

Christmas Is for Communion

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[0:00] You may find it interesting that we are celebrating the Lord's Supper this evening. At Christmas we usually focus on the birth of the Lord Jesus.

! So why remember His death?! Why remember His death tonight? Why communion at Christmastime? I think we could say a lot of things, but perhaps the best answer is this, that Christmas is for communion.

The incarnation that took place 2,000 years ago was so that we could draw near to God. And we could draw near and not be destroyed, but we could worship the Lord with joy.

And so that is why I say that Christmas is really for communion. Jesus came precisely to open a new and living way for us to come to God our Father.

So that we could come close and not be destroyed, but we could come close with affectionate, radiant hearts, ready and full of worship for who He is and what He's done for us.

[1:15] So Jesus came precisely so that we could have communion with God. You'll see this in Hebrews chapter 10. Turn there in your Bibles, Hebrews chapter 10, and we'll read the first 10 verses.

Hebrews chapter 10. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said, Sacrifice an offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.

With burnt offerings and sin offerings, you were not pleased. Then I said, Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, O God.

[2:42] First, He said, Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings, you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them, although the law required them to be made.

Then He said, Here I am. I have come to do your will. He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Beginning in Hebrews chapter 8 and right through chapter 10, the question is, how can people have communion with God? And you saw that setting there in the verse the author has in mind in verse 1 of chapter 10.

For this reason, it can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year make perfect those who draw near to God. The question is, how can people draw near to God?

The rest of the passage answers that question. It's not by the sacrifice. It's not by the blood of bulls and goats. It's only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And so that is why, in a nutshell, I say that Christmas is for communion.

[3:55] Because without a body, there could be no sacrifice made. Without a human nature, there could be no communion for us. So have you ever had a dream where you're walking along and it's nighttime and you're walking to your car and all of a sudden, as dreams are, all of a sudden, you're being chased by someone.

And you're running to your car and you're trying to grab your keys so that you can open the door because your car is locked. And so you're fumbling through your keychain trying to find just the right key and you put one in and it doesn't work.

And so you fumble again and you maybe drop the keys and you pick them up and then you try to find another key, but that one doesn't go in. And the whole time, your insides are full of butterflies and they're all knotted up and you're scared to death.

Well, that is the universal experience and human response to God as we are as sinners. We're not right with God and we are terrified about that.

We are unclean and we're not ready to meet Him. And so we fumble for key after key to try to make the situation okay.

[5 : 14] And you saw it in the garden. Adam and Eve sinned. They ate the fruit and immediately they feel ashamed. They feel dirty. And what can we do?

And so they start tearing down fig leaves and with shaking hands, they start sewing clothes that they can wear. And as they look at themselves, as Adam looks at Eve and Eve looks at Adam, they know it's no use.

The fig leaves don't cover us. And they hear God walking through the garden and they run and hide. And men have been desperately pulling fig leaves down and sewing up clothes and running and hiding from God ever since.

Trying to cover, trying to atone for their sins. Trying any way that they can to make the guilt go away.

Trying to pay for their sins so that they can just live with God and it will be okay. So here's this medieval hermit and his digestive track is just destroyed and in ruins because he starves himself and eats horrible food.

[6 : 28] And his body is covered with dirt and bruises and lashes. And he says his prayers far into the night. Trying to do something to atone for his sin.

Trying to make up with God. Well, here's King Manasseh, King of Judah. And he's offering his son on the altar of Chemosh.

And he burns his own son alive on the red hot hands of Chemosh thinking, maybe I can have peace.

If I've given my firstborn son, surely I can have peace. I'll be able to worship with clean hands.

Here's a teenage girl and she goes to a church a lot like this one.

And she just did something awful with her boyfriend. And she's filled with shame. She feels defiled. She knows that God looks upon her with disfavor and his gaze puts her at an infinite distance from him.

[7 : 41] And so in absolute wretchedness, she runs and she starts to cut herself with rocks and with a knife saying just maybe my blood will make it okay.

Will make it all better. And I'll be able to come. And I'll be able to be clean. And I'll be able to come close to God. Well, here's something different. Here's something different.

It's an Israelite man. And he doesn't use some man-made way of atoning for his sin, of clearing things up with God, of being able to come to God.

He uses God's design, the God-given Levitical sacrifices. And so he is a good Israelite and he's there at the Day of Atonement.

That's what our author in Hebrews 10 has in mind. He says in verse 3 that these sacrifices are an annual reminder of sin.

