April 30, 2023

Sermon 18

Hebrews 9:1-13

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Hebrews 9. Lord willing, we will get through the first 14 verses. I was thinking of a memory from about 13 years ago or so, when Molly and Marissa were little. I think that any parents would be able to relate. They were in the other room playing. Marissa would have been about six months old, and she was in one of those saucer things that sort of bounce and spin. All they really do is bounce all over it, slam their face into it, drool all over it. Molly was in there and she was about 2 -2 ½, and all of a sudden Marissa was just screaming and crying. We go in there and Molly is playing with toys. What had happened is, you know, they make those things that are supposed to keep them alive and safe while you go about your life, but they put these toys on them that are designed to inflict pain. And there was this one plastic toy that was on a spring and Molly had grabbed it, pulled it back, and let it go, as Marissa was coming forward, and it just smacked her in the face. So, she was crying, which was funny, especially if you picture them as they are now in the story. We come in and we’re like, “What happened!?,” and Molly says, “Oh, I did this,” and she grabbed that toy, ripped it back, and let it go into Marissa’s face again, which started the whole cycle over, and then just looked at us. No guilt, no shame, and we thought, “She might be a sociopath. I don’t know. Who are we raising!?” I thought, even in your conscience, even as a two-year-old, you should know that, okay, that wasn’t cool.

There are so many times, I know for me, the times that I’m comfortable sharing where my conscience was so eaten up with guilt; we all know that feeling. You’re just eaten up with guilt and there’s really nothing you can do to make it right. I was fifteen years old and we lived with my aunt and uncle in their home, and they had gone on vacation. So, they were gone, and somewhere in the week I decided I was going to start driving this car around the neighborhood. I was stealing my uncle’s car and it was mostly to impress a girl. I’m stealing my uncle’s car and driving around the neighborhood and I just lost control and I T-boned a brick mailbox. I hit it so good that the foundation came about halfway out of the ground. It was front wheel drive, so all I knew was that all of a sudden, I was looking at the horizon and I could hear the tires just spinning. It was about 3-4 days until they came home and then the first 48 hours that my uncle was home, he didn’t look at me and he didn’t talk to me. And I felt horrible. I knew I didn’t have the money to fix the car. He was talking to the insurance, and he told them he was driving to try to get out of it. It was a huge mess and I just remember that feeling. You know that feeling, “I can’t make this right. My conscience is guilty, and I’ve done wrong.” It was the same feeling I’d have every time I sat in the principal’s office, especially through middle school, just waiting and knowing, “Yeah, I did these things.” I was just waiting on the punishment but knowing I can’t make it right.

I think that feeling, that all humans know deep down that something is wrong, really goes back to the Garden. It goes back to the Garden where we ate of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and our conscience was made alive. It’s a good thing that we should be able to use because we’re made in the image and likeness of God – to be able to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. But our conscience is perverted by sin, and humanity has found a million different ways since that moment to try to deal with this inconvenient reality; that we know that everything is not alright, and we know “I’m the problem.”

So, our text tonight gets into that. Spencer did such an awesome job in last week’s sermon talking about the Old Covenant and why this existed for so long. Why didn’t Jesus just come right away? God is setting up these pictures, and images, and these moving illustrations for us to be able to understand our need for the Gospel. So, God had set up in Israel a way for people to approach God, because our conscience is right – there is something wrong – and what’s wrong is that we’re separated from our God. Apart from Christ, because our conscience is defiled because of our impurity, we’ve been separated from our God. And philosophy, psychology, therapy, and all the different false religions we’ve come up with, try to deal with a guilty, defiled conscience, and they fall flat. Even what we’re seeing so much now – not trying to do away with it or cover it, but to embrace it and say, “What you’re saying is wrong is not wrong; it’s good.” We’re calling evil ‘good,’ and embracing it and saying that the only reason people would think this is wrong is because of a structure within society that was founded on the Bible. And that’s why people feel guilty for the way that they’re living, and they shouldn’t feel guilty, but they should celebrate these things. And it leaves them just as much in their guilt, and their shame, and drowning without hope. But the Bible addresses these things. God had set up in Israel a way for people to draw near.

