

## Christ Came in the Flesh – to Give It for Us All

4<sup>th</sup> Sun. in Advent – 12/19/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Hebrews 10:5-10 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 5, [Jesus says to the Father,] **“Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body have You prepared for Me;”**

v. 10, [The preacher to the Hebrews teaches us,] **“And by [God’s] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ Today, in the sermon written to those Christian believers identified as “the Hebrews”, you and I have the special blessing of listening in on a conversation between Jesus and God the Father regarding Jesus’ purpose for coming to earth and the human body that God prepared for Jesus during His time here in this world.

→ Upon first hearing this text read today, on the last Sunday of Advent, some people may think of it as a strange text to read this close to Christmas. But as we look more closely at it, we see that it has some very important and very close connections to our preparation for Christmas.

→ The preacher to the Hebrews connects the Old Testament sacrificial system to the New Testament Christian life now that Jesus has come. He answers questions like this, “What is Jesus’ connection to the Old Testament animal sacrifices?” “Has His coming in bodily form and dying upon the cross really made that much of a difference to the system that God set up for His people in the temple?” And “Do the demands of that sacrificial system still apply to the Christian community in New Testament times; in our lives today?”

✘ Now, it looks like none of you brought a spotless bull or goat for us to sacrifice today, did you? So obviously, we don’t engage in those kinds of animal or grain sacrifices anymore.

→ So then what role does this reading play in our lives as Christians now? Here’s the deal, even though we aren’t making bloody sacrifices, as sinners we do still create sacrificial systems that we believe make us holy. Even though this sermon to the Hebrews tells us that there is only one person, one sacrifice that truly saves people and makes us holy.

### **I. God’s will has always been making worshipers holy.**

✘ This concept of “holiness” though is so easily glossed over and misunderstood. First, it is the very nature of God’s being as God – it’s what makes Him unique and set apart; what defines His god-liness, status, power, authority, and more.

→ In the Old Testament, no one could ever be in the presence of God, unless he/she had been made holy. And to be made holy, that person had to be spiritually and ritually clean and pure.

✘ Well, God set up an intricate sacrificial system for that very purpose; to make His Old Testament people both clean and holy. Because of sin, the only way someone could reach purity was through death.

→ Sin requires death; so an animal or plant would have to take the place of the sinner and die to remove that person’s guilt, sin, and impurity ... at least for the moment. You see, that was the thing, the entire Old Testament sacrificial system, though it could purify and make people clean before God, was only temporary! The holiness; the clean-ness didn’t last because the sacrifice was not a true, equal sacrifice. Though it might have been a spotless bull or goat or bundle of grain that was sacrificed, it still wasn’t a human life; a sinless human life that was being sacrificed to pay for the person’s sins.

- ✘ So the best that the sacrificial system in the Old Testament could do was only serve as an object lesson to point God's people forward to something far better that was yet to come.
  - ➔ In verse four, just before our text today, the preacher makes this statement, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins". That's the fact, they just cannot make the people of God holy.
  - ➔ Why? because they were imperfect sacrifices. And so the repeated offering of those sacrifices continued day after day, year after year, to remind the people that they were still sinners; still impure; still unclean and unholy.
- ✘ Ultimately, God revealed to David in Psalm 40:6-8 that He did not desire these temporary sacrifices and offerings for their own sake. That's what Jesus refers to in verses 5-7 of our text today.
  - ➔ In verse six Jesus declares how inadequate these Old Testament rituals were. He says, "In burnt offerings and sin offerings You have taken no pleasure". Why? Because they were not sufficient for lasting – that is, eternal salvation!
- ✘ But Jesus knows God's will and plan for salvation. He knows what the answer is to this temporary system. He says to the Father in verse five, "But a body have You prepared for Me". And then in verse seven Jesus says, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God, as it is written of Me in the scroll of the book".
  - ➔ This is why we Lutherans do not fall into the trap of celebrating this time right now as the Christmas season. No, we use the season of Advent to recount the promises from God that He will send His Son for this purpose. We review these things like we are today, to see why God established the sacrificial system first, as a teaching tool; as a lesson about how inadequate imperfect sacrifices really are. And we enjoy Advent as a time of preparation to learn about God's will for sending His Son and to hear how Jesus came to do God's will by offering His body once for all.

## II. Still We make our sacrificial systems

- ✘ In spite of that, what do we still do today that certainly has to make God shake His head in disappointment and wonder about whether or not we really have learned the lesson that He wanted us to learn?
  - ➔ We set up our own self-contrived sacrificial systems – often without even realizing that's what we're doing.
- ✘ What kind of sacrificial systems do we establish? The story of the rich young man in Mark 10:17–22 is a good example. The man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus said, "You know the commandments" and then listed Commandments 4-10 that emphasize that we must all die to self, in order to love and serve God and our neighbor first.
  - ➔ That rich young man believed he had done all of this and he said, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." You see, this was his sacrificial system. Thinking he could actually earn salvation by following a set of rules, even if it was God's set of rules.
  - ➔ But Jesus said that wasn't enough. He said, "Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor ... and come, follow Me" (Mk. 10:21). You see, he was to give up his very identity as a rich man. He had to die to self and give up the idols; his things and his status that he was worshipping and sacrificing to. The rich man couldn't give it up; he couldn't make that sacrifice, so he went away grieving.

