

## The Covenant behind Bethlehem (Hebrews 10:1-17)

The beautiful unity and harmony between O.T. and the N.T. finds its golden link in the plan of God to send Christ as our merciful Redeemer. Scripture attests to the fact in many places that God's plan send His only begotten Son was formed in eternity past (Titus 1:1-3; 2 Tim 1:9).

We shall designate this divine plan (formed before time) to send the Son: **the counsels of redemption**. In eternity past, the Father and the Son entered an agreement, or covenant if you will, with one another. The Father promised to give a people to the Son upon certain conditions fulfilled by the Son.

The promise to give Christ a people was contingent, or dependent upon the Son's obedience. The Son's incarnation and sacrificial death constituted the work of redemption (the work given Him by the Father). This promise given to the Son of a people is condensed (and foretold) in a number of Scripture passages. Isaiah 53:10 is one of the most sublime: "But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand" (Is 53:10).

It was said of the O.T prophetic authors of Scripture (among whom was David). "They spoke better than they knew." This is especially true in the Messianic prophecies. David (in the Psalm from which our N. T. text is taken, Psalm 40) expresses his inspired recognition of the fact that animal sacrifices cannot adequately communicate devotion to God — so David speaks as if self-offering will be the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

When David penned this, he wrote better than he knew. For, the Psalm prophetically points forward to the only One who could bring those words to fulfillment — it points to Christ the Lord. For in the fulfillment of this Psalm, Jesus is consciously offering up His body as a sacrifice.

We will see in our text this morning the conditions necessary for the Son to fulfill the eternal counsels of redemption are centered upon the incarnation. A body must be prepared for the second person of the Godhead to occupy.

*PROPOSITION:* Our purpose this morning is to better understand the will of the Father in planning our salvation, that we might develop an ever stronger hope in the Lord and assurance of faith, that we might serve Him with joy and surrender.

## **I. THE PLAN OF GOD**

**The plan of redemption was formed by the Father in eternity past (vv. 1-6).**

V. – 1 A shadow is a dim representation of an actual object. The closer the object, the more defined the edge of the shadow (the further away, the fuzzier). The good things to come is Christ, and the mercy and grace the Church receives by His coming in the flesh. O.T. types and prophecies Christ are but a shadow, but Christ is the substance. The constant repetition of the O.T. sacrifices was, evidence of their total inability to make the worshipper perfect in conscience before God.

Vv. -- 2-3 — O.T. ceremonies could give a sense of temporary forgiveness, but couldn't perfect or purge the conscience of the worshipper. The constant need of sacrifices was a disturbing reminder and remembrance of personal sins. The Levitical system of sacrifices and ceremonial cleanness was intended to raise the consciousness of sin to new heights — it really wasn't intended to bring in a pervasiveness consciousness of pardon, peace, and liberty before God. In that sense the Levitical sacrifices were preparatory for Christ's work.

In the O.T., confession of sin was actually part the sacrifice offered (hands were placed upon the head lamb in a symbolic transfer of guilt), but in the New Covenant, the believer is encouraged to confess sin because an all-sufficient atonement has already been made.

V. 4 — The O.T. believer was taught to look forward to the ultimate sacrifice which alone could take away sins (note John the Baptist's announcement – John 1:29). God planned a way to take away sins which was consistent with His truth, holiness, and righteousness. The O.T. sacrifices did have value -- Scripture taught that atonement must be made by means of substitution — the just for the unjust, the innocent in place of the guilty (Lev 17:11).

Christ's blood alone is that perfect propitiation that satisfies God's broken law and justice. Unbelievers who die lost are ruined because they look to other ways of expiation; the other ways are insufficient to protect men from divine wrath (the

fact that God condemns all other ways of seeking pardon is evidence of His holiness, righteousness and severity against sin). (EX John Amador — Cal Poly.)

Vv. 5-6 — The value of the O.T. sacrifices is that they point to Christ. Hebrews chapter 10 makes it clear that the incarnation of Christ has a central purpose—the sacrifice of Christ Himself. (Religious liberals would scoff at that, suggesting the purpose of Christ’s birth was His teachings and His example, etc.). These two verses (vv. 5-6) open up the wonder of God’s plan; they give us insight into the depths of the Father's love, grace, and wisdom.

“A body Thou hast prepared for Me” is central to God's plan to redeem sinners. The divine plan of the ages is that the Son might have a human nature able to yield obedience to the will of God. This obedience would involve yielding complete obedience to the will of God that He might offer His whole human nature; body and soul — all His substance, faculties and powers as an offering up to God (His entire humanity). And in so doing; He would confirm the eternal covenant, and would thereby inaugurate the new covenant.

He came in the flesh. “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb 2:14-15).

“But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9).

The Father prepared a body for Him to offer up (the preparation of the body is ascribed to the Father and produced, or conceived by the Holy Spirit). By “a body” is meant a human nature with a rational soul, able to feel pleasure, pain, the full range of emotions. The Father prepared it, ordering all things necessary; the Holy Spirit conceived it; the Son assumed it. The Son of God’s union with human nature is completely personal -- two natures: One Person. This is a very deep mystery; He is fully human and fully God.

Christ's coming in the flesh (assuming our nature) is the effect of an eternal counsel between the Father and the Son. Before the worlds were created, the Father proposed the plan to His Son, what His will and design was. Isaiah 53:10 is the quintessential core of that eternal counsel. "If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring." The Son willingly accepted the condition – for the Son's response is captured in our text: "Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, but a body Thou has prepared for Me" (v. 5).

## II. THE PROPITIATION OF GOD

### **Propitiation was accomplished by the Son in His suffering (vv. 7-9).**

Vv. 7-9— in these verses we see into heart of Christ; we see His love, obedience, and willingness to suffer -- His total resolve to do His Father's will (on behalf of believing sinners). Christ is proclaiming His determination to obey the Father.

