

Hebrews 10:1-10 "Born to be a Sacrifice" **

Main Idea: In Hebrews 10:1-10 we learn why Christ came into the world, namely He was *born to be a sacrifice*. But what did His sacrifice accomplish, and what difference should His sacrifice make in our lives. We'll find out this morning.

I. Consider the deficiency of old covenant sacrifices (1-4).

A. Old covenant sacrifices were a shadow (1-2).

1. They couldn't make sinners perfect.
2. They couldn't make sinners clean.

B. Old covenant sacrifices were a reminder (3-4).

1. Undeniable fact #1: I am a sinner.
2. Undeniable fact #2: I need to have my sins removed.

II. Consider the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (5-10).

A. Christ came to the world to do His Father's will (5-9).

1. He knew what His Father wanted, and did it.
2. He knew what we needed, and provided it.
 - a. By His obedience Christ became our Savior.
 - b. By His obedience Christ became our example.

B. Christ came to the world to make sinners holy (10).

1. Our holiness matters to the Father.
2. Our holiness matters to the Son.
3. Our holiness should matter to us.

Application: If you have accepted Christ's sacrifice...

1. Your sins have been taken away.
2. You can live a holy life.
3. You can anticipate eternity with confidence.
4. You have a message to share with others.

I ran across the following words this week, an observation attributed to C. S. Lewis:

"There is a stage in a child's life at which it cannot separate the religious from the merely festal character of Christmas or Easter. I have been told of a very small and very devout boy who was heard murmuring to himself on Easter morning a poem of his own composition which began 'Chocolate eggs and Jesus risen.' This seems to me, for his age, both admirable poetry and admirable piety. But of course the time will soon come when such a child can no longer effortlessly and spontaneously enjoy that unity. He will become able to distinguish the spiritual from the ritual and festal aspect of Easter; chocolate eggs will no longer seem sacramental. And once he has distinguished he must put one or the other first. If he puts the spiritual first he can still taste something of Easter in the chocolate eggs; if he puts the eggs first they will soon be no more than any other sweetmeat. They will have taken on an independent, and therefore a soon withering, life."^[1]

It's a challenge to be *in the world* but not *of the world*, and that's especially true at Christmastime.

Christ came to earth. History verifies the validity of those words. They are fact, as even our calendar testifies, and we are currently in the season that historically has been devoted to the celebration of that amazing event.

The problem is, many people today who celebrate the holiday don't know why Christ came. Oh, they know there's a baby in a manger, and they may even acknowledge He is a special baby, but they really don't know why. Why did the first Christmas occur? Why did Christ come into the world?

There are many places we could turn in God's Word to answer that question, and while I contemplated leaving our current series in Hebrews to help us prepare for Christmas, it dawned on me that we have actually come to the perfect place in Hebrews to give us God's perspective on Christmas. That's Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:5 states, "Therefore, *when Christ came into the world*, he said..." And in verse 9, "Then he said, 'Here I am, *I have come to do your will.*'" So Hebrews 10 is about the incarnation of Christ. It tells us *why Christ came to earth*, and it will serve us well as we seek to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas this year to the honor of our King. This week we'll consider the first ten verses, and next week, the Lord willing, verses 11-18.

Let me give you the big idea as we begin. In Hebrews 10:1-10 we learn why Christ came into the world, namely He was *born to be a sacrifice*. But what did His sacrifice accomplish, and what difference should His sacrifice make in our lives? We'll find out as we devote our attention to this important passage this morning. We'll be considering two points in our study.

I. Consider the deficiency of old covenant sacrifices (1-4).

Notice the first words of verse 1, "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming." To appreciate why Christ was born we must realize the status of things prior to His birth. We're told here *the law* was in place, a reference to the law that God gave to Moses for Israel fourteen centuries before Christ. By mentioning "the law" the writer has in mind the contents of the Torah, the first five books of our Bible, and specifically the sacrificial system that the law prescribed. For hundreds of years the Jews had brought animals to the tabernacle, and later to the temple, so that priests could sacrifice them on the altar to make atonement for sins. And although those sacrifices were commanded by God, they were inherently *deficient*.

The writer uses two words in this paragraph to highlight the deficiency of the old covenant sacrifices. Here's the first...

A. Old covenant sacrifices were a shadow (1-2). "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. If it could, 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."

