

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 8A, Hebrews 9:1-10:18: Christ our Atonement (Part 1)

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Welcome back, everyone, to another Deep Dive. Today we're going to be tackling something that I think is really, really fascinating and kind of mind-blowing, honestly, and that's the connection between Jesus' death and ascension and the Old Testament, specifically the Day of Atonement. Yeah.

Now, I think this stuff is super interesting, but it's also pretty complex, so I'm really glad to have an expert with me today to help us sort through it all. Happy to be here. We'll be looking at some excerpts from this source here, [deSilva Hebrews, Our Session, ero8arabic.pdf](#), which dives into the book of Hebrews and tries to get at how early Christians viewed these events and maybe even what they might mean for us today.

It's going to be a good one. So you're ready to dive in? Absolutely. Let's do it.

Okay, great. So maybe just to set the stage, can you give us a quick refresher on what exactly the Day of Atonement was all about? Okay. So the Day of Atonement was the most important day of the year in the Jewish calendar.

It was the one day a year when the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Oh, wow. The Holy of Holies.

That's like the inner sanctum, right? Where God's presence was believed to dwell. Exactly. It was considered the most sacred space in the entire tabernacle.

So you're saying only the high priest could go in there and only on this one specific day each year. That's right. It was a pretty big deal.

So what was the purpose of all this? What were they trying to achieve with these rituals? Well, the author of Hebrews actually has a lot to say about that. He suggests that all those elaborate details about the tabernacle weren't just about aesthetics. They were meant to highlight something much deeper: the vast separation between humanity and God because of sin.

You're saying it was a physical representation of that spiritual separation. Exactly. Imagine it like trying to get into an exclusive event with layers of security checkpoints and VIP areas.

Not everyone gets the same access. Okay. I'm starting to see the picture.

Right. And that's similar to what the author of Hebrews calls graded holiness. Graded holiness.

What's that? Well, it basically means that there were different levels of holiness or purity within the tabernacle. Even the priests who were set apart for service had limited access to God's presence. Oh, I see.

So even those who were considered holy weren't considered holy enough to be in God's presence all the time. Exactly. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies.

And even then, only once a year on that day of atonement. That's heavy stuff. So even though they were going through all these elaborate rituals, it sounds like there was still a sense of separation, a feeling of being kept at arm's length from God.

That's precisely the point the author of Hebrews is making. He's saying that this system, with all its rituals and sacrifices, couldn't truly cleanse people's consciences or grant them full access to God. It was like constantly applying a band-aid to a deep wound, never really getting to the root of the problem.

So even though they did all the right things, there was still this sense of incompleteness, something missing. According to the author of Hebrews, yes. And this is where Jesus enters the picture and changes everything.

This is where it gets really interesting. Now, from what I understand, Jesus' ascension is described as entering a heavenly tabernacle. That's right.

It's not something you hear every day. It's a pretty mind-blowing concept, and the author of Hebrews is using it to make a direct connection between Jesus' ascension and the Day of Atonement ritual. Okay.

So how does that work? Well, think about it this way. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Right.

Now, imagine Jesus, the ultimate high priest, bypassing all those earthly barriers and entering directly into God's presence on our behalf. Whoa. So it's like Jesus becomes the ultimate bridge between humanity and God, bridging that gap that the old system could never fully close.

Exactly. And the amazing thing is this access isn't just for a select few, like the high priest in the Old Testament. It's for everyone who believes in Jesus.

That's pretty incredible. But how does Jesus' sacrifice differ from the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant? Weren't they making sacrifices too? Yeah, they were, but there's a crucial difference. The author of Hebrews is very clear that those animal sacrifices were just symbolic and temporary.

They could never truly atone for sin. I see. Jesus, on the other hand, offers something far greater.

He offers his own blood, signifying a permanent cleansing, a new, unbreakable covenant with God. Wait, his own blood? Yes. It's a powerful image, isn't it? It is.

And why is that so significant? Well, think about it. Jesus' sacrifice wasn't just an outward ritual. It was a complete self-giving, a demonstration of love so profound that it completely shatters the limitations of the old sacrificial system.

So it's like the ultimate act of love and sacrifice, taking our place and offering himself as the ultimate atonement for our sin. Exactly. It's a game changer.

It completely redefines our relationship with God. This is really mind-blowing stuff. So what does this mean for those of us who believe in Jesus today? Does it mean we can just do whatever we want since our sins are already forgiven? That's a great question, and it's one that the author of Hebrews actually addresses head-on.

Okay, good. I was hoping you'd say that. He's very clear that while Jesus' sacrifice does offer us complete forgiveness, it doesn't give us a license to sin.

