

HOLY HELP FOR THE HOPELESS GIVES US EVERY GOOD THING GOD HAS PROMISED

Hebrews 9:11-15

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

What are some people or things that you regularly depend upon? What is it about these persons or objects that convinces you they are trustworthy, that you can put your faith in them?

Most of us, when we are sane and thinking straight, recognize that people, including ourselves are highly unreliable saviors. Most of us recognize that trusting in money or vacations or obedient children is foolish because none of these are permanent or can deliver what we trust them to deliver. Our contentment and happiness is always short-lived when our faith is in created things. The Bible is quite clear that God's goal for your life is to shatter your faith in every created person and object and to convince you that only Jesus is worthy of your trust (see 1 Peter 1:6-7). This is the aim of this letter to the Hebrews. It is the author's objective to convince these people that trusting in their performance of the religious rituals of Judaism is absolutely fatal and that only Jesus is a reliable savior. There are few of us that are tempted to trust in Jewish religious rituals but all of us are inclined to trust in other saviors and look for other salvations apart from Jesus. So our aim in this study is to demonstrate that only Jesus is worthy of our trust.

STUDY

1. According to Hebrews 11:8-10 why did God give the "regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary" to Israel on Mt. Sinai?

The reason God gave the regulations and the tabernacle to the people of Israel was so that the Holy Spirit could speak through these symbols to show that the way to know God required someone and something superior to the priests and food laws and sacrifices and tent. The entire system God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai daily bore witness to the fact that God could not be known through these things but a better priest, tent, sacrifice, cleansing, etc. was required. These were only temporary. They pointed ahead and prepared for the "time of the new order".

2. Verse 11 begins, "But when Christ came..." What does this beginning tell us about what follows and its relation to what just preceded?

Christ is the disclosure of how the Most Holy Place can be entered. His coming is the beginning of the "new order" that replaces the "old order" of the law and tabernacle. His arrival brings an end to the previous, temporary system. Christ is going to be compared and more importantly, contrasted with the system given by God at Mt. Sinai.

3. What is the first point of comparison and contrast made between Christ and the old system in v. 11?

The first point of comparison/contrast is that the human priest merely enters and goes through a tent that is man-made and then into that inner room that is also man-made. However, when Jesus came as high priest he entered the more perfect tent that is not part of this creation, that is into heaven itself. The perfect tabernacle of which the imperfect, earthly tabernacle is but a symbol is not part of this material, matter and energy, universe. There is a place that is outside of this physical universe in which God dwells and into which Christ has entered which is what v. 12 means when it says he entered into the Most Holy Place.

4. What difference would it make to you and to how you live if there was no heaven?

5. How do we know there is a heaven?

We know there is a heaven because Jesus Christ came into this world, lived a life of perfect obedience to his Father, bore witness to the fact that he was the promised Messiah by his words and works, suffered death on the cross, rose from the dead and passed through the greater and more perfect tabernacle into "the Most Holy Place."

6. Prior to Christ the door to this heavenly Most Holy Place was locked (9:8-10). What was the key that opened that door (v. 12)?

The point of the contrast in v. 12 is the answer to that question. The means by which Jesus was able to enter heaven is compared to the means the high priest used to enter the Most Holy Place in the earthly tabernacle. The high priest entered into the earthly Holy of Holies for a few moments, once each year on the Day of Atonement, the 10th day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. He entered by means of the blood of a bull that he killed to

cover over his own sins and the blood of a goat he killed to cover over the sins of the people of Israel. But Christ entered into God's heavenly throne room by means of his own blood, that is, by means of his own death. Just as the high priest gained the right to enter the earthly Holy of Holies by killing a bull and a male goat, so also Jesus earned the right to enter God's very presence by dying, by spilling his own blood. The earthly tabernacle with its regulations regarding the Day of Atonement sacrifices showed that entry into God's presence required a death. So Christ died in order to gain entry into God's very presence in the true sanctuary that is not part of this creation. Jesus is the priest and he is the sacrifice that the priest offers. Unlike the human high priest who can only remain in the Most Holy Place for a few moments each year Jesus entered heaven permanently. His death earned him the right to sit at God's right hand forever. He is permanently in God's presence because God is delighted with the obedient death of his Son. He never has to leave. He never has to make another sacrifice. His death on the cross is sufficient to gain entry into God's heavenly sanctuary forever.

7. What difference should vv. 11-12 make in your life?

Jesus Christ alone is worthy of all your trust because only Jesus earned the right to enter heaven.

8. Verses 13-14 both compare and contrast the "blood of bulls and goats" with the "blood of Christ" (NOTE: v. 13 begins with "if". Thus the structure is a "from the lesser to the greater" argument. "If the blood of bulls and goats...then how much more the blood of Christ.."). What do these two things share in common?