The law, says our text, was a *shadow*. The Greek word *skia* means a reflection, a silhouette, a form without reality.^[2] That's what the law was. As Gromacki explains, "It provided a dark outline without details."^[3]

Some see a painting metaphor here which reminds me of watching Nancy Rae Litteral paint. Nancy, as you know, was a quadriplegic (no longer, for she's now in heaven!), and while in her wheelchair she painted by mouth. When she began a portrait she would first pencil in the rough outline of the person or object she intended to paint. Those first marks on the canvass were a very basic and elementary sketch of the intended product. To use Hebrews 10 terminology, it was a *shadow* and not the *reality*. Then, building on that sketch, she applied brilliant colors and added wonderful details, and the result was a spectacular image to behold.

The law with its sacrificial system was good, just incomplete. It was just a sketch, an outline, a *shadow* of what was to come. It showed the shape of what was to come, but did not possess the reality of it. The reality is found in Christ and in Christ alone. Barclay says it well, "Without Christ you cannot get beyond the shadows of God."^[4]

In what specific ways were the old covenant sacrifices deficient? The writer mentions two ways here, the first...

1. *They couldn't make sinners perfect.* That's what the end of verse 1 tells us, "It can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship." A lot of people might read that and think, "So the old covenant sacrifices couldn't make worshipers perfect. What's the big deal about that? After all, nobody's perfect." That *is* the big deal. *Nobody* is perfect, *nobody*. Yet to enter God's presence, that's what is required, perfection. God who is holy cannot tolerate sin. Because He is just, He must deal justly with sin and execute the just punishment for every sin. But beyond that, because He is holy, He requires, not only the absence of sin, but positively that a person be *holy* and *righteous* to enter His presence. Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48)."

And that's something the old covenant sacrifices couldn't accomplish. They couldn't make sinners perfect. A second deficiency...

2. *They couldn't make sinners clean.* That's what the end of verse 2 says, "For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all"—but they weren't—"and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins"—but they did. Or as the KJV puts it, "the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins."

That's something an animal sacrifice couldn't do. It couldn't cause the sinner's conscience to stop telling him that he was a sinner, because he *was* a sinner. It couldn't eliminate the feelings of guilt for his sin because the fact of his sin remained. Oh, maybe not the sins for which he brought this year's animal for sacrifice, but what about next year's, and the next, and the next? Those old covenant sacrifices, though required, couldn't make sinners clean, temporarily yes, but not once for all.

Keep in mind the reason the writer of Hebrews is making this point in the first place. Because of persecution, some of the first readers of this epistle were thinking about reneging on their commitment to Christ and going back to their old ways in Judaism. But to leave Christ is "to forsake the substance for the shadow," as Leon Morris puts it.^[5]

By the way, verse 2 talks about *no longer feeling guilty for sin*. Please realize that, contrary to what psychology asserts, feeling guilty for sin is a good thing. When? If you have sin in your life. When we violate God's standard (or even what we consider to be God's standard; see Rom. 14:23), we ought to *feel guilty*. A guilty conscience is God's good gift to us that He intends to use to bring us out of our disobedience and back to Himself.

Perhaps you're plagued today by a guilty conscience. Then thank God for it! Don't do what so many do, shift the blame to another, or try to drown out the conviction with a bottle or a pill or a relationship.

Yes, thank God that He's working with you, seeking to get your attention, not letting you go unchecked down the path that leads to destruction.

But please know that although the law can point out your sin, and that's a good thing, it cannot make you perfect or clean, both of which are essential if you're going to be right with the holy Creator God. [\[6\]](#)

That brings us to our second word. Not only were old covenant sacrifices a shadow, but secondly...

B. Old covenant sacrifices were a reminder (3-4). "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Those sacrifices are an *annual reminder*, says the writer. Every time a Jew brought his sacrifice to the priests in the holy place he was reminded of two undeniable facts.

1. *Undeniable fact #1: I am a sinner.* What does that mean, to say, "I am a sinner"? You'll notice the word "sins" appears in verse 2, again in verse 3, and again in verse 4. It's the Greek word *hamartia*, and it means "to miss the mark" or "to wander from the path." That's our fundamental problem. We have missed God's mark, God's target for us. We've wandered from the path He intended for us to take in life, the path marked out for us in His written law as well as on our conscience, the path of righteousness.