In fact, he argues that it should actually motivate us to live lives of holiness and obedience. So it's not about earning our salvation, but about responding to God's grace with gratitude and a desire to live in a way that honors him. Exactly.

It's about a transformed heart, a changed life. Okay, that makes sense. So how does all of this connect to the idea of the new covenant that we hear about in the Bible? Well, the author of Hebrews links Jesus' sacrifice directly to the prophecy in Jeremiah about a new covenant where God says, I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

Oh, wow. That's powerful. So you're saying that Jesus' sacrifice is the fulfillment of that promise? Absolutely.

It's the ultimate expression of God's love and mercy, a love that chooses to remember our sins no more. I'm starting to see how all these pieces fit together. There's one part of the source material that kind of threw me for a loop.

The author brings up those ancient cleansing rituals for corpses. Why bring up dead bodies when talking about Jesus and this new covenant? It just seems kind of out of place. I know it seems a bit strange at first, but it's actually a really clever argument that the author is making.

He's using those outward cleansing rituals to expose the limitations of mere external purity. Okay, I see. He's saying that true purity, the kind that Jesus offers, comes from within.

It's a heart change, a transformation of our innermost being. So it's not just about following rules and rituals. It's about a deep inner transformation, a cleansing of the heart.

Exactly. And this idea was likely influenced by later Hellenistic thought, which put a lot of emphasis on the inner self. So you can see how the author of Hebrews is weaving together these different strands of thought to present a really compelling picture of what it means to be truly cleansed and made right with God.

Wow. I'm starting to see this in a whole new light now. But what about all the practical implications of all of this? What does all of this ancient history have to do with us today? How can these concepts from centuries ago actually impact our lives in the 21st century? That's a million-dollar question, isn't it? And it's one that I think we need to spend some time unpacking.

So let's take a break here and come back in our next segment to explore those implications. What do you say? Sounds good to me. I'm ready for a coffee refill anyway.

You know, where were we? Yeah. So we were talking about how those Old Testament rituals, even with their good intentions, ultimately couldn't bridge the gap between humanity and God. Right.

It's like trying to put out a forest fire with a garden hose. It's just not enough. Exactly.

And in Hebrews chapter 10, the author actually quotes Psalm 40 to drive this point home. Oh, really? Yeah. It says, sacrifices and offerings you did not desire, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.

Wow. So even back then, there was a sense that something more was needed. Something beyond those external rituals.

I think so. It's like the psalmist was sensing a deeper longing, a yearning for a solution that those repeated sacrifices just couldn't provide. And the author of Hebrews is saying that Jesus is that solution.

Precisely. He's using this Old Testament longing to set the stage for the radical new thing that Jesus brings to the table. OK.

I'm starting to see the connection. But honestly, all this talk about animal sacrifices feels a bit foreign to me. You know, it's not exactly something we can easily relate to in our modern world.

I hear you. It can definitely feel a bit distant. But what if we shift our perspective a bit? Instead of getting bogged down in the literal details of animal sacrifice, let's think about it in terms of cost and commitment.

OK. I like where you're going with this. Back then, those sacrifices represented a real cost for the people offering them.

They were giving up something precious, something valuable, as a way to demonstrate their devotion to God. So it was about more than just going through the motions. It was about a genuine sacrifice, a tangible expression of their commitment.

Exactly. And now think about the ultimate cost and commitment involved in Jesus offering himself as the sacrifice. Oh, yeah.

That changes everything. It does, doesn't it? It's a level of self-giving that goes far beyond anything we can even imagine a love so radical that it shatters all our human attempts to understand it. It's like he's saying, I love you this much that I'm willing to give up everything for you.

Precisely. And the author of Hebrews uses the stark contrast to highlight the revolutionary nature of what Jesus has done. It's a declaration of freedom, a liberation from the endless cycle of sacrifices and rituals.

So it's not just about what Jesus did for us in the past. It's about how that act continues to impact our lives today. Absolutely.

Because of Jesus, we are free to approach God directly with confidence and boldness, no longer bound by those old systems. That's incredibly liberating. Yeah.

So we don't have to constantly be trying to earn God's favor or prove ourselves worthy. We can just come to him as we are, knowing that we're already accepted and loved. You got it.

But here's the thing. The author of Hebrews also emphasizes that it's not enough to simply believe in Jesus's sacrifice. We must also persevere in our faith.

So there's an element of ongoing commitment to actively walking this path of faith. Exactly. It's like receiving a precious gift and then casually tossing it aside.

The author of Hebrews urges his readers and us to cling tightly to our faith, to encourage one another, and to live lives that reflect the transformative power of the gospel. So it's not just a one-time event. It's an ongoing journey of transformation, a continuous process of becoming more like Jesus.

You nailed it. And this is where the author of Hebrews gets really practical. He talks about the importance of gathering with other believers, supporting each other through trials, living lives marked by love and good works.

It sounds a lot like what we would call discipleship today, the idea of intentionally walking alongside others as we grow in our faith. Exactly. It's about more than just showing up for a weekly service.

It's about weaving faith into the fabric of our lives, investing in relationships, serving others, and letting our actions speak louder than words. And the author of Hebrews seems to be saying that this kind of life, though not always easy, is ultimately worth the effort. Absolutely.

Because it's a life lived in the unshakable confidence that we have been reconciled to God through Jesus and that we have a future hope that nothing can take away. Okay. This is starting to make a lot more sense.

But there's one thing I keep coming back to. Earlier, you mentioned how the author of Hebrews draws a parallel between the high priest entering the Holy of Holies and Jesus returning to bring those who are faithful into God's eternal presence. Right.

Can we delve into that a bit deeper? What does that even mean? Of course. This is where the author brilliantly connects his argument about Jesus's sacrifice and ascension to the ultimate hope of all believers. Remember, the high priest entering the Holy of Holies was the culmination of the Day of Atonement ritual, the moment of ultimate access to God's presence.

Well, the author is suggesting that just as the high priest entered that sacred space once a year, Jesus will one day return to usher his people into God's eternal presence, not for a

fleeting moment, but for all eternity. So it's not just about our current access to God through Jesus, but also about our ultimate destiny, our eternal home with him. Exactly.

And it's a powerful message of hope and encouragement. Even though we face challenges and uncertainties in this life, we can hold fast to the promise that a glorious future awaits us, secure in Christ. That really resonates with me.

It's like saying that our present struggles are temporary, but our future hope is eternal, a reality that should shape how we live today. You got it. And that realization should profoundly impact our choices, our relationships, our entire outlook on life.

If we genuinely believe we have a future secured in Christ, it should fuel our perseverance through trials, empower us to forgive those who have wronged us, and inspire us to live lives overflowing with love and generosity. This is all incredibly insightful. Thank you.

But there's one part of the text that I'm still grappling with. The author of Hebrews states that Jesus appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. What exactly does he mean by that? Does that mean that sin no longer exists? That's a great question.

And it leads us to one of the most mind-blowing concepts in the book of Hebrews. The idea that Jesus's sacrifice wasn't just a historical event, but a cosmic one. Cosmic.

That sounds pretty intense. What do you mean by that? The author is saying that Jesus's death and resurrection didn't just impact humanity. They actually shifted the very fabric of reality.

Imagine a drop of dye transforming an entire glass of water. That's the kind of impact the author is describing. He's arguing that Jesus's sacrifice shattered the power of sin and death on a universal scale.

So it's not just about individual forgiveness. It's about a universal victory over the forces of evil, a cosmic shift in the balance of power. Exactly.

And the author of Hebrews is pushing us to expand our understanding, to see beyond our limited human perspective and grasp the truly cosmic significance of what Jesus accomplished. I'm starting to see the bigger picture here. But how does this connect to the idea of Jesus returning to bring his people into God's eternal presence? Are those two things related? That's a brilliant connection to make.

The link lies in the fact that Jesus's triumph over sin and death opened up a whole new reality for humanity: the possibility of eternal life with God. So it's not just about escaping hell or going to heaven. It's about participating in a new existence, a reality inaugurated by Jesus's sacrifice, a reality we can experience right now through faith.

Exactly. It's like stepping through a doorway into a new dimension, a reality where sin and death no longer hold sway, where we can experience the fullness of life in God's presence both now and in the future. This is all incredibly profound, and it's making me rethink everything I thought I knew about the Christian faith.

It's powerful stuff, isn't it? It is. But there's one last piece of the puzzle I'm still trying to understand. The author talks about the danger of falling away and the impossibility of restoring those who have fallen away to repentance.

Yeah, that's a tough one. That sounds pretty intense. What's he getting at? Is he saying that once you're saved, you can never lose your salvation? That's a passage that has generated a lot of debate over the centuries, but I think understanding it hinges on grasping the context of the author's overall message.

And what is that context? Well, remember how we talked about the unmatched value of Jesus's sacrifice and the crucial need for perseverance? Yes. The idea that authentic faith is an active journey, not a passive belief. Precisely.

In this passage, I believe the author is issuing a stark warning to those tempted to abandon their faith. He's saying that rejecting the incredible gift of salvation offered through Jesus carries severe consequences. There's no reset button, no taking back that decision.

