

Guest Preacher - Mr Murdo A Murray (Elder Stornoway)

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Preacher: Mr. Murdo A Murray

[0 : 00] We can turn back to that chapter that we read, chapter 9 in the book of Hebrews.

! And we can read again at verse 20, saying, this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you. And in the same way, He sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

Now, the book of Hebrews, it used to be in old commentaries that it was deemed to be the Apostle Paul that wrote it, but more lately, it's an unknown author is the way they put it. So, but the author of Hebrews looks to the superiority of Christ and makes just arguments for that as it goes through. And it starts off with the argument of the superiority of Christ over the prophets.

The prophets spoke the Word of God, but Jesus is the Word of God. He then goes on to talk about the superiority of Jesus over the angels. The angels are the servants of God, but the angels worship Jesus. He also talks about the superiority of Jesus over the law and of Moses. The law was given to Moses, but Jesus is superior to Moses and therefore superior to the law. And it goes on through the chapters, just explaining these and the high priestly situation of Jesus. And it comes in chapter 9 here to talk about the holy place and the things in the temple. And Luke's in particular then at this verse that we've raised that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Now, it says here forgiveness in the ESV. Personally, nothing wrong with it in a sense, but I think for myself, I would prefer the word remission, which is in other versions of remission, which is in other versions, but not in the ESV. And the reason for that is because remission seems to speak of more than forgiveness. In the Old Testament, there was this dependency on animal sacrifices. And the animal sacrifices meant that there was forgiveness.

But as we read, the high priest would have to go in every year into, not just into the holy place, but into the holy of holies, right in where the Ark of the Covenant was, into the very presence of God, and sprinkle the blood of an animal, a bull or a goat. But that had to be done every year. And he was doing it for the unintentional sins of the people. And it's interesting that it says that, I think, because it's reinforcing the fact that there was intentional sin. And the Bible in the Old Testament gives us examples of when that happened and what the result was, so that where there was intentional sin, God would deal with it in his own way. So he would destroy individuals.

[5 : 05] But what the high priest was doing was going in and offering the blood of animals for the unintentional sins of the people and for his own sin. And that gave forgiveness. But for myself, I would prefer that it was the shedding of blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.

Because remission of sin takes in more than this sort of forgiveness. Because remission of sin is a putting of sin behind. Doing away with. Linguists will argue about it. I'm not a linguist. But sometimes you prefer one thing or another.

I personally prefer the word remission there. And I think it's more meaningful. Certainly to me, it's more meaningful in terms of what Christ has done. And I was reading a book. It was interesting. When I was asked to preach here, I was asking the Lord for a text to preach on. And this text came strongly to my mind. And I thought, I can't see how I can preach on this. But anyway, I made it a matter of prayer. And I came across a book. And it's a seminal work by Hugh Martin on the atonement. And I found it fascinating when he was talking about this particular section. He talked about it in terms of three aspects. The law, love, and conscience. And I thought, well, that sort of makes sense to me when I started looking at it. So I thought we could look at it under these three headings.

And then I've said it's a looking back and a looking forward. Well, these aspects are a looking back and a looking forward. Because the law aspect is going back to the Old Testament and to the covenant, the first covenant. Then love, the love that's demonstrated, it's the love that Christ demonstrates when He came and gave Himself. People were remembering His birth, but there is also His death and resurrection and ascension. And the great thing, to some extent, about His birth, His death and resurrection, are that they are attested in history. And although some people would say, oh, there's no such thing as Jesus, there's no such thing as His death or His resurrection, history records that for us. And it would be very difficult for someone. In fact, it's probably one of the things that you could ask someone if they're questioning Christianity and saying, hmm, how does this relate to other religions? You can actually say to them, well, look at this with an open mind in history. And history supports the fact that Jesus came, Jesus died, and Jesus rose.

There are witnesses to these things that are demonstrable. And people like Professor John Lennox and people of that sort of standing have no question about the veracity of these things, and can demonstrate even in debate with atheists the reality of these happenings.

[9 : 18] So it's good to be able to do that. So we know that Jesus came, we know that He died, we know that He rose, and we know that He sits ascended at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

That is a reality. That is a reality. But of course, it's not a saving reality, in the same way that lots of things in history are history. But they don't necessarily impact us internally until the Holy Spirit of God. And indeed, it cannot. Because many people will believe in Jesus on the surface, but they don't believe Him in a saving way.

So there is a looking back to the law. And this is from the vantage point of Jesus coming into the world.

So there's a looking back, and then there is Jesus, the reality of Jesus. And then there is another aspect of it which is going forward.

And that's the impact on the conscience. The impact on my conscience, on your conscience. And I thought we could look at these just for a moment, and then also look at it in the context of where we are coming up to the end of a year.

[10 : 44] To look back and see what that looking back for us means. And looking forward, what does that mean for us as well, as we come to the close.

So first of all, law. Now, law is a strange thing. If I try to think of what is law, it's difficult.

But the reality is that we are all conscious of a need for law. And if there was an incident occurred in Barvis, where there was a real situation where there was a transgression that everybody was aware of, there would be demand for justice.

