

The grace, mercy, and peace of Jesus Christ be yours this day. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is ‘Sacrifices of praise’ and is taken from the Epistle, Hebrews chapter 13. Let us pray... Amen.

Our Epistle lesson today is taken from the 13<sup>th</sup> and final chapter of the Book of Hebrews. In the twelve chapters leading up, the author of Hebrews looks into deep theological matters and draws from the rich traditions, offices, doctrines, and heroes of the faith of the Old Testament all pointing to Christ and how they have their completion in Him. Jesus’ crucifixion is the once-for-all sacrifice for sins, which is not repeated or honoured by further sacrifices. Jesus’ death was the necessary payment and ransom for the sins of all people. As a result, Christ is our sympathetic High Priest and Mediator of our salvation. Now in chapter 13, the author has an assortment of practical exhortations, doctrinal declarations, and prayerful appeals. The structure of this chapter keeps the sacrifice of Christ as central for the lives of sacrifice detailed in these verses.

And sacrifices were nothing new. In the Old Testament God gave His people a sacrificial system because they lived under the Law. They had sacrifices to give thanks, they had sacrifices for peace, sacrifices to go with prayers, and especially sacrifices to take away sin and guilt. Making a sacrifice was a huge part of the temple worship. As a result, in the centuries between Moses and Jesus, the people of Israel made sacrifices, lots and lots of sacrifices. They sacrificed all types of animals: bulls, sheep, goats, lambs, doves, and pigeons. They also sacrificed grain and other crops.

Now the most important day in all of Jewish life was a day of sacrifice for sin and guilt. It was the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, a goat was sacrificed, and its blood was taken into the holy of holies, the holiest place in the temple. The Ark of the Covenant was there and it was where God promised to be with His people. The blood of the goat was offered to God as a way to atone for, make up for, to pay for the sins of the peoples and to receive forgiveness for the people. The author of Hebrews earlier explained the purpose in this way: **“Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”**(Heb 9:22)

So, you can imagine what a sacrifice looked like on that day. Blood, lots of blood, on the altar, staining the wood and stone. Blood on the ground and sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place in the temple. And then, the body of the goat was taken out of the Temple and outside of the city and burned away from the sacred place.

Yet all these sacrifices, in and of themselves, did not forgive sins. The blood of all these animals and the burning of all those crops, on their own, did not atone for the people’s sin. Instead they all pointed ahead to the Lamb to come and His sacrifice for all. For, as long as they were offering those animals they still could not approach God, nor could they come to His altar to eat.

But now we have something much better. Christ, **“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”**(Jn 1:29b) Christ’s sacrifice reconciled you back to God, His sacrifice made atonement for your life, and in His sacrifice all your sins are forgiven.

Instead of being sacrificed on the altar in the Jerusalem temple, the Lamb of God was slaughtered outside of the city on the altar of the cross. Instead of His blood being poured out over the Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies, Jesus’ blood ran down the wooden cross from His hands, feet, side, back, and head. In the words of Isaiah the prophet, **“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.”** (Is 53:5) Jesus stripes atoned for your life, His Blood forgives your sins, and Jesus’ sacrifice saved your life eternally.

This means, instead of hearing God’s holy, righteous, and just Word proclaiming your condemnation, now you can hear God’s gracious Word of forgiveness and salvation in, and because of Christ. Instead of being under the Law and never able to approach God or His altar because of your own merits, you are under grace and He calls you to Himself at the foot of the cross. Jesus came for all sinners, endured the reproach for all sins, left the heaven itself and the holiest of holies and came to where you are to atone and rescue you. Your salvation is guaranteed through the blood of this Lamb, through Christ and in His resurrection. There is nothing left for you to do to earn your salvation.

But, the time for making sacrifices is not over. Yes, the time for trying to earn your salvation and the forgiveness of sins is over, because there is nothing you can add to Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross.

The author of Hebrews explains how other sacrifices are still to be made. He says in verses 15-16: **“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”** We still make sacrifices to God with our lips, with our lives, and with how we use our possession. Christ sanctified each and every one of us, He made us holy when He washed us in Baptism, clothed us in His righteousness, and when He made us a member of His body, the holy Christian church.

