

Good Friday
Hebrews 7:27 – We Preach Christ Crucified: Once for All Time
April 2, 2010 by: Pastor Wessel

*God's own Son most holy Came a servant lowly,
Came to live among us, Came to suffer for us,
Bore the cross to save us, Hope and freedom gave us.*

Introduction – What is it you see before you today? What you see before you today is your only hope. Hope for what? Your only hope to escape God's justice. We will all meet our Maker one day, knowing full well that we have sinned against his perfect law. Like a fugitive from the law, we can try to run and hide, try to avoid that day, but eventually time will run out and there will be no place to hide.

But if you meet your Maker trusting that the horrible scene on the hill called Golgotha, with three bodies hanging on crosses, on a day in many ways just like today, and believe that the whole scene was planned and executed because of your Maker's great love for you, then you can meet him with confidence, without a doubt that your Maker will welcome you home with open arms, eager to have you enjoy the kind of life that he had originally planned for everyone – an endless feast, you might say, of peace and joy and health, the tranquility and the eternity of God's paradise home.

It is my privilege today to Preach Christ Crucified. The scene of Christ crucified seems to be a scene of weakness and foolishness to so many, but for us who are being saved, we see God's greatest power and wisdom. I am here to proclaim Christ crucified for you, so that you might enjoy the daily encouragement of God's mercy for you. I am here to tell you about Christ crucified so that you can be confident that you have eternal life through your crucified Savior, who was sacrificed once, for all time. We hear the Word of God recorded in the letter to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 7:27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Brothers and sisters – not only in the family of humanity, but also in the family of God: In the distant past, in a time and world that we cannot easily recognize with our 21st century eyes and ears, God established a priesthood among his chosen people on the other side of the world. It was 1,400 years before the birth of Jesus, God the Father's own Son and Christ. It was the time of Moses and the Exodus of the slave nation of Israel out of Egypt and their entrance into the freedom of the Promised Land. In this new land, in one sense they were their own masters, but they always had God watching over them.

They did not need a king because God ruled his people through his chosen priests, from the tribe of Levi, who were scattered throughout the Promised Land. These priests represented God among the people, spiritual leaders. They also served as the representatives of the people before God. They were in the middle of it all. They would present the prayers and sacrifices of the people to God according God's own instructions. They delivered God's messages of justice and mercy.

One of their important responsibilities was the presentation of animal sacrifices. Animal sacrifices were demanded by God for almost every aspect of human life: they were commanded to maintain fellowship between God and his people and between God's people and their brothers; they were commanded for premeditated sins and sins committed in ignorance; they were commanded for specific sins and for sin in general. Blood sacrifices needed to be made for grandpa and grandma, for mom and dad, and for the kids. Blood sacrifices were for the prosperous and the needy. They were necessary for the priests and the sheep herders, the artists, and the carpenters. They were for the descendents of Israel and for the foreigners who had been brought into the faith of Abraham. God clearly showed his people that no one is exempt. No one could escape his wrath. There was no way, except through the shedding of innocent blood.

The job of priest was a full time job, because sin was a full time occupation, even for the people of God, who had been blessed by God with such a special, intimate relationship. "*Day after day*" the high priests needed to offer sacrifices, "*first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.*" The priests that God chose to represent the people and to represent him to the people, were sinful human beings. So the high priests had weaknesses and limitations, not the least of which that each of the priests was only able to serve for a limited time, because they were mortal. Each priest would die and be buried and another would take his place.

But God has introduced to us a better high priest. In fact, he is the perfect high priest, far superior in every way to every high priest appointed among the people of Israel. He is superior even to Aaron, the brother of Moses, who was the first high priest chosen by God. Today, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, as hard as it is, as he is hanging on the cross. He is the one high priest we need, the Son of God himself, showing us his Father. He is also the high priest serving as our representative before God. We fix our eyes on him as he hangs there awfully, in a very fitting way, between God and the people of this world, suspended on a wooden cross, doing what every high priest did – offering a sacrifice. Christ Jesus hangs there, declaring both God's justice, which condemns every sinner, as well as God's mercy, which assures us that sinners are freed from their obligation to obey the law of God and free from the obligation to be punished if they disobey.