And I think that's an inherent thing in each and every one of us. And indeed, it goes to the ends of the earth. Civilizations across the globe have had elements of law in their systems.

But the law of God is the fundamental law. And I came across an interesting quote in terms of law from a professor, Jonathan Burnside, from the University of Bristol Law School.

[12 : 15] Biblical law has a claim to historical influence that's unmatched by any other ancient legal system.

And he goes on to say the huge influence of biblical law. Now, that's now, of course, being cast under people's feet.

People want to do away with biblical aspects of law. And what do you expect but that we would just be wandering away from the truth?

Because God is law. And God's Word is law. And that's fundamental. Absolutely fundamental.

And if we recognize that, then we're also recognizing that we have a responsibility in terms of God's law.

[13 : 20] And God's law demands, demands blood. Why? Demands blood because it demands life.

And life is in the blood. The Word of God tells us that. But law demands satisfaction.

And the whole premise of it is the righteousness of God Himself. And the holiness of God.

And that's what we need to come to terms with as we look back. Because there is a righteous God there who has given law. And He gave law very early on in Genesis.

He gave law to Moses. He gave law to the children of Israel. And these laws, the Ten Commandments, are still law.

[14 : 24] And much of law in the Western world is based on the law of God. And rightly so. Even although people today are wanting to do away with all of that.

Law is there because God is there. God is righteous. God is holy. And the holiness of God demands that we are accountable to Him.

So looking back, there is law. But that law could never really be satisfied. We could never satisfy God's law. And that's why the sacrifices that we read about there were going on every year. because no sacrifice with an animal's blood would satisfy divine justice on behalf of the sinner. So looking back, what do we see?

We see a law that cannot be satisfied with the blood of animals. But then we come to the central focus of history, to the pivotal point where love comes on the scene.

[15 : 35] God is love. But it was the love of God in giving His Son, giving His Son to come to this earth, coming from an eternity of bliss with God the Father and God the Spirit, came into time, took our nature, accepted our sin, and went to a cross of shame.

It was the love of God that gave all that. And it's the love of God in Christ that shines forth for us today and for everyone.

So we have that love. We have the law in the background which we cannot satisfy. And we cannot do justice to it. And it reminds me of a thing I heard about a question meeting once.

There was a man from Ness and he was at a question meeting and he was telling about a situation where he had wanted to join what was called the Malushi.

Now, I don't think today you would get people voting with their feet and wanting to go to war. But that was the situation back a long time ago. They were keen to be going to war and to be called up.

[16 : 57] But this fellow was too young. But what he did was he got someone in the village, in Ness, to sign that he was on this little boat.

It wasn't supposed to be a little boat at all. It was to be a vessel, either a fishing vessel or a ship. So he got a letter to say that he was a crewman on this ship.

And he went to join the Malushi. But eventually he was found out. They checked up and the boat, the ship didn't exist. It was just a small boat down in Ness.

So he was then taken to court. And he went to court. And they asked him, you said you joined this vessel.

Yes, my Lord. But this vessel didn't exist. That's correct, my Lord. And the boat that you said that you were on was only a small boat, which wasn't suitable.

[18 : 01] And you're underage. Yes, my Lord. So he was guilty under the law. And he really felt that guilt. So the sheriff then said, well, I'm going to fine you two pounds.

Two pounds is a lot of money in these days. Or you'll go to prison. And he didn't have two pounds. So he knew he was going to prison.

And he said that his heart was hardening against the sheriff, against the law, against the whole system. And all of a sudden, there was a shopkeeper from Ness who came and put two pounds on the sheriff's bench.

And he said, although my heart had hardened against the law and the sheriff and the whole of the judicial system, it broke when that was paid.

And he was then showing that that's what Christ had done in his sacrifice to satisfy divine justice.

[19 : 21] He had satisfied that law which none of us could ever, ever satisfy. But he satisfied it. So we have the love of God in Christ as the central focus and pivot of all of history.

And that happened when Jesus came to this world and gave himself. But then the other point that Hugh Martin was raising was to do with conscience.

And he was saying that on the one hand you have the law which we cannot attain to or deal with properly. We then have this love of God in Christ which is offered for us.

But the issue of conscience is are we prepared to accept it? Are we prepared to accept what Christ has done? Are we prepared to accept that his blood is necessary for us?

Or are we to say no thank you? And that is where conscience comes in. For conscience to be satisfied.

[20 : 40] For conscience to be solved. For conscience to be clear. There has to be that acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ which gives us then the ability to stand with boldness to come with boldness to our throne of grace.

That boldness is not on the basis of ourselves or anything we can do. It is simply on what Christ has done on our behalf.

And that is what gives us. So, looking back we have the law. Standing on the pivot of history we have the love of Christ. And then going forward we either have the wonder of that grace operating in our consciences or we have to face the penalty of the righteous indignation of a holy and a just God.

But where does that leave ourselves then as we come to the close of a year this being the last Lord's Day of the year? We can look back as well and we can look over the year and over our lives indeed and we we have to recognize that although we try yet we sin and we cannot but sin because it is there in our very nature.

