

Picture this: you are reading books that are all set in the same world. As you go work your way through the series, there are these callbacks to previous books. They start referencing characters from past stories or events that happened way back in the early books. If you jumped into the middle of the series, it might be confusing because you wouldn't know who they were referencing. But if you've read all of them, these callbacks might be really fun because it helps bring the story together. Or it helps you better understand the story as a whole; you can see the big picture of what the author is trying to accomplish.

If you have been following along with us in Hebrews the last several weeks, you will notice that there are lots of callbacks in Hebrews to the Old Testament, with Moses being a person who is frequently referenced. We've heard the author talk a lot about how Jesus is a better priest than Moses. Now we've moved on to see how the New Covenant that Jesus brought about is better than the covenant God made with Moses, as well as all the other covenants God made in the Old Testament.

In tonight's passage, we find even more callbacks to Moses, specifically the instructions he was given for how to perform the sacrifices in the tabernacle. As we think about the sacrifices in the Old Testament, we can also look at Jesus' sacrifice that we're celebrating this weekend. The sacrifice that took the place of the animal sacrifices from the Old Covenant.

Let's dive into our passage in Hebrews 9, starting with verse 16.

**In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, <sup>17</sup> because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. <sup>18</sup>This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. <sup>19</sup>When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. <sup>20</sup>He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” <sup>21</sup>In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. <sup>22</sup>In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

**The first question to ask is why blood? Why was blood the requirement to fulfill the covenant? It just seems so outside of how we would think about things. Why did a living being have to die for cleansing and forgiveness?**

**In Leviticus 17:11 it says, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”**

God tells Moses that the life of a creature is found in its blood, and so it is through blood that atonement is made. As we read in verse 22 in our passage, the law required blood for purification, showing us that forgiveness has always come at a cost; it was never taken lightly. Under the Old Covenant, God gave His people a way to deal with their sin through rituals of cleansing, where animals were sacrificed and their blood offered as

atonement. But this was something they had to return to again and again, a continual reminder of both their need and God's provision.

In the New Covenant, we see a beautiful shift. **God, in His grace, provides a way beyond this endless cycle—offering a once-and-for-all cleansing that brings true and lasting forgiveness.**

To understand more about this new covenant, I want us to look at the previous two verses in chapter 9.

**<sup>14</sup>How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! <sup>15</sup>For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.**

We have the new covenant because of Jesus' sacrifice. Because of his blood. His sacrifice is better than animal sacrifices because those were earthly sacrifices made by imperfect humans. Yes, Jesus was human, but he was also God and he was perfect and sinless. Verse 14 says he "offered himself unblemished to God." The sacrifice came from someone who was sinless yet took on all of our sins. The only way we can gain this eternal inheritance from God is through Jesus.

This is why the New Covenant is better than all the previous ones. We are finally free from our sins, once and for all. We have forgiveness because God's perfect Son paid that

price for us. The author of Hebrews says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, so Jesus died and shed his blood so that we could be forgiven.

This covenant—this promise God makes—is only possible because of what Jesus did for us. It's not based on anything we've done, but on His willing sacrifice. **Through His blood and His death, Jesus made a way for us to receive something we could never earn on our own—an eternal inheritance that comes from God.**

There's a lot of comfort in that. It means our relationship with God doesn't depend on us getting everything right, but on what Jesus has already done. His sacrifice was enough. Because He gave His life, we're given new life, along with forgiveness and the promise of this eternal life.

So instead of constantly trying to prove ourselves, we can rest in that. We can trust that it's already been taken care of and live knowing we're loved and provided for because of Jesus.

On Maundy Thursday, we have the opportunity to remember this sacrifice that Jesus made. We come together in worship tonight, reflecting on what this day signifies and the events that follow with Good Friday and then Resurrection Sunday.

Each time we participate in the Lord's Supper, it is a callback to the events of Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper. Looking back at when Jesus shared this Passover meal with his disciples. Jesus told his disciples what was going to come as they shared this meal together. In Luke 22:15-16 Jesus says, **"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover**

**with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”**

Jesus knew that this moment was going to be an important part of the New Covenant that he was bringing about. As we go to the table later on, we will hear the words that Jesus said to his disciples about the significance of this meal. But right here in the lead up to those words, we hear that Jesus “eagerly desired” to share in this meal with them. He knew exactly what was going to happen to him in the following days, but he wanted to give them this reminder of why he had to suffer. This reminder that we participate in each month. That we have this new covenant to live into and the forgiveness that comes with that.

Participating in the Lord’s Supper is different from the ritualistic cleansing that the Jews went through as they sacrificed animals at the altar. We are not constantly sacrificing something for our atonement. We didn’t even have to give anything up for our forgiveness. Jesus gave his life as the ultimate sacrifice. We just need to believe and follow Him. Participating in the Lord’s Supper is a reminder of this. Of the new covenant that we have with God.

This new covenant isn’t transactional like some of the old covenants God made. There is no “if you uphold my laws, I will do this.” This time God is saying, “I gave my Son to pay your price, so that I can have a relationship with you.”

**We have this eternal inheritance, this everlasting life, because the debt is already paid.** God is there waiting to have a relationship with us, we just have to say yes.

This week we remember and celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Jesus came to earth and became human. A perfect, blameless, human, who preached about love and showed kindness to the sick and outcast. Then he took on all of our sins when he was crucified, so that we would be forgiven. One final sacrifice so that we would not continue this cycle of ritual sacrifices to gain forgiveness.

God wanted to be in a relationship with His creation, with the people that He made in His image. Jesus broke down the barriers that were between us and God. Sin created this barrier between us. We couldn't have the same kind of relationship with God before Jesus. There was always a mediator between us and God in the previous covenants. In this passage, it talks about how Moses sprinkled the blood from the sacrifices to cleanse everything. And in the tabernacle, where they worshiped God before the temple, only the priests could go into the holy of holies, which was God's dwelling place with them.

But now that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant, there are no barriers between us and God. **Jesus brings us into relationship with the Father without any conditions.**

As we reflect on Jesus' sacrifice this week, think about what that means for you. Think about the significance of this new covenant.

With a lot of the covenants God made with his people, there was something they needed to do as well for their side of the covenant. But with this new covenant, Jesus did our part. Jesus took on our sin.

We have this eternal life and forgiveness from God because Jesus died on the cross for us. The blood that is used for this atonement is Jesus'. We don't need any more blood to atone for our sins.

So, what does that mean for our lives now? Verse 14 said, **"<sup>14</sup>How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"**

We don't have to do anything to gain this inheritance, but Jesus' sacrifice cleansed "our consciences from acts that lead to death." He has broken the cycle of habitual sin in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin as Paul says in Romans 6.

We are alive in Jesus.

That is the good news that we celebrate each week, but especially this weekend.

We have this new life we can live. That should give us hope.

That should give us the strength and courage to strive to live the way that Jesus calls us to live. To love God and love our neighbor. To share this good news with others. To remember why Jesus came to us and sacrificed his life. Because God wants to be in relationship with us. There are no more barriers between us and God.