

**“OUR HOPE: JESUS IS WHAT’S HAPPENING”**

Dr. John Allan Lavender  
Hebrews 9:16--10:18

*For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. <sup>17</sup>For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. <sup>18</sup>Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. <sup>19</sup>For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup>saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” <sup>21</sup>And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. <sup>22</sup>And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

*<sup>23</sup>Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup>For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; <sup>25</sup>nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. <sup>26</sup>Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*

*<sup>27</sup>And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment; <sup>28</sup>so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation.*

*<sup>10:1</sup>For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. <sup>2</sup>Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup>But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. <sup>4</sup>For it is impossible for the blood of*

*bulls and goats to take away sins.* <sup>5</sup>*Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering Thou has not desired, but a body Thou hast prepared for Me;* <sup>6</sup>*in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure.* <sup>7</sup>*Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Thy will, O God.’ as it is written of Me in the roll of the book.*

<sup>8</sup>*After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law),* <sup>9</sup>*then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Thy will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.* <sup>10</sup>*By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

<sup>11</sup>*And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;* <sup>12</sup>*but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,* <sup>13</sup>*waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.* <sup>14</sup>*For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.* <sup>15</sup>*And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,* <sup>16</sup>*“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them.”* <sup>17</sup>*He then says, “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”*

<sup>18</sup>*Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

Structurally speaking, the first eighteen verses of chapter 10 are a reiteration, with additional scriptural references, of everything the writer has said in chapters 8 and 9. As such, these eighteen verses do not require separate exegesis. However, they round out our grasp of Christ’s action on our behalf. *“For the Law since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?”* (10:1,2).

Usually the New American Standard Bible is more correct and clear than our cherished King James Version. In this case, the opposite is true. At the end of verse 2, the New American asks

the question, if the law were effective in getting through to God, wouldn’t the cleansed person “*no longer have had consciousness of sin?*” If the NAS is correct, the inference is that Christians who do get through to God no longer have any consciousness of sin. But our author’s argument throughout has been that under the old system, that is, Judaism, worshipers did not get through to God. Thus they were plagued by a continuing consciousness of sins which denied them rest. But we know from experience that, following cleansing, our consciousness of sins is often sharpened! Attitudes and actions we were once able to tolerate in ourselves are now unacceptable. In fact, the closer we get to Jesus, the greater our consciousness of sin.

The King James Version says worshipers who really get through to God “*have had no more conscience of sins.*” This, in my judgment, is the correct translation. The word conscience appears over 30 times in the New Testament. Each time the same Greek word is used: “suneidesis.” This is the word used by our author. It means more than mere intellectual knowledge or awareness. It involves the emotional life as well. It has to do with feelings of goodness or guilt.

The thing Jesus does, which that old system could not do, is cleanse the conscience, that is, the thinking, feeling center of our being. Once a sinner has turned from waywardness and committed himself to God in Christ, moral innocence is restored. A man in Christ has the past of Christ, which is perfect! Wholly acceptable to God. Therefore, while he may have a consciousness of sinning, there is, through confession and repentance, a cleansing of his conscience. The guilt may be remembered intellectually, but the sting of guilt is gone emotionally. The forgiven man knows he has sinned, but he no longer feels it.<sup>1</sup>

Each time we come to God with the problem of recurring sin, as we saved-sinners surely must, and confess it, repent of it, claim forgiveness for it, we are given more of Christ’s perfect past. And so it goes. Moment by moment. Day by day. Week by week. Year by year. As long as life lasts, the good Lord continues to give us more and more of Christ’s past until at long last, when we are absent from the body and at home with Him, we present to Him a slate which has been

made clean by the blood of the Lamb.