We were shapen as we were singing. We are shapen in iniquity. Born into this world because of our first parents' sin that sin also applies to us and we have it in our very beings and the question for us as we look then back over the years what have we done about our sin?

[22 : 40] We can ignore it. We can just say well I'm a sinner anyway so that's it and that reminds me of another thing about in the days of my own ignorance I remember once being in a house being in my grandparents' house in Borough and there was a number of us there and we were just foolish and the man that was married to my aunt came in and he was a godly man and he tried to reason with us about the foolishness of what we were doing and one of the men in fact the oldest man that was there turned round to him and said when God meets with me he'll say he wasn't so bad after all and you know at the time

I found that funny but when I think of it now it just brings shivers to my spine first of all he was saying that when God meets me the reality is we will meet God for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and God cannot say to anyone he wasn't such a bad guy after all it is only on the merit of the son of God and when you think of what that means the holy just righteous God sending his son to give him for us and yet we have the audacity to say when God meets me he'll say he wasn't so bad after all well that's not the testimony of scripture that's not the testimony of the old testament or of the new the reality is that if we don't have

Christ we have nothing so that then takes us to looking forward as we look forward to a new year what are our hopes what are our fears the problem with looking at prophecy is that prophecy is difficult to interpret looking forward it's only really when things happen that you can see the reality of what the prophecy says and we can see that in say for example the prophecy of Daniel where you see amazing things that Daniel was able to see but it's only as these things developed in history that you can say ah there we go that was what that was prophesied and there are so many things in the Bible that talk about the second coming of

Christ that chapter itself talks about it but there is no real certainty about what will happen it does appear as if as we go forward things will actually get worse because it talks about things like the world almost being under one super ruling ship rulership which is just the man of sin and you can almost see aspects of that in the world today the way certain countries in the world we can have been insulated and been insulated for the last 50 years or so but the reality is that there are many parts of the world where you can't speak about Jesus you can't even open a Bible and who knows what the future holds for us we don't know and we can't really speculate either but the point is that irrespective of what it holds the important thing is that we have

Christ because if we have Christ we can face anything and I came across an interesting thing the other day and it's an old thing it was in 1666 a 26 year old Scottish covenanter named Hugh McHale was martyred for his faith he was ordained a Presbyterian minister at the age of 20 but was ejected from his pulpit a year later by King Charles II in a later sermon he held the persecuting authorities accountable for their actions against God's people he said that the scriptures give abundant evidence that the people of God have been persecuted sometimes by Pharaoh upon the throne sometimes by Haman in the state and sometimes by a Judas in the church this statement ensured his death sentence when he was captured at the

[28 : 13] Pentland Rising in November 1666 he was tortured before he was condemned but maintained a faithful witness to the end as he stood on the scaffold he uttered these immortal words now I leave of to speak anymore with created beings and begin my communion with God which shall never be broken off farewell father and mother friends and relations farewell the world and all delights farewell meat and drink farewell sun moon and stars welcome God and father welcome sweet Lord Jesus the mediator of the new covenant welcome blessed spirit of grace God

of all consolation welcome glory welcome eternal life welcome death into thy hands I commit my spirit now there was a man who had Christ in him the hope of glory and he was able to face even death itself and it reminds us that it's not the circumstances that are important in life it's what we have in our hearts because if we have

Christ in our hearts the circumstances don't matter and many people across the world today in prisons in many countries are aware of that they have the consciousness of the indwelling Christ that gives them the ability to face whatever may come and whatever may come against them but as we look forward having looked back conscious of our sin conscious that we cannot satisfy divine justice ourselves what if we go forward and we're looking forward unable to stand before the judge of all the earth that is an unthinkable thought and it behoves us all then to recognize that Christ is what we need as we come to the end of this year and into the next oh make it your heart's desire and earnest prayer to God that as you go into not just next year but into another day even before this very day is out that you would have Christ on the throne of your life and if you have what does it matter what comes or goes amen we'll close our meeting singing in psalm 32 in sing psalms psalm 32 psalm 32 1 to 7 how blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin whose sins are covered from

God's face whose debt is cancelled in God's grace there's no deceit in him these verses how blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin whose sins are covered from God's face whose debt is cancelled in God's grace there's no deceit in him!

when I care! I care! I let all my bones with groaning wear worn out beneath your hand heart I felt and thrive Both day and night my strength was set as in a summer throne!

[33 : 33] Then I let bear my sin to you the guilt that laid me within I said O Lord I have transgressed!

and you forgive when I confessed you pardon all my sin so let the God leave to you while you are blessed and you are to be found surely when waves are sweeping past and mighty waters rising fast you'll keep safe and you'll keep safe and you'll safe and sound you are my hiding place oh Lord my true security you keep me safe in you keep me safe in troubled days you circle me with joyful praise when you have set me free the and eternal ever Lord thank you for your word and we pray that you would bless it to each and all of us and we ask now that you would part us with your blessing and watch over us in this year and the year to come if we're spared to see it guide us and keep us especially into the truth as it is in Jesus and pardon our sins for his sake amen