

Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

Part 13

Hebrews 9:1 –10

The writer of Hebrews had just been meditating on Jesus as the one who leads us into reality.

He had been using the idea that this world is only a shadow of the true real eternal spirit world.

The worship we can offer is also only a pale copy of real worship, that only Jesus the real High Priest can offer.

The centre of worship for the redeemed Israel, whom God had led out of the slavery of Egypt, was the tabernacle.

Hebrews 9:1-5 [NIV] *“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.”*

The tabernacle was a thing of great beauty with its priceless possessions yet this was but a pale imitation of the real tabernacle, where God’s presence was.

Exodus 25:9 [NIV] *“Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.”*

Moses was commanded to make this earthly, shadow-like tabernacle to teach us how we should approach and worship our Creator God.

The tabernacle consisted of three areas, the outer court, the holy place and the totally enclosed holy of holies.

The outer court was where the priests prepared themselves to worship God.

Exodus 30:18-21 [NIV] *“Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come.”*

The laver – filled with water for the priests to wash themselves before they carried out their duties.

Exodus 27:1-8 [NIV] *“Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. Make all its utensils of bronze, its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and firepans. Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar. Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. The poles are to be inserted into the rings so they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried. Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.”*

The brazen altar – on which the priests offered their sacrifice before entering the holy place.

Our approach to worshipping God must follow the same pattern.

John 13:10 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”*

Jesus indicates that before we take the bread and wine, depicting His sacrifice, we should have cleansed ourselves physically.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

We are also to offer our lives to Jesus as a living sacrifice as a prelude to worship.

Our attitude towards worshipping God is shown by these two items of furniture in the outer court.

To acknowledge we need to be cleansed and accept the office of a bond slave of Jesus Christ.

We can only then move into the holy place through a curtain that had blinded us to the three items of furniture that were there.

A table for the shew bread – offering that was prepared and baked fresh every day.

John 1:1, 14 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Jesus Christ is the Word of the triune God.

John 6:48-51 [NIV] *“I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”*

Jesus Christ tells us to eat and digest His flesh, the Word of God.

We do this through the study and meditation on the Christian Bible.

Also in this part of the tabernacle was the lampstand of seven oil lamps that were constantly illuminating the shew bread, God’s Word.

John 16:7-13 [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”*

These depict the work of the Holy Spirit who will reveal God’s Word to us and lead us into all truth.

The final item in this area of the tabernacle was the **altar of incense**.

Revelation 8:3-4 [NIV] *“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the*

throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand."

Incense is a pathway by which our prayers ascend to God's throne, to be a sweet offering of worship towards Him.

Exodus 27:2 [NIV] *"Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze."*

This altar of incense had four horns, one in each corner, and was a place of safety and salvation to all who held on to those horns, on which the sacrificial blood was sprinkled.

1 Kings 2:28 [NIV] *"When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar."*

This is why Joab acted in this way but condemned himself to death by his own words.

2 Samuel 22:3 [NIV] *"my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my saviour, from violent men you save me."*

Psalms 18:2 [NIV] *"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."*

Luke 1:69 [NIV] *"He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David"*

God is the horn, or strength of our salvation through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ.

This is as far as the priests and the offerings of those wishing to worship God and fellowship with God, went under the Old Covenant.

God called human beings to come to Him, serve and worship Him, yet they were not allowed to come too near, the next curtain kept them at a distance.

As the people worshipped in the tabernacle they were showing a desire to restore the fellowship that Adam and Eve had with God before they were cut off from God because of their rebellious sin of disobedience and disbelief.

This restriction also clearly showed the people their unfitness for this relationship and inability to attain it.

Only the high priest and only once a year on the Day of Atonement could go through this third curtain into the very presence of God.

The love of God desires to fellowship with humans but our lack of righteousness holds us back from the presence of a Holy Creator God.

Humanity can only go through this final curtain by following a perfect high priest and his perfect sacrifice.

In the holy of holies there was **no natural light** while the curtain was closing it off from the rest of the tabernacle. **The only light would be the supernatural presence of God.**

The only furniture was the ark of the covenant containing three things, the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded and the stone tablets on which God had written the law.

The lid of the ark was called the Mercy Seat and over-arching with their wings were two cherubim of solid gold.

Exodus 25:22 [NIV] *“There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”*

This is where God would commune with the high priest and through him the people.

For all this beauty and symbolism this was only a shadow of the real heavenly tabernacle, because of its limitations.

The ordinary people could only come to the entrance of the outer court.

The priests and Levites might enter the outer court, but only the priests could enter the holy place.

Then only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, after much preparation and only on one day a year.

The ordinary people would only be able to enter the holy presence of God after Jesus Christ, as our high priest, ratified the New Covenant.

With His sacrifice on the cross the curtain that barred our entrance was torn down.

Matthew 27:50-53 [NIV] *“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”*

Christ’s death was accompanied by at least four miraculous events, darkness, the tearing in two of the curtain in the temple, an earthquake and dead people rising from their tombs.

Therefore Jesus’ death could not have gone unnoticed, everyone knew that something significant had happened.

The three items in the ark of the covenant, below the Mercy Seat [atonement cover] typified certain things.

Jar of manna – communion with Jesus Christ Who is the bread that came down from heaven during the exodus of Israel out of Egypt.

Aaron’s staff – resurrection and rulership of Jesus Christ.

Stone tablets – the eternal law of God fulfilled by sacrificial love.

Hebrews 9:6-10 [NIV] *“When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations applying until the time of the new order.”*

Again the limitations of the Old Covenant are mentioned.

All that took place in the tabernacle were anticipating the New Covenant that would be introduced and ratified by One who would come from the heavenly tabernacle, Jesus Christ.

This was the “*new order*” referred to in these verses.

The earthly tabernacle offered only external righteousness, a covering of sin but not a cleansing and solving of the problem sin brings.

The intimate relationship that God wanted with His created children was **not** yet available, not until the problem that sin brings was solved by the shed blood of the very Son of God, Jesus Christ.

How was this new way into the presence of God going to be revealed?

At the time of the death of Jesus Christ, His disciples could **not** understand why Christ had to die.

The full understanding did **not** come to them until the Holy Spirit came into their lives on the Day of Pentecost.

Only the Holy Spirit can reveal to human beings the mystery of the way into the presence of the Holy Creator God, that is through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”*