In a twist that may seem somewhat ironic, Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee, of the tribe of Judah, descended also from King David, came to die for the sins and weaknesses of the high priests of God's chosen tribe of Levi. He also came to die and at the hands of those priest. So he becomes the perfect high priest offering the perfect, one-time sacrifice, his innocent blood shed for every human being, ever guilt ridden soul.

The chief priests so badly wanted to see Jesus dead, so they handed him over to the Roman governor. The High Priests Annas and Caiaphas, had the privilege to serve as God's representatives to the people and to serve as the representatives of the people before God. But they and their priesthood were overwritten by the faithful service in the real temple of heaven, the Most Holy Place, by the perfect high priest. Their priesthood was established by God, but it was inferior because of their sinfulness. The high priesthood of Jesus Christ was superior, because he did not sacrifice for his own sins, because he had no sin.

Can you hear the voice of our High Priest as he hangs there? Can you picture yourself standing there with Mary and John and the other women, in total disbelief at such cruelty done to an innocent man? It is the voice of the Eternal God, his own Son, always one with the Father and the Spirit. He utters his statement from the cross with the pain and anguish that are felt by his crucified body and his tormented soul. It is the voice of the Perfect High Priest doing his perfect work, stepping in-between God and us, in order to destroy the hostility that our disobedient human race has caused and bring us God's peace. His sinless sacrifice is made once for all time.

While enduring the brutality of the crucifixion, the burning muscles, and the unbelievable tension on every joint, the bloody ribbons of flesh from the scourging and the piercing pain of the thorns leaving their marks on his skull, what does he say? *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Any other man at the very least would be tempted to spit venom and curse the very souls of those carrying out such a horrible unjust execution. An innocent man was robbed of a perfect life in which he could accomplish so much good for so many. Why could his ministry not continue? Think of the places he could have gone, the miracles he could have performed, the people he could have reached with his life saving message! But no, here he is, killed for crime he didn't commit, his life cut short, no more opportunities to do mission work to save lost souls.

There is no cursing from Jesus, no words of anger. He had spoken more harshly to the Pharisees in his preaching and teaching. He was never reluctant to condemn the sinfulness of the arrogant and the hard-hearted. But the sacrifice of the high priest isn't about proclaiming the law to sinners. It is about proclaiming the gospel, the message of God's forgiveness. No curses from Jesus for those who are gloating over his death. Just, *"Father, forgive them."* That is what the sacrifices of the high priest always pictured – forgiveness. The death of an animal instead of the death of a sinful human being. A reason for us to leave the scene on Golgotha and say thank you to our merciful God. A reason to leave that scene and have hope like none other – hope that will not disappoint us.

The chief priests, who served in the temple most likely were celebrating the Passover in those days, just as Jesus had with his disciples on Maundy Thursday. They were celebrating the sacrifice of a lamb without any spots or defects. They were celebrating a sacrifice that had saved their people from certain death in Egypt so long ago. At the same time, ironically, unjustly, and eagerly, they were ushering to his death the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Caiaphas the High Priest, in his political pride and hunger for power, that year had talked about the need to sacrifice Jesus: *"You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."* (John 11:50) How little did he realize that Jesus to be sacrificed – once for all time, superior to every sacrifice offered by his fellow priests.

For these sinful, temporary, mortal priests, Jesus asks forgiveness from his Father in heaven. For everyone who needs to be punished for unfaithfulness and hard heartedness and facing God every day, but refusing to go along with his will, Jesus asks for forgiveness. In other words, Jesus asks for forgiveness from his Father for everyone. And his prayer is answered by his own willingness to die for you and me. *"He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."* The perfect sacrifice does not need to be repeated. The one time offering of the life of God's own Son paid for the guilt of every sinful human being. From Adam to the last person born before Christ's return, the sacrifice has removed all human guilt, from the smallest deception to the worst war crime.

Conclusion – You don't need to make any sacrifices to enter into the presence of God. You enter the presence of God with the historical fact of the Lamb of God sacrificed once for all time. You enter the presence of God pure and innocent through Christ. Your sin has been paid for in full, no outstanding debt, no debt collector on your trail. Bring your prayers to God. He promises to hear them. Offer yourself to him each day. Though imperfect, you are holy in God's eyes through Jesus Christ. Amen.