

WHAT DOES CHRIST SAY ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

Hebrews 10:5-7

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Tis the season for a Christmas message, and there are numerous ways to approach the story of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. One could look at the story from the perspective of Mary and Joseph, or of the Angelic messengers, or the startled shepherds. You could come at it from Elizabeth and Zacharias experience and what they would have thought, or the traveling "wise men" and their tense experience with Herod. If you push the envelope far enough, you may even hear a sermon or two on the birth of Christ from the perspective of the animals. Some of these are more helpful than others, but I thought this morning we could look at what Christ himself had to say about the day of his birth. As we look into what is revealed to us by the author of Hebrews, we will see that Jesus had a very specific idea in mind when it came to his incarnation.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

A brief look at the context of Hebrews is important before any serious study of our passage today can take place. Hebrews was written to encourage believers, particularly among the Jewish community, who were learning to live within the new covenant family of God. It is an exhortation to continue to live obedient lives with severe warnings against those who would fall back into Judaism and its rejection of Jesus. With this being the case, the book of Hebrews relies heavily upon a proper understanding of the Old Testament scriptures, revealing how the Messiah Jesus Christ, functioned within and fulfilled much of the Old Testament themes and structures. In fact, the very first verses take our minds back to the Old Testament, and even all the way back to creation. The book of Hebrews is saturated with the Old Testament. Every chapter is littered with quotes, pictures and themes that find their origin in the Old Testament. The author finds great truth in both the old and new covenant relationship of God with His people, and he establishes Jesus as the central point of both.

In our study today, we will look into one particular aspect of the Old Testament, namely the sacrificial system, more narrowly focusing on the day of atonement, or "Yom Kippur" and how Jesus is the full and complete picture of what the day of atonement and all its rituals were only a shadow of. Let's take a look at what exactly Christ says about Christmas.

THE INSUFFICIENCY OF ANIMALS (HEBREWS 10:5-6)

The author of Hebrews looks into the incarnation of Jesus, the moment "when Christ came into the world", and puts the words of Psalm 40 into Jesus' mouth. He turns the focus of the bodily birth of Jesus Christ toward the Old Testament sacrificial system and the "insufficiency of animals". This is a large theme through the entire book of Hebrews, and we only need to look back a few verses, to get an idea of why. Simply put, (10:1-4) the animals sacrificed year after year were never sufficient to "make perfect" those who drew near in worship. There was always a sense of their sin remaining and another sacrifice needed. In order to be "made perfect" there would need to be a complete removal of the penalty and guilt of sin, resulting in no more sacrifices required and the resulting clear conscience. The sacrifices were only a "shadow of the good things to come".

Every year at Yom Kippur, the high priest would make the sacrifice of a bull and a goat to cover the sins of all the Jews for the year. It was a sabbath day meant for fasting and sincere confession of one's sins. It was a reminder of how sinful one had been and the yearly need for the sacrifice. As the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place it was a reminder that God was separated from the people due to their sins. God was perfect and holy and these sinful people, even in their worship, were reminded of their sinfulness and unworthiness. The blood of bulls and goats simply could not remove their sins. It was a God given and gracious means by which followers of God could have their sins covered over, but it simply

was not sufficient to remove the stain of sin and bridge the gap between God and man. That would need something else, or more accurately, someone else.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS CHRIST (HEBREWS 10:5, 10)

The only one who could fulfill what the law was a shadow of, was Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus knew this and was willing to be the sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament pictures and prophecies was not a new thought once Jesus came on the scene. It wasn't that the author of Hebrews was looking back through Jesus into the Old Testament to find meaning, but rather that the entire Old Testament was looking forward to Jesus. Numerous prophecies, psalms, stories and images are "shadows" of who Jesus was and what he would do.

God prepared a body for Jesus Christ, so that he would be able to be a sufficient sacrifice. Unlike bulls and goats, Jesus' bodily sacrifice is able to completely cleanse a person from their sin. This is because the body and blood of an animal would never be sufficient to pay for the sins of a man. The sacrifice must match the sinner. In giving his body and blood up for us, "He does away with the first in order to establish the second" (10:9). Jesus Christ, the "Sinless God Man" came to earth in bodily form to do for God's people what nothing else was ever able to do. And he did it because it was God's will revealed to him through God's word.

GOD'S WILL REVEALED THROUGH HIS WORD (10:7, 9-10)

Jesus Christ came to earth to be the fulfillment of the sacrificial system by offering himself up on man's behalf, that those who would have faith in him would be reunited with God. This was God's will for Jesus. Jesus understood that his body was a gift given him by God, which God had prepared for him, in order that God would be able to accomplish His will. God's will was that the body of Jesus Christ would be offered up, once for all, as a sacrifice for sins. That those who would believe would be "sanctified" or "set apart for service" to God. Now that the blood of Jesus Christ has been shed, we who believe can be completely cleansed and can now set to the task of serving God with clear consciences.

Thanks be to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who followed the Father's gracious will toward us and did what no sacrifice or offering was ever able to do!

Join Us This Tuesday For Our Christmas Eve Celebrations

3:00 & 4:30 pm

There will be a time of refreshment in between services at 4:00 pm

There will be no childcare as children will be welcomed into the service