But, what does this new life in Christ look like?

To begin, take a look at the sacrifices you make with your lips. Our services sometimes contain the words of King David from Psalm 51:5 “**O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.**” But that is just one way. Other sacrifices our lips make are when the words of the Creed are spoken out loud as we confess our faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we do this before eating at home, at Tony’s, or anywhere, saying thank you to God for the food; the Jr. and Sr. choirs as they sing praises to God and declare His glory; we tell other about Jesus and inviting them to church so they too can regularly hear God’s Word; we say “thank you Lord” through the day for the many blessing and wonderful gifts He provides. These are just some example of sacrifices of praise with our lips, but there are also many more.

There is also the sacrifice of doing what is good. The author of Hebrews gives us a list of good things to do, ways to give of our time and money, to sacrifice of ourselves, in the way we live.

“**Let brotherly love continue.**”(12:1) We’re family, and we care for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We sacrifice time, talents, and money to make Trinity our home and to encourage others in Churchbridge with God’s Word.

“**Show hospitality.**”(12:2) We provide food, drink, and sometimes even a place to stay for those in need. We collect and make quilts and layetts and other material for people around Canada and the world. The VBS helped support the God’s mission to the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations with the BC Mission Boat and the Sunday School has helped out with LAMP on a few occasion.

“**Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.**”(12:3) We remember all our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. It is estimated there are around 100,000 martyrs, Christians seriously persecuted, imprisoned, and even killed every year for the simple crime of believing in Christ Jesus as their Saviour. In the last couple of weeks over 60 Christian churches, along with other Christian homes and building, in Egypt were targeted, looted, and burnt for no other reason than they were Christian. Also, when we remember those in prison, we also remember those who’ve done what’s wrong in this country and how they also need to be cared for and treated with respect

“**Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.**” (12:4) God’s Word is clear. Marriage is to be treated with respect, honor, and as an institution of precious value. The gift of sex is to be expressed within the marital relationship alone. In a world of rampant pornography, television shows where sex and marriage are seldom, if ever, put together, and a climate in which sex outside of marriage is encouraged because it is seen as the norm, these words about keeping the marriage bed pure seem kind of out of step and old-fashioned. But they are God’s Word, and it is what our sacrifice of doing good looks like today.

**“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.”**(12:5) It sounds easy, but have you ever woken up in the middle of the night worrying about a bill, or bills that needs to be paid or about the debts you’ve built up? I have. One way I’ve found to get back to sleep is to count, not sheep, but instead to count blessings. I simply start saying thank you in a prayer for anything and everything God has given to me. Counting blessings rather than worrying over bills makes for a better night’s sleep.

Or have you ever caught yourself wanting something new or better than what you have? It could be about a house, land, machinery, job, clothes, jewelry, vehicle, or whatever. Being content is hard mainly when you see everything else around you. But once again, the secret is to thank God for what we have. Being content and not loving money is what our sacrifice looks like today.

**“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. . . . Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”**(12:7,17) The author to the Hebrews here reminds his hearers of their required obedience to the Gospel, God’s Word of life. He does not establish any dominion for pastors or church leader. It simply, and clearly points to God’s Word. Pastors are here to faithfully proclaim God’s Word and administer God’s Sacraments. They are here to see that no one is lead away by false doctrine or teaching. Remember God’s Word spoken over you in your baptism, His Word spoken to you each and every Sunday declaring your sins forgiven in Christ, and to you at the altar where also receive Jesus own sacrificed body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins.

This is a picture what our sacrifices look like. Some sacrifices are hard, other are very easy. The author to the Hebrews explained it very well. Our sacrifices do not save us, they do not contribute anything to our salvation. That sacrifice was completed in its entirety in the sacrifice and death of Jesus in our place on the cross, the one we are reminded of every Sunday as we look up to it in remembrance of what Jesus did for you, me and the world. His sacrifice for our lives, for our forgiveness, to atone for us. Instead our sacrifice is the natural response to our being saved by grace through faith on account of Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice on the altar of the cross. Because of Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice your sins are forgiven and your life atoned for. Now, in Christ, we can live lives of faithful sacrifice with our lips, our lives, and our possession and by doing good in God’s eyes.

Amen.

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