- ✘ So, friends, what is your self-contrived sacrificial system? What is it in which you place your confidence? Where do you find your identity? Your offerings of money, time, leadership, skills, service?
  - ➔ Maybe it's carving up your time so that you can go to the lake, or the mountains, or the mall, or the casino, or just sit in your recliner and watch TV. Maybe your sacrificial system is even connected to your acts of serving others as a volunteer, which are good and righteous on their own, but now you are convinced that all of this "good Christian service" as you call it, is the actual reason why you will make it to heaven.
  - ➔ You see, we can so easily get things turned around and make the things that God has given us as a gift into things that we now use to boost our pride and actually use to push Jesus aside – things like generosity and Bible knowledge and hospitality and sharing the faith and community service. These are all good and pleasing to God, unless we miss the fact that they are the result of Christ's sacrifice for us, and instead we offer them up to God as our own works of sacrifice, expecting to gain forgiveness on our own!
- ✘ These self-designed sacrificial systems – whatever they may be, must be put to death, so that Jesus Christ can stand alone as the sacrifice for our sins; as the only way for us to become holy before our God.

### III. Only the body of Jesus Christ makes us holy

- ✘ This is what Jesus understands and teaches us through our text today. As He prepares for His time on earth as the Son of God, He leaves no doubt as to His purpose for coming.
  - ➔ He says first of all in verse five that His coming involves His "incarnation". That's a fancy word that simply means to "take on flesh". Jesus says that the Father has "prepared" a unique body for Him, a body that verse 10 then tells us is intended for the express purpose of presenting it as an offering to God so that His congregation of believers will be "sanctified" – that is made holy.
  - ➔ He gives us His second purpose in verse nine when He says, "Behold I have come to do Your will" – that is His Father's will.
- ✘ There you have it, as we are now less than a week away from our celebration of Jesus' coming, now we know why that little baby was born "away in the manger" as we will sing later this week.
  - ➔ He came in real human flesh as a genuine human being with 100% human nature. And verse nine says He did it, to "abolish" or do away with all of the offerings and sacrifices that could never "take away (our) sins" (v.4).
  - ➔ Once Jesus came God no longer desired those sacrifices and offerings. They had served their purpose and now the perfect sacrifice; the sinless Son of God in human flesh and blood was on the scene to fulfill His purpose and His Father's will!
- ✘ Only Jesus' sacrifice; only His death on the altar of the cross was sufficient to pay for the sins of all sinful mankind. And because He was perfect, His was not just a temporary sacrifice. It is the only "once-for-all" sacrifice: once for all people in the world and once for all sin – past, present and future!
  - ➔ Jesus says in verse 10 that we as Christians realize three glorious results because of His sacrifice in our place. First, we "have been sanctified" – we are now unique from all others in the world. We are connected to Jesus as God's Son and we are proud to wear the label "Christian".

→ Second, the source of our holiness is NOT anything from within ourselves. It is only through the offering of “the body of Jesus Christ”. Of the countless organized religions and man-made sacrificial systems, there is only one sacrifice that has the power and authority; the ability to save and forgive souls and cleanse them so that they; so that we can stand in the presence of Almighty God for eternity. That is the sacrifice of the babe of Bethlehem, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified, buried and resurrected to now reign at the Father’s right hand in heaven.

→ The third result we’ve already talked about. Just as it was God’s will for Jesus to come in human flesh so it is God’s will to make Him, in that body, the source of our salvation and sanctification forevermore.

## **Conclusion**

✘ You see, God’s will, His plan is so much better when we finally put our imperfect plans aside and joyfully receive the gifts He desires for us to have.

→ Now that Jesus has come; now that He has made the sacrifice for us all, it is the Father’s will to connect you and me to Himself so that we can fully enjoy the benefits of Christ’s work not only in the future after we leave this earthly life, but even now today.

✘ That’s why He has given us His Word in Holy Scripture, so that we can read and study it; so that we can learn more and more of the details of God’s plan for us as we have here in this text today; so that we can enjoy talking about it with other Christians and sharing it with those who do not yet know it.

→ That’s also why God has washed and purified us in His saving water of Holy Baptism, as a physical sign of Jesus’ cleansing work on the cross to assure us that yes, we have been made holy in Jesus alone!

→ And that is why the Father feeds us with His feast of grace in Holy Communion; so that from this very altar, week after week, He can remind us and fill us to overflowing with the very same body and blood that He gave to Jesus when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in the stable that first Christmas night; so that He can fill us with the forgiveness of sins and the strength of faith, by feeding us again the same body and blood that Jesus gave and shed upon the cross in our place, once-for-all!

✘ So my beloved friends in Christ, prepare the royal highway within your hearts. For the King of kings has come, and is coming again, in the flesh – for us all! Amen.