

The Way into the Holy

Hebrews 9:1-14

Introduction

Human beings were made in the image of God to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. Ever since we chose sin over God and were driven from the garden of Eden, our greatest challenge has been how to find our way back to wholeness and joy. We have tried thousands of substitutes, secular and religious, but none of them can fill the void. How do sinners by birth and by choice ever find their way back into the holy—back into the ancient fullness and joy buried deep in humanity's memory? That is what our text this morning is about: The Way into the Holy.

¹ 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. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 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 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, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

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.

1. Symbols of Holy Closeness (1-5)
2. Rituals of Mediation (6-10)
3. Perfection of Worship (11-14)

1. Symbols of Holy Closeness (1-5)

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Divine Covenants (Ben) established a special relationship between God and an undeserving people; involved a blood sacrifice (necessary because sinful people are undeserving); initiated and dictated by God

We see in the first verse of our chapter that even the old covenant had divine regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.

Old or new covenant, sinful human beings do not set the terms of how they can approach God in worship as they enter into sanctity of what belongs to God. Only God can qualify an unholy people to enter into a holy place to worship a holy God.

The writer of Hebrews briefly references elements of the old covenant. He does not go into detail because his readers are already familiar with what the tabernacle furniture signified.

We want to take a few minutes to remind ourselves of the significance of these types and symbols because understanding what the symbols mean will help us connect them to what true worship is in both old and new covenants.

Tent (tabernacle)—meeting place of God with human beings during their earthly pilgrimage till they reach their forever home

Lampstand—light of God revealing truth and life to us

Bread of the Presence—presence of God supplying our daily bread

Altar of incense—prayers of God's people
The holy place is a place of prayer.

Ark of the covenant—symbol of God’s presence with His people

Urn of manna—God feeds us and keeps us alive even in wilderness times

Aaron’s staff that budded—God chooses who will be priestly mediator for His people

Tablets of the covenant—God defines right and wrong, but we have broken His law.

Above it the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat—We enter the presence of God’s glory where the angels attend only through blood atonement by His mercy because we have broken His law.

All of these were only earthly symbols, shadows, types of heavenly realities. The curtains closing off the holy place and the holy of holies from the worshiper indicated that the way to God was not yet fully open to us.

Under the first covenant God instituted these tabernacle/temple symbols to be used in worship by His people trusting Him for salvation. He did not leave it up to them to determine for themselves how to worship Him. That is true under the new covenant as well. God determines the way into His holy

presence. As sinners, we are not qualified to dictate that ourselves. But even though God instituted the old covenant worship, the tabernacle worship with all its vessels, furniture, and rituals, is by design incomplete. With all its types and symbols, it pointed to a better day, a greater objective, and heavenly reality.

Even now there is more to be fulfilled. Earthly existence veils perfect realities from our view. 1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

We look forward to the full day, the consummation of the age. The last thing we want to do is go backwards to what is more symbolic than real. *Sometimes we gravitate to tangible symbols as a means of comforting our yearning hearts rather than pursuing a spiritual relationship with God through Christ by the Spirit.* A spiritual relationship is less tangible, harder to define, and makes it more difficult to congratulate ourselves on our accomplishments.

Human society at large tends toward rules and identity markers and prejudices that make people feel secure, superior, and safe. Symbols prevail over substance, among the religious and the irreligious. Causes, societal

class or ethnic group, mantras, may make us feel better about ourselves but they all tend to move the focus away from reality, whether you are talking about who people actually are or how they interact with God or their fellow human beings.

Who are you with all the externals stripped away? God already knows. But are you being honest with yourself?

Have you come to realize just how desperately you need God? He created you for Himself. To find Him you must take the path He has provided. It's the only way into His holy presence.

2. Rituals of Mediation (6-10)

⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 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 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, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for

the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Under the old covenant only the priests could go into the holy place, and only the high priest could enter the holy of holies—and then only once a year. He offered blood sacrifice there for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. Ritual upon ritual, year after year, high priest after high priest. It was never finished.

Key verse: Hebrews 9:8

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.

The tabernacle was called the meeting place. It was where sinful human beings could meet with God. But the way into the actually holy presence of God was not yet open. The very layout of the tabernacle and the rituals and rules connected to access to the holy place and the holy of holies (the holiest place) were a Spirit-given object lessons of that reality.

All the gifts and sacrifices of the worshiper, along with all the dietary rules and washings and rituals to cleanse the body, could never purify the conscience. Everything was external, symbolic of spiritual and internal, but not actually cleansing sin from the soul.

Such rituals cannot perfect the conscience of worshipers—that is, they cannot heal their consciences of their sin plague and sin guilt and make them whole.

We practice a much simpler liturgy—service of worship—and for good reason, but *we miss the point of the worship ceremonies if we neglect the true state of our own hearts and the real character of our daily living. These cannot change apart from the mighty work of Jesus Christ, our High Priest.* You cannot be good enough, you cannot sing well enough, you cannot do the worship excellently enough to rescue the actual state of your soul before God. Only Jesus can. It is all empty apart from Him.

