

Christ's Once-for-All Sacrifice

Cameron was driving the speed limit on the way to church, but his mind was in overdrive.

First, there was the recent fight he had with his girlfriend, Dedra. After more than a year, he wanted something permanent. But when he brought up the idea of marriage, Dedra said she didn't think she wanted to get married.

Then there was the issue of expanding his construction company. He didn't know if he could do the licensing, find good employees, and keep up with his current workload.

There was also his bottled up anger. He reflected on the last session with his therapist, which he didn't publicize about going to because of the historically negative cultural leaning about Black people—let alone Black men—in counseling.

Cameron didn't like it when he felt indecisive. Lately, it had led to him putting up walls with people. He needed to do better.

Arriving at church, Cameron gratefully reached for the Communion elements before entering the sanctuary. When it was time for Communion, Cameron exhaled. One thing he was certain of, and that was the love of Christ and the blood of Jesus that cleansed him from all his sins.

What did he have to worry about? Didn't Christ always meet his needs? As Cameron took Communion, he basked in the presence of God—being renewed with confidence—all because of Christ.

- 1. How confident are you in drawing near to God?*
- 2. What can you do to remind yourself of the approachability of God?*
- 3. How can Christ's sacrifice make you more confident in your faith?*

LESSON FOCUS: Draw near to God in confidence because of Jesus' sacrifice.

A Better Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:23–10:4 KJV

23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; 26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the

Hebrews 9:23–10:4 NIV

²³ It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities

things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. ³ But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. ⁴ For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Christ's priestly work fulfilled and transcended the old covenant patterns of worship. Since the earthly tabernacle was purified with animal sacrifices, the cleansing of its heavenly counterpart required a more precious sacrifice. Christ entered that heavenly tabernacle to offer Himself on our behalf. Unlike earthly high priests, who must offer the same sacrifices year after year, Christ sacrificed Himself only once.

In Hebrews 10:1–4, the author explains why Christ's sacrifice and priestly service were necessary: the Law was intended to foreshadow the true purification that Christ would bring. Animal sacrifices of the old covenant were never sufficient on their own. To defend this claim, the writer points to the repetitive nature of past sacrifices. If they were truly effective at cleansing God's people, they would not need repeating again and again. Rather than purifying God's people, animal sacrifices served to remind them of their need for more purification. In truth, the sacrifice of animals could never deal with human sinfulness.

4. *How does Christ's sacrifice differ from those performed under the old covenant?*

5. *How do we know that the law was not intended to take away sins?*

A New and Living Way

Hebrews 10:11–14, 19–25 KJV

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: 12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; 13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; 21 And having an high priest over the house of God; 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And

Hebrews 10:11–14, 19–25 NIV

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let

let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The author draws more contrast between Christ and the priests of the old covenant. In the past, priests never saw an end to their duties; they performed the same ineffectual sacrifices every day. Christ, on the other hand, offered Himself as a sacrifice once for all and took His rightful seat as king at the right hand of God the Father. Unlike offerings of animals, Christ's self-sacrifice was effective in making God's holy people "perfect," free from the guilt of their sins. Verse 20 makes a metaphorical comparison between the temple's curtain—which separated sinful humans from God's holy presence—and "body" or "flesh" of Jesus. At the same time that Jesus was killed, the separation between God and humanity could end (compare Matt. 27:51).

Christ's blood opened a new way for us to enter God's presence, with confidence instead of fear. As the high priest of God's heavenly temple, Christ enables us to "draw near to God" with security in our salvation, purified of sin and guilt in our innermost beings. As our faithful high priest sustains our hope, we encourage one another "toward love and good deeds" (v. 24). We must remain engaged in the community of God's people, encouraging each other as the day of Christ's return draws near.

6. *How do the duties of priests under the old covenant differ from Christ's?*

7. *What does Christ's sacrifice enable us to do?*

A Job Done Well Doesn't Need Repeating

"If you want something done well, do it right the first time." That's what my father used to say. As a landscaper who specialized in building retaining walls, a big part of his job was fixing the faulty work of others. Weather has a way of testing what we build; unless someone takes the time to dig deeply into the soil to prepare a firm foundation, nothing can keep a wall from falling—even a wall built of heavy stones.

We often forget that it was God who created the old system of sacrifice. The ancient priests weren't doing the wrong things, but it was a system of endless repetition. Priests of Israel were always flawed and sinful, so how could their work be effective? Jesus wasn't like them at all. He wasn't even a priest who worked in the physical temple of Jerusalem, but His work went to the foundation of the problem. He entered the heavenly sanctuary, where He offered a perfect sacrifice—the firmest foundation of all. And He sat down because the job was done.