The Psalm expresses His heart of obedience. *By this very passage written of Me, I will undertake to do Thy will.*

"Lo, Behold," ( 10:7) emphasizes a complete spirit of obedience in Christ — In effect Christ is saying; *Behold, I voluntarily delight to fulfill Thy counsels and My covenant with Thee. I desire to perform Thy promises and fulfill Thy prophecies. By this very passage written of Me, I undertake to do Thy will – to die for the sins of the world that all who believe may be saved. Let the curse fall on Me; but let these whom Thou hast given to Me go their way.*

"I came down from heaven to do the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn 6:38). The 'will' here, is Thy will, the Father's will – it is not from anyone but God (it is not the Ten Commandments, it is the eternal covenant of redemption). It is the good pleasure of God by which He proposed to call, justify, sanctify, and save to the uttermost – bringing the elect to glory.

Just how this redemption was to be accomplished was hidden in the Bosom of God from the beginning of the world (Eph 3:8-9). In the fullness of time God broke into human history, He revealed His mystery; Christ Himself who is the answer to man's guilt, fears, darkness, and confusion (Gal 4:1-7). Because of the redemption wrought by the Son of God, we go from shadowy knowledge to seeing the glory of God displayed in the face Christ. Like the sun breaking

through a thick grey cloud, Christ sends His beams of light as God's 'sunrise from on high' (Lu 1:78-79).

He takes away the old order; He removes the old covenant in order to establish the new. Those who continue to offer up sacrifices as in the old covenant, whether material or animal, are guilty of flagrant opposition to the revealed will of God in the gospel. For since Christ's finished work, God only accepts spiritual sacrifices, that is the fruit of lips that give thanks (Heb 13:16; Rom 12:1-2).

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### **III. THE PURPOSE OF GOD**

**The will of God sanctifies through the offering of the body of Jesus (v. 10).**

Here is the heart of our passage – we send a depth gauge down but we cannot plumb its bottom. We sit in a tiny boat on an expansive an ink blue sea but cannot fathom the depths. Yet we are invited by God's Spirit to meditate upon and dwell upon the eternal counsels of God that planned our redemption. There is nourishing spiritual food for your soul here -- spiritual nutrients designed to establish you in your faith and deepen your hope and confidence God. For, the book of Hebrews was written to make persecuted, doubting believers hold fast to their God.

Notice that the cause of the believer being set apart to God ('sanctified') is the eternal will of God (v. 10) – the same will of God that prepared a body for the Son to occupy and to sacrifice. This is the will of God that our Savior so willingly undertook to fulfill (as 'His meat and drink'). Every present and eternal blessing of salvation that comes to us comes by way of God willing the sacrificial offering of His Son.

God's will here is not merely His will of precepts or commands (the Decalogue), His will has as its aim that sinful men should be constituted into a people for Himself. It is a will which has resolved that their sin should be dealt with so that it no longer keeps them at a distance from Him. In short, it is a will that provides a righteous standing for sinners in His sight. It is a will which calls for the Son's obedient in the suffering of death so that God's wrath against sin can be fully satisfied on behalf of believers.

By God willing Christ's sacrifice, believers are sanctified, pardoned, purified, and set God apart to God, they are placed into the body of Christ (His Church), they have peace with God; and all the privileges of the gospel — liberty, bold access

through Christ, and the glorious comforts of sonship. All these things are communicated to us because of the dignity of Christ's Person and the efficacy of His 'once for all' sacrifice. Our minds stagger at the thought of just how pleasing it was to the Father for Christ to undertake this mission of redemption. Christ's offering up of His body as a sacrifice was infinitely pleasing to the Father. Scripture says, "But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief" (Is 53:10a).

How advantageous is this will of God to the souls of men? Infinitely so! God has chosen gladly to give believers the Kingdom (Lu 12:32). The originating cause that made us accepted in the Beloved is this will of the Father in sending Christ.

Never let anyone tell you that Christ by His perfect life and by His death made God kindly disposed to sinners. No, the member of the Holy Trinity are in total harmony in the gracious salvation of sinners – for the Father's love planned the atonement. That is key in understanding the eternal counsels of redemption.

Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant; He accomplished the redemption planned by the Father. But, the originating cause that made us accepted in the Beloved is this will of the Father spoken of in verse 10. The will of the Father is the first cause which decreed redemption from the foundation of the world (Titus 1:1-3). That we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus is the instrumental or mediating cause of our salvation that was planned and willed by the Father.

God's eternal counsels of redemption made a way for mercy to reach sinners while God's truth and justice were satisfied. God's wisdom in planning propitiation towers over the human intellect. The eternal counsels of redemption are penned in Scripture so that the saints will have a solid hope in God, and that the hope of the saints will glorify God. Our ongoing action of taking refuge in Christ (who is our covenant) glorifies God.

#### **IV. THE PROMISE OF GOD**

**The victory Christ won is the new covenant hope of the saints (Vv. 11-18).**

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Because of His obedience, God has highly exalted Him. We wait for Christ's return, and Christ waits for the Father to send Him to gain a final triumph over all His foes. The amazing hope given to us in this passage is that Christ has made our enemies, His enemies. He has put Himself between us and our enemies. This is what He did when He became that 'once for all' offering. The great comfort and consolation of the Church is that our Savior in glory wants our enemies defeated even more than we do! And He will vanquish all of them. They are under His power; He will make them His footstool. Death, the flesh, sin, the world and the devil will be deprived of all their power against us.

Vengeance and envy do not belong to us — by right of His sacrificial death, He has divested all these enemies of their power — their destruction awaits. Christ is Overcomer, Conqueror. All of His true followers are overcomers, they enter into, and appