

The Cross Centred Church

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[0 : 00] The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

For this reason, I can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, we do not have stopped being offered, for the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and we no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.

With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, my God.

First he said, Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings, you do not desire, nor will you please with them.

[1 : 24] Though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, Here I am. I have come to do your will. He set aside the first to establish the second.

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties.

Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when the priest had offered for all time, one sacrifice for sins, that is, but when this priest had offered for all time, one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever, those who are being made holy.

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says, This is the covenant I will make with them. After that time, says the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.

[2 : 42] Then he adds, Their sins and lawless acts, I will remember no more. And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

Gavin, thanks very much for reading. Warm welcome to you. My name is Martin Ayers.

I'm the minister here. And we're in Hebrews chapter 10 together. So it'd be a great help to me if you could keep that open. And we'll look at that together in a moment after we've prayed.

We're starting this new series. We're thinking a bit about, I think I changed the name of it today. The new series is called The Living Church. Church. We're thinking about what kind of church does God call us to be?

And the series is based on a book. It's actually not for churches. It's for leaders. It's called God's Leader. It's by Andy Mason. We read it as a staff team. But actually, chapter by chapter, as we worked through it, we're thinking these are the kind of values that we need to think about as a church, not just for people in leadership in a church.

[3 : 49] So we're going to do that together in the coming weeks. Before we turn to look at that, let's pray and ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, the living word, and ask that by your spirit, you would open our eyes to see him clearly.

You'd open our ears to hear your word to us this evening. And you would work in our hearts that we would respond rightly to you. Amen. So, our evening service is a bit smaller than the morning, looking around tonight, which is a potential.

Look around at the empty seats of potential all around us. But sometimes when we think about something like that, as those of us who are regular here might be thinking, I'd love there to be more people here, love to see this service grow.

That's how I think. We sort of think, if only we had some stuff that would change our status.

And if only we had certain things, our service would really grow. So, my first question for us to discuss together is, what's on your evening service wish list? You might be someone who's visiting tonight, and you might be thinking, well, I'm looking for a church.

[5 : 13] What am I really looking for in a church? What should I be looking for if I'm going to go to a church where I'm really going to grow in my faith? Or, you may be someone who's regular here, and you've already got a whole list of things.

You mean, I've been waiting for ages for this stuff. So, what is on your evening service wish list? Perhaps thinking about the next six months at St. Silas. If we really want to be effective in reaching out to people who've not yet heard of Jesus, in growing ourselves in our faith and hope and love, and in sending people out equipped to serve Jesus in the world, what do we need to see this evening service grow?

Let's discuss that for a couple of minutes, our evening service wish list. Let's come back together. So, if you're anything like me, among the midst of many things you might have said, or might have thought over recent weeks, months, as you think about opening service, I go for things that are concrete and visible that I think we need.

So, it's a bit like planting a church, and there's this book that, you know, people like me read called The Redeemer Church Planting Manual, and Tim Keller tells you what you need to plant a church, and he says, there's two types of people you really need to plant a church.

You need bringers, and you need servers. Okay? You need more bringers and more servers. So, I think if only we had more servers, more people who can fulfill our vision to serve the best coffee in Glasgow Sunday evening by Sunday evening, more people to set up and set down differently and make the room look different, and more people serving by leading the music and joining Greg and the team and the other music teams, more people serving us with better social media, so we're out there on the internet with this great web marketing presence.

[7 : 02] And if only we had more bringers, people who have contact with lots of non-Christians and they're just unashamed about Jesus and they love the evening service and they're inviting everyone along every week.

And I saw this video that a church had in London. There was this feature on this growing church and they had like these massive banners out in the street in front and they were all out there welcoming and going, do you want to come into church?

Welcome to church. Do you want to come to all these pastors by? Oh, if only we had a team like that. And you might be more of a practical person thinking, as you look at our building, if only we had better lights, especially in the winter, if only we had a better notice board, if only we had a better ordered front that people could walk past and look in and think, oh, right, I might go in there.

If only we had, if it looked different at the front, if only we had the money to completely change the building. Or you might be more of an experiential person.

So you're thinking, if only we had someone a bit more dynamic and more interesting to preach. Or if only we had Matt Redman or Lou Fellingham to lead worship.

[8 : 10] Or Adele to lead worship. You know, then I'd really, I might actually invite a friend if Adele was leading the worship. These are the kinds of ways that we often think. And loads of what I've said there, apart from the Adele bit, is not bad stuff, is it?