There is nothing that we need to add, no work that we could offer in return. But it is our responsibility to proclaim Christ to the world. While we wait for the day that Jesus puts an end to evil, we continue in the "love and good deeds" that encourage one another (Heb. 10:24). Our confidence isn't based in what we do; it is based in what has already been done. We can be confident that Jesus does things right the first time.

8. *What is the difference between things that are done repeatedly and things that are done only once?*

9. *Do you find it easy or difficult to be confident in the completed work of Jesus?*

10. *What are examples of acts of "love and good deeds" that proclaim the work of Christ? How do these actions encourage one another?*

Proclaiming the Work of Christ

Nothing we do can add to the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice. But if we are confident to come before God, that should also make us confident to share with our friends and neighbors who might not know Jesus. Easter Sunday is one time each year when many people are receptive to an invitation, either to share a meal or even to come to church for the first time.

► *Ask God to show you one or two names of people you could invite to your church to hear the message of Christ's sacrifice. Write a prayer that God will give you confidence to invite these people to consider Christ.*

KEY VERSE

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. —Hebrews 9:24 KJV

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. —Hebrews 9:24 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 7 through April 13

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 59:1–8—Our Sins Separate Us from God.
- Tues.** 1 Peter 2:19–25—Healed by Christ's Wounds.
- Wed.** John 3:1–15—The Promise of Eternal Life.
- Thurs.** John 3:16–21—God So Loved the World.
- Fri.** Romans 3:19–31—Atonement through His Blood.
- Sat.** Romans 5:1–15—Reconciled to God by Christ.
- Sun.** 1 John 2:1–6; 4:9–17—Atonement through God's Son.

A SACRIFICE THAT SAVES

Have you ever stopped to ponder the sacrifices of ancient Israel? In those days, many people sacrificed animals to their gods. But Israel's God was supposed to be different.

Other nations offered sacrifices to get something in return—an abundant harvest, children to carry on their name, success in battle—but that didn't apply to Israel's sacrificial system at all. Instead of twisting God's arm, sacrifices in the Bible allowed people to live in close relationship with the holy God—a God radically unlike the disordered and sinful people He had chosen. In other words, sacrifice is about a relationship.

Humans disobeyed their creator and wandered from the order of His design, but God longed to be near them, just as He had once walked beside humans in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8). God chose a group of people—not perfect by any stretch—but ordinary people who became special because God chose them. They would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). They would bring blessing to the whole earth, just as God had promised their ancestor Abraham (Gen. 12:3).

But to be with His people, God would need to set boundaries and ground rules. If God's very presence was going to dwell in their midst, they would have to keep the standards of a covenant agreement. Most of all, they would carefully separate God's holy presence from the sin and disorder of their own lives. God asked them to construct a tabernacle, a place for the divine presence to “dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8).

To tend to the tabernacle, Israel would need representatives called priests (see Ex. 29:1–9). Not just anyone could enter the presence of a holy God, but Aaron's sons would have this important task. They would offer burnt offerings, “an aroma pleasing to the LORD” (Lev. 1:9) And once each year, the high priest would offer a separate kind of sacrifice, a goat whose blood would be required to “cleanse . . . from the uncleanness of the Israelites” (Lev. 16:19).

But over time and through the centuries, the corruption of human priests became harder to ignore. Even Aaron's sons could not be trusted to be faithful and to observe all that God had asked (see Num. 3:2–4). How could any high priest represent the nation before God? How could priests offer proper sacrifices and ask God to forgive, especially when priests were flawed and culpable? Could the sacrifices performed in an earthly temple ever be enough to reach the heights of heaven, and could those sacrifices actually rid people from the entanglements of sin?

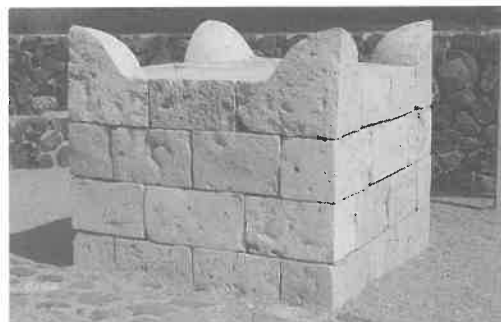
But the mystery of God's plan had yet to be unveiled; God's designs cannot be derailed. God would establish a relationship like never before. God would transform the hearts of His people, dwelling with them—first in the ministry of Jesus and later in the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 9:26 says, “He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Not only was Jesus a fitting sacrifice to take away sin, but He was also a superior priest—one who had no sin and who can stand blameless, appearing before God in heaven (Heb. 9:24).

Something dramatic changed through the ministry of Jesus. Instead of seeking the atonement of sin through repeated sacrifices—a constant reminder of human powerlessness to overcome sin—God's people could rely on their “advocate” before God the Father (1 John 2:1). The new way to find relationship with God is through the Son of God, the “Righteous One” sent to earth (1 John 2:1). Obedience to His word and message shows the love of God and redemptive power of His sacrifice (1 John 2:5–6). Sacrifice was always about relationship, but the Spirit of God dwells within all those who follow the way of Jesus and receive forgiveness for sin. The love displayed by Jesus and through His followers is the ultimate sign of redemption for the world.