[8 : 41] He's thinking of that annual sacrifice at the Day of Atonement. And so here's this man and he's celebrating the Day of Atonement and he's doing what God says. Verse 8 says that the law required this.

And yet, oddly enough, he doesn't have the key either. The Levitical sacrifices, they don't perfect God's people.

They don't provide a lasting way for man to be able to come to God and have communion. And so year after year, the sacrifices are made.

And yet, year after year, they need to be made again because the sin hasn't been taken away. And maybe they provide a momentary relief, but the next year they need to be made again.

They're exactly, you're left in exactly the same place where you started. And so they're better, they're better than all the man-made ways because they come from God.

[9 : 47] But in reality, these sacrifices aren't any more effective at bringing us to God and communion. Therefore, verse 5, therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said, sacrifice an offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.

So why did Christ come into the world? Precisely to take care of this problem, to fix this problem, to provide an open door where men can draw near to God.

And so, Christ does that for us by taking a body and sacrificing Himself. He came to do what fig leaves and abusing yourself and making child sacrifice could never do.

And He makes us clean again so that we can draw near to the Holy One and worship Him forever and ever.

Jesus says, sacrifice and offerings, burn offerings and sin offerings you did not desire nor were you pleased with them. They don't solve the problem, but Jesus does.

[11:06] But, I do, Jesus says. And you might say, I don't understand. God requires the sacrifices by law. He tells them to do it, but He isn't pleased with them.

Why not? Why would He say that He wants them, but then He's not pleased with them? What does He mean when He says He doesn't desire them?

Well, it means simply this. Those sacrifices never could completely satisfy God because they never and they couldn't adequately deal with sin.

They don't cleanse anyone. They can't take sin away. Why not? What is wrong with the animal sacrifice that Jesus takes care of in His sacrifice?

I have three answers. Answer number one. Animal sacrifices never give full vent to God's wrath. They never give full vent to God's wrath.

[12:12] Paul looked back over the whole Old Testament period. He looked over all the animal sacrifices. He looked over all the Israelite worship. He looked over the entire past and he says this in Romans 3 about Jesus and how Jesus solves this problem.

God presented Him, Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement, of propitiation, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

He left the sins unpunished. Sins were never punished in any of these sacrifices. This was God overlooking sin, forbearing with it.

Never once in an animal sacrifice did the victim know God's wrath. The bulls and the goats and all the animals that were slain were all completely clueless.

God never poured out His indignation on them because in order to fully suffer God's wrath, we have to understand, the person has to understand, the victim must realize that they are doing it because of sin, because God is holy.

[13:28] And they have to understand that they are dying because they are not holy. And that the person is suffering because they're falling short, they fell short of the glory of God.

Now in hell, those suffering God's wrath there know that they are suffering for sin. Their view of God's holiness and God's majesty is elevated in hell.

They hate it, they hate it still, but God is nevertheless seen and exalted. And so when those animals died, no one really knew or experienced how holy God is.

They never experienced God's wrath. God's glory and His name and His fame were never vindicated. Sins were never taken away or dealt with. But when Jesus offered Himself up as a sacrifice, He had a full understanding of God's glory.

He understood fully how horrible and heinous sin is. And see, if God is going to be pleased with the sacrifice, and the sacrifice is going to be sufficient, the person must know how worthy God is.

[14:52] They must have seen how great God is. and they must appreciate the weight of His glory and His magnificence. And the Son of God knew it.

Even as He suffered, He knew that God was perfect and He knew the supreme value of God. And so Jesus Christ was the perfect man. He never once had a lower view of God than what God deserved.

In His whole life, it was an appreciation of God's glory, an enjoyment of God's glory. And so when He came to die, when He experienced God's holiness and His holy indignation, He knew that that wrath was right.

He knew that this was the right payment of sin, and He understood that this was right for sin to be punished in this way. And so His offering pleased God.

Animal sacrifices, or human means of atonement, whatever they might be, can never address or deal with sin.

[16:00] They never see sin as something horrid. They never give God full vent to His righteous wrath. And so they're not sufficient, but Jesus Christ was.

Answer number two, animal sacrifices weren't pleasing because they weren't willing victims. victims. They weren't willing victims.

Their death was not in obedience to God. Now, the people offered them in obedience, but the animal itself never obeyed God.

In the heart of sacrifice, if you read the Old Testament, God wants obedience. And if He has to have obedience or sacrifice, He wants obedience. obedience. The animals were incapable of offering God an obedient heart.

