

The Mission of Jesus

*“The blood of Christ shall purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God”
(Heb. 9:14).*

In the opening verse of Hebrews 8, Paul says, *“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum.”* He has gradually worked into the very heart of his subject—the center, in fact, of all Scripture—the mission of Jesus Christ, the great high priest, *“set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”*

There is nothing higher, nothing greater, nothing more exalted than this—the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. This is the high calling to which we are called. If there is one lesson in the Tabernacle, and all the tragic events connected with it and its contents, it is the great and terrible majesty of God. Jesus Christ shows forth his love and condescension—but the majesty had to be established first. Only on the altar of the sacrifice of Christ can He be approached. His own Son must die before men can come near Him. Not because He is vindictive, or malignant, or despotic, but because eternal things can only be built on true principles, and the principle of righteousness and perfection must underlie everything related to eternity. *“Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.”* We approach God shielded by the perfection of Christ.

Verse 3 continues, *“Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices.”* Sacrifice did more than establish principles and keep the issues clear between righteousness and sin. It provided an outlet for the expression of repentance, gratitude and love. It gave man something he could do to show his feeling toward God—a way in which he could offer the best and choicest of his possessions, and in the uprising smoke of acceptance he found peace. The principle of sacrifice still holds true. It is the opposite of the basic principle of the flesh—selfishness.

“He that will lose his life shall find it” (Matt. 16:25).

The Law was nothing in itself—it just taught lessons.

And to those who could discern, here also was a constant reminder that, in the fullness of time, the love of God would provide a lamb who would bring mankind back to perfect divine fellowship. For those who had eyes to see, the sacrifices were what the bread and wine are to us. The depth and righteousness of the mystical significance is limited only by the development of our mind to receive it.

“Wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat to offer” (Heb. 8:3).

The whole plan from the beginning is built on sacrifice. Every prophecy and ordinance points forward to one great culminating sacrificial act. And now the time has come when it is all brought expectantly to a focus on this one man, standing alone before God. What has he to offer? Only a complete self-surrender—only the utmost possible—could fittingly fulfil the requirements of the case. Anything short of perfection would hopelessly lower the plane upon which eternal salvation was being developed. Anything short of perfection was failure.

What a weight for mortal man to carry through thirty years of troubled life, never free from the burden of the world's redemption. This was the sacrifice called for—ceaseless vigilance and struggle—the issue constantly in the balance. Only our utmost efforts at self-discipline and self-transformation can justify our dependence upon this man's mediatorship and friendship. We have no perfection to offer, but we are asked to give all that we have. To give less would be to mock his suffering, and belittle the seriousness of the condition that made it necessary.

“If he were on earth, he should not be a priest” (v. 4).

Paul has already shown that one must arise according to a new and different priesthood. He has shown this from the references to Melchisedec who was a priest, but not of the Mosaic order. And the Messiah is to be a “priest after the order of Melchisedec.” Now Paul goes further to show that this new order couldn't fit into the old Mosaic system. The main point he is establishing all through the Hebrews is that everything connected with the Law of Moses ritual is done away and no longer operative—replaced by something immeasurably better.

The Jews Difficulty

It was difficult for the Jews who had become Christians to realize that that which had been ordained by God and had been the centre of their national life for one thousand five hundred years should be changed. The Law was ingrained into their very nature. The whole life of the Jew was built upon it from the day of his birth. To see the Truth concerning the end of the Law required tremendous independence of mind. It meant going directly in the face of all the established thought and authority of the nation. It meant taking the time and trouble to study and learn his own Scriptures to the point of being able to stand up confidently against the experts, rather than the easy way of accepting handed-down interpretations. It meant above all things *thinking*—really *thinking*—for himself. Very, very few have ever been willing to do that and stand by it.

But Paul takes it point by point. Here is a new and superior order of priesthood foretold in their own Scriptures. But is it still possible for them to cling to some of the old order? No, says Paul, it all must go. No new patches on an old garment. No half measures.

This new high priest—if he were here on earth—could not fit into the old system. There was no provision in that system for him. The Law would disqualify him from priestly service. Clearly then an end of the Law was contemplated by God, as Paul points out in Heb. 7:12—

“For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

This mysterious Melchisedec, irremovably rooted in the Jewish Scriptures at two vital points—the records of Abraham and David—is Paul's strongest lever in overturning the Jewish conception of the eternal supremacy and unchangeability of their Law. Melchisedec undeniably Abraham's superior—David's great son to be of the Melchisedec order.

Verse 6 presses the advantage by asserting that a new and better order to harmonize with the new priesthood was also foretold in the very Scriptures they relied on in defense of the unchangeability of the old. What could be plainer than these words of Jeremiah to which he refers? Had they never considered what they meant? Were not the Scriptures read every Sabbath in the synagogue, and every day in the home?