In both there are unclean or defiled persons, that is, people unfit to be in God's presence, which are made clean by the application of the blood of undefiled victims. The defiled ones are sanctified or cleansed through the death of an unblemished victim in their place. Those who are made clean then participate in service to God. (NOTE TO LEADER: You may want to draw your groups attention to this: Notice in v. 13 that he refers to "the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer." This refers to the cleansing ritual described in Numbers 19 where a red heifer is killed and its body completely burned to ash in a place outside the camp. The ashes are then mixed with water and sprinkled on people who have touched a dead body to sanctify them so that they can enter into the camp and into the tabernacle. The author includes this ritual in order to expand the rituals he is referring to from just the Day of Atonement to encompass all the cleanliness laws and all the rituals.) All the acts of cleansing were done to cleanse people who were

physically defiled in a variety of ways so that they could participate in the worship of God in the tabernacle and live among the people of God. In the same way Christ's offering of himself cleanses people to worship God and live among the people of God.

9. How are they different?

First, the blood and the ashes in v. 13 belong to animals who do not choose to die but who are killed by another whereas Christ offers himself up to death. Second the animals are only physically unblemished whereas Christ is morally and spiritually unblemished. He is sinless and actually holy because of his active obedience to God's will whereas the animals are innocent only because they are irrational, amoral creatures. Third, the animals only sanctify people in an outward way so that they can participate in the acts of worship in the earthly tent. However Christ's offering cleanses the internal life of the worshipper. His death changes the very nature of the one who trusts in him so that we can participate in the actual worship of the living God, not merely participate in copies and shadows of that worship. The implication is that we are made fit for entry into the same place that Jesus has entered, the heavenly Most Holy Place.

10. Describe in your own words what it is that defiles us, thus keeping us from serving the living God. Compare to Genesis 6:5, Romans 3:9-18 & Ephesians 2:1-3.

In the language of this letter the thing that defiles human beings and thus prevents them from entering into heaven is the fact that we each, by nature, possess a (literally) "conscience of works of death." This is to say that we each have a heart, an interior part of us that produces actions which are in every sense dead and which inevitably result in our death. If your conscience, your heart has not been sanctified or cleansed by the blood of Jesus, then every action you perform is leading you to death. Every action of every person whose conscience has not been cleansed by the death of Jesus is worthy of the death penalty. This phrase is a description of that historic Christian doctrine called total depravity. Every action of everyone who is outside of Christ is an affront to God and worthy of his eternal anger, of death and hell. We have no greater problem than this: we all, by nature, have a conscience, a heart, a mind that is hostile to God, that hates to obey God and loves to do evil. The evil actions you perform: the anger and fighting, the lying, the stealing, the drunkenness, the over-eating, the laziness, the accumulation of things, the refusal to get involved in helping others, the defensiveness, the lack of interest in God and his ways all comes

from you, from your conscience, your heart. Nobody makes you do it. It is the greatest lie of our therapeutic culture that your behaviors, your emotions are caused by what someone or something else did or does to you. Your biggest problem is not what others have done to you but what you have done because you have a conscience that produces works that lead to death. It is this that keeps you from God and only the cleansing power of the blood of the great Son of God who offered himself, by the eternal Spirit, unblemished to God can cleanse your conscience.

11. What is the result of your conscience being cleansed by the blood of Christ?

If your conscience has been cleansed by the death of Christ, then you are now free to serve and worship the living God. What you could never do before because you hated him and had no interest in him you now want to do. Your life is now about living to God and for God and in God. Your conscience was not cleansed so that you can get God to heal you or make you rich or because God needed your help to win the world to Christ or feed the poor. Your conscience is clean so that your life can be all about God. John Calvin says it like this: "...we are not washed by Christ, that we may plunge ourselves again into new filth, but that our purity may serve to glorify God." Your conscience is clean so that God is now the center of your universe and nothing and no one else. In all that you do, from eating your meals to coming to church to going to work, to mowing your lawn, to going on vacation you do it out of your delight in God and your eagerness to please him. This is what you look forward to doing forever. This is what makes heaven pleasing to you, unfettered delight in God that produces actions that are full of his life.

12. Has your conscience been cleansed from acts that lead to death so that you now serve the living God?

Jesus Christ alone is worthy of all your trust because only Jesus has solved your biggest problem.

13. According to the first half of v. 15 what is the result of Jesus' offering himself, by the eternal Spirit, unblemished to God?

He has, by this offering, become the mediator of the new covenant which results in all those God calls receiving the promised eternal inheritance.

14. The second half of the sentence says that Jesus' death was the payment of the ransom to free those called ones from "the sins they committed under the first covenant." What does this mean? Who are these called ones who committed sins under the first covenant and what is the relationship between Christ's dying and their sins?

The only reason that anyone who lived prior to the coming of Christ is in heaven is because they had their conscience cleansed from acts that lead to death by Jesus' offering of himself, unblemished to God in about 30 A.D. on a Roman cross. Moses and Rahab and Ruth and David and Elijah and Hezekiah and Josiah are not in heaven for any other reason than because Christ's blood has redeemed them from all the sins they committed while living under that first covenant. They are not forgiven because they participated in the rituals of cleansing at the tabernacle. They are not forgiven because they obeyed the law. They, like us, were defiled and unfit for God's presence because they had a conscience that produced actions that are worthy of death. Thus, Jesus has always been the Savior of his people. No one has ever been redeemed or set free from their slavery to sin and the curse of death by any other means, not even those who lived before his coming, under the regulations for worship in the Law of Moses.