It's actually useful stuff. It would be helpful. Some of it is sensible. But very encouragingly, when we turn to hear God speak to us, we find that the biggest thing we need as an evening service, if we want to grow ourselves, we want to reach out, the biggest thing that we need, we already have.

The first thing on our evening service wish list is the cross of Christ. And you could see that from almost anywhere in the Bible. The Bible is about the cross of Jesus Christ.

But we're going to think about it in this book, Hebrews. And the first hearers of this letter, Hebrews, that it was written to, they were drifting from Jesus. And their particular temptation was to drift back into Old Testament worship.

Because that was what was going on around them in the Jewish culture. People were continuing to worship in the Old Testament style with the temple and the priests. And they would have had their closest family and friends worshipping God in that kind of way.

[9 : 22] And they've come to faith in Christ and they're being drawn back into that other way of worshipping. And one of the big attractions of it was that it was visible. It was big.

The temple was enormous. The disciples, remember, with Jesus. They're with Jesus in Jerusalem and they say, look at the building. They're absolutely staggered by the building. Just as today, when we're thinking about something even as spiritual as church life and church growth, the temptation is to think about the visible and forget the invisible.

To think about the stuff that's more tangible. As though all we need is the right business model, the right systems, the right personalities. And at its worst, we kind of forget about Jesus.

He gets left behind as we try and build our church in a different way instead of in prayerful dependence on Him. So in this chapter 10 of Hebrews, the writer is urging those first heroes and us to grasp what we've got in Jesus.

So he starts with this first point and it's this. It's we cannot atone for our sin. We cannot atone for our sin. And the writer proves that by showing us the futility of the old covenant system to deal with sin.

[10 : 40] So if you look at that from verse 1 of chapter 10, have a look with me. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered?

For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

So, can you see, implicit in those verses is the reality that we all have a sin problem. Sin is the Bible's word for our rebellion against God that all of us in our hearts have said to God, get out.

You don't have the right to decide, for me, what's right and wrong. I get to decide what's right and wrong. Get out. sin is our greatest problem because, not just because we've turned from God's good rule over us, but because it's alienated us from God and his goodness and means that we're against him.

[11 : 53] And he is still God of the universe he has made. So that if he didn't judge sin, he wouldn't be a just God. If he didn't judge sin, he wouldn't be a just God.

But what does rebellion by a creature against the loving rule of their good creator deserve, it deserves death.

The wages of sin is death. So how do we deal with that problem? Well, one way that human religion sometimes tries to deal with that problem is to diminish our view of God's holiness.

We play down the holiness of God. So we say, well, God isn't really going to judge sin. He's going to forgive all sin. Because he's not so different from us.

He's just like a bigger version of us and he knows what we're like. We're not perfect, but the world's not perfect. That's what my kids sing at school in assembly now when you go and see them. I'm not perfect, but the world's not perfect.

[12 : 53] Trying to think, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter that we do things wrong. But if God is really like that, what that leaves you with is the frightening thought that you have a God who accepts you, but who really doesn't care how you treat one another and how we treat him.

He's an amoral God. It sounds welcoming, but it's actually very frightening to think that we have a God who doesn't care how we treat one another and how we treat him. A God who doesn't care.

So that won't do. But another way to deal with our sin problem is to try and put it right ourselves. And we would usually do that by making sacrifices of some kind. Maybe by trying to serve God in particularly stretching ways, do good stuff for him, or maybe by a religious system that we hope will put us right with God.

And our churches today are rife with that mentality, that we start to think even subconsciously that by going to church, by doing good things, by praying, by reading our Bibles, by serving other people, we're building up a positive account with God, that we've got a bargain system with him and he should really give us some good stuff now because we've served him.

Instead of realizing that all we're doing there, even in our best moments, is doing our duty, not making up for what we've done wrong. So in order to prove that we can't on our own atone for our sin, the writers of the Hebrews takes the best form of sacrifice any of us could ever make.

[14 : 26] No ritual we could ever think of could ever compare with this one. Why? Because this one was set up by God himself. These were the holy sacrifices that God gave to Moses for the people to carry out and they took place day after day, year after year, at the sanctuary and then at the temple.

In other words, well the sanctuary of the temple, previously it was the tabernacle, in a most holy place, the holiest place in the world. And the people performing the sacrifices day after day had to be from exactly the right family that God had stipulated and they had to go through a series of God ordained purification rites so that everything was done exactly as God had set out that it had to be done.

Nothing that we could ever do could compare with this. So what's the point? The point is if those sacrifices couldn't deal with sin, if they were ineffective, then clearly nothing that we do could ever deal with our sin either.

did you notice? He says, repeated endlessly, verse 1, it could never be the same sacrifices repeated endlessly, year after year.

They've gone on those sacrifices for more than a thousand years, year after year. Animals being bred, getting born, growing, being healthy, and then being butchered and killed, and their blood used in temple rituals every single day, generation after generation, people being born and living and dying under that system.

[16:04] And it didn't even make a dent in our spiritual problem. That's what the writer's saying. That's how awful our sin problem is. That doing all of that didn't actually deal with our sin.

All of that death, all of that work, all that cost, all of it done in careful, prescriptive obedience, couldn't sort out our sin. And yet the temptation all the time for us is to go back into that kind of thinking.

To think that God is a bargain maker and he must be pleased with us because we've had a really good week. To think, well if we just do church in a particular way, God must bless us.

He'd be duty bound to bless us if we pray in the right way and we serve in the right way. So we plow ourselves into serving him together, but our motivation is wrong.

We think that by doing it we're putting things right that we've done wrong. That we're earning merit from him. When the truth is that our sin is so hideous, the ways you and I have sinned today, today, is so hideous.

[17:10] Nothing that we do for the rest of our lives could ever make it up to God. And it will be the same tomorrow and it's the same every day. Our situation is utterly desperate and we can't do anything about it.

That's our first point. We cannot atone for our sin. But then comes the second point. And the second point is God is pleased to atone for our sin.

The writer quotes this Old Testament psalm, Psalm 40, explaining that it's fulfilled on the lips of Jesus Christ. So if you look with me at verse 5, Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, said to God, Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.

With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, Here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, my God.

So God wasn't ultimately pleased with the sacrifices that sinful humanity brought to him. But instead, God prepares a body that will please him.

[18:22] So if these are Jesus' words here, what's being talked about is his body offered to God at Calvary. That work of atonement, Jesus living the life we should have lived and dying the death we should have died.

Look at how it's being described by God here. Just have a look at verse 7. It says in verse 7 that he was, it was his will at the end of verse 6 that he's pleased with it.

In verse 5, that it's what he desires because it's in contrast to those sacrifices and offerings. He desires it. He's pleased with it. God is eternally happy. That's why we exist.

We only exist because of God's eternal happiness. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit have lived in eternity in love and happiness, delighted with each other. And as an overflow of that, they have made the universe and they made us.

And God does whatever he pleases. And wonderfully, we see here that what pleases God when he sees us in our sin is to make atonement for it himself.

[19:29] That's what pleases him. With the result in verse 10, verse 10, and by that will, God's will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

I don't know what you think about that, but I think that is a hugely comforting reality. That when we turn back to God in confession, he doesn't frown at us sternly.

I've got a mate and recently he was staying in a house that wasn't his. And they got a message from the owner of the house. Said, you can use any part of the house on a particular side of this door.

There was a door. You mustn't go through the door. Whatever you do, you mustn't go through the door. Okay? So Ben arrives with his family. I've said who he is, sorry, but you don't know him. So he arrives with his family and they're there and then the Wi-Fi isn't working.

Okay? It breaks down and he thinks, I'll just go and sort it out. It's not a big deal. So he goes through the door. Okay? Goes through the house. He gets into the room with the Wi-Fi box, finds the box, pushes the button and it kind of makes this horrible noise and breaks, right?

[20 : 38] Because he's pressed a button. So he had to tell the owner of the house. He had to say, I'm sorry, I went through the door. I thought it wouldn't be a big deal but I've broken your Wi-Fi box.

He still didn't really think it was that big a deal. He thought, well, I'll just say sorry. But as he said sorry, he said the guy who owns the house really lectured him, basically.

It wasn't enough that he said sorry. He really lectured him and said, you need to really think about what you're doing with your life because you clearly have a massive authority problem.

Because I told you one command and you broke it and you need to think about that. You need to reflect on that. Why don't you get people to help you reflect on that? And sometimes that's our picture of God is that though we know, even if we know we've done wrong, we come back to him and we say sorry but we see him frowning, arms folded.