They said, “We can’t be wrong. We read the Scriptures constantly. We are familiar with what’s there.” But how easy to read it and accept it without getting the faintest idea what it means! All Jewish study and learning was about the Scriptures. There were doubtless many who practically knew them by heart, and the books of commentary were legion. These words of Jeremiah which Paul quoted would not be new to them—

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a NEW COVENANT with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT that I made with them in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”

“Well,” Paul says, “what does that mean? How does that fit in with your view of the case? What is the *“rest that remaineth”* which David referred to long after the Israelites entered the Promised Land? Who is the priest of the Melchisedec order? What is the new covenant? And doesn’t a new covenant necessarily make the old obsolete?”

Satisfaction

These questions would be annoyingly uncomfortable to those who were thoughtlessly content with the old and did not want to be disturbed. But they would be intensely satisfying and interesting to the few real thinkers among them who hungered and thirsted for divine knowledge and wisdom. These inspired teachings of Paul would be like a discovery of hidden treasure—as if someone had at last opened a locked door which had been for ages the object of reverent hope and wonder. These were the things the angels desired to look into, and these questions Paul propounded, and undertook to answer, would have been topics of conversation among the godly through all the previous ages.

To some, as he said, he was a savour of death unto death; to others of life unto life. It all depended on how they reacted to his message. It all depended upon how deep their knowledge of divine purposes and principles went. The obvious lesson, of course, is to be sure we redeem the time and get ourselves well grounded and deeply rooted. That is our only defense. With a poor knowledge of the Bible, we are just empty lamps ridiculously pretending to be brighter than all the world’s great luminaries. But with a good knowledge of the Bible we are the light of the world.

There are no short cuts to a good knowledge of the Bible, and no excuses for a lack of it. If a desire to continually know more about God and His Word is not our primary object in life, then our whole profession is a mockery. Our characters are made up of the things that fill our hearts and minds and attention. If these things are personalities, or trivialities, or temporalities—then our characters are small and empty and stunted, totally unfit for the great things God has in store. We shall never be any better or bigger than the things that fill our minds.

We are therefore continually exhorted to set our minds and attentions on the things that are above. Such are the matters Paul treats of in writing to the Hebrews. How much do we know and understand about them? They were recorded so that by continual meditation upon them we could empty our minds of chaff and rubbish, and gradually transform them from fleshly to spiritual. It is so easy to deceive ourselves into the idea that others know more of the Scriptures because their memory is better. But we don’t have any trouble remembering the things we are interested in—they crowd into our minds without any effort. Just listen to the things people habitually talk about, and see how wonderfully well-versed they are in them, and what marvelous memories they have in certain directions.

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21).

In the first seven verses of chapter 9, Paul briefly describes the Tabernacle—the holy place where only the priests could go, and the Most Holy where only the high priest could go and then but once a year and not without a solemn atoning ritual. Was this arrangement final—or was it but a symbol of what the final arrangement would be?

The Effective Reality

In verse 8, we are told that the Holy Spirit signified by the Tabernacle ordinances that the way into the holiest of all—final perfection—was not yet made manifest, or opened to man, as long as the condition symbolised by the restrictions of the Tabernacle existed. The way must be opened. The veil of the flesh which obstructed man’s access to God must be taken out of the way. The Tabernacle showed that something stood between God and man, but in itself it contained no provision for correcting the condition. Quite obviously, if perfection was ever to be reached, the repetitious and never-advancing shadows of the Tabernacle must be superseded by one final and ever-effective reality.

In verse 9 Paul says the offerings of the Law could not make the worshiper perfect in conscience. In verse 14 he says *Christ’s* sacrifice *will* purge the conscience from dead works. In this we are getting very close to the heart of the Truth, and the great distinction between the shadowy Law of Moses and the living Law of Christ. The Law of Moses was strictly a law for the regulation of the flesh. It was on the level of the flesh. The Law of Christ sweeps away all restraints and restrictions of the flesh, but—it also sweeps away the flesh itself as an influencing factor of the mind and conduct. The Law of Christ does not regulate the flesh—it obliterates it. The believer in Christ is no longer “*in the flesh*.” Paul says—

“When we WERE in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom. 7:5).

“They that are IN THE FLESH cannot please God, but YE are NOT in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:8-9).

“In the flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18).

This is all-embracing. There are wide degrees of badness in the flesh, and the flesh has its own standards of good and bad, but to God “*in the flesh*” nothing is good. All is carnal and unholy. The first step toward goodness is to step right out of the flesh. This parallels the truth that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The flesh has its own standards of wisdom and folly but to God all “*in the flesh*” is folly. All the works of the flesh are “*dead works*.”

