

JESUS IS BETTER: letter to the Houstonians

Sermon Study Guide | Part Four: Better than Sin | 10/1/17 | @thestoryhouston @pastorerichuffman

PURPOSE OF THIS SERMON SERIES

1. To become more familiar with the Bible through a study of Hebrews
2. To convey the stark differences between the Gospel of Jesus and religions of men
3. To inspire people to believe Jesus (as opposed to just “believing *in* Jesus”)

A LITTLE BACK-STORY

Hebrews, more than any other New Testament book, requires a level of knowledge about the Old Testament that most people simply don't have. Parts of Hebrews make you feel like you're reading a foreign language because, in a way, that's exactly what you're doing. At several points in this letter, the author writes to his audience in “code” using phrases and vocabulary, and referring to concepts and stories, that only those familiar with Hebrew scripture (a.k.a. “The Old Testament”) would understand. In today's readings, the author uses words like “perfect tabernacle,” “by means of the blood of goats and calves,” “Most Holy Place,” “the ashes of a heifer,” ceremonially unclean,” “outwardly clean,” “new covenant,” and “the promised eternal inheritance.” You almost need an ancient Hebrew glossary to keep up.

Here's all you need to know: the author wants his audience to see how the things they've been living for - religion, tradition, family, and morality - while good in theory, are just copies of God's true intentions for us. Those things give us extrinsic righteousness (we *look* like we have it all together because our lives look awesome from the outside), but Jesus restores our *intrinsic* righteousness (we *know* we're loved by God because of Jesus' sacrifice).

What are the fundamental differences that you see between appearing righteous *externally* and being made righteous *internally*? Discuss the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic worth with your Chapter or your family/friends, or make your own notes here.

KEY TEXT: HEBREWS 9:11-14

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 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!

GOOD NEWS FOR HEIFERS (AND EVERYBODY ELSE)

To understand this passage, you really need to check out Leviticus 16:1-34, which tells about the Hebrew festival called the Day of Atonement. It's not the quickest or easiest read, but it gives some important context to Hebrews.

What does the Day of Atonement have to do with Hebrews 9:11-14? How is the blood of Jesus more effective than the blood of animals shed by priests?

KEY TEXT: HEBREWS 9:15-22

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. In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 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. He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

OMG THERE'S BLOOD EVERYWHERE

Why does the author say there's no forgiveness without the shedding of blood?

He describes Jesus' death as a "ransom." How does that sit with you? Does that make sense to you? Why or why not?

KEY TEXT: HEBREWS 9:23-28

It was necessary, then, for the copies of heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world.

But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

A COPY OF A COPY

In the movie *Multiplicity**, Doug, played by Michael Keaton, feels like he can't keep up with the demands of life, so he decides to let a doctor clone him. So he stays home, and his clone goes to work. Everything seems to be going great until the clone returns to the lab to be cloned again. The result is "Lenny," a socially challenged, less intelligent, and hilarious version of Doug who's not authentically *Doug* because he's "a copy of a copy."

The author of Hebrews is making a similar point about religious buildings and practices: they may *appear* to be holy, but they're really just copies of copies. Jesus is God, unfiltered; therefore, religions are no longer necessary. What do you think about this? Do you really experience Christianity as something other than religion? What are some ways we Christians still miss the point of the Gospel by continuing to behave like a religion?

GOING DEEPER

Do you know anyone who is afraid or ashamed to approach God because of their past decisions or present lifestyle?

What do you think this passage from Hebrews has to say to people who struggle with a guilty conscience or shame?