You need to have a good long hard look at yourself, young man or young lady. And we see in Hebrews 10 that God is nothing like that. That when we turn back to him, he doesn't frown sternly.

[21 : 38] He doesn't fold his arms. He is delighted that he can put it right. He is delighted that he can make atonement for our sins. So he doesn't say about time too.

I hope you've learnt your lesson. He doesn't turn his back on us or shake his head. There's nothing begrudging begrudging about God when he makes atonement for us. He is well pleased to do it for us.

If he wasn't well pleased he wouldn't have done it. He is delighted to deal with our sin problem through Jesus' work on the cross. It's his joy, it's his pleasure. And that leads us to our third point from the text.

Nothing more is needed to atone for our sin. These days lots of us sit down to work, don't we? Lots of us are in office jobs or perhaps we're students and you sit down to work.

But in those days you sat down after you finished work usually because you stood up to work. So if you look at verse 11 day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties.

[22 : 40] Again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Notice that in verse 14 it's perfect tense a past event that shapes the present. He has already made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

His sacrifice is once for all and as Christians we're not just looking forward to a day when God will look on us and see us as clean and forgiven. Rather God looks on us as perfect now if we're trusting Christ.

We stand today with his verdict over us when God looks at us that he sees us as righteous and vindicated and he's well pleased with us as he sees Christ in us.

Because when God looks on you he sees his son and not your sin and because he sees his son he's absolutely delighted and he tells us that the Holy Spirit speaks to us now to confirm that truth in verse 15.

[23 : 58] The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this and it's the Spirit speaking through the Bible. He quotes Jeremiah 31 the foundation of this new covenant verse 17 the Spirit adds their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

And where these have been forgiven sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. In fact to try and add to the finished work of Jesus at the cross is deeply dangerous because you're taking your trust away from the thing that is sufficient to save you.

We have to be there's that ancient hymn when we approach God nothing in my hand I bring simply to the cross I cling. We don't add anything because if we were to add something that we'd done ourselves it would imply that Jesus' work wasn't good enough on its own it would diminish the value and the glory of what he had done.

So we trust that his death alone makes us perfect in God's eyes now and forever. And God provided it because he loves us with a depth of love that moved him so that the only thing that would delight him was to do everything in his power to put right everything we'd done wrong and wipe the slate clean so that we can have fellowship with him forever.

So here are three implications for us as we think about what kind of church God is calling us to be as we think about our evening service wish list implications the first one is the cross meets our deepest need.

[25 : 33] We've thought about what a terribly serious problem our sin must be and we see here that God has solved the problem for us and that puts all of our other needs into perspective doesn't it?

Our biggest problem has been dealt with. I remember a friend telling me about a missionary couple that came to his church and they'd had a terrible time they were overseas on mission and it had been indescribably awful what had happened to them and they're being interviewed about it and the interviewer in the church was clearly utterly shocked by this story of how hard it was and said I just cannot understand it how did you keep going and the couple said we just had to keep telling each other our biggest problem has been dealt with.

That was their perspective that got them through. We are terrible sinners and Jesus has saved us from all of it. Our biggest problem has been dealt with and not only that God was delighted to deal with it and provide the atonement.

We need the cross and we need each other to need the cross that's what we need from one another so that we point each other to the cross. When we gather together we can encourage each other to depend day by day on the atoning work of Christ and even if our building is a bit dingy and dark even if we're in the wrong location or we're too small in number or the coffee is horrible it wasn't horrible Pauline but even if it was horrible even if the music was terrible or the preaching is really boring we will be okay if we know that our deepest need is for atonement with God and our deepest need has been dealt with by the cross.

And knowing that should keep the cross absolutely central to everything that we do everything that we're about as a service the evening service because we know it's the deepest need of everyone around us everyone we met today serving coffee in the street watching the cycling their deepest need is not to be entertained if they come in here is to have their sin dealt with.

[27 : 38] It was that commitment to the cross of Jesus that led to the foundation of the Christian union movement in the UK. You might have heard the story in the early 20th century about 100 years ago there was a Christian movement called the SCM the student Christian movement but evangelical students were starting to get concerned Bible believing Christians about SCM because they didn't feel it was Bible based enough and the emphasis wasn't enough on evangelism on sharing the news.

And in 1910 they started an alternative group and then in 1919 there were meetings about whether they could find a way to work together and be united at university.