So, starting in verse 1, it says,

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. 2 For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.3 Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place,4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. 5Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

So, if you remember, earlier in this study we walked through and we looked at images of the Tabernacle. They’ll be up again in a minute, just to refresh our minds. But God had given them this tent, which one day, under Solomon, would be a Temple. But first, it was just a tent that they could move around the wilderness. It was a means to draw near to God. And we won’t go into all the furnishings of the Temple, following his lead here, and say that’s not the main point, to go into the lampstand, and the altar, and the basin. But the main point is what was happening there. Remember, all the priests who got to serve into the Tabernacle, would go into the courtyard, and that’s where sacrifices would be made. There is a huge altar there for animals to be burned on and sacrifices to be made. This was constantly happening. People could bring a lamb, bring a goat, bring a bull, and make an offering for their sin. The priests also, by lot, would have the opportunity, probably just once in their lifetime, to go into the Holy Place, through that first set of curtains. They would set out the bread, and they would light the candles, and they would burn incense in there as a picture of prayer going up before the Lord. Remember, when it was Zechariahs’s turn, by lot, to serve in the Holy Place, the angel comes to him and says, “Your wife, who was barren, is going to have a child,” which would be John the Baptist. The priests would go in there constantly, but it was just the one day a year, on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would go.

So, he picks up and he says in verse 7,

7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and…

Listen.

and for the unintentional sins of the people. **8**By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing **9**(which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,

Here it is. Here’s the main point.

 **10**but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

The system was built up so that the people could draw closer to God. Right? So, you have the nation of Israel, out of all the nations of the Earth, -- this one nation got to come a little bit closer to God. Our sin had separated all of us and Israel gets to come closer. And then, within Israel, one tribe, could come a little bit closer – the tribe of Levi – as they served in the Temple or the Tabernacle. Then, out of that tribe, one family, the family of Aaron, could come the high priests, who would one day out of the year serve in the very presence of God in the Holy of Holies.

So, as much as it speaks to God’s grace in drawing near, it speaks to our separation, and what the writer of Hebrews is pointing out is that it never accomplished the point of cleansing your conscience, so that you would ever feel confident to come before your God. You would never have full access to the God who made you, to the God who loves you, to the God who made you in His image and likeness, so that you would know Him, and love Him, and serve Him. There’s still separation. And here’s the point – it wasn’t ethnicity, and it wasn’t tribe, and it wasn’t family, and it wasn’t curtains that separated us from God; it was our conscience, in two ways. In two ways, our conscience keeps us separated from God, apart from Christ. One is that it’s really defiled. When it’s telling us something is wrong, that’s such a gift from God. Something is wrong. Sin has defiled us. It demands justice. It demands wrath. And it’s warning us that that’s our situation before a holy God. The other way it separates us is that feeling, that understanding, that I’m not worthy. It keeps us separated from Him. And this Old Testament system, which was beautiful and helpful, never accomplished the goal of bringing us into full relationship, and total, unlimited access, into the presence of God. It couldn’t do that.

Turn to Leviticus 16. We will spend a few minutes here. I encourage you, if you want to learn more about the things that he said we don’t have time for, pick up in Exodus 25-30, and you can read about the instruments and the furnishings of the Tabernacle. There are a lot of cool ways that it points to Christ. But in Leviticus 16 we meet Aaron, and he’s getting instructions as the first high priest of Israel. Before this, the Tabernacle was already set up and Aaron had two boys, two sons, who had been serving in the Tabernacle. If you will remember, they do something – we’re not told explicitly what they did that was wrong – but they offered some sort of strange fire in the presence of Yahweh and they are consumed. They die in the presence of the Lord. So, then God is giving Moses more specific instructions to Aaron. Now, don’t let this be lost on you – it’s to the father of those boys. Listen to what the Lord says,

Yahweh spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before Yahweh and died, **2**and Yahweh said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. **3**But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4**He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. **5**And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

**6**“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. **7**Then he shall take the two goats and set them before Yahweh at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8**And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for Yahweh and the other lot for Azazel. **9**And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for Yahweh and use it as a sin offering, **10**but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before Yahweh to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

**11**“Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. **12**And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before Yahweh, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil **13**and put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. **14**And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

