

Third Sunday of End Time - Saints Triumphant
November 18, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Hebrews 10:11-18 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. **12** But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. **14** For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 “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.”

17 Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more.”

18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

“No More Work”

Looking around, she couldn't help smiling. Her friends were all there. Her family too. Even the ones who traveled hundreds of miles to get here. They were here for her. And that gave her a sense of accomplishment. Because she knew she had been working hard. She had been making sacrifices. When some of her friends were sleeping in, she was up working. When some of her friends were enjoying doing nothing, just sitting on the couch at home on their phones with the TV on in the background, she was studying. They were hanging out with friends, but she was busy reading and getting ready for tests. She knew how hard she worked to get here. But today, on her graduation day, other people, her closest family and friends, were also acknowledging what she had worked so hard to achieve. Even if they only knew a small fraction of what it took, their presence was a figurative fist-bump to everything that went into getting that precious piece of paper.

And for once, she could just sit back and enjoy it all. There were no more assignments to hand in. No more tests to take. No more books to read. No more correspondence necessary with teachers. No more collaborating with fellow students. At least for today. For today, she could just soak it all in and bask in that sense of accomplishment. But tomorrow, well, tomorrow will bring its own challenges. Graduation is never really the end. Graduation just means the start of something new. Just another challenge. Another series of episodes for working hard and making sacrifices and working toward some other goal.

That is one of the sobering realities of life that you learn as you finish one phase of life and move on to the next. The first grader is so tired of everyone telling her what she can and can't do. She can't wait until she is in high school when she has more freedom and can decide for herself what she wants to do. Then she gets to high school and can't wait to be 18

and graduate so no one can tell her which classes she has to take and when she has to be home at night. Then she gets her first real job. She realizes her boss is always on her case about following company policy. She realizes she can do things her own way and cause more problems at work or she can play by the rules, swallow her stubborn pride and do what she's told so she can get promoted and start bossing other people around. Then she gets a management position where she feels like she stuck trying to get the employees subordinate to her happy while she's trying to keep the big boss from interfering too much, all while making sure the customers are being served. She decides the only way to get away from that mess is to have her own business and be her own boss. But even then she won't have much of a business unless she is giving the clients what they want and keeping the people she hires happy. It changes and shifts slightly as you go through life. But in every stage of life you have to answer to someone.

Hebrews chapter 10 doesn't really address work or school. But it does help us understand how we live our lives with God. And that involves everything in every stage of our lives. And, like so much in life, how we go about every day in our lives of faith depends on our attitudes. So often we suffer because we live in tension with God. We have this realization of what God demands from us. We are answerable to him. And every day we push through life with the tension between what I want to do and what God expects me to do. So the question becomes how are we going to handle this tension.

Hebrews 10 identifies two ways that trap us in our efforts: sins and lawlessness. The Bible has various words for our offenses and failures against God. Sin has that idea of knowing what God expects, trying our absolute best, and still not quite measuring up. Lawlessness, on the other hand, has the idea of living in outright, open rebellion against God. If you know what God says, you just live in outright defiance against him. If you aren't aware of God's instructions, you don't care enough to find out more.

Now we can probably recognize there are times when we slip into the mentality that God is just like some overbearing teacher or demanding boss. We get disgruntled and decide we're going to do our own thing. No matter what you do, it's never enough, so why bother trying to please God. We try to slide by, doing just enough to avoid attention and detection. We don't let God's standards bother us too much as we make our own way through life. I imagine most of us get those feelings sometimes. But since we are here in church, paying attention to God's Word, that means we probably still care about what he says beyond just going through the motions. We want God to be happy with us. We want God to notice that we are working hard and making sacrifices. We have this deep desire to be noticed and congratulated by God. We want to be acknowledged that we are separating ourselves from other people so God promotes us up to the next level.

Sometimes we just get so absorbed in living out each day. We can't let ourselves get too caught up in thinking about the big picture. By some estimates 74% of Americans are behind on their retirement planning. That same study highlights the average monthly social security payment received by retirees in 2017 was \$1,386.¹ Those numbers just show that

¹ <https://www.aplaceformom.com/blog/americans-are-not-ready-for-retirement/>

most people, not just a small minority have not done enough to plan for typical health care expenses, leisure activities or senior living costs when they plan for retirement. Another study found that among the various fears related to retirement - like losing Social Security benefits or the rising costs of healthcare - the greatest percentage fear not being able to retire at all.² That means working well past the age when you'd like to retire.