So it's not about God's unwillingness to forgive, but rather about the consequences of intentionally turning away from his grace, closing ourselves off to his love. Exactly. And I think the author is particularly concerned about those who have tasted the transformative power of the gospel, but are now toying with the idea of returning to their old ways.

It's like being offered a cure for a deadly disease and then choosing to refuse it. So it's a warning against apostasy, against turning our backs on the truth we've come to know and embrace. Precisely.

And it serves as a powerful reminder that the Christian life isn't a one-time decision, but a lifelong commitment to following Jesus, a continuous journey of transformation and growth. This is heavy stuff. And honestly, it's a lot to digest.

But I appreciate the way you've broken it down and made it accessible. I understand. But it's important to remember that the author of Hebrews is writing out of deep love and concern for his readers.

His goal isn't to condemn, but to awaken us to the incredible privilege and responsibility that comes with being a follower of Jesus. So it's ultimately a call to action, an invitation to fully embrace the reality of the new covenant and live lives that reflect the transformative power of the gospel lives that shine with the hope of our eternal destiny. You put it beautifully.

And it's a challenge worth embracing, wouldn't you say? Absolutely. But before we wrap up, I think it's important to address the practical side of all this. We've talked a lot about these profound theological concepts, but what does living out this reality actually look like on a day-to-day basis? How do we take these ancient truths and apply them to our modern lives? That's a great question, and I think it's the perfect segue into our final segment.

So we've been unpacking some pretty heavy theological concepts. How are you holding up over there? My brain is definitely full. But it's a good full cot.

It's like I've been given a whole new framework for understanding my faith. It's really exciting. I'm glad to hear that.

It's always amazing to me how these ancient texts can still speak so powerfully to us today. Absolutely. And speaking of speaking powerfully, there's one passage from the source material that really jumped out at me.

It says, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings. Ah, yes. Hebrews 10.22. It's a classic.

Yeah. And it really does encapsulate so much of what we've been talking about. Yeah.

I feel like it ties everything together. Can you break it down for us? Sure. First, notice the emphasis on drawing near to God.

It echoes that theme of access we've been exploring throughout our deep dive. Because of Jesus's sacrifice, we no longer have to stand at a distance. We can boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence.

Right. The veil has been torn in two. The barriers have been removed.

And we can come to God just as we are. Exactly. And the author of Hebrews isn't just stating a theological fact.

He's issuing an invitation. He's urging us to actively cultivate that intimacy with God to make it a priority in our lives. So it's not just about knowing in our heads that we can approach God.

It's about actually doing it, making that connection a lived reality. You got it. And then there's that beautiful phrase, with a sincere heart.

It highlights the importance of authenticity in our relationship with God. No pretending. No masks.

Just raw, genuine connection. Precisely. God isn't looking for a performance.

He desires a relationship marked by honesty and vulnerability. He wants us to come to him with all our doubts, our fears, our messy imperfections, the whole shebang. That's incredibly freeing, knowing that we don't have to have it all together to come to God.

He welcomes us just as we are. Absolutely. And then finally, there's that powerful phrase, with the full assurance that faith brings.

This is where it all comes together. Our confidence in approaching God doesn't come from our own goodness or our ability to follow all the rules. It comes from our faith in Jesus Christ and what he's done for us.

Right. It's all about grace. It's a gift.

Yeah. Not something we can earn or achieve on our own. Exactly.

And because of that grace, we can come to God with boldness, knowing that we are fully accepted and loved, not because of who we are, but because of who he is. Wow. When you put it like that, it really does change everything.

So if we had to sum up the author of Hebrews' message in a single sentence, what would it be? That's a tough one, but I think I'd say something like this. Because of Jesus, we can approach God with confidence, live lives marked by perseverance and love, and cling to the unshakable hope of a future secured in him. Yeah, that's good.

It's like a roadmap for the Christian life, a guide for how to navigate this crazy journey of faith. I like that. A roadmap for the journey of faith.

And the best part is we don't have to travel alone. We have each other, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide us every step of the way. This whole conversation has been incredibly challenging and encouraging.

I know I'll be chewing on these ideas for a long time to come. That's what it's all about, right? Wrestling with these big questions, digging deeper into God's word, and allowing it to transform us from the inside out. Well said.

And to all our listeners out there, thanks for joining us on this deep dive. We hope you found it as insightful and thought-provoking as we have. It's been a pleasure exploring these ideas with you all.

Until next time, keep seeking, keep questioning, and keep diving deep. And keep the faith. We'll see you on the next deep dive.