

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 8B, Hebrews 9:1-10:18: Christ our Atonement (Part 2)

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All right. So welcome to this deep dive. And today we're going to be cracking open some really fascinating ideas about the book of Hebrews.

We'll be using this insightful lecture by Dr. David A. deSilva kind of as our guide. So get ready for some pretty surprising connections. Like how does Plato's cave allegory relate to ancient Jewish rituals? And did those prophets, you know, the ones we hear so much about, actually have beef with animal sacrifices? Yeah, it's definitely not your average Sunday school lesson.

Right. So deSilva starts off with this really thought-provoking comparison, right? He says the law, like how it's presented in the Old Testament, is a shadow of something much greater. And it kind of reminds me of Plato's cave, you know, where those shadows are just these faint representations of the real deal.

But here's where it gets interesting. How does deSilva see this idea as different from what Plato was talking about? Well, in Hebrews, the real thing, like the thing casting the shadow, it isn't some abstract ideal or anything. It's actually rooted in history, in the person of Jesus.

And deSilva really emphasizes this ineffectiveness of the repeated sacrifices in the Old Testament to truly cleanse someone's conscience. Doesn't that make you wonder, like, why would those rituals need to be performed over and over if they actually worked the first time around? Yeah, I never thought of it that way. It's like those sacrifices were more of a temporary fix than a permanent solution.

And get this, deSilva goes on to say that the Day of Atonement rituals, the ones that were supposed to atone for sin, might have actually served as a reminder of sin rather than removing it. Isn't that kind of head scratcher? It might seem a little counterintuitive to us now, but deSilva points to this pretty strange ritual. It's described in Numbers 5.15. And it involved a priest making a woman suspected of adultery drink this bitter water.

And it's supposed to kind of, like, bring your sins to remembrance. Oh, yeah. I vaguely remember that one.

Not exactly the most uplifting ceremony. But are you saying this interpretation of atonement was common back then, or was the author of Hebrews kind of going rogue? It's actually more common than you might think. Other Jewish thinkers, like Philo of Alexandria, they had similar interpretations.

They saw these rituals as highlighting the reality of human sinfulness and the need for something more. It's like they were saying, hey, these sacrifices are just a Band-Aid. They're pointing to a much deeper problem that needs a more permanent solution.

I'm starting to see where this is going. But before we get ahead of ourselves, I have to ask about the prophets. DeSilva kind of brings them into the conversation.

And it made me wonder, were they really against sacrifices altogether? I mean, those sacrifices are pretty central to the Old Testament. That's a great question. And it's easy to misinterpret what the prophets were saying.

They weren't necessarily anti-sacrifice, like in principle. What they were concerned about was the motivation behind those sacrifices. Were people just going through the motions, or were their hearts truly changed? The prophets were calling for genuine repentance and a transformed life, not just empty rituals.

So it's like they were saying, sure, go ahead and offer the sacrifice, but don't think that gives you a free pass to live however you want. Your actions have to line up with your supposed devotion. Exactly.

There's this incredibly powerful passage in Isaiah, chapter 1, verses 11 to 13, where God basically says, I'm sick of your sacrifices. I want justice. I want mercy.

I want you to walk humbly with me. Outward actions without inner transformation are meaningless. Remember, the law is just a shadow pointing to something more substantial.

And that brings us to Psalm 40. DeSilva uses it to show how God desired something more than just animal sacrifices. Right.

And this is where it gets really interesting, because there's this fascinating difference between the Hebrew text of that Psalm and the Greek Septuagint version, the one the author of Hebrews was using. We're talking about the whole ears you have dug for me versus a body you have prepared for me. Well, you got it.

And it might seem like a minor detail, but this translation difference has huge implications for how the author of Hebrews understands Jesus' sacrifice. Hold on, hold on. This is where we'll have to pick things up in the next part.

We've got Plato, prophets, and now some intriguing translation choices. This deep dive is definitely living up to its name. So we left off on kind of a cliffhanger last time we were talking about Psalm 40 and how that difference between the Hebrew and the Greek versions impacts how we understand Jesus' sacrifice.

Can you unpack that a bit more for us? Absolutely. So in the Hebrew text, that phrase ears you have dug for me, "really emphasizes obedience to the law. It's about truly listening and following God's commands.

That makes sense, right? It's not just about going through the motions of the sacrifices. It's about a deeper level of devotion. Right.

But the Greek Septuagint translates that phrase as a body you have prepared for me. And for the author of Hebrews, this points directly to Jesus, to the incarnation, to God becoming human in order to offer that ultimate sacrifice. So the author's using this specific translation to connect Psalm 40 directly to Jesus, setting him up as the fulfillment of what the Psalm foreshadowed.

It's like he's saying, look, this isn't just some random verse. It's a prophecy about Jesus. Exactly.

And this leads the author of Hebrews to a pretty radical conclusion. Those animal sacrifices we talked about earlier, they become basically meaningless in light of Jesus' sacrifice. They're completely obsolete, just like that shadow in Plato's cave.

Okay. So we've got the law as a shadow, sacrifices that don't really cut it. And now Jesus comes in as the ultimate sacrifice.

But I have to ask, is this just the author's interpretation? How does he back this up, like using scripture? Oh, he's definitely grounding this idea in scripture. He goes on to quote Psalm 110.1, which describes Jesus as sitting at God's right hand. And according to deSilva, this detail, it speaks volumes about the nature of Jesus' priesthood.

