

483 Saved to the Uttermost

After the Flood, we read - “And Noah built an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Genesis 8.20, KJV). In this way Noah was showing that he understood three old, central truths: that as the offspring of fallen Adam and Eve we are all sinners; that the consequence of our sin is spiritual and physical death, a state of separation from Almighty God our Creator; and that God’s forgiveness is only possible when innocent blood is shed on the sinner’s behalf, in place of the sinner’s own blood being shed because of sin (eg., Leviticus 17.11). Hence Noah “offered burnt offerings” to the Lord, asking for the Lord’s forgiveness and consecrating himself afresh to Him in all that lay ahead.

But sin soon spread once more. We read of Noah’s drunkenness and Ham’s sin regarding his father (Genesis 9.20-27), and then of the extending “family tree” in which are mentioned Cush, Nimrod, Asshur, Babel and Nineveh (10.6-11) – people and places where sin flourished. Their plan to build “a city and a tower, whose top [may reach] to heaven”, ended with the Lord confounding their language and scattering them abroad (11.4-9). The stage was now set ...

In Genesis Chapter 12 we come to God’s crucial call of Abram, with His firm promises of blessing, of seed, of the land, of covenant, and of circumcision (egs., 12.2-3,7; 13.15-18; 15.1-18; 17.1-14). We see in these passages how Abram, as with Noah earlier on, also built “altars to the Lord”. Despite all of God’s gracious promises, Abram never took Him for granted, but offered animal sacrifices as an acknowledgement of his own need of God’s forgiveness. In time, and as promised, via Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the “children of Israel” came into existence, who were to serve as God’s covenant people, and as a witness in the world as to God’s nature and God’s requirements.

Central to those requirements was the need for the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins (as mentioned above, Leviticus 17.11, quoted in Hebrews 9.22), and hence the Lord God gave meticulous instructions to Moses as to the Law, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the offerings and the feasts. We must note that in setting out all these details the Lord was not being nit-picky or officious; all were necessary to allow Him in His utter holiness to have dealings with sinners who were under sentence of death.

Then we come to the “But”! All those animal sacrifices in themselves did not and could not ever win God’s forgiveness of His people. They could only ever serve as “types” of God’s still-future forgiveness, each such sacrifice pointing forward to the ultimate, long-promised “Antitype”, the true “Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world”, who was duly identified by John the Baptist in the fulness of time (John 1.29).

Herein lies the main theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews – that Jesus Christ, as the ultimate High Priest and the genuine Lamb of God, has achieved what the old Law could never achieve. Jesus is Man, not animal, and He is sinless Man, the first and only such sinless Man to walk the earth since Adam before the Fall. Thus Jesus’ own dreadful death has infinite reach, allowing anyone to ask for forgiveness from God the Father, on the basis of Jesus’ blood having been shed on that sinner’s behalf (eg., Romans Chapter 5). With that gracious forgiveness come further blessings – including eternal life, peace with the Lord, hope and assurance, understanding and purpose (egs., John 3.36 / Romans 5.1 / Hebrews 6.18b-20 / Ephesians 5.14-21).

So, just as the Father planned, Jesus is now “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him”, for he “needeth not daily, as those high priests (before), to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself” (from Hebrews 7.25, 27). The key word is “once”! The rituals of the Old Covenant of Law have been superseded by Jesus’ one-off death under the New Covenant of Grace. Truly, “Be it known unto you therefore ... that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (from Acts 13.38-39).

As the world lurches from crisis to crisis, we have rehearsed again in this Reflection the scriptural journey culminating in the full Christian Gospel. At the Gospel’s heart lies Jesus’ simple obedience to His Father’s bidding, to undergo suffering, death and resurrection, “to take away our sins” (Philippians 2.5-11 / I John 3.5). Truly - “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ!” (Ephesians 1.3).

And what is more: Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

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