And in Cambridge Norman Grubb was a student from Trinity College and he went with his friend Daniel Dick to meet 10 representatives from the student Christian movement that was led by Rollo Perry and Norman Grubb said this after an hour's talk I asked Rollo point blank does the SCM put the atoning blood of Jesus Christ central?

He hesitated and then said well we acknowledge it but not necessarily central. Dan Dick and I then said that this settled the matter for us in the Kikuyu the Christian union.

We could never join something that did not maintain the atoning blood of Jesus at its centre and we parted company. So that meeting is what led to the Christian union being born at Cambridge but within a few years there was the vision to see Christian unions at every university in the UK and that's what's UCCF today.

[29 : 14] That's how it was founded. Within a few years after that there was the vision to see it on every university in the world and IFES was founded as an international fellowship. that recommitment to the centrality of the cross by Norman Grubb.

He was 24 at the time and used by God to launch a movement that was instrumental in many of us here coming to faith for the first time. So there might be loads of different things we'd want to do as a service but if we want to be genuinely useful in serving Christ and genuinely useful in serving Glasgow we keep the cross central.

It meets our deepest need. Secondly the cross provides our pattern of life. See Jesus predicts his death and then he says to his disciples in Mark 8 whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. Just last week doing some reading I was reminded about Martin Luther how he had he described how you can have two different types of theology in your life a theology of glory or a theology of the cross and when he talks about a theology he actually means about the kind of person you are and you want to be what you're hoping for for your life.

So if you've got a theology of glory what you're hoping for in life is acclaim comfort and people to speak well of you and if we're thinking like that we want a big and growing church gathering but for the wrong reasons for people to say oh they were the guys there at the beginning and didn't they do a great job they must have been doing something really well we want us to we want to feel powerful because we're in among a big group and there's great triumph and Jesus doesn't call us to a theology of glory he calls us to a theology of the cross a way of life shaped by his way of life that is that when he says we are to take up our cross daily and follow him it's a life of self-denial of day by day saying no to our own desires for the sake of him and his will choosing to serve him instead of ourselves choosing to serve others because we know that will please him just like in the upper room when Jesus was with his disciples and he he takes off his outer garment and he wraps that towel around his waist and he washes the disciples feet and he does it to show them that they need to be washed by him as he goes to the cross but then he says

[31 : 53] I'm setting you an example now that I have washed your feet you also are to wash each other's feet so if we feel that we need more people serving in different ways we don't bang them over the head with a rotor we point them to the cross and moved by the cross we're moved to serve one another that brings us to our third implication the cross is our place of refreshment it's seeing our need for the cross and that our need has been dealt with that's so refreshing the spirit uses that as we look at Jesus on the cross the spirit uses that in our hearts to refresh us and to motivate us to serve him and that means that if we don't keep the cross central in our lives then we'll see the needs around us perhaps the needs at our evening service and we will exhaust ourselves we'll serve and we'll serve and we'll serve and we'll burn out and then we'll think that what we really need is to get away from church and never go again we need more rest and more holidays and more other stuff and rest is a good thing it's a really good thing but what we'll really need is to go back to the cross to see the ways that our great God has served us and dealt with our greatest need that's what will recharge us and empower us to give our all serving others it's a bit like if Craig doesn't mind me saying since he put it on Facebook

Craig one of his competitions this summer was a half iron man and he describes how basically he was basically like a machine all the way through this half iron man until he got to right near the end and he got his nutrition miscalculated so he'd taken on enough sugar but not enough water and he just felt suddenly completely drained as he got right near the end and that's the kind of it's just one of the reasons that happened to you Craig was for this moment of illustration of that could happen to any of us if we're seeking to serve God together but we've taken our eyes off the cross that's our true living water to empower us to serve him to refresh us so that it doesn't feel a burden to serve him so whether it's that today and next Sunday we're out on the street looking to serve people this week spending time with people who are struggling let's be refreshed ourselves by going back to the cross to rejoice that there our greatest needs were met let me lead us in a prayer then I've got a couple of questions we could discuss let's pray together just a moment of quiet and then I'll lead us in a prayer those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins then he said here I am

I have come to do your will and by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all Lord Jesus we praise you and thank you for all that you have done for us for your life lived as an offering to your father and our heavenly father for your death died in our place to please him by atoning for our sin may our grasp of our need for the cross deepen that by your spirit your grace will be more amazing to us day by day that our church will be marked by a cross centeredness for the glory of your name amen and university is for the