

Entering the Most Holy Place

The Book of Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 9:1-15
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Our reading then is Hebrews 9 from verse 1 to verse 15.

1 Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

And we do thank God for his word.

Well, this evening we return to where we were when lock-down came and that was in the book of Hebrews, and in this particular portion of the Scriptures where we very much are getting down to the details, details to do with the ordinances under the first covenant, the old covenant, the covenant which has been replaced by the new covenant. Better things have come through the Lord Jesus Christ and the writer is having to stress this because the people of that day of these churches, were beginning to go backwards, beginning to relinquish their hold on Christ and going back to the ordinances, really, that belong to the old covenant, and thought that these maybe would keep them safe from persecution, or that maybe Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient. Well, the writer will have none of this and his argument is relentless and sustained. When we come to chapter 9 and verses 1 to 15, we are right in the middle of this detailed argument where he is actually taking the things they are now beginning to rely upon and to show them that it's all changed, it's all been replaced, better things have now come, and those are the only things that will save you. What used to be, what God had provided, has been superseded and you really need to hold onto Christ, not go backwards because going backwards is to be apostate, it's to denounce the faith, because there's no saving power in those things. Well, there never was, in one sense, because it always needed faith. You couldn't rely upon these things and God imposed them until the time of reformation, until the time when the Lord Jesus Christ would come. Then they were all to pass away.

He goes on to make this case again and again because he's shaming them, really. He's embarrassing them. He's showing them, "This is futile. Why are you doing this? Why are you relying upon things which are never meant to last, which are never meant to bear the weight of hope that you're placing upon them." And so he contrasts the old covenant established at Mount Sinai with God's people, had its various commandments and laws, but now with the new covenant, a better covenant, a covenant being an arrangement between parties, an agreement that two parties come to. Well, in this new arrangement, the new covenant not with the blood of bulls and goats now but with Christ's own blood your sins will be remembered no more. No annual remembrance of them. Day of Atonement year after year. Consciousness of sin. No, that's ended. The new covenant is a better covenant. Why then go backwards?

And a key word in all of this, the Mediator. Somebody who makes the terms and conditions of an agreement, an arrangement, covenant, come into place, who makes it work, who stand representing the two parties and who makes this agreement work. Well, earlier it was Moses. God spoke to Moses. He was the mediator. And now Moses has been well and truly surpassed. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Mediator. He makes this agreement work and he makes it work through his own blood. He's able to represent the sinner, on the cross taking the wrath of God. He's able to represent God providing a sacrifice for sin. And so people who were dead in trespasses and sins can be made alive and can be brought to God.

And another term in this is a surety, somebody who is a surety for somebody else, which means basically they're standing bail for them, that if they default, I will pay. If they cannot meet the terms and conditions of this arrangement and this agreement, then I will pay on their behalf. That's what he does as Mediator. We can't meet the terms of holiness. We can't meet the terms of perfection. He will meet them on our behalf. He will be our surety. He will pay what we cannot pay and have a righteous life and then die a death, if we were to die it, that would be the end of us, not for him because as the Son of God, he's able to receive his life back again.

So this is the much superior arrangement. Things have moved on so so much further. And the title, actually, of our sermon tonight is this, "Entering the Most Holy Place." Entering the most holy place, which we find in Hebrews 9:1-15 is what the writer is speaking about, that holiest of holies in the old tabernacle. So we come to our first heading, then, as we develop this: the old order. Right, the contrast. He keeps making them, doesn't he? Have you got the message yet, he says? Right, well, let's go back over some more material here.

The old order and for this he takes us to the old tabernacle. He's going to make his point here that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to take us into heaven by contrasting it with what was there in the old covenant. We read Exodus 25:1-22 and the instruction that Moses was given about the building of the tabernacle, that portable, that movable tent. You have a large tent with some poles, lots of clasps, lots of fittings there, a huge thing, in its way, and which was to be the place where, in the most central place of it, God himself would be pleased to dwell. But it had its own appointments, its own design so in Hebrews 8:5 it says that Moses, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." Mount Sinai. We're told here is the detail. This is its size. And in Exodus 25, we had all the cubits and all the particular measurements, and that would have applied to all the other furniture and the fittings that the tabernacle had. And there, there was regular worship, worship according to particular rules that the old covenant had brought in. These are called here earthly commandments, a fleshly commandment, because they're going to pass away but at their time, they're important, vital. They had to be followed. These were the instructions to maintain fellowship with God, enjoy his presence, then these things had to be obeyed and followed.