They never could embrace God's will and claim it as their own and say, I love this will. This is what I want to do. Because they were only animals. But look at Jesus Christ.

[17:04] How does He differ than an animal? Look at Jesus Christ. Then I said, here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, O God.

So Jesus Christ's whole life was obedience, was God's will lived out. And so we're standing at the brink of heaven 2,000 years ago, and the Son of God is coming into this world and He's taking on flesh and His attitude.

What He is saying is, I will obey. Your will is now my will. It was written about me in the scroll. So it was planned from before all time, but it was Jesus' spontaneous choice.

He wanted to obey what God had said. And so He rose with enthusiasm to go into this world to save sinners. He embraced God's will from the very beginning. And I will obey no matter what. And so He took on flesh. His divine glory was put behind a veil will of human nature. And as He's walking through this earth, He said, I always do the will of God, my Father.

[18:22] I always do the will of my Father. His will is my will. And so He set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem. And some Pharisees came up to Him and said, Jesus, you need to leave.

You need to get out of here. Herod is trying to kill you. And Jesus said to them, go and tell that fox, behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I will finish my course.

Herod, you can't stop me. Pharisees, you can't stop me. Demons, you can't stop me. I have a course to run and I am running. And so I'm curing people and I'm casting out demons and then it's on to Jerusalem.

So Jesus had a set course to his life and he ran it willingly. And in the garden of Gethsemane, he took the cup of God's wrath and it probably terrified him more than anything that we could ever possibly imagine.

And yet he said, not my will, but your will be done. And what was that will? It was to die, to swallow the poison of God's anger, to feel the full displeasure of God upon him.

[19:39] And nails and thorns were nothing compared to being cut off from his father's face. So on the cross, God turned his back on his son and put him in the shadow.

more than that, God faced his son and looked upon him, but there was no longer a smile of, this is my son with whom I am well pleased.

God looked on him with holy, blazing wrath for all the God-diminishing sin that was clinging to his son.

And so that was the will of God. That was obedience. And Jesus embraced it. And he was a willing victim. He was an obedient victim.

And so he did what no other sacrifice could do. He took away sins and he opened the door so that we could come to God. Why was God not pleased with animal sacrifices?

[20:44] Answer number three, bulls and goats are not worthy victims. They're not worthy victims. What does it take? To give God his honor and his glory back.

Every sin is falling short of the glory of God. It's missing how valuable God is. It's exchanging his glory for something else.

And sin is saying, God, I want you this much, but I want other things more than you do. You're worth this much, but these things are worth more than you.

We saw that this morning, that sin diminishes God. And so the question is, can the death of an animal deal with that problem?

Can that death give God his glory back? Can it show how great God is? The answer is no. So what would that say about God's majesty if I can give him a fair return by killing an animal, that his glory

is worth one bull?

[22:00] It's worth a hundred bulls? It's worth a thousand bulls? No matter how often, no matter how much, animals could never give God the glory back.

They could never vindicate his majesty. And so the Old Testament saints knew it. They knew it. And they knew it wasn't perfect. They knew it wasn't all right on the basis of these sacrifices.

We still feel guilty. We still feel like we can't come into your presence. We can't draw near. Maybe we feel okay for a while, but then next year we're going to be right back doing it all over again.

Why were these sacrifices offered then? Because these sacrifices made those Israelites long for something better. And they longed for it, and they hoped for it according to Hebrews 11, and it says God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us could they be made perfect. And that something better was Jesus Christ. Christ. And he, his sacrifice in himself, he is completely worthy.

[23:18] And his sacrifice proves how glorious and holy and wonderful God is. Because he was a completely worthy victim.

So how great is Jesus? How great is he? How worthy is he? Colossians 1.16 we saw this morning.

All things were created by him and for him. All things were created by him and for him.

He is worthy of everything that is created to be for him. So rocks, hills, and plains, they are for him.

And sun and stars and moon, they exist for one purpose, for Jesus Christ. And he is the perfect representation of God. Hebrews 1 says he's the exact representation of God.

Everything that makes God, God, Jesus, was, and is. He takes part in that. In every way that God is God, Jesus, the son of God, was God.

[24:19] And so he perfectly represents the divine majesty. And he's greater than all the angels.

When God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, let all God's angels worship him.

So on that dark Bethlehem night, God says, okay, it's time for all my angels to worship him. And so they appeared and they sang his praises.

Before Jesus ever died for any sinner, he was worthy of all of the angels' glorious song. So how worthy is Jesus Christ?