In recent decades nearly all of the so-called worship wars had to do with form and symbol rather than substance—what kind of clothes you wear, what translation of the Bible you read, what style of music you sing. But even in an environment where squabbles over ceremonial rules don't distract and divide us, we can drift into going through the motions of a worship service without ever actually worshipping. We can talk and sing about God without actually engaging with Him. We can give lip-service to cleansing from sin, and neglect actually bringing our sinful hearts to Christ to be forgiven and cleansed. We can celebrate the ordinances of baptism and

communion without ever having experienced what they signify.

John 4:23-24

²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

God wants the real you to meet the real God. A sinful human being made clean and holy and thus able to step into the very presence of God.

The last word of verse 10 points us to the needed improvement—the reformation, that is, a reforming, a reconstruction of worship that would bring it from symbolic to real and accomplish far more than symbols and ceremonies ever could. Even the incomplete nature of the tabernacle and its rituals testified to God's desire and purpose to bring His people into fellowship with Him. Just as God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, God is restoring His people to walk with Him face to face in garden city of heaven and in the new earth where sin and death are no more.

3. Perfection of Worship (11-14)

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.

Jesus perfected our worship—our entrance into the holy:

- Entered the real holy places of heaven Christ, that is the Messiah—the Anointed One, promised Savior-King, entered the real heavenly holy places. The earthly holy places of the tabernacle were only copies. Christ entered the perfect tent, a holy place not made with human hands, but “a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.”

- Secured an eternal redemption for us He accomplished eternal redemption that is once for all, with no need to go back every day and every year as priests had to do under the Old Covenant.

Isn't it obvious that the lifeblood of a bull or goat could never cleanse human beings of their sin guilt? (See Psalm 50:12-15.) Animal sacrifices only symbolized cleansing of the conscience. They had value because they were commanded by God in order to point to the real sacrifice they symbolized—that of Christ Himself, the God-man. So God honored those who engaged by faith in the animal sacrifice He instituted by forgiving them. If God accepted the symbolic ritual, how much more the actual sacrifice of Christ!

- Purified our conscience from dead works His perfect, unblemished sacrifice and resurrection actually purifies our consciences. The guilt is gone. We've been set free. Set free from works that could not make us alive to serve in holy worship the living God.

Your greatest sin, wat you are most ashamed of—Christ's blood can wash you clean and set you free from your heavy load of guilt.

We have been born again—made alive by the Holy Spirit of God—to live a life of worship everyday to the God who ever lives and gives life to those who trust in Jesus.

The dead works aren't just sins that work death in us. They are also works that have no

power to bring us into eternal fellowship with a holy God in heaven.

People fill their lives with such dead works, as if there is nothing more to live for.

Richard Phillips: "Building empires that will fall, buying things that do not satisfy or last, serving ambitions that are destined for the grave."

Part of those dead works are religious rituals with no reality behind them.

Luke 11:35-39

³⁵ Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. ³⁶ If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

Human beings created in the image of God were made for so much more than external rituals that only symbolize holiness and closeness to a holy God.

Revelation 21:3-4

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Jesus Christ has gone before you into heaven itself to make intercession for you, to cleanse you completely from your sin and to purify your conscience from all your guilt. He has opened the way for you to have direct fellowship with God not just now by the Holy Spirit, but forever in the heavenly city and the new heavens and new earth. This inheritance is yours through Christ alone. He has made a way for us into the Holy.

God knows you. God loves you. God desires you to know Him and to love Him and to come close to Him. Christ opens the way for you—the way into the holy.

Conclusion

1. Symbols of Holy Closeness (1-5)
2. Rituals of Mediation (6-10)
3. Perfection of Worship (11-14)

Discussion Questions:

1. Given where the human race started (in Eden) and given what Christ's redemption will restore to His people when all is said and done (heavenly city, new heavens and new earth, sinlessness, immortality), how are holiness and happiness connected?
2. In what ways did the tabernacle furniture (tent, lampstand, bread of the presence, altar of incense, ark of the covenant—urn of manna, Aaron's staff, tablets of the covenant, cherubim of glory over the mercy seat) symbolize closeness to God?
3. Why do you think it's easier for us to focus on tangible symbols of closeness with God rather than to pursue and to enjoy actual spiritual closeness to God?
4. What did the necessity of having priests as mediators between people and God with ritual sacrificial duties reveal about our ability as sinners to approach a holy God?
5. What about the tabernacle design and rituals revealed that the way was not yet open to the holy presence of God?

6. In what ways did Christ perfect our worship by opening the way into God's presence for us (11-14)?
7. How does His sacrifice for sin actually purify our consciences?
8. Why does a conscience purified of dead works free us to render the service of worship to the living God?
9. When we will enjoy the ultimate experience of entering the holy presence of God, and what are the similarities and differences between then and now?