The picture most helpful to me in this regard is that of a field of new blown snow stretching as far as the eye can see, and beyond! Freshness and whiteness are everywhere. The landscape is cloaked in purity. That’s a portrait of our past in Christ. It is spotless, from each moment of confession and repentance, back into the eternity of God. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

This incredible truth! God cleanses us of all unrighteousness! Not just the sins we confess, but the sins we do not confess because we are not yet convicted of their sinfulness. There are things in my life I do not yet recognize as sin. Others may see them. My wife does (or so she insists)! But I don’t. The Holy Spirit has not yet revealed these chinks in my Christian character to me. Thus, I can’t honestly confess them as sin to God.

But the Lord knows the debilitating effect of unconfessed sin in a Christian’s life. Therefore, when I confess those sins of which I am conscious, God in His goodness cleanses me of all unrighteousness, including those things I do not yet recognize as sin. In that moment of God-washed-cleanness, I stand before Him spotless, with no past but the past of Christ, which is perfect. Hallelujah!

Does that mean past sins are forgotten? From God’s perspective, yes. From ours, no. We would all like to forget some of our sins, as well as some of those committed against us. But, to hope for that is to hope for something which cannot be. It is impossible. This brain of ours is a physical computer with a memory bank which cannot forget. A psychologist told me recently of new forms of treatment used to quicken areas of memory which were thought to be lost. Under prodding, however, memory was discovered to be still there.

Hoping to forget our sinful past is unrealistic. But, we can put a new meaning on our memory. It can serve to remind us of areas of danger we need to avoid because of past susceptibility.

Memory can serve to remind us of the amazing grace of God, and of those things of which He in His love has cleansed us. We still know we've sinned, but that knowledge does not plague us. To the contrary, it is a cause for rejoicing, for we also know, with even greater certainty, that we have been forgiven!

Jesus people are not spared from a consciousness of sins, but we no longer have a conscience of sin. Though we fail our heavenly Father, we can return to Him with absolute confidence, knowing "*the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Thus, our conscience no longer sears us with burning regret over a past which God has completely cleansed and forgiven.

When you get that message loud and clear, you will no longer feel any compulsion to become involved in a feverish, ceaseless round of religious activity aimed at making yourself more acceptable to God. Christianity is not some feeble effort on your part to live a shoddy imitation of Jesus. Christianity is Jesus living His life in you, here and now. Right where you are. Through your set of genes, chromosomes and glands. In your set of circumstances.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says, "*Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*" (1 Corinthians 3:16). That ancient tent-tabernacle in the wilderness is gone. So, too, is the beautiful temple in Jerusalem. But the temple, the Christian believer, is more in evidence today than ever before. And, of course, that has been God's game plan from the very beginning. God has not been primarily concerned with getting people into heaven, though that's important to Him. His primary concern has been to find a way to get Himself back into man on earth. When we are "*born again*" (John 3:3), God's purpose becomes possible. He is given a body through which to function. Your body. And mine.

That's one of the amazing truths of the Christian faith. God's tabernacle, or dwelling place today, is in Christian believers. If you are a Christian, the Lord Jesus clothes Himself in your personality, and lives His life over again in your circumstances. In the process, you experience the adequacy

of reality.

All the loving father was to Jesus, Jesus is to you! As a Christian you are plugged into a Source of spiritual supply which never runs dry. Your dependence is not upon “*dead works*” (9:14), but upon the free flowing power of the living Christ who dwells in you. Jesus is what’s happening. In heaven, yes. But also in your heart, right here on earth. “*You are a temple of God, and . . . the Spirit of God dwells in you*” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Have you been slow to grasp this precious truth? Have you been quick to rush back to legalism and reject your liberty in Christ? Have you been an easy prey for Satan’s foil whereby he attempts to get you feverishly locked up in the futility of activity, trying to make yourself more acceptable to God? If so, write this down in living letters of fire upon your memory: Christ’s death completely satisfies God as far as your perfection is concerned. The blood of Jesus Christ is adequate. There is no adding to it. No mixing with it. No going beyond it. It is complete. Satisfactory. Final. Thus, you can reject the futility of activity as a means of grace and rest in the adequacy of reality.