Well, now to courtyard which was sectioned off from the rest of the desert or wherever the people of God were in their times of wandering in the wilderness and then when the tabernacle in the Promised Land was established in Shiloh, the period it was there before it was moved eventually to Jerusalem. And there in the courtyard you had the bronze altar on which the various sacrifices were to be made. Burnt offerings. Peace offerings. Thank offerings. Grain offerings. Sin offerings. All the whole variety of offerings that we find in the book of Leviticus, and there you were confronted this bronze altar. Priests would take whatever animal you were bringing with you to be your sacrifice, and they and only they could offer that sacrifice.

And there was something we call the laver, a place where the priests would go and wash so that they could be ritually clean. It talks about those various washings. Well, that was

part of what they had to do there. They had this sea, this water which poured forth and they could use to wash to be ceremonially clean.

Well, then you had the tabernacle itself, this remarkable structure. It had three coverings, there were rams' skins dyed red, you had the badger skins, and then inside that intricately woven curtain, cherubim woven into it, that yarn that was there, the blue and the scarlet and the purple, this beautiful rich kind of tapestry. And there within this part of the sanctuary, the holy place, you had the golden lampstand. It was a golden lampstand and this had seven lights, seven lamps fed with olive oil and kept alight constantly, always to be alight, standing for, actually, Christ, the light of the world. Now the people of God receiving the light of God are themselves, then, to be light to others.

You had a table on which there were 12 loaves. A table of showbread. It was renewed every Sabbath day. Loaves were changed, new ones were put there. And these really were representing, indeed, Christ, the bread of life, that God gives life to his people. And that represented that and 12, of course, for the 12 tribes that were there, and they, in turn, were to go and be fruitful in the world outside and grow their crops there with thanksgiving to God.

But then you came to the most holy place, the holiest of all. This tabernacle was rectangular in shape but the most holy place, this sectioned off part, that bigger sort of rectangular structure was a square. It was like a cube. And the tabernacle itself had a veil between it and the outer courtyard but then there was another veil between the holy place where the lampstand was and the table of showbread, but then the most holy place itself. And this was a most special special location. There is where the curtain was where you would enter into it so that the priests in the sanctuary could still tend it, was the golden altar, the incense altar that offered up a perfume, a special fragrance, only this particular fragrance could be offered on this altar. And that represented the prayers of the Lord's people coming before the very presence of God.

And the presence of God was where what we read of in Exodus 25, the ark was. A chest of wood, acacia wood overlaying with gold both outside and inside, and then upon it solid gold. A big slab, as it were, on top of this chest and that was the mercy seat of pure gold. And then the mercy seat itself all in one piece and woven and there were hammered into it two cherubim, one at one end, one at the other. And there between the cherubim was the very presence of God, the Shekinah glory of God. God is not everywhere, he is, that was like a particular representation of his presence. That is where he dwelt among his people, in the most holy place.

And inside the ark itself, there were special things. The 10 Commandments, the stones which the Lord wrote the 10 Commandments upon, they were inside the ark. Then we also read that there was a golden pot with some manna representing the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness and God's kindness and volition to them. So some of that miraculously preserved and kept inside the ark. Then interesting, too, there was Aaron's rod that had budded. Well, for that you have to go to Numbers 17 and when there was a rebellion against the priesthood and where Aaron was to bring his rod and all the others

who were revolting and saying, "No, we will be the priests here. Thank you." And all their rods. Well, Aaron's rod blossomed, produced almonds. Remarkable, incredible. And so it marked out his priesthood as indeed being the true priesthood, and that too was represented in the ark and this was a most, most special place.

And it could only be entered once in the year, so for the most of the time, a priest could at least tend to the ark, the incense altar and tend that, and the fragrance were being produced, but they couldn't go through the veil into the most holy place. The priest could go in the first part of the sanctuary but none of them except the high priest could go in the most holy place. He could go on but only once a year, the Day of Atonement, and only following very clear and very prescribed regulation, and to shed blood for his own sin. And then he would go in and be able to sprinkle that blood on the mercy seat, that golden slab, representing there that place where God himself would be what we call propitiated, where his wrath would be pacified. There would be the shed blood sprinkled on the mercy seat and God's wrath would be removed from the people. So it's a very big day, the Day of Atonement, because this is the day in which all the sins of the whole community, the things they didn't even know that they'd done wrong, the things wherein they had transgressed but where they had no clarify about it, all of that could be forgiven and pardoned for another year on the Day of Atonement by the high priest going into the most holy place.

Restricted access. During this whole time, this whole covenant period, God was teaching the people their access is strictly restricted. You are kept at arm's length. There are things still to be done and accomplished which haven't yet happened and so you're in a state, really, of infancy, "Keeping you at arm's length from Myself, that there is My presence. You need a priest, only the high priest will be able to do this, to come and to be mediator here and to officiate. And you are dependent upon that high priest to do this function for you. You can't all come in. You can't all offer worship before Me. This is the only appointed access for this season."