**15**“Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. **16**Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. **17**No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. **18**Then he shall go out to the altar that is before Yahweh and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. **19**And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

**20**“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. **21**And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. **22**The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

Now, there’s a lot going on there. This is the picture God painted. He’s telling us, “Listen, today the Holy Spirit has a lesson to teach us from these things.” And the main point of the lesson is that it could never removed the guilt, and shame, and defilement of your conscience that is keeping you out of fellowship with your Creator. It couldn’t do it. But we have this vivid picture of Aaron. And I can’t get over this. I can’t imagine this for Aaron. God killed his sons in the Tabernacle, and then he has to go back in there to, first, make an offering for himself and the rest of his family and then on behalf of a sinful nation. You may be better at controlling your thoughts than me. I’m not super good at it. I told you before, for me, even to be able to pray for even ten minutes, I have to type it out because my mind just goes to weird places. My mind wanders and it usually doesn’t go to somewhere pure and holy, where a crystal river flows and cherubim are singing. It doesn’t go there; it goes to other places. So, I can’t imagine. How does he go in there and not have bitterness in his heart toward the God he's supposed to serve? Over the death of his boys. Just his own sin, and selfishness, and pride, and greed, and envy. All that you know that is in your own heart and mind – he’s carrying that in there. That’s why he’s got the vivid picture of this basin with the blood of a bull in it; because he’s sinful, he’s guilty, his conscience isn’t clean, and he knows that he deserves the wrath that he knows that God has the power to unleash. He’s got to go in for himself and then for the nation. Can you picture it? Maybe with the goat and the bull he’s grabbing their horns and symbolically transferring his sin, his family’s sin, the sin of the nation onto this animal, so that by their blood this temporary picture of atonement can be made.

I think they knew all along. I think they knew all along that this didn’t actually take away their guilt. This didn’t actually take away their sin. I think of King David, when he’s committed sin. Pause here – Are y’all tracking with me? One of the pastors is with me. Okay, good. Are y’all with me? Are you picturing it in your minds? There are so many vivid pictures. Remember, the writer of Hebrews says that the high priest would offer for the “unintentional sins of the people.” That should make us all hit the brakes. There was a sacrifice for unintentional sin but what about intentional sins? I don’t know about you – yes I do. I’m saying that but you know I do. I know about us. Most of our sins are intentional. Was there no provision for intentional sins? And we have to be careful because people are all over the map on this. Some of the ambiguity in the language between intentional and unintentional is on purpose, but it’s not like what we have in English, where we know that unintentional sins are those that I really didn’t mean to do, it caught me off guard, or I didn’t know about it. It wasn’t intentional. I didn’t see the speed limit change. It’s not that kind of thing. It’s more of highlighting what the Old Testament refers to as ‘high handed’ sin – what we’re going to come to in chapter 10 that’s described as willful sinning. If we go on sinning willfully, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin. And more to the point is that regarding high handed or intentional sin – yes, there was no provision for it – and it was this: I know it’s sinful, I know it’s an attack against God’s nature and character, I know God said not to do it, and I’m doing it anyway, not just because it’s what I want to do but because I’d rather do what I want to do than serve God. That’s terrifying. Do people really go there? Absolutely. David went there. Because remember, when David’s praying his prayer and he says two things that seem to contradict. He says, “You don’t desire sacrifice or else I would give it.” Do you remember? Psalm 51. He says, “You don’t desire sacrifice. You don’t desire the blood of a bull or a goat.” What’s he saying? He’s saying, “I know that can’t help me.” But in the same prayer, he says, “Have mercy on me according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy.” And then he says this, “Purge me with hyssop.” What’s that? The hyssop branch, the branch that was used to dip into the blood of the lamb at Passover, to put the blood on the doorway. And then, later on in Exodus, they’re to take a hyssop branch and sprinkle almost everything with blood as a picture of it being atoned for. So, he’s saying, “I know the blood of animals can’t be a sacrifice for my high-handed rebellion against you,” but in the same prayer he says, “so purge me with the blood of the lamb.” I think they knew. I think they knew that all of this wasn’t an end in and of itself. It was all pointing to the greater Lamb, the greater Sacrifice. He knew his only hope is that one day God would provide a Sacrifice that really could purge him of his guilt and his shame in his sin.