Christ takes us out of the flesh. He agonized through a perfect life of renouncing and condemning “the flesh,” though in the most intimate contact with it right in himself; and finally, by death and resurrection, he came actually and physically out of the flesh. Now He calls us to Him—out of the flesh, into the Spirit. That is why he, and he alone, can purge our conscience, or consciousness of sin. The enlightened, spiritual conscience can never be clear in the flesh. The motions of the flesh will continually disgust and humiliate it. Paul cried—

“In my flesh dwelleth no good thing—who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:18, 24-25).

There is no condemnation to those which are IN CHRIST—those who are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

But what necessarily follows? What is required to maintain the consistency of the picture and to avoid destroying all its meaning and bringing on a bitter anti-climax? “How shall we that are dead to the flesh live any longer therein?” We have launched out. We have staked everything. We cannot falter or go back. “*The just shall live by faith.*” That is true. But the Scriptures immediately continue—

“but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb. 10:38).

There must be no drawing back into the flesh. Once purified, we must, as He says earlier, “go on to perfection.”

The test of success is in actual, measurable results, not hopes and feelings. “*The tree is known by his fruits*” (Matt. 12:33). “*The fruits of the Spirit are these*”—and specific qualities are listed: gentleness, meekness, holiness, patience, hunger for divine knowledge. “*The works of the flesh are these*”—and again we have definite characteristics—pride, greed, worldliness and the love of pleasure. The works of the flesh include everything that the flesh does naturally—all the things we do whenever we are not specifically and consciously seeking the guidance and help of the Spirit. No one can perfectly follow the Spirit, but two things are essential. First, the fruits of the Spirit must predominate—they must shape the main course of our life, and second, they must constantly increase and gradually invade and purify the whole fabric of our existence. “*On to perfection*” is Paul’s watchword.

It is a common misconception that because we are under grace, and justified by the blood of Christ, works are not necessary to salvation. *Works are absolutely essential to complete the process that Christ has begun in us.* But we don’t do them—they are done through us.

“*I am the vine and ye are the branches, HE THAT ABIDETH IN ME BRINGETH FORTH MUCH FRUIT. Without me ye can do nothing*” (Jn. 15:5).

“*He that beareth not fruit is cast forth and burned.*”

To the Romans, Paul says (Rom. 8:3-4)—

“*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*”

But is that the end? No, as far as we are concerned, it is the beginning, for He continues—

“*That THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:4).

Unless that happens, the sacrifice of Christ has, in our case, failed.

“*That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.*”

The end has not been changed, only the *means*. The Law was a carnal commandment. It took the power of the flesh and attempted to direct it toward godly ends. The corruptness of the flesh made that impossible. The Law merely succeeded in exposing that corruptness—the exceeding sinfulness of sin—the great pretensions of the flesh to goodness but the actual emptiness and deception behind those pretensions.

God lifted up Christ that all who keep their eyes and mind fixed upon him may be healed. The chief priests said—

“By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (Acts 4:7).

The Apostle answered, *“Jesus Christ.”* We must go back at the old problem—the mortification of the flesh—armed with a new and invincible sword of God’s providing, the Name of Jesus Christ. Everything must be faced and solved with Jesus Christ kept purposely in the forefront of the consciousness. Paul says (2 Cor. 10:5)—

“We must bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

It is God’s expressed will that all things should be by Him and through Him. “I can do all things,” says Paul, *“THROUGH CHRIST”* (Phil. 4:13). Jesus said, *“I am the way.”* This is the answer to all questions as to “How can these things be?” *“I am the way.”*

“The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints—CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory”

(Col. 1:26-27).

This does not apply just in specific and larger activities—belief, baptism, breaking of bread. No matter how finely we subdivide the analysis of our time and activities, “I am the way” still is the only hope of success. No matter how small or unimportant the matter may be, it is either Christ consciously present or a victory for the flesh.

Of course, it must be the *real* Christ. There are Christs many, but only one true Christ—the Word made flesh. The Christ we have must correspond with the Word we have recorded, and the image must be constantly refreshed from that appointed source. Of the Tabernacle, God said, *“I will meet with you there.”* It was useless to seek elsewhere, however earnestly. The Scriptures are the present appointed meeting place. Christ and the Scriptures are synonymous. They permeate each other. We cannot have Christ in our hearts unless we have the Word continually renewed in our minds. And we cannot get any living power out of the Scripture unless we see Christ shining through every word of it.

Let us then, with boldness—not presumption, but the boldness of intimate love—enter into the holiest by the blood of Christ, in the full assurance of faith, never looking back but going on to perfection, drawn irresistibly forward and upward out of the flesh and into the eternal immensity of the Spirit.

(Taken from “Be Ye Transformed” Volume 2, pages 311-318 by Bro. Growcott.)