Wait, what does sitting down have to do with priesthood? I always picture priests standing, you know, performing rituals and stuff. That's the common image. And for good reason.

In the Old Testament, standing was the posture of service, of carrying out those priestly duties. But when Psalm 110.1 describes Jesus as sitting at God's right hand, it implies that his work is finished. He doesn't need to keep offering sacrifices because he's already done what needed to be done.

Ah, I see. It's like he's clocked out after completing the ultimate task. He's not on active duty anymore, so to speak.

Exactly. It's this powerful contrast to the Levitical priests who had to constantly repeat their sacrifices. Jesus' sacrifice, on the other hand, is a one-time event.

That perfects forever those who approach God through him. Okay, I'm starting to see the big picture here. The old system of sacrifices was temporary and imperfect.

But Jesus brings in this new and perfect way of relating to God. It's like a major upgrade. And this new relationship, it's directly tied to that new covenant promised by the prophet Jeremiah.

DeSilva reminds us that Jeremiah 31 talks about forgiveness of sins and a law written on the heart, not external rules and rituals. It's about an inward transformation. So it's not just about having our past sins forgiven.

It's about being empowered to live a new kind of life, a life that is actually pleasing to God. Yes. And deSilva warns against focusing on one aspect of this new covenant while neglecting the other.

Forgiveness is crucial, but it's meant to lead to real change. It's not a free pass to just keep on sinning. It's not about getting a get-out-of-jail-free card.

It's about being set free from the power of sin so we can actually live differently. Which leads us to a really important question. If we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices, what

does it mean for us to offer ourselves to God in our everyday lives? What does that kind of sacrifice look like? That's a profound question.

And it's something we all need to wrestle with. How do we live out this new covenant, this new way of relating to God in the here and now? It's a journey, that's for sure. And I think one of the most impactful takeaways from deSilva's lecture is this.

It's not just about understanding these ancient rituals and theological concepts. It's about applying them to our lives today. And that's where this idea of graded access to God comes in, which deSilva brings up towards the end of his talk.

Ah, yes. Graded access to God. You mentioned that earlier.

And I have to admit, I'm a little fuzzy on what that means. Can you shed some light on it for us? So last time, we left off with this intriguing idea of graded access to God. And I'm curious to learn more about that.

What exactly does that mean? Well, it refers to this idea that in the old covenant, not everyone had equal access to God. There was like this hierarchy, this system of priests and rituals that determined who could get close to God and like how. So it's like there were different levels of like VIP access, like you might see at a concert or a fancy event.

Some people got the backstage passes, while others were kind of stuck in the nosebleed section. Yeah, that's a great analogy. Under that old system, some people, like the high priest, had closer access to God, while others were kind of further away.

But deSilva's point is that with Jesus, those barriers are completely broken down. There's no more hierarchy, no more need for priests to mediate our relationship with God. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can all approach God directly with confidence and boldness.

Wow, that's a pretty radical shift. It's like everyone gets an all-access pass now. But what are the implications of this? Does deSilva talk about how this new access to God changes things for us today? He does.

DeSilva challenges us to think about how we might be recreating those old hierarchies even today, even without realizing it. I'm really curious about that. Could you give us an example of what that might look like, like in modern churches? Sure.

Think about the distinction we often make between clergy and laity. Sometimes we kind of elevate clergy to a special status as if they have a closer connection to God than the rest of us. Yeah, I can see how that happens.

It's like we're putting the clergy back in that VIP section while everyone else is relegated to the back. But if what deSilva is saying is true, that's a complete misrepresentation of this new covenant. Exactly.

DeSilva is reminding us that because of Jesus, we are all priests. We all have equal access to God, and we are all called to minister to others. So it's not about relying on the clergy to do all the God stuff for us.

We all have a responsibility to participate, to live out our faith in concrete ways. We all have that backstage pass, and we can't just let it go to waste. That's a powerful image, and I think it captures the heart of deSilva's message.

It's a call to take ownership of our faith, to not sit back and passively wait for someone else to do it for us. We have this incredible privilege of direct access to God thanks to Jesus. This has been such an insightful deep dive.

We've gone from Plato's cave to ancient Jewish rituals to the heart of the new covenant. We've explored how the author of Hebrews uses Scripture to make his argument. We've been challenged to think about how these ancient ideas apply to our lives today.

It's amazing how these ancient texts can still speak to us so powerfully today. The book of Hebrews really pushes us to go beyond superficial understandings of faith and to really grapple with what it truly means to follow Jesus. And on that note, I think it's time to wrap up this deep dive.

But before we go, I want to leave you with one final thought. If we no longer need repeated sacrifices or a designated priest to connect with God, how does that change how we approach our everyday lives? How can we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, as the author of Hebrews encourages us to do? What does that look like for you, practically speaking, in the midst of your daily routines and responsibilities? It's a question worth pondering, and I encourage you to keep exploring it. I agree.

There's always more to discover and uncover within these ancient texts and within ourselves. So keep digging, keep asking those tough questions, and most importantly, keep seeking truth. Thanks for joining us on this incredible journey through the book of Hebrews.

We'll see you next time for another deep dive into the ideas that shape our faith in our lives.