Every year, when the high priests would go in, tradition tells us this – the Bible doesn’t tell us this – but to me it just makes sense. When I’ve preached on this at camp before, and I think even for Red Oak, I think that whatever that tradition is, when they started tying a rope around the high priest, that just makes sense. Because if he goes in there over, and over, and over again – in Leviticus 16, he says, “Tell Aaron to do it just like this, so that…..” what? So that he may not get fired? No. Get demoted? No. “So that he may not die.” If he did die, who’s going in to get him? Not me. Can you see all the pastors, priests, standing outside? They hadn’t heard a bell in a while; who’s going in there? Somebody get Zach. Zach knows Greek. Get Spencer. Somebody go get him. Where’s Shawn? No, it makes sense that they would have a rope attached to him to pull him out. If he’s supposed to be the best of us and he took in the blood of the bull, and he took in the blood of the goat on our behalf, and God didn’t receive that, I’m not going in there. There was separation. Why? We feel it in our conscience. We’re impure, we’re defiled, we’re guilty – and we can come up with religions, and we can come up with philosophies, and we can come up with a whole system of psychology that says it’s really not you’re fault. It's all these other things, and the guilt that you’re feeling, that’s not real. That’s been projected onto you by this system that’s been in place that you were raised in. “That’s not your fault. Let’s remove that.” No, no, no. At the end of the day, my conscience is guilty, and if I’m not careful, all I’ll do by embracing more sin, shifting the blame, is sear that conscience and make it more callous. It’s worth taking the time to talk about these things, because that was the whole point of the Law. It speaks to the conscience. It tells us something is wrong. It tells us we need a greater sacrifice. Y’all have heard me say it a bunch – my favorite Charles Spurgeon quote – where he says,

I do not believe that any man can preach the Gospel who doesn’t first preach the Law, for the Law is the needle and you cannot draw the silken thread of the Gospel through a man’s heart until the Law first makes way for it.

Why a needle? Because our conscience is hard. We’ve seared it by ignoring its warnings day-in-and-day-out as we continue in sin.

So, Aaron would go in, do his work, and get out. I think what becomes so clear is that they didn’t belong in there. He didn’t belong in there. So, every year a new high priest, or however long a high priest would serve and then a new one would take over and go in and do these same sacrifices - he would get in and get out. Whether a rope was tied to him or not, he’s getting in and he’s getting out. They would try to keep it dark. They would even burn the incense so that there was smoke between them and the Mercy Seat, and the tablets of the Law, that only speak to our guilt before a holy God, who said, “I’ll dwell there. I’ll be there.” And there is fear and separation. They didn’t belong. Then, he would go out.

And then, there’s this weird picture with the other goat, right? Azazel. That’s probably not how you say it, but it’s how I say it. Other translations will say ‘scapegoat.’ It’s where we get our term and our idea for scapegoat, which still fits. It’s a good picture. People will say, “He was kind of made the scapegoat.” What are they saying? “He got blamed for everything. He took the blame. He took the fall.” It shifts the blame from us onto him. That’s what was happening. There was a picture of a sacrifice being made, atonement being made, blood being shed to cover our sin that demands our death. The blood of an innocent was given – the spotless, blameless blood of a lamb. And then this other one is taking that guilt and shame and sending it away into the wilderness, never to return. It’s a really cool picture.

So, we come back to Hebrews 9 and he says that all of that was just outwardly, it was just ceremonial. It could just set you apart to temporarily worship and then you had to do this all again. There was never any confidence, never any full, unlimited access. He says in verse 10, that these things…

**10**but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Verse 11,

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12**he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13**For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14**how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Do you see it? Jesus is the fulfillment of what all these pictures were, so that our conscience could be cleansed. So that the actual impurity could be removed. Because He offers His own blood, His spotless blood, that actually has the power to remove our sin. And He goes into the presence of God, into the Holy Place, not made with hands, into the heavenly reality, and He offers himself.