He's greater than Moses. Moses was a great man, the meekest man in the whole world, they said.

And he was only a servant in God's house.

But Jesus ruled over that house as a son. And he's greater than Joshua. Joshua was this great leader of the people and he gave them rest in the land. But Jesus gives people true eternal rest.

[25:25] Joshua one time met the pre-incarnate son of God. Remember, Joshua is nearing Jericho. They haven't taken the city yet.

They are about to. And he's walking towards Jericho. And he looks up and he sees a man standing there in front of him with a drawn sword. Joshua is probably wondering, I wonder if this man is for my enemies or for us, who does he belong to?

And his mind was working completely on the human mundane level. And so he asked that question to the man and the son of God said, neither. I don't fit into your categories.

But as the commander of the army of the Lord, I come. And what did Joshua do? He's on his face before him.

He says, what will you have me to do? And Jesus says, take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy. And Joshua took them off.

[26:34] So there's Joshua and he meets Jesus and Joshua is on the ground barefoot, face down. How worthy is Jesus? He's greater than Aaron.

Aaron had to make a sacrifice for himself just so he could come into the holy of holies one day a year. And the Son of God, from all eternity past, bathed and enjoyed God's holy presence.

He's greater than Abraham. For Abraham was, I am. And the greatest of all the prophets was John the Baptist. And what did John say?

I'm not worthy to even loosen, to even loose his sandal. So when a visitor came, to your house back in those days, the servant, you know, he was responsible for washing their feet and refreshing them.

But no servant ever had to get down on their hands and knees and take off someone's shoe, their sandal. And John says, you know, that activity that is below the lowest servant, I am not even worthy to do.

[27:45] I am not worthy to get on my hands and knees and take off Jesus' sandal. In total abject humility, I cannot do that. It is too far above me. That's something, it's only something of Jesus' worth.

And so when he lays down his life, he shows everyone how glorious and great God is. And some people like to say, you were so valuable.

Look how valuable you were, that Christ loved you and gave you himself. He came and died for you. But that's all wrong. It's all wrong.

Your sin was so enormous, your depravity was so deep, that it took the Son of God to be killed in order for you to be okay with God.

The perfect, infinite, Jesus Christ, Son of God, had to die in order to make up for your depravity. So on the cross, Jesus freely, intelligently, willingly, gloriously died for his bride.

[28:57] And what is the result? Verse 10, and by that will we have been made holy. And verse 14, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, if you are one of Christ, then Christ has in a very real way perfected you, made you perfect.

He has washed you and he has made you holy and he has consecrated you to worship to God so that you could come and have dealings with God.

That's what it means to be made perfect. So now we can come. Verse 19, we didn't read it. Verse 19 says, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through the curtain, that is his body, let us draw near to God with sincere heart, full, with full assurance of faith.

That is why he came, so that we could come to God with full assurance. So the reason for the season is communion. That is Jesus Christ's gift to you.

[30:17] He took away your sin and he opened the way so that you could come to God and that you could come gladly to God. So God is this fountain of life and our sin makes it impossible for us to come to him.

But now through Christ, there's been a new way made open so that we could come and that we could enjoy God and that we can drink and be satisfied. We can come as close to God as we dare and we like and revel in everything that he is for us and everything that he has done for you.

That is what Jesus Christ gave to us by becoming a man and dying for us. He gave us full access to God who is our life.

So Christmas is in five days and how will your children show you that they love and appreciate the things that you gave them?

They'll tear open the package and they'll immediately want to start playing with whatever you've given to them. So suppose you buy them a bicycle and they are going to want to ride that bicycle and it's snowing out and there's ice everywhere but that will not stop them from wanting to go out and ride the bicycle and they will overcome every barrier to enjoy your gift to them.

[31:46] So Jesus Christ's gift to you is full free access to God. So how can you show him that you love and appreciate what he's done for you?

Well you start using it. Every barrier that's getting in the way between you and God every sin that so easily entangles us every right thing every wrong thing that distracts us from coming to God we get rid of it.

We overcome every barrier and we come and we gladly worship him. And so you give up your idols you give them up and you say oh my God your steadfast love is better than life.

you're better than anything that makes my life good. You're better your love is better than my wife it's better than my children it's better than my work it's better than my play it's better than my money it's better than my shopping your love is better than life and when you embrace that and when you start going that direction that is when you show Jesus how much you appreciate what he has done for you so begin enjoying God even as we remember what he has done for us in his death so that we could draw near to God well we also can just say thank you by singing to him and that's what we want to do now