Years ago when I ran Cross Country, staying on the right path was always a concern, particularly for the guys leading the pack up front, but also for those of us following them. As opposed to a track meet where the runners just go around the oval, in a Cross Country race you travel over all kinds of terrain, but you must do so staying on the prescribed course. In order to know what the prescribed course is, you would typically have an instruction session before the meet with your coach. He would review the course rules and inform you of where you were supposed to run. To be a successful runner, you had to do more than run hard and fast. You had to be able to recognize signs and color-coded flags which identify the accepted route. "Red means right, blue means left, white means straight," said the coach. Or did he say, "Red means left, blue means right..."? Of course, the penalty for getting off the prescribed path was severe and every runner knew it. Leave the course and go your own way and you'll be *disqualified*.

That's what we have done. God put the flags in place in the course of life. But the first man veered off the path and tried to trail-blaze his own way. And the rest of the runners—that's all of us—have followed Adam on the path of disqualification that leads to destruction.

And let me point out that the problem of sin isn't merely that we've left the path, as bad as that is. It's that we have a heart that *wants* to leave the path, a sinful heart. It's been well said, "We are not sinners merely because we sin. We sin because we are sinners."

There's a second undeniable fact of which the old covenant sacrifices were a reminder. One, I am a *sinner*. And two...

2. *Undeniable fact #2: I need to have my sins removed.* That's the verb at the end of verse 4, "to take away sins" (*aphaireo*), and it refers to the complete removal of something. In Luke 22:50 it's used to indicate that Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. He *took it away*. In our text we learn that's what the old covenant sacrifices could *not* do. They could not take away the sins of the sinner. Remind him of his sinfulness, yes. Remove his sins, no.

The old covenant sacrifices were *deficient*. But let me take it a step further. *Anything* we try to do to get rid of our sin problem is deficient. Give money to charity? That won't do it, for the hands that gave the gift are still sinful hands. Sing Christmas carols? Also insufficient, for the words that are sung are coming from a heart that is still marred by sin. There's nothing that human hand can do to remedy the sin problem, *nothing*.

Thankfully, God has done for us what we can never accomplish on our own, and that brings us to the second point of our text...

II. Consider the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (5-10).

Verse 5—"Therefore when Christ [the Messiah] came [the Son of God became incarnate] into the world [into the cosmos which He Himself created; see 1:2]." Here is the true meaning of Christmas, beloved. Here is why Christ came. The writer mentions two reasons, both of which highlight His sufficiency.

A. Christ came to the world to do His Father's will (5-9). "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.'" He sets aside the first to establish the second."

Let's take a closer look at these verses. The writer of Hebrews is quoting from Psalm 40:6-8, a psalm of David, and says that Christ spoke these words when He came into the world. He actually takes the words of David (who penned Psalm 40) and says they came from the mouth of Christ. Notice again verse 5, "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, *he* said."

That's interesting. This is the only place in the New Testament that Psalm 40 is even quoted, yet here the writer informs us that during His incarnation *Christ* said these words.

Furthermore, when you read Psalm 40 you discover it is a psalm in which David is praising the Lord for delivering *him*, and David is responding to the Lord by saying, "Hear I am. I have come to do your will, O God." So if these were originally David's words, why does Hebrews want us to know that Christ spoke them?

Philip Hughes explains, "Over and over again the New Testament shows that passages in the Old Testament have a significance and an application beyond and in addition to the original occasion of their composition, and this is especially so with reference to the redemptive work of Christ. If the Psalmist could say, *Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God*, he could do so only falteringly, because of his sinful inadequacy before his Creator. But on the lips of Christ these words are uniquely and preeminently appropriate, first of all because in terms of promise and prophecy he supremely is the Coming One, the messianic deliverer whose advent has been longingly awaited, and, secondly, because the predominant purpose of his coming was to do the Father's will."^[7]

Now let's notice what David, and ultimately the Son of David, the Christ, actually said. Turn to Psalm 40:6...

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire. It's not that sacrifices were bad, for after all God commanded them. They were simply not enough. As Westcott put it, "In themselves...the sacrifices gave no pleasure to God. Their value was in what they represented."^[8]

But my ears you have pierced, says David. He may be alluding to a provision in Exodus 21:5-6 where we learn about an option open to slaves. If a slave was given the choice of freedom, but out of love for his master declined that offer, he would go through a ceremony of sorts in which his ear was pierced with an awl, thereby pledging himself to be the life-long slave of his master. "I exist to do *Your will*, Lord."^[9]

Yet there's a twist here. If you compare Psalm 40 with Hebrews 10, you'll notice a line change. Whereas Psalm 40:6 reads, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced," Hebrews 10:5 says...