Now, listen to this quote from Kent Hughes. He said this,

The theological message portrayed through the rites performed on this most sacred day (the Day of Atonement, in Israel) serve as a template for understanding the message of Christianity. The centerpiece of Christianity is the cross, where Jesus’ death resulted in the forgiveness of sins through the shedding of His blood, for all who repent and express faith in Christ as Savior. The rituals that happened on the Day of Atonement provided an explanation through moving pictures of what happened in God’s eyes when Jesus died on Mount Calvary.

When Jesus is on the cross bleeding, when He’s suffering, when He’s dying – this is how God sees what He’s doing – accomplishing our redemption. Jesus is on the cross, nails through His hands and His feet, and what He is doing is providing full access for us by the shedding of His own blood. It’s not being offered to the Romans; it’s not being offered to the Devil; He’s bringing it before His Father on our behalf. He’s sprinkling it on the Mercy Seat so that He can then provide eternal redemption, full forgiveness, and the actual cleansing of our conscience. Impurities removed but not just the removal of our impurity and our defilement but changing the way we think and feel about our relationship with God. That’s huge.

It's interesting – the relationship between Jesus and the high priests who were serving physically on Earth. Do you remember who it was? Caiaphas was serving as high priest. Remember, Jesus’ ministry was kind of blowing up, getting famous, and they were not down with that. They were jealous. And remember, at one point they were having this meeting and it was people from the Sanhedrin, and some Sadducees, and the priests were there, and Caiaphas rebukes them. He was kind of a jerk. He said, “Y’all are being idiots. You’re being fools. Don’t you know it’s better that one person die than the whole nation?” And they’re scared about Rome. He thinks, “If we let this happen and they think this guy is the Messiah, Rome will come in and smash us.” They’re worried about that. But he says this and John goes, “Time out. Now, Caiphas didn’t know what he was saying. But because he was high priest, he was prophesying.” What did he say? In another place, it says, “It’s more expedient that one man die than the whole nation.” He didn’t realize what he was saying. He was identifying Jesus as that sacrificial lamb, that goat, that would be killed and its blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat for the sins of the people, to make atonement, to make a propitiation.

Think of that image of Aaron coming out and putting his hands on the head of the animal, and symbolically transferring the guilt of the people to it. Fast forward to the night that Jesus is betrayed and He’s arrested. Do you remember? He’s taken before all these jokers and this mock trial takes place. Do you see it? Do you picture it in your mind? You have the high priest sitting, exalted above Jesus, surrounded by these Temple guards, and they’re all leveling accusations against Him. And they’re calling Him a liar, and they’re saying He's trying to lead an insurrection. They’re saying that He claimed to be God. They’re saying all these things against Jesus and it says that Jesus, “like a lamb before its shearers is silent, opened not His mouth.” It’s so muddled because the witnesses can’t even agree, and finally, Caiaphas stands up and he says, “Enough! Do you claim to be the Son of God? Are you the Son of the Most High? Are you the Son of the Most Blessed?” and Jesus says, “I AM.” And Caiaphas tears his robe and he says, “What further need do we have of witnesses? He’s a blasphemer!” He accuses Jesus of sin and they start pounding on Jesus. They spit on Him, they slap Him, they punch Him, they tear Him out of there and it just begins the torture that He will experience that night. I think – they unwittingly didn’t even realize that they were playing their part. Caiaphas doesn’t realize that he’s symbolically transferring the guilt of the nation, our guilt, our shame, our sin – we’re the blasphemers. We’re the ones who claim to be god of our lives and we’re not. And all that gets transferred to Jesus, who like a lamb doesn’t open His mouth. Caiaphas doesn’t even realize that he’s playing the God-ordained role that every high priest had played before, except now, now it’s real. And Jesus bears that sin, and He bears that guilt, and He bears that shame, and He carries His cross all the way to Calvary.

I’ve often wondered this. On the Day of Atonement, for that goat or that bull, it’s a pretty clean, quick process. A sharp knife cuts the throat. I don’t know how animals experience pain but whatever, it’s quick. It’s quick and they bleed out fast. It’s vivid. It’s real. But it’s quick. And I think, it wasn’t like that for Jesus. Why?? Why did He have to suffer so acutely? Why did it have to be so excruciating? Why the scourging? Why the additional humiliation of the crown of thorns and being crucified naked? Why did it have to be crucifixion, where He’s fighting for every breath, pushing up on the nails in His feet, and pulling on the nails in His wrist? Why? I don’t have a good, clean, well-articulated, theological reason, but Isaiah says this,

He was pierced for our transgressions,

He was crushed for our iniquities,

Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

And with His wounds we are healed.

