) that does anything, it is the actions of this trustworthy God. Our trust is what allows him to act in our lives.

Some of the examples are surprising. “By faith the prostitute Rahab” is hardly a phrase we would want to use as a contemporary example in a church bulletin! What about Jephthah—is he being commended for human sacrifice? We need to understand what faith really is. Is it some mystical component that we possess? Is it some body of truth (“the faith”)? Is it misplaced confidence? We are frequently called to “have faith,” but what should it be based on?

Faith is evidence-based trust. Without the evidence, we would be foolish to trust. But without the trust, we are on our own, hopeless and helpless. The important lines are at the end of the chapter. Paul is making the point that despite all their trusting confidence in God, they did not receive the totality of God’s promises. The future leads on, and God will eventually fulfill all his promises to those who place their trust in him. This is not pie in the sky by and by; rather it is the completion of the trust relationship that has begun—full presence of the Lord as he truly is, forever. God’s assurance of ultimate perfection (v.40) is to be with all of us—see Rev. 21:3.

Ellen White Comments on Intelligent Faith

The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is an intelligent faith.... Christ would have His followers use their intellect in spiritual matters... He desires them to think deeply. *Signs of the Times*, July 28, 1898.

He [God] gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence.... God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe. *Testimonies Vol. 5*, p.675.

You should walk by faith, not by feeling. We do not want a sensational religion; but we want a religion founded on intelligent faith. *Review and Herald*, April 9, 1889.

Faith rests not on certainty, but upon evidence. *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 16, p. 112.

We may have an intelligent faith; we may not only say we believe, but we may in meekness and confidence be able to define what we believe, and why we believe as we do. We should exercise living faith, not a blind credulity. *Signs of the Times*, March 31, 1890.

Extra Material on Blind Faith

“Blind faith is the bedrock upon which all of our belief systems are built. It is the starting point for each individual spiritual journey.... So let us celebrate our blind faith, as unprovable as it is unshakable. For without it, we would have no faith at all.” David Keating.

As Shelle Rose Charvet comments, such a position only needs to apply to God: “Only God can demand blind faith, everyone else has to prove their case.” Really?

Apparently it’s fine for God to demand blind faith, to expect irrational trust from his believers yet not be reasonable or make sense himself. Because faith involves blind acceptance of God and his requirements then no one can argue, goes the “logic” of this argument.

So, according to this view, faith is absolutely blind, and should be defined as belief in what you cannot prove, cannot argue for, cannot give any logic for. More than this, such blind faith should be the more valued because it is blind, that there are no logical reasons for belief—assuming the idea that if you have reasons, you don’t need faith.

The problem with such blind faith is that it can be used to defend any belief or action. As critics of faith clearly point out, if there are no reasons, you can blindly accept by faith whatever you want, and there can be no argument, since all is accepted on faith:

“Blind faith can justify anything. If a man believes in a different god, or even if he uses a different ritual for worshipping the same god, blind faith can decree that he should die—on the cross, at the stake, skewered on a Crusader’s sword, shot in a Beirut street, or blown up in a bar in Belfast.” Richard Dawkins. As a consequence, many reject such a frightening prospect:

“Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith, I consider a capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile.” Kurt Vonnegut.

For what happens if you are really blind? An elderly woman was waiting to cross the street. The traffic was heavy. A man came up to her and asked if he could cross with her. She took his arm and they headed out into the traffic that hurtled past, swerving around them, horns blaring. Miraculously they made it over. Safe, but terribly upset, the woman started shouting angrily at the man: “You could’ve got us both killed! What were you thinking? Are you blind?”

“Yes,” said the man, “that’s why I asked to cross with you...” Just like those blind guides that Jesus mentioned, who were leaders of the blind. What is the value of blind faith...?

12. Jesus and the Christian Walk

Texts: Hebrews 12

Quotes

- I looked at Christ and a dove of peace flew in my heart. I looked at the dove and it flew away. Charles Spurgeon.
- The more you think about Christ, the more you think of him. H. C. Trumball.
- We are never nearer to Christ than when we find ourselves lost in a holy amazement at his unspeakable love. John Owen.
- God useth many a moving persuasion to draw us to holiness, not a hint to encourage us to sin. Thomas Manton.