So it's showing that things are incomplete and the writer here to the Hebrews is saying in verse 9 that really it is symbolic, that it was showing that not yet was the way to God's presence available and so there was still something in the conscience that was unfulfilled, that was still wanting, something still missing. This talks about the service performed, making perfect in regard to the conscience. It didn't work for that. It couldn't quite bring the depth of peace, the provision that really the soul needed, that all his sins were forgiven, his transgressions forgiven. But that was still being shown to be something that awaited a further time, another ministry, another ministry that would affect that pacifying of the conscience.

So this was the old order and the cleansings, where it says in verse 10 of Hebrews 9, was to do with food and drinks. It was all external. It didn't get to the depth of the soul. And the washing as well, wash the body, made you ceremonially clean but what about the conscience? What about the soul? Where was that inner washing that left you feeling at peace? It simply was not there. It purified the flesh, it mentions there the ashes of the red heifer that would be killed, and then upon those who were unclean it would be sprinkled,

and that would make them, then, clean. But it was all outward. It didn't affect such a deep work within the soul.

That was the old order. No entry into the most holy place. There is God's presence and there was the worship and there was a distance, there was a gulf. And while it was beautiful, that all the service that was rendered here and the lampstand and the table of showbread and, well, the ark when one could actually see it and only the high priest could, beautiful things, wonderful things but in the end incomplete things. So the writer is saying why go back to them? Why refer back to that which is only temporary, which was never the finished product? That could never bring to the soul what now comes with the new order.

My second heading: the new order. And the writer here draws a contrast that as the high priest entered into a physical tabernacle, so the first part of the sanctuary, the Day of Atonement entered the most holy place, but our Lord's ministry takes him actually into heaven itself. The tabernacle on earth was a type of heaven. That was pointing towards God's presence and the worshiper being able to come into God's presence. The Lord Jesus Christ has opened the way for the worshiper to come into heaven itself, to come into the presence of God today now worshipping in spirit and in truth, but as a token, a pledge of something even better one day, heaven itself.

And that's what it speaks of in verse 11. The Lord entered heaven itself, not the tabernacle that was on earth but a greater, a more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. In Exodus 25, the people were to bring all those items, all those different stones and all that different yarn and gold and such things. Well, heaven does not rely upon such industry. Its architecture, its foundation, no, it's God made it. God made it by his own will and decree. That's his habitation and his dwelling place and the Lord himself entered into it in verse 12, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood. He entered the most holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

He didn't enter the tabernacle on earth but he entered into heaven itself. He ascended into that glory with all of the sacrifice he had done, shown, the wounds in his hands, and in the spear mark that was in his side. And that is the ministry that he has brought about. Also, God always intended one day, one day this earthly sanctuary, tabernacle, removed and then you rely upon the high priest of Aaron's stock but upon this high priest who came from the stock of Judah, and he is going to take you beyond what the earthly ministry could do. That's been replaced. He will take you to the very presence of God and you'll be able to worship there, you'll be able to come before him not in fear, trepidation, got the rules and the regulations right, should we be here, where's the high priest, where's Aaron? No. Don't panic. Don't fear. You are welcomed. You are brought near and it's through the blood of the Son of God. He has obtained that access.

His blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat and that blood, of course, is the blood of his sacrifice on the cross, that has now obtained pardon not just for a year, not just now and you have to do it again. No, one offering and now he's entered into heaven until his

return. He doesn't have to come back out again, go back in again. A year later come back out again, go back in again. No, he's gone and he's now seated at the right hand of God. Not temporary, not something that's almost superficial. This is a much much deeper work and as Isaac Watts' hymn puts it in that verse there which says, "My guilty conscience seeks no sacrifice beside."

The Old Testament, the old covenant worshiper still had an awareness of sin, a consciousness of it because every year there was a reminder of sin on the Day of Atonement and all the other sacrifices. But not anymore. This is a sacrifice that goes beyond the various washings and sprinkling of sacrifices for the purifying of the flesh. No, this is the much more, the contrast of verse 14. It's "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, how much more will He cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Ah, this is something so far superior, so much more, the new order, the new covenant brings such greater blessing to the soul. Not just to dwell there but the whole issue of the conscience, the conscience, what it does cleanses the conscience in verse 14 from dead works to serve now the living God.