Now this isn't God's biggest concern for your life. But it just shows that we can get so focused on what's right in front of us. We can put our heads down and do our best to obey and serve and keep God happy with our best efforts. And yet when we do look up, we have that uncomfortable tension of realizing our inability to perfectly work our way toward God. That work will never be done.

But God wants a different way of looking at ourselves that comes from a different way of looking at our work. Hebrews gives us this contrast: **"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 this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."** (Hebrews 10:11,12) God's people who knew and cared about God's demands in his law were in a cycle. They brought sacrifices and the priest offered them up repeatedly on their behalf. Yet every law and every sacrifice were just preliminary to the ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Jesus brought them to their end goal by his sacrifice. So he brings his people to God's ultimate goal for them.

There's only one way to be able to say everything is done. Completely. Absolutely. For all time. Hebrews shows us this portrait of Jesus: **"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."** (Hebrews 10:12-14) Jesus made one sacrifice. That sacrifice was enough to put an end to all sacrifices to match God's expectation. That was the work Jesus did.

Only Jesus could offer this sacrifice. Only the death of God's own Son could accomplish what the blood of bulls and goats could never achieve. Only his death, pouring out every last drop of blood for the sins of humanity could fully cover over every sin ever committed. Only Jesus could ever say all of his work is completely finished. Only Jesus would never have to get up again and go through the same routine day after day and perform the same rituals repeatedly. Only Jesus could take his rightful place in heaven at his Father's side knowing everything has been done for humanity that was required.

There's a huge difference in our world between graduation and retirement. Graduation means you are moving on to the next step. You have work to do. You are just more prepared for more advanced work. Retirement says you don't have to work any more. As those statistics cited earlier remind us, it's not a guarantee for every person. So it's a tremendous blessing to be able to do what you want without feeling like you have to work. But wouldn't

² <https://www.gobankingrates.com/retirement/planning/americans-fear-never-being-able-retire/>

it be a shame if you stopped working just to stop doing anything? If every day of retirement you just put on your slippers and spent the whole day in front of the TV?

Instead, there are people who dive into retirement with passion and vigor. They still have enough stamina and health to do the things they want to do instead of the things someone else wants them to do. What are you passionate about? What would you love to do if you didn't have to do it to make a living? Do you love your family and can't wait to spend the bulk of your time being there for your aging parents and the young families just scraping by? Do you love animals and want to devote your life to helping them? Do you love the outdoors and would want nothing more from life than to just get lost in the woods for weeks or guide newbies into a deeper appreciation of nature? Do you love learning new things and would love to travel to new places or volunteer at museums so other people can develop appreciation for history, art, and culture? Do you care about at risk kids in our community and would love to be able to be a role model and mentor for them?

Hebrews chapter 10 expresses the finished work of Jesus in a way that is a little tricky to put into regular English. Verse 14 says: **“For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”** (Hebrews 10:14) This means Jesus has made you perfect. There is nothing missing. There is nothing lacking in what Jesus did. There is nothing left undone. Jesus doesn't demand anything from you. He doesn't require any contribution on your part.

And yet we are people who God says **“are being made holy.”** (Hebrews 10:14) We are people who have direct access to come to God. We have unlimited access to receive gifts from our Savior. We come to be daily and weekly refreshed by his good news in Jesus when we open the Scriptures. We come to be given the actual body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of our sins. There is no longer anything we have to do. But God is still working in us.

Maybe that's actually more like a charitable foundation than retirement. It's hard to imagine getting to this level. But some people achieve a certain status where they recognize there's nothing more they need. They have nothing left to prove or accumulate. So they start giving it all away. They live to improve the lives of others.

You and I know the tension of trying to live under God's demands and satisfy every expectation of our righteous Judge. And yet we are blessed to know Jesus has done it all. There are people who are trapped in this hamster wheel of trying to be acceptable to God by their work. You have the perfect work of Jesus to share with them. There are people who live under the crushing load of guilt and shame because they know they haven't done enough. You have the no-strings-attached forgiveness of Jesus to give them. You know people in your life who ping-pong from pride to despair, from feeling so good to feeling utterly worthless. You have the blessed calling to free them from this spiritual tension. Jesus did his work. Jesus did your work. Your work is done. Enjoy your freedom! Amen.