But a body you prepared for me. Why the difference? It's because the writer of Hebrews isn't quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures (which is the basis of our English translation of Psalm 40), but from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. If you think about it, either reading amounts to the

same bottom line thought. Christ opened His ear to His Father's word and thus surrendered His body to His Father's will.

With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Again, old covenant sacrifices weren't bad, just deficient. And that's a theme that's hit hard even in the Old Testament again and again...

1 Samuel 15:22 "But Samuel replied: 'Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.'"

Hosea 6:6 "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."

Micah 6:6-8 "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

When Christ came, He fulfilled this expectation. He fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. He knew that His Father was not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings. His response?

Then I said, 'Here I am.' Christ made Himself available to His Father. Philippians 2:6-7 says He made Himself a servant.

It is written about me in the scroll. "In the scroll of the book" says the ESV. The KJV says, "in the volume of the book." The term "scroll" or "volume" (*kephalidi*) literally means "head" and according to Gromacki refers to the knob at the end of the roller around which the manuscript of the Scriptures was wound.^[10]

I have come to do your will, O God. Christ didn't come to do His own thing. His Father's will was His constant focus. Ponder this truth about our Savior...

1. *He knew what His Father wanted, and did it.* Hear Him in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Your will be done." And that resolve was how He lived His entire life...

John 4:34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

John 5:30 "I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."

And how far would His obedience take Him? All the way to the cross. Philippians 2:8 says He "became obedient unto death." Hear His own words again...

John 10:17-18 "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

John 15:10 "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

John 17:4 "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."

We, as sinners, miss the mark, but Christ hit it every time. We get off course, but Christ stayed on course to the very end. Yes, Christ knew what His Father wanted, and did it. What's more...

2. *He knew what we needed, and provided it.* That's the point the writer of Hebrews is making,

and he actually repeats the Psalm 40 quotation for emphasis in verses 8-9. In verse 8 he tells us again that Christ said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them." And He repeats Christ's resolve in verse 9, "Here I am. I have come to do your will." At the end of verse 9 the writer explains the significance, "He sets aside the first [the first covenant with its insufficient sacrificial system] to establish the second [the new covenant based on His sufficient and perfect sacrifice]."

Leon Morris offers this vital word of caution, "Some exegetes have been so impressed by the emphasis on doing the will of God over against the offering of animal sacrifice that they suggest that the actual death of Jesus mattered little. What was important, they say, is the yielded will, the fact that Jesus was ready to do his Father's will at whatever cost to himself. The death was incidental; the will was primary. But this is not what the author is saying. The will is certainly important, and unless we see this we misunderstand the author's whole position. Yet it is also important to realize that the will of God in question was that 'the body of Jesus Christ' be offered. Calvary, not Gethsemane, is central, important though the latter was. The contrast is not between animal sacrifice and moral obedience. It is between the death of an uncomprehending animal and the death in which Jesus accepted the will of God with all that it entails."^[11]

Let the significance of this sink in, brothers and sisters. What we needed Christ in His perfect obedience provided for us, two things...

a. By His obedience Christ became our Savior. And...

b. By His obedience Christ became our example. He must be both to us, both Savior *and* example, and in that order. As sinners we need someone to save us from our sins, and by means of His obedient life, vicarious death on the cross, and triumphant resurrection, Christ did that. But we also need someone to show us how to live, and we have that too, in Christ.^[12]

In verse 10 we're given a second reason, one closely related to the first, as to why Christ came into the world. First, Christ came to do the Father's will, and this was the Father's will...

B. Christ came to the world to make sinners holy (10). "And by that will, we have been made holy [KJV 'we are sanctified'] through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Our holiness is a big deal to our holy God. Here we learn that, first of all...

1. *Our holiness matters to the Father.* "And by that will, we have been made holy." How is a person made holy? By *that* will. Whose will? The will of the One to whom Christ was speaking when He said in verse 9, "I have come to do *your will*." Our holiness is the Father's will, and so we can be sure our holiness matters to the Father.

2. *Our holiness matters to the Son.* "We have been made holy *through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*." Our holiness is linked to the Father's will and the Son's work. The Father planned it, and the Son accomplished it.