And the truth, because there's more truth. There is the truth about Christ. There's something much greater than the old covenant could ever afford and the Holy Spirit takes that truth and applies it to the depths of the conscience. Whereas the conscience couldn't ever be fully satisfied in the blood of calves and bulls and goats and such things, be very satisfied now with the blood of Christ, seeing one who wears our nature, one who is one with us, Immanuel, God with us, bearing our sin upon the cross. All those dead works, dead works, ones that belonged to the old man, the old man that was crucified with Christ but still something of that old man still wants to do dead works, try to please God by some religious observance. All of that is over and finished. Conscience should not even try to, as it were, resurrect such dead works, rituals and things like that.

Well, it is still, isn't it, there? People out there in the world know nothing of this. It's an inner life, isn't it? It's an inner religion, a religion of the heart. They want to light candles and come in here, they're rather disappointed, aren't they, when they come in here and are taken off a bit with the memorial stones there. No candles. No sort of altar. Nothing like that. Nothing of smell or light something here or nowhere to bow down there, or some sort of confessional here, some place where you can go and confess all your sins. And we don't go off on pilgrimages and don't say to us that we're all going to walk barefoot 10 miles somewhere or other. Not eat for 10 weeks or do something like that. No chocolate. No salt and vinegar crisps, whatever it is. But we don't do these things and they find this strange, there's no religion about doing these kinds of things. No, it's not. Those are dead works. Those don't bring you nearer to God. Those can't work. They can't affect it in that way. It's an inner life. It's a realization in the soul. It's a conscience that's at peace. It doesn't need to sort of now introduce new novel works and go off and find some ways in which we can wear sort of sackcloth and ashes and flagellate ourselves with whips and feel very uncomfortable about things and deny ourselves things. Dead works. Our conscience being cleansed from that, left behind whatever we thought religion was and we're not going to start reintroducing some new religion now.

And we're to hold onto that truth but sometimes isn't it rather guilty conscience? Sometimes we feel, well, almost as if it's too good to be true. This new order that tells us that we can come into the presence of God and one day our forerunner is going to take us to where he is in the most holy place, heaven itself, and we can sense it's too good to be true. I've got to contribute something to this. I can't rest in that. I need to do something so I can then look at myself and say, "Well, look, I'm doing this, I'm doing that, I'm doing the other. So therefore it must be true, mustn't it?" Well, no, that's not the way that it's meant to be when we can, at times, have there an overactive conscience and begin to bring dead works into play and think that somehow we can pay off our debts or even convince ourselves that the debt has been paid because we, in a sense, are paying that debt and not relying upon the one who has paid the debt once for all. Paid it entirely. Offered himself with the help there of the Holy Spirit who by the eternal Spirit offered himself, his humanity supported by the Holy Spirit.

Rely on nobody else. Don't spoil your day. Don't ruin your peace of mind. Don't allow your conscience because conscience sometimes can get the better of us, putting it in that way and just be too overactive. It can be not pacified, not resting in Christ and rearing up, as it were, and saying, "No, I've got to do this or I want to do that. I can't feel comfortable unless I'm doing this in this particular way." And we invent ways, really, of making ourselves unhappy because we can never be happy in those things. There's always more to have to do. We could have done it better or we could have done it differently and we worry and we're not meant to. We're meant to be at peace.

This is what Christ has done, he's entered the most holy place. He tore, didn't he, the curtain, his flesh, which represents the veil there which was there, and we can go now through his sacrifice into the most holy place, into God's presence and not feel ashamed, not feel we ought not to be here, are we trespassing because the answer is, "No, you're not." That's what his blood obtained for you, boldness, and peace of mind, and a conscience that is now satisfied. It seeks no sacrifice beside. And just as the priests in the temple when our Lord died on the cross were amazed when the actual veil between the sanctuary and the most holy place was torn from top to bottom, and suddenly they could see the cherubim and they could see the ark. Wonder of wonders, something they were not allowed to see but they could see, because that's what this has affected, this has brought us into the very presence of God, redeemed us from all transgressions that we may receive the promise of the internal inheritance in verse 15.

So the writer is saying to people then and he's saying to us now, you value that Christ that died on the cross. You value him. You value his ministry. You value all that he has done. You don't need something else, some strange experience. You don't need to add to him some extra religious dimension. If you remain with him, you'll find all you need. If you stay with him, you'll find it all and you will find peace of heart, you'll find peace of mind, you'll find contentment, you'll find assurance because he's in heaven and he's going to take all of us, each of us, every one of us, we are his children, to heaven with him. Entered the most holy place once for all. Not going to leave it until the time comes when heaven invades earth at his Second Coming and we will find that death be with him, we'll

be in his presence, we'll go to heaven, and all the more so when he comes back in glory to this earth in triumph and reign without rival.

So he's entered the most holy place. Take heart as he's done it for each and every one of us who are here this evening and for who are listening on this recording.