15. Why does the author think it is important to make this point right after telling us that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant?

It is because God does not want us to think that when we are told that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant that this is plan B. What is going on in the coming of Christ and the end of the regulations for worship and the tabernacle is not that God instituted one plan back there on Mt. Sinai to make people fit for heaven and he suddenly discovered that it didn't work and so now he has come up with another, new plan. It isn't that God when he was confronted with Israel's disobedience said, "Oops, I guess that didn't work. I'll have to come up with a different plan." New does not mean different. What is "new" about the new covenant is that Christ has actually come into the world and done all of what the OC shadows and copies were describing. In the argument of this letter you can really see why this is important. These people are thinking about returning to the Jewish system in order to escape persecution for being Christians. They are not saying they are leaving God behind, only that they are going to leave Jesus behind. They are claiming that they can know God through the Jewish worship rituals. The author is telling them they are wrong. No one has ever known God by these means. All of God's people who are now in heaven are there because Christ shed his blood for them and for no other reason. If they return to the

OT law they are returning to a system that cannot save because it never could save but was given only to reveal that Christ is the Savior.

16. How does knowing this help you to trust Jesus more?

The God who made the world and who gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai and who sent Christ into the world is in control. He is not reacting to human actions; he is acting. His plan to redeem his people was put into motion before he made the universe and he is carrying it out even today. He is never caught by surprise. He is working out all things in conformity with the purpose of his will. You can trust Christ because he has always been the Savior of all of God's people. He came into the world at exactly the moment God wanted and he accomplished our salvation in exactly the manner that God determined. He is as this author says in chapter 13, the same, yesterday and today and forever.

Jesus Christ alone is worthy of all your trust because only Jesus has ever been able to save sinners.

17. In v. 12 we are told that the benefit Christ obtained by entering the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood is “eternal redemption.” What is this eternal redemption he obtained?

Redemption is an economic term that refers to the practice in Israel of settling debts. If you were a farmer and borrowed money from a neighbor so you could buy seed and oxen to plant your fields and then there was a drought and so you did not harvest a crop to sell and so you could not pay your neighbor back what you owed him, then you would sell yourself to your neighbor as his slave to pay back the debt. You could be redeemed by a rich uncle who would come and pay off your debt for you and set you free from your slavery. So the idea is that you are set free from slavery and the misery of slavery and poverty. Notice this is an eternal redemption. You and I, by Christ's death are set free forever from the tyranny of sin and the misery of sin and we are made into free citizens of heaven. We are released from our debt to God and now belong to him not as slaves but as children. The debt we owed to God was not due to some accident or misfortune. Rather we are in debt to God because we have squandered all that he has given us to serve him for our own pleasures. We are like people who borrow money from the bank to start a business and instead we go lose it all at the casino. The bank will not be pleased with us. God, through Christ's death has released us from our debt and made us free citizens. It is true forever and it is already (see v. 11) true for us. We already are enjoying the benefits of that freedom

from sin's tyranny and God's displeasure and will enjoy them forever and in fullness when Christ returns.

18. In v. 15 we are told that the benefit we obtain from Christ as the mediator of the new covenant is that we receive the “promised eternal inheritance.” What does this mean?

***First**, this inheritance has been promised. All the promises that God made to his people throughout the OT are referring in one way or another to this eternal inheritance. When we read those OT passages describing a world where lions and lambs graze together and where there are no more tears and where people live together in perfect harmony and love, we should understand it to be referring to this promised inheritance. **Second**, it is an eternal inheritance. You will see the word "forever" regularly attached to the OT promises. God told Abraham he would give him and his descendants the land of Canaan forever. He told the city of Jerusalem in Isaiah 60:15ff., "I will make you the everlasting (eternal) pride and joy of all generations... the Lord will be your everlasting light and your days of sorrow will end... Then will your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever." All of the promises in the OT were never about this land, nor about national Israel. They were always about the eternal inheritance and about true Israel, those who are called, the church. **Third**, it is an inheritance. This means first that all those who are called are children of God and therefore right now are enjoying all the benefits of being an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ. However it also means that we are not in full possession of our inheritance right now. It is yet to come. The fullness of the promised eternal inheritance is not yet ours. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ you can be absolutely certain that there is a glorious future for you. God's promised, eternal inheritance belongs to you and one day you will enter into its fullness. It is as Peter says, "reserved in heaven for you."*

19. What difference does it make in your life that you are the recipient of “eternal redemption” and God’s “promised eternal inheritance” through the mediatory work of Christ?

Jesus Christ alone is worthy of all your trust because only Jesus can give you what you really want and need.