Introductory questions

Who should be the focus of our faith? How do we ensure that this is what happens? All too often when we think of “the Christian Walk,” the perspective switches to ourselves, rather than Christ. How do we deal with concepts of compliance and performance? What is discipline all about? How do we see God acting in our lives, and for what purpose?

Discussion ideas

The lesson asks the question, “If this fails to motivate us to live worthy of our high calling, what will?” (Lesson intro p. 137 Teachers). What is the motivation for right living? Is it the thought of reward? Fear of punishment? Assurance that Jesus has pleaded the Father for us? The reason for the way we live speaks to our beliefs and convictions—for did not the Pharisees also live outwardly exemplary lives?

The emphasis of Hebrews 12 is “let us fix our eyes on Jesus” (v. 2, NIV). If you were explaining this to someone who didn’t know, how would you state what was important? Jesus pointed out that anyone who sees Jesus, sees the Father. What’s the relevance of this? The concept that we see God in Jesus is frequently stated, but seems often forgotten...

We have come to God and Jesus (verse 23-24), and our response is thankfulness and worship as we come to a knowledge of the nature and character of our loving Lord.

Discipline (verses 4-11). Similar root to *discipling*. It connotes teaching and training—which is what discipline is also intended to accomplish. The problem is that we all too often see discipline as punishment, rather than correction. Punishment without the possibility of change (as for example in popular ideas of hell) is truly demonic, and the infliction of pain in this way is defined as torture. There are a number of international documents that outlaw torture. However, concepts of hell would certainly mean that God could be prosecuted for breaking these international agreements! No: God’s discipline is to change and correct us; to help us recognize the truth and right; and to lead lives that demonstrate that we agree with God that this is the only way to live!

In the words of Hypatia of Alexandria (370-415 AD), a woman scholar and mathematician, countering the concept of an eternal hell: “To rule by fettering the mind through fear of punishment in another world, is just as base as to use force.”

Ellen White Comments on Looking unto Jesus

Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. {COL 355.1}

Let a living faith run like threads of gold through the performance of even the smallest duties. Then all the daily work will promote Christian growth. There will be a continual looking unto Jesus. Love for Him will give vital force to everything that is undertaken. {COL 360.2}

The kingdom of God consisteth not in outward show. Light will not be received by following selfish plans, but by looking unto Jesus, following Christ's leadings, not the suppositions of men. {ChL 73.4}

We are expected to grow in capability, in influence, and in power, ever looking unto Jesus. And by beholding, we shall be changed into His likeness. {DG 127.1}

But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. "I do nothing of Myself," said Christ; "the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father." "I seek not Mine own glory," but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. {DA 21.2}

Extra material on a Lasting Relationship with God

Most people think that they have to *do* something in order to earn God's favour, to please Him. I remember talking with a woman about her experience. She had tried *so hard*. Doing everything her church leaders told her she had to do. Making sure that her behaviour was faultless. As if she were trying to impress God, just as we try to impress those around us. The result? It made her life miserable, and she ended up hating God. Sad, tragically sad. Because even in human relationships, the ones that last, the ones that are meaningful, are not based on trying to impress. Only by being who you really are can you have a deep, enduring relationship.

The same with God. He loves us just as we are. Not that He loves all the mess of sin that we have got into, but He still sees what we can be. He came here to this earth for that very purpose: to show us what He was really like (John 14:9), and to win us back to love Him and to trust Him. What God most wants is that love relationship based on mutual trust. Said Jesus, "If I be lifted up...I will draw all to me." (John 12:32). The drawing power of God is His character, wanting to love all of his unlovable, rebellious children. He offers healing love to all.

Think about it. How do you form a lasting relationship with *anyone*? Can you call someone friend without spending time together, doing things together, sharing life together?

Same with God. You can't call God friend if you don't take time out together. He's not interested in a long-distance relationship—he wants to be involved with you, be close beside you, the one you call first! So to have a lasting relationship with God, *you* have to invest time.

A good friend came to me and told me that she'd "lost her faith"—speaking in the same way as if she'd left her handbag on the bus. Suddenly she'd woke up one morning and realized that she didn't have a relationship with God any more. But in reality such a change doesn't come overnight. It comes from years of neglect, of taking God for granted, of forgetting to involve him in your day-to-day life. Think of Abraham, Moses, Job. They weren't perfect, but they knew where to go when they went off course. They realized that their failings were due to their failure to take time with God and to trust Him completely. But despite their failures, they were still *friends of God*. That is the objective, and that is what God wants. What should we want? To be friends of the Friendly God.