Albrecht Dürer, a sixteenth-century master artist of the German renaissance, created this woodcut depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus' offered Himself as a sacrifice, cleansing for sin with His own blood (Heb. 9:25–26).

Albrecht Dürer/National Gallery of Art



This modern altar is created to be like the altar in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. The priests maintained a regular burnt offering, creating “an aroma pleasing to the LORD” (Lev. 1:9). Through the sacrifices from one day to the next, God was invited to dwell with His people and to meet with them.

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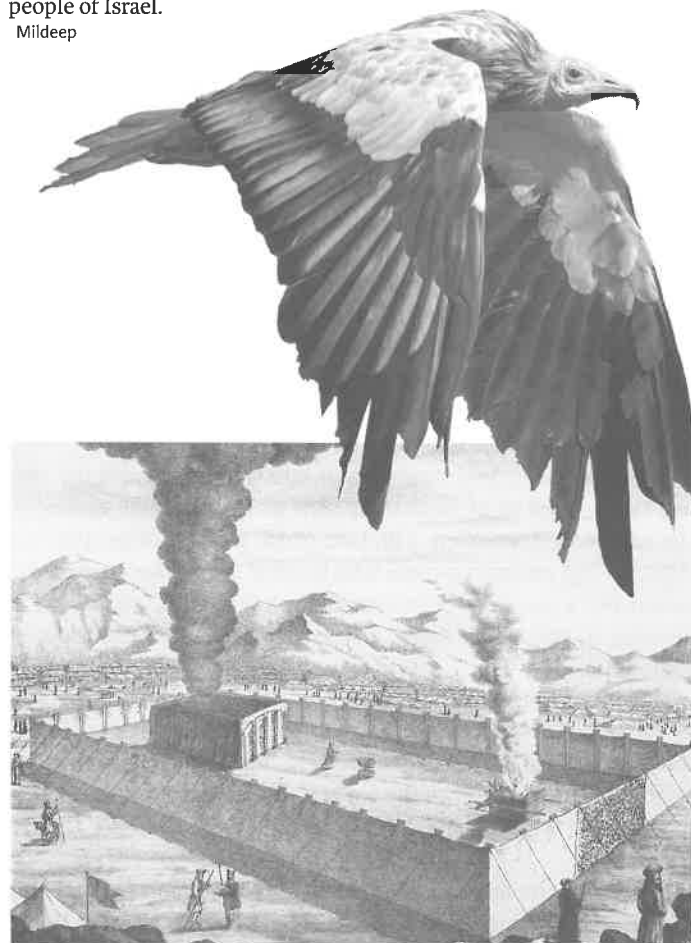


The *Christo Redemptor* statue (Portuguese for “Christ the Redeemer”), with its outstretched arms of invitation, has become an international symbol of Christianity where it stands in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In the words of 1 John 4:16, “God is love.”

© Peter Adams/Getty Images

God delivered the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt and brought them out “on eagle’s wings,” (Ex. 19:4). This miraculous deliverance set the stage for a covenant relationship that God would give to the people of Israel.

Mildeep



God provided all of the raw materials that the Hebrews would need to construct a mobile sanctuary in their midst. This nineteenth-century illustration places the tabernacle in the middle of the tribes of Israel. It was a visible manifestation of God’s presence with them.

Internet Archive Book Images



This cathedral’s window depicts Aaron’s job of choosing a goat to offer once a year on the Day of Atonement. This once-a-year offering was necessary “because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins [had] been” (Lev. 16:16).

Jules & Jenny, UK



This mosaic which was created by the contemporary Jewish artist, Yael Portugéis, has twelve sections of stones to represent Israel’s twelve tribes. This reminds us of a special garment, called the ephod, which was worn by the high priest Aaron and the high priests (Ex. 29:5). It had twelve stones to represent each tribe of Israel, since the priest was representing the whole nation before God.

Djampa

A Sacrifice for Us

Sacrifice was God's way of inviting sinful people to remain in a covenant relationship with Him. The system of sacrifice was always pointing forward to Jesus, whose once-for-all sacrifice is able to give freedom from the power of sin (Rom. 6:6-7). As a group, list 5-10 words to describe the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. You may use the space provided below to record answers.

Freed From

Now consider, in light of Jesus's sacrifice on our behalf, what have you been freed from? For example, you might write: "I am freed from shame."

Freed For

In light of Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, what have you been freed to do? Put another way, what do you have the freedom to do in light of Jesus' sacrifice? For example: "I am free to forgive this person."