

TEXT - Hebrews 7:27

The faithful Jews knew about sacrifice. There was clearly no payment for sin without sacrifice, the shedding of the animal's blood. In the O.T. animal sacrifices there was blood everywhere. Sometimes blood was sprinkled on the altar where the sacrifices were made. On the Day of Atonement blood was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant that housed the Ten Commandments which sinners repeatedly transgressed. Sometimes blood was sprinkled on the high priest, as in his ordination. Blood was even sprinkled on the people themselves. There was blood everywhere when God's people worshiped. Throughout the Old Testament the Israelites were constantly directed to sacrifice, the shedding of blood to take away sin. Yet those animal sacrifices were continuously offered with no end in sight. But then Jesus was sacrificed. This was different. Yes, there was blood as Jesus gave his life for the sins of the world. But Jesus' sacrifice was different. It did not need repeating. Our text reminds us that the sacrifice Jesus made was **ONCE FOR ALL TIME**.

In the Old Testament God instituted the holy priesthood through the Levites and designated that the family of Aaron, Moses' brother, be the high priests. The high priests from Aaron's descendants were called to pray for the people and to offer sacrifices with the other Levites assisting them. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us in our text that the Old Testament high priests offered their sacrifices day after day after day. The priest would offer sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering sometimes for his own sins and sometimes for the sins of the people. There were so many sacrifices that were offered throughout the day. Every single sin demanded a sacrifice. Premeditated sins and sins of ignorance, specific sins and sins in general, every sin required an animal sacrifice – sheep, goats, rams, bulls, even doves and pigeons for those who were poor. These sacrifices crossed generational lines too. Men and women, rich and poor, king and servant, Jew and converts to Judaism, no sinner was exempt from bringing a sacrifice to pay for sin.

But Jesus is not like those Old Testament priests. In the verse just before our text we are told, **“Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.”** Jesus was completely holy, pure and sinless. He didn't need to offer sacrifices for his own sins because he had none. But how could Jesus be a priest and offer a sacrifice? He wasn't descended from the priestly line of Aaron who came from the tribe of Levi. Jesus was a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah. In this book the writer to the Hebrews repeatedly tells us that our Great High Priest Jesus was more like the priest Melchizedek who spoke with Abraham. The writer quoting Psalm 110 says, **“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”** Like Melchizedek, Jesus suddenly appeared on the scene and just as suddenly vanished with no line of succession. What makes Jesus' priesthood far better than Aaron's and his descendants is that Jesus' priesthood is permanent. He is a priest forever. He is a priest forever because only his work saved sinners and only his sacrifice truly, once and for all, paid the price for sin.

Jesus made his sacrifice on the cross. He stretched out his arms and lengthened his legs so that the soldiers could nail his battered body to a wooden cross. As Jesus hung there from the cross he gasped for each last breath weakened by all his suffering. His blood was pouring out of his veins, running down his body and pooling at the foot of his cross. There can be no doubt that this was indeed a sacrifice of his own life that Jesus offered on the cross. But it was only one sacrifice that Jesus had to make – once and done. It does not need to be repeated ever again. That's why our altar is bare on this Good Friday. That's why you weren't required to bring sheep, goats, rams or bulls to our worship to offer as a sacrifice for your sins. That's why we don't have blood everywhere tonight as we worship the Lord. Those animal sacrifices came to an abrupt halt. The writer tells us why, **“He (Jesus) sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”** All those animal sacrifices offered again and again and again pointed ahead and reminded God's people of the one true sacrifice that would be made, once for all, the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross.

There is nothing to add to Jesus' sacrifice to make it more complete. Our celebration of the Lord's Supper is not offering up Jesus again in an unbloody manner as our work for God. In the Lord's Supper we receive the body and blood that Christ offered once on the cross for the assurance of our forgiveness. We are not sacrificing but receiving from Jesus our forgiveness. Nor do we offer our sacrifice of good deeds or holy living to somehow complete Jesus' sacrifice. We don't even offer our faith as part of the sacrifice we must do in order for Jesus to forgive us. Our faith is a gift from God the Holy Spirit that trusts Jesus' once and for all sacrifice on the cross. Jesus himself testified to his once and for all sacrifice when he shouted from the cross, **“It is finished.”** There is nothing that can or should be added.

Jesus' sacrifice was once for all time. It was the one true sacrifice for all the sins of all people of all time. It is Jesus' death on the cross and the forgiveness he won that embraces all time and has definite meaning for all eternity. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross reaches back beyond David and Moses and Abraham, to Adam and Eve and the very first sin of disobeying God's command by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross also stretches into the future beyond all the sins we will commit, to the last sinful thoughts, words, and deeds ever to be committed on this planet just before our Savior's himself returns to judge the living and the dead and destroy all things on the Last Day. Jesus' very first words from the cross announced what he was accomplishing for all. He said, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** Was he pleading forgiveness only for the soldiers who were crucifying him or the chief priests and elders of the people who handed him over to be crucified or the people who were shouting, "Crucify him, crucify him"? By his once and for all sacrifice Jesus was pleading to his heavenly Father to forgive our sins too and the sins of all people.

"Jesus sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." What comfort this message of Jesus' payment for sins brings to our sinful, guilt-burdened hearts. On that cross on Calvary, Jesus embraced our sin. He told his Father, "No, I was the one who misused your name. I was the one who skipped church because I was just being lazy. I was the one who yelled back at my parents. I was the one who got so angry. I was the one who was filled with lust in my heart. I was the one who greedily obsessed over material things. I was the one who spread the gossip. I was the one who lied right to someone's face." On the cross Jesus told his Father that he was the sinner and truly the only sinner. Jesus stepped in the path of the Father's hellish fury to be forsaken, hated and disgraced with all our sin. When our conscience nags us because of our own rebelliousness against God's commands, when our heart aches because of the rotten way we have treated even those we love including God himself, we remember that once for all covers it. No matter what sin, no matter how great, no matter how many times – Jesus' sacrifice is once for all. Peter writes, **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."**

Since Christ has done it all for our forgiveness and our salvation by making the once and for all payment for sins, some might think that this is cheap grace and makes for lazy Christians. Sin is going to make Christians lazy in their faith. But that is not the fault of Christ's one time sacrifice for sin. Christ's once and for all sacrifice had a profound affect on one of the criminals crucified with Jesus. Luke tells us, **"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him, 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'"**

Are we willing to make that same kind of confession in a world that hates Christians for being followers of Christ? Are we willing to confess our faith in Jesus when the world around us jokes around and even boasts of its infidelities, its cheating and lying, and all its sinful lifestyles and habits? "Don't you fear God," the criminal said. Don't we fear God? This is not an easy faith. There are plenty of excuses to be lazy or cowardly in our faith. Jesus made the once for all sacrifice and we know that through faith in him as our Savior he will remember us when he comes into his heavenly kingdom. There is nothing cheap about Christ's grace. It is a grace we proudly wear and are willing to defend, confess, and if necessary die for. Peter writes, **"If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you... If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."**

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was once for all time. It is the full and complete payment for all sin. On this Good Friday, as we picture Jesus hanging there on the cross suffering and dying for our sins, we cannot help but feel our hearts break knowing it was our sins that put him there. At the same time we cannot help but be filled with such peace and joy knowing that our sins are forgiven because the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. It's done. It's finished. There is no more sacrifice needed. Later in chapter 9 of Hebrews we read, **"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."** What a relief. Amen.