

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

HEBREWS 10:1-7
NEW AND IMPROVED

*For the Law—having **a shadow** of the good things to come and **not the very image** of the things—can never, with these same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins! But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.*

Therefore, when He [Christ] came into the world, He said, “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire—but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God ” [Psalm 40:6-8].

What is the attraction to buy something new—whether boots, coat, phone, car, etc.? Isn't it that New is better—better than what has become worn out and useless, or better because of additional features and capabilities? “New and Improved” is an effective sales statement. Do you realize that the coming of the eternal Son of God to this earth was also something new and improved, compared to the old? Old Testament people, like us, were sinners. They had no way to attain a right-standing, or to make themselves acceptable to God. For that reason, in His love, He promised to send The Seed of the woman, who as holy and powerful God would bruise the wily serpent's head (“control center”) and break his power, like a man stepping on the head of a snake, bruising, and crushing it. Through this Seed of woman, Satan and sin would no longer ruin man's future. The promised Seed would take the punishment for the sin of men, women, and children everywhere, dying and rising again in victory!

But now a problem. Like people today, the Old Testament people could easily get sidetracked. Are you easily sidetracked? Perhaps during church? Therefore, God gave them a covenant at Mt. Sinai to govern their lives. The covenant involved physical demands, each a reminder from God. 1) The Ten Commandments—Do this or die! Remember you are a sinner. 2) The worship sacrifices—offer a lamb each morning and evening (Exodus 29:38-42), so that there will be peace. 3) Celebrate the Festivals of Passover, Atonement, and more, each year, with the appropriate sacrifices, so that you remember My Promises of the Savior from sin. 4) Bring various sacrifices for various sins—to remind yourselves that you have fallen short before Me and that atonement—a making of peace—is necessary. 5) Keep the Sabbath Day, the Rest Day, each week—so that you long for the peace and rest for your souls that I Myself provide. 6) Selected priests only shall approach my altar with the sacrifices—you are not acceptable the way you are. Old Testament worship-life involved much repetition, ritual, and rules. All reminders from God.

Did these Old Testament rules keep the people on track, looking ahead to the coming of the Promised Savior? Not very well. The people misconstrued the purpose. They failed to remember that these were only reminders, pointing to the Savior to come. They thought that the reminders, in and of themselves, were the route to God's forgiveness, acceptance, and favor, as if “Do the duties, and all will be good!” They missed the point.

Even after Christ came, suffered, died, rose, and returned to heaven, the people of Israel, the Hebrews, still had that notion, that Christ wasn't the Savior, but that the real way to heaven was the Old Testament regulations. And so, in our text we read, *The Law—having **a shadow** of the good things to come and **not the very image** of the things—can never, with these same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.* The laws of the Old Testament were just shadows, not the real McCoy. A shadow can tell you a little about someone who is coming around the corner; but once the individual comes into view, forget about the shadow. Look at the real image! The Hebrew recipients of this letter needed to forget about the Old regulations and look to Jesus of the New.

Actually the repetition of the Old Testament sacrifices and religious rites should have proved to them that those actions never really took care of sin's problem. If they had, the sacrifices would have no longer been needed. Consciences would have been at peace with God--“My sins are all atoned for.” But every year the same sacrifices-and-routine were followed. In fact, animal blood could not atone for man's sin. If someone owed you money, would you accept a bone from their dog as payment? The dog could bring you as many bones as he wanted, but it would never pay the debt. Likewise before God, mechanical deeds do not make up for sin. Going back to the example: You could even make an arrangement with the person who owes you money: “Every day while you still owe me money, your dog must bring me a bone.” It would certainly be a reminder for them, but it wouldn't square things with you. And so the Lord in heaven sent His Son to offer the real sacrifice. The sacrifices offered by the Old

Testament priests were only pictures of that sacrifice. In Hebrews 7 we read, *For such an high priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once for all, when he offered up Himself (Hebrews 7:26-27).* Jesus was the real sacrifice—once for all—not just a repeated picture.

Speaking of repetition, is it needed today? Jesus has already offered His blood for you at Calvary. The real sacrifice for sin has been accomplished, once for all, never to be repeated. So why go to church so regularly week after week? Why read the Scriptures or a daily devotion each day? Why pray every day? Why does the pastor make the confirmation class say passages until they know them by heart? Such repetition! Is there something meritorious in repeating these actions? Maybe it's the idea that even though you have been declared Not Guilty in Jesus and the verdict is yours by faith, that you still "have to do something"? That's not it. Just as in the Old Testament, our New Testament repetition has nothing to do with bringing about our own peace with God. Jesus is the real sacrifice, new and improved! Your repetition is a reminder. Your sinful nature, prodded by the devil, will not long remember and will easily turn away from forgiveness through faith in Christ, God's gift, and turn to something more "self"-satisfying, involving deeds and efforts of your own. The purpose of repetition in your Christian life today is to point you to Jesus, your Savior, not to yourself.

The text quotes Psalm 40's prophetic words regarding the Savior. *Therefore, when He [Christ] came into the world, He said, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire—but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God" (Psalm 40:6-8).* From these words, it is clear that Jesus knew His purpose on earth was not just mechanically to obey the commandments for us and carry out other requirements as well, or even mechanically to offer Himself for us on the cross—just going through the motions. Mechanical deeds and sacrifices—no matter how many or how costly—are not pleasing to God. Jesus says, *I have come . . . to do Your will. But a body You have prepared for Me.* Jesus came in the flesh that He might physically, from the heart and will, live in holiness before God for us and die. He did not just come mechanically to offer Himself for our sin. He came to offer Himself willingly. This is what God's Word, *the Book*, laid "upon" Him. It was not just written "about Him" that these were things He was going to do, but that these were things that God laid upon Him, to keep with His heart and will. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Not My will, but Thy will (Your will) be done. The New and Improved willing Sacrifice!

It is interesting that Psalm 40 itself does not say, *a body You have prepared for Me*, but *My ears you have opened*. A little different picture, but the point is the same. Jesus came to this earth, not for mechanical performance, but with ears to hear and understand what God's will was. He came "to hear" and obey what God wanted. When a king's messengers in the Middle Ages, cried out, "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!" they didn't just mean, Listen to this and understand it. They meant, Take this decree of the king to heart and do it. The thought of "opening the ears" of Jesus may also refer to an unusual Old Testament command from God: When a Hebrew slave at the end of his seven years of servitude was set free, if in his slavery his master had also given him a wife who bore him children, the wife and children rightfully remained with the master. But if the slave said, No, I am happy here and will remain; then his ear would be pierced with an awl, and he would remain a willing slave to the master for life. Thus Jesus came as the New and Improved Sacrifice who would keep God's Word willingly—ears opened.

Does this make a connection for you? This is also the kind of hearing and obedience that God looks for from you, His child through faith in Christ. Do you sometimes do His will and Word because you "have to," or because of mechanical, ritualistic, habit. I once knew of a faithful elderly Christian who when he was asked why he always went to church on Sunday, responded, "What else should I do on Sunday morning?" I assume he meant, what could be better or more important on Sunday morning. But those words easily sound like, "Well, there's nothing else to do. I just go out of habit." You who have Christ in your heart, because the Holy Spirit of God has worked faith in the Bible's message of salvation in Jesus, do not just let repetition and doing the right things become a mechanical habit to which you are bound and chained. Serve Him from your heart! This is the New Man of faith in action vs. the Old Adam who obeys only when he has to or if there's a reward. In Christ, who is the REAL sacrifice for your sin, you have forgiveness and right-standing before God. Serve Him with your ear perforated, serve Him in willing service. As Paul says *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1).*

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---