### **The Efficacy Of Finality**

The last thread in our author’s argument is the efficacy of finality. We see it in chapter 9, verses 11 through 28, describing the ministry of the high priest as he applies the blood of the sacrifice in the tabernacle rituals. Our author shows that when Jesus appeared as our high priest, He applied His own blood, once for all, in the holy place of the greater and more perfect tabernacle, one not made with hands, and thereby obtained our eternal redemption.

Among other things, efficacy involves power to perform. That old hymn, “There Is Power in the Blood,” comes to mind. “Would you be free from the burden of sin? There’s power in the blood. Would you o’er evil a victory win? There’s wonderful power in the blood.”

Many recoil at this coupling of blood with the Christian faith. Lucille, my wife, tells of a college

dorm mate who, when the blood of Christ was mentioned, said, “Ohhhhh, that sounds messy.” Others speak caustically of Christianity as a “slaughterhouse religion.” Their very words reveal their utter insensitivity to, and abysmal ignorance of, the scarlet thread which runs through scripture.

Just why blood is indispensable to the forgiveness of sin is a secret locked in the mind of God. But, surely, the repeated sacrifice of substitutionary animals, leading finally to the shed blood of Jesus, clearly fixes the fact that forgiveness is a costly thing. It’s no “tsk, tsk” matter. It involves brokenness.

Blood is a mysterious fluid intimately associated with life. We moderns who know so much about chemistry can easily lose the awe once felt by those who believed “*life is in the blood*” (Leviticus 17:11). For them to give God blood was to give God life, the highest and best of all gifts. When we turn that truth around and remember, “*God was in Christ [on that cross] reconciling [us] to Himself*” (2 Corinthians 5:19), we begin to see that in the blood of Jesus, God was offering us the best of His gifts. And, we begin to understand the true meaning of love.

One of our college students stopped by just now with what he termed a mind-blower. “I’ve been thinking about the meaning of love,” he said. “I’ve come to realize love says ‘I die for you.’ Not, ‘I will die for you.’ Nor ‘I would, if necessary, die for you.’ But ‘I do die for you.’ In other words,” he went on, “love says to the loved one, ‘From my perspective, you’re more important than I am. I put your joy, fulfillment and self-realization ahead of my own’”.

Well, as my young friend said, that is a mind-blower. For the Bible declares: “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). Love says, “I die for you.” And God, who is love, did just that! When God in Christ was nailed to a cross, in effect, He was saying, “Man, from My perspective you’re more important than I am. I lay down My life for you. I put your joy, fulfillment and self-realization ahead of My own. I die for you.” When that wonderful truth penetrates, we concur with Isaac Watts: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

We begin to understand and to say, “Oh, no, God, that’s all wrong! *You’re* more important than I am, I die for *You*.” Thus, we stop sinning. That is, we stop trying to be our own God. We put Him first. Willingly. Joyfully. Increasingly. We say, “God, I die for You.” And, in the process of losing our life, we find it, just as Jesus promised (Matthew 10:39). God’s loving desire for us is accomplished. We are reborn. Made whole. Liberated from the ego which would rule us. And our joy is complete, for both the Redeemer and the redeemed.

Christ’s sacrifice was retroactive. He settled accounts for all who acted in faith under the terms of the old contract. The new covenant is greater than the old. The greater includes the lesser. Therefore, those Jews who were “*promised (an) eternal inheritance*” (9:15), received it through Christ. Their faithfulness to the light they had, met the qualification of salvation “*by grace ... through faith*” (Ephesians 2:8).

To further fix the indispensability of Christ’s blood in our heart, our author uses the illustration of a will (or covenant). “*For where a covenant [will] is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives*” (9:16,17).

His logic is clear. The benefits of a will only come to the beneficiaries after the death of the benefactor. The last will and testament of our Lord Jesus Christ, the new covenant, included many riches. For us to inherit these, it was necessary for Jesus to die. The shedding of Christ’s blood put the will into effect. But sometimes a will can be broken. The desires of the deceased are violated. So the writer of Hebrews announces some incredible news: Jesus is what’s happening! He not only died to activate His will, He made Himself executor of that new covenant. Because of His resurrection, He now lives to intercede for us. To guarantee that our adversary, the devil, will never succeed in breaking the terms of Christ’s will.