How? On what basis is a sinner made holy? On the basis of a sacrifice. An animal sacrifice? No. On the basis of the sacrifice of the body of Christ. Christ came to earth to sacrifice His *body*. Remember His words? "This is my body given for you (Luke 22:19)."^[13]

Athletes talk about "sacrificing their bodies." Soldiers do, too. But there's never been a sacrifice like His. His sacrifice resulted in sinners being made holy. As Raymond Brown points out, "Something more is achieved by Christ's death than the removal of guilt. *We have been sanctified*."^[14] And Hebrews makes it clear that the body that Christ sacrificed He sacrificed *once for all* (see also 7:27; 9:12).

Do you realize how unique this teaching is? Christianity says that man's holiness, indeed man's salvation, hinges on what *one historical person* did with His body. That makes it distinct from every other religion. Other religions assert that man's salvation is linked, perhaps to some past accomplishment or teaching of a great person, but primarily to man's present contribution. Only Christianity says it depends

entirely on what one person did on one day many years ago. *We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ.*

The writer of Hebrews will have a lot more to say to us about the subject of holiness in verses 11-18, as we'll see next time, the Lord willing. But for now, let's not miss the obvious. If our holiness matters to the Father and to the Son...

3. *Our holiness should matter to us.* The question is, *does it?* Do you think about holiness when you're choosing which movie to watch, or which book to read, or which song to listen to? Beloved, if our holiness meant enough to our heavenly Father that He designed a plan to secure it, and to our Savior that He sacrificed His body to achieve it, surely it ought to be at the top of our list of priorities.

How important is holiness to you? It is important enough to get up fifteen minutes earlier so you can spend time in God's holy Word? Is it important enough that you'll make the sacrifices necessary to join us for the upcoming Biblical Answers for the Problems of Life class that begins in January? Is it important enough to change your circle of friends, so that you're hanging out with folks that promote holiness rather than hinder it? It's why Christ came into the world, my friend. He was born to be a sacrifice, a sacrifice to make us holy. Let's talk application...

Application: If you have accepted Christ's sacrifice...four things are true.

1. *Your sins have been taken away.* Let the past tense verb in verse 10 thrill your soul... "We *have been made holy.*" If you have put your faith in Christ, your sins are gone and you are declared by God to be holy.

"Why then do I still struggle?" you ask. Because, as we'll see next time in verse 14, holiness is both a position and a progression, both linked to Christ. "By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever [there's our positional holiness] those who are being made holy [there's our progressive holiness]."

2. *You can live a holy life.* Let me repeat that. You *can* live a holy life. Christ gave His life to make your holiness a reality. He's also given you the resources you need to tap into this potential—His Word, prayer, and the church.

3. *You can anticipate eternity with confidence.* You don't need to wonder what will happen to you after you die. You can know. If you have accepted Christ's sacrifice, your sins are gone, your standing is sure, and your eternal home reserved for you with Christ.

Maybe you don't know for sure, and maybe the reason is because you don't know Christ. Look again at the text, and believe it, believe *Him*. "I have come to do your will," said Christ. And He did just that! Will you accept His sacrifice today?

4. *You have a message to share with others.* All around us are people celebrating a birthday they don't understand. Let's not keep the good news to ourselves!

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Taken from www.sermonillustrations.com

[2] William Barclay, p. 112.

[3] Robert Gromacki, p. 160.

[4] William Barclay, p. 113.

[5] Leon Morris, p. 94.

[6] We see the grace of God in this passage. God desires for people to come near Him, even undeserving people who have sinned against Him. That's why He provided a way to make this a reality, first a temporary way in the provision of the old covenant sacrifices, and then the ultimate way through Christ's sacrifice.

[7] Philip Hughes, pp. 394-5.

[8] Quote taken from Raymond Brown, p. 178.

[9] A potential problem with this interpretation, however, is that Psalm 40:6 says, not *ear*, but *ears* plural, “My *ears* you have pierced.” It’s possible to translate the verb “opened,” indicating that God had *opened his ears*, that is, prepared him for ready obedience.

[10] Robert Gromacki, p. 162.

[11] Leon Morris, p. 100.

[12] Hebrews 5:8 says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” This is our calling, to obey even if it means suffering, as it did for our Savior.

[13] The focus in Hebrews 9 was on His *blood*. Here in chapter 10 it’s on His *body*.

[14] Raymond Brown, p. 178.