

“What Jesus *Doesn't* Expect from Us”

Hebrews 9:1-10:25

The last 3 weeks we've been looking at Jesus' humanity and what we can learn from the example He left us with. We are to have His attitude; looking at others at the very least as co-equals in being shown and receiving grace so that we would get rid of any entitlement mentality and treat others with the same gracious spirit. We learned two weeks ago from a young Jesus that even though we may have lots of knowledge, its important for us to humble ourselves to listen and learn so that our fellow disciples will be built up not torn down because 'we already know that'. We don't know everything and no one appreciates know-it-all attitudes.

Then last week we saw from Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet, while He was hurting and in need of ministry Himself, lowered Himself to serve others in love. He commands us and expects us to follow this loving attitude towards each other so that a lost world will see the difference our following Jesus makes.

But Jesus also took on flesh because of some things we can't do. There are things Jesus does not expect us to do, that only He can do; and yet, many people who don't understand who Jesus truly is and sometimes ourselves who haven't fully grasped what Jesus can do for us, still insist on doing ourselves.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author writes to a predominantly Jewish Christian audience, who, in the mid-to-late 60's AD was suffering great persecution under Emperor Nero. It was Nero who blamed the Christians for the great fire of Rome and had many thrown to the lions or burned alive. This extreme persecution for identifying with Jesus caused some Jewish believers to draw back to Judaism and worship through sacrifices. The whole book of Hebrews is a plea to not forsake Jesus. Everything God commanded under the old covenant was a foreshadow of the better things to come with Jesus. Jesus fulfilled the legal requirements of the Law. Jesus never sinned. Jesus became the sacrifice that was needed for forgiveness of sins. The veil was torn at His death, symbolically pointing to the reality of salvation through Jesus that the sacrificial system and the temple/tabernacle pointed toward.

As we come to Ch.'s 9-10, the author is in the middle of his explanation of how the tabernacle and its sacrificial system fell short of removing our sins yet God allowed it because the Tabernacle was an illustration of how one approaches God and worships Him. Since Jesus came to show us His Father and how to have a secure and intimate relationship with His Father, then there are things He doesn't expect us to be able to do. Thankfully,

Jesus Does Not Expect us to Come to God on our Own (Heb. 9:1-14)

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. ² A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. ⁶ When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. ⁷ But only

the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹ This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. ¹⁰ They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings— external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

The Tabernacle (and later the Temple) were set up in such a way as to communicate God is holy, separate from people. They brought sacrifices that the priests handled. Then only the priests went into the outer room called the Holy Place. There were no windows in it. The menorah (Lampstand) alone provided light. The 12 loaves of bread symbolically representing God's people Israel was 'in God's presence' on your behalf. The priest offered prayers for you by keeping the coals burning in the altar of incense. But they couldn't go past the veil that separated the Holy of Holies, where the symbol of God's presence was. Only the High priest could go in once a year but not before offering a sacrifice for his own sins. It was an object lesson that God is holy, we are sinners.

No one can come into God's presence on their own. (9:1-10)

The priests mediated for you. The Tabernacle illustrated limited access. Rooms got smaller. All solid gold inside, bronze on the outside. The sacrifices of meat and grain and wine were symbolic. In themselves they could not assure inner cleansing of conscience.

And yet, people always tried. They thought the act of sacrifice alone was sufficient. 'I'm clean, I'm good. I did what was required.' But how many times do we read in the Old Testament where God rebuked Israel for heartless and ritualistic worship. Jesus Himself said '*You honour Me with your lips but your heart is far from me.*' God allowed people to approach Him carefully and even forgave sins based on the future coming of Jesus. So, none of us can approach God on our own,

But Jesus Can! (9:11-14)

¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not manmade, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 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!

Only now through Jesus can we approach God and serve Him because Jesus entered the Holy Place of God's presence itself when He died and rose. The sacrifice Jesus made was Himself; a human sinless sacrifice. Now that Jesus opened the way into God's presence, the way to God is open for anyone who desires to come to God yet still according to God's stipulations. We still have to have our sins forgiven. And here's another thing Jesus doesn't expect us to do;

Jesus Doesn't Expect us to Pay for our Own Sins **(9:15-28)**

Since all sacrifices must be unblemished or sinless,

No one can pay the price for their own sins (9:15-23)

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, ¹⁷ because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. ¹⁸ This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. ¹⁹ When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. ²⁰ He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." ²¹ In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. ²² In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Everything must be cleansed with blood including ourselves. Since we have sin, we can't pay for our sins. But people try with their good works, or church attendance or giving money or being pious. What's missing from all these? Blood. The Tabernacle system was messy. It wasn't pretty. God never changed His mind but He also didn't expect us to do this on our own. No one can.

But Jesus did! (9:23-28)

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.