That’s what it means to have Jesus as our intercessor. He isn’t trying to convince God to be kind

and loving, as if God were otherwise. Nor is he attempting to get God to forgive us, as if God were unwilling to do so. Everything the Son does, He does on behalf of and in concert with the Father. As our intercessor, Jesus is bringing to bear upon our situation all the resources of heaven so Satan will never succeed in breaking the conditions of His will.

We often speak of the finished work of Christ, and we thank God for the fact that Jesus died “*once for all*” (9:26,28), and later “*sat down at the right hand of God*” (10:12) to dramatize the efficacy and finality of His all-sufficient sacrifice. In the Old Testament tabernacle, there were no chairs. Instead, day after day, year after year, century after century, the priests bustled about the tabernacle, coming and going, in the never-ending business of making sacrifices for sin. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin, He “*sat down*” (10:12). His job was over. So, we thank God for the finished work of Christ. It gives us a great sense of security and serenity.

But we should also be grateful for the unfinished work of Christ! His ministry of intercession! “*For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (9:24).

His sacrifice on earth was once for all. His intercessory ministry in heaven is perpetual. Through the first, we are put into relationship with God. Through the second, we are kept in fellowship with God. Our relationship is final and complete. Our fellowship must be renewed and refreshed day by day.

Someone has said, “Sin twines through my thoughts and slips into my prayers.” With each intrusion of sin, Satan, our adversary, tries to create a cleavage in our fellowship with God. But Christ, our high priest, steps in to intercede for us. To remind us His sacrifice covers all our sin, past, present and future, so there need never be even a moment’s break in our fellowship with the heavenly Father. This special intercessory ministry of Christ will never end as long as a solitary sinner-saint is in the place of testing here on earth. As long as one of us is under siege by Satan,

the intercessory ministry of Jesus will be working on our behalf to keep us creative and free.

Thank God for the unfinished work of Christ. Jesus is what’s happening! Now. Today. In heaven and in your heart. He is active at this very moment on your behalf, administering the conditions of a will He died to activate. A will in which you inherit forgiveness of sin. A cleansed conscience. Victory in time. Hope in eternity. The blessed assurance of immediate access to God any moment of the night or day.

While this is really too wonderful for words, the best is yet to be. “*Christ. . .shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to those who eagerly await Him*”(9:28). The Hebrew day of Atonement is in our author’s mind. He is thinking of the high priest who would take off his beautiful garments of glory and, clothed in a robe of white linen, go into the Holy of Holies to perform his tasks.

While the high priest was in the Holy of Holies, there was great anxiety among the people outside. It was a time of tense waiting. He had gone into the very presence of God on their behalf. To offer God their prayers of confession and repentance. Would these be acceptable? The reappearance of the high priest, now dressed in his royal robes, was an especially welcome sight. It meant God had approved of their sacrifice. God had forgiven their sins.

With all of this in mind, the writer of Hebrews thinks of Jesus, the Christian’s high priest, Who took off His garments of heavenly glory and, clothed in the white linen of spotless manhood, set out to make atonement for sin. This completed, He entered the heavenly sanctuary where He now intercedes for us. We need not worry or wonder if God will accept His sacrifice. Or hear His prayers of intercession. The resurrection is proof of that. It is God’s seal of acceptance on all Jesus was and did. His sacrifice was enough.

But one day He shall return in robes of regal glory. Not to deal with sin. He has already done

that. But, to bring final and total fulfillment to those “*who are (eagerly, constantly and patiently) waiting and expecting him*” (9:28, Amplified Bible). Little wonder Philip Bliss wrote in the hymn Hallelujah, What a Savior. “Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

### Notes

1. A. W. Tozer, “The Editorial Voice,” The Alliance Witness, 1962