13. Jesus and the Our Future

Texts: Hebrews 11-13.

Quotes: True or false?

- Even now I am full of hope, but the end lies with God. --Pindar, C5 BC.
- At first we hope too much, later on, not enough. --Roux.
- Hope is a great falsifier of truth. --Gracian.
- Hope is only faith in relation to the future. --L Feuerbach.
- Hope is a good breakfast, but a bad supper. --Bacon.
- The miserable have no other medicine but only hope. --Shakespeare.
- In all things it is better to hope than to despair. --Goethe.
- Extreme hopes are born of extreme misery. --Russell.
- Man is, properly speaking, based upon hope; he has no other possession but hope; this world of his is emphatically the place of hope. --Carlyle.
- Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us. --S Smiles.
- God in his very being is the future of the world. --W Pannenberg.

Introductory questions

In what kind of ways is Jesus our future? How do we balance the future perspective with the needs of the present? What has the future to do with what Hebrews is talking about? Are we preoccupied with the future to the detriment of being involved in the urgent demands of the present, or is it the other way around? How do we “occupy till I come”? What is it we are most looking forward to—the city with golden streets—what?

Discussion ideas

Intriguingly, hope is an essential aspect of Hebrews. We tend to view the main theme as focussed on the ceremonial systems of the past, but Paul is keen to stress the future perspective. He speaks frequently of hope, and it’s helpful to review what he says:

Hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. 3:6. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 6:11. we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 6:18. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. 6:19. A better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. 7:19. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 10:23. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 11:1 NIV.

In the current chapter, he writes that “we are looking for the city that is to come.” 13:14 NIV. The essential aspect of our ongoing relationship with our loving Lord is that it will not come to an end, even with death. The guarantee—the promise—is that we have an eternity to look forward to, an eternity not marred by sin and rebellion, but in an expanding understanding of truth and a deepening love. For what would life be if this was all? Our hope is in God himself, and in his desire to restore harmony and peace throughout his universe.

Ellen White Comments on Jesus and our future

The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. {GC 299}.

The Lord intimates a delay before the morning finally dawns. But he would not have them give way to weariness, nor relax their earnest watchfulness, because the morning does not open upon them as soon as they expected. The waiting ones were represented to me as looking upward. {2T 192.1}

Heaven, I long for heaven; Christ is the center of attraction. Our future state is a continuation of our work in coming to God in probationary time. Heaven is the ceaseless approaching to God through Jesus Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness--Ms 14, 1895, pp. 1, 2. (Untitled, August 10, 1895.) {6MR 4.1}

To His faithful followers Christ has been a daily companion, a familiar friend. They have lived in close, constant communion with God. Upon them the glory of the Lord has risen. In them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has been reflected. Now they rejoice in the undimmed rays of the brightness and glory of the King in His majesty. They are prepared for the communion of heaven; for they have heaven in their hearts.

With uplifted heads, with the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness shining upon them, with rejoicing that their redemption draweth nigh, they go forth to meet the Bridegroom....

A little longer, and we shall see the King in His beauty. A little longer, and He will wipe all tears from our eyes... Then by innumerable voices will be sung the song, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). {AG 358}

Extra material

"Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love." Reinhold Niebuhr.

The truth is that eternal life is assured, if we allow God to put us right with him through his grace. This transformation will be achieved finally at the second coming, that day we all hope for. For in contrast to all those hopes of the world, this is the *only* hope. This is *the* hope, for God is our hope, and we are saved by hope (see Romans 8:24).

"Eternity is the divine treasure house, and hope is the window, by means of which mortals are permitted to see, as through a glass darkly, the things which God is preparing." Mountford.

While this world's hopes are found futile and wanting, Paul identifies the Christian perspective as the *blessed* hope—a hope *sure and certain*. The certainty is based on the promises of God himself, and because he is trustworthy, and because we already know and trust him. Our hope is centered on the person we believe God to be.

May we truly want to have this hope, to desire to be with our gracious God through all eternity, and to hold onto this living hope until the end. Our responsibility is to know God now, to enter into loving trust as his true friend, and plan for our future with our loving Lord. For in the end, "The future belongs to those who belong to God. This is hope." W T Purkiser. Or to use Corrie Ten Boom's words, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." "May the God of hope fill you...so that you may overflow with hope." (Romans 15:13 NIV).

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