Jesus entered God's presence through His sacrifice for our sins. He only had to do it once. The reason why the sacrifices continued daily and yearly was because no sinless human sacrifice had come along yet. Not until Jesus. Jesus paid the price for our sins. This is why He came. Gabriel made this point clearly to Joseph in the dream when he said of Jesus,

"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:20-21)

And Jesus will bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. Those who wait for Him are those who believe by faith He died in their place. Confessing we are sinners and our sins separate us from God. But believing that Jesus death for us now enables us to enter a relationship with God now and are secured in Christ who will bring us one day into the Father's presence.

Since God only allows that which is holy to come into His presence, we can't even boast that we can do that ourselves because God leads us to accept Jesus! Even Jesus doesn't expect us

Make Ourselves Holy (10:1-18)

Ch. 10 does not start a new thought. Accepting Christ is not the goal of our relationship with God, only the beginning. Holiness is what God wants from us. But

No one can make themselves holy (vv.1-4)

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

God's goal is to make us 'perfect' or 'completed, fully mature'. The word means to come its final end product. God's goal is to make us fully clean and pure in His presence. Accepting Christ assures us He will do that and we stand positionally forgiven and accepted because of what Jesus did. However, we are not fully mature or holy yet. We still need to approach God daily asking forgiveness for present sins based on the accomplished work of Jesus on the cross. His payment for our sins is not only retroactive – covering all sins in the past but also proactively assuring forgiveness for all future sins we might commit. How then can we come into His glorious presence one day, fully holy and mature if God's goal is to make perfect those who draw near to Him in worship. Again, we can't do it on our own . . .

But Jesus is making us more holy as we speak (vv.5-18)

Quoting a number of Old Testament verses in vv.5-9, affirming this has always been God's plan, the author tells us in v.10

¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 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.

The Greek of v. 10 makes for terrible English but it literally says we are having been made holy. 'Having been made holy is in the perfect passive tense meaning, it was accomplished in the past and will always have ongoing results but someone else (Jesus) is doing it to us. How?

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

¹⁶ "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

¹⁷ Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

The more we grow in His Word in our hearts and minds and obey it by our words and actions the Spirit enables us to grow in holiness accomplishing what He is committed to doing, which is conforming us into the image of Jesus.

Now, in vv.19-25 here's where Jesus does expect us to do in light of what He's accomplished for us – making approaching God possible now and to be in His holy presence forever:

Jesus Expects us to Enjoy our Relationship with Him **(10:19-23)**

Listen to the tone of the writer as opposed to the explanation of the Tabernacle;

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 unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who **promised is faithful**.

Whereas before Jesus none of us could come to God on our own now

We can anytime (vv.19-22)

The most Holy place is still God's presence but now we can enter directly at anytime because there's a new way opened for us through Jesus. Why can we do this any time?

Because Jesus is there (v.21; 7:25)

Back in 7:25 we are told Jesus is "is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because He always lives to intercede for them." He's our great high priest who makes it possible to enter God's presence any time.

And the other thing He expects from us is

Jesus Expects us to Encourage Each Other To Serve Him **(10:24-25)**

²⁴ And let 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.

You ever notice the two greatest commandments always work together? Vv.19-23 remind us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and vv.24-25 remind us to love each other as we love ourselves. The love for God spurs us to love one another.

We should be doing these things regularly (vv.24-25a)

We should be taking advantage of this great access into God's presence every day and at anytime, but do we? And we should be encouraging each other to meet together so that we don't forsake (abandon each other). "Not giving up meeting" is a weak translation. Those translations that say abandon or forsake grab the essence of the word.

Think about the original context for a moment. Those who were going back to the sacrificial system because they were afraid of persecution were obviously abandoning their fellow disciples, who were now shorthanded in their ministries and getting discouraged. Forsake means to rob others of what you have to offer. Any time we choose not to meet together we fail to see that our absence causes others miss out on the unique gifts you and I have to offer one another. And this is why he

ends this section so practically. If we truly believe Jesus is the substitute for our sins and paid the penalty for them on the cross, and can come to God freely at anytime how come we're not taking advantage of this freedom more often? And if we were would it not increase our desire to encourage one another to come together and exercise our gifts? And why should we do this?

Because Jesus is coming back (v.25b)

“All the more as you see the day approaching”. We are going to be evaluated by Jesus when this life is over. For how we took advantage of the freedom we have in Christ to worship and pray to God and how we served Him with our gifts.

This is why Jesus came to earth to be one of us. To die for our sins making access to God available without shedding any blood and by modelling what discipleship looks like, serving one another. If we have little desire to do either how do we know we're even saved? That's the whole message of Hebrews! If you would rather resort back to ritualism and try to get to God on your own rather than sticking it out with God in worship and serving each other how do you know you're saved. And so, the writer pleads with his readers to persevere because we will be rewarded for our faith (10:35). And then he gives a whole slew of examples to be encouraged by in Ch. 11 and tells us they are a cloud of witnesses cheering us on and if that's not enough Jesus is waiting for us at the finish line.

Unto us, Jesus was born; unto us Jesus was given. To make access to God available and to encourage one another in our relationship with God. Let's celebrate Christmas by doing a little more of both.

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