I don’t know, but that’s how it had to happen. And He laid down His life so that our conscience could be cleansed. Not just so that we don’t have to go to Hell, but so that we would feel differently. I used the word ‘feel’ on purpose, because oftentimes, as believers, who believe everything that was just preached – Jesus’ blood was shed for the remission and forgiveness of my sins. I belong to God. But you live as if the feelings of your conscience that are still separating you from God are the most real thing, and it’s not. It’s been cleansed. And Jesus went into the Holy Place, into the very presence of God, and unlike those high priests in Israel, He doesn’t hurry out. He stays. He belongs. He sits down, enthroned as the Son of God, our great King-Priest. And there’s not a rope tied to Him to bring Him out in case God’s not pleased with His sacrifice. God is pleased with His sacrifice. But chapter 6, in Hebrews, tells us, no, no, no – He’s not getting pulled out; He’s the Anchor. He’s the Anchor, and connected to that Anchor is a chain, and connected to the chain is the boat of our faith. And what He is doing is He is not allowing us to drift. He’s saying, “I don’t care what your conscience is telling you. It has been cleansed. It has been purged with the blood of Jesus.” And what Jesus is doing every day, as our Great High Priest who makes intercession for us, is He’s pulling us in. Every day. He’s not allowing you to drift; He’s pulling you in. He’s saying, “Live your life here. Live your life here, in my presence. Come boldly.” Because I’m so awesome? No. Because Jesus’ sacrifice is so much better.

Verse 14,

**14**how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

It would be easy to pass over that last part, but that’s the whole point. Why have our consciences been cleansed? So that we can serve. We don’t just go into the presence of God with Jesus and party. We go into serve. We don’t need a priest; we have the Great High Priest, and now what we have is the priesthood of all believers. We are all ministers in the presence of God. So, what do we do? Now, we get to serve. We get to go in and pray for ourselves. Absolutely. We get to go in and do what we did tonight for Alani, and pray for one another. We get to invite other people into this glorious truth – quit making all the excuses in the world. Quit trying to make a fig leaf out of philosophy, and hedonism, and whatever else you would do to try to get away from the guilt and shame that you actually feel. But come and have your sins forgiven in the presence of God by the blood of Jesus. We can minister from this place from the very presence of God, with a clean conscience, because of the perfect work of Jesus. We are now ministers.

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron would get done and the second goat would be sent off. A lot of guys would say that the second goat doesn’t really come into play here in chapter 9, but I disagree. I think the second goat is implied. Because our guilt – the actual legal, moral ramifications of our sin, had to be dealt with. But so do our feelings of guilt and shame, and that’s what that goat pictures. It’s been removed. It’s gone. We’ve been separated from our sin like the east is from the west.

I think the way Spencer said it last week was so good. He said, “The God who knows all and remembers everything chooses to forget our sin.” It’s been separated. It’s been carried away.

Pray with me.

Lord, God, I love you. Thank you for your perfect, once-for-all sacrifice. Thank you for cleansing our conscience. Thank you for allowing us to have full, real, unlimited access into your presence. I pray that we would enjoy that now as we sing songs about your perfect work. God, I pray that if there’s somebody here who doesn’t know you, I pray that the picture in their minds would be that their sins are being transferred to you on the cross as they cry out in repentance in faith; that they would find in you hope, that they would find in you cleansing, and purity, and purpose. I pray that you would give them the courage to come talk to us. Lord, I pray that as a church, as believers, as we deal with feelings of inadequacy, and struggling, and feeling, “I’m not worthy. I’m not worthy to serve before the Lord,” that we wouldn’t believe those lies, that we would believe the truth that you’ve cleansed us, Lord, and you’ve made us righteous, you’ve made us pure, and that we would from that standard serve you, for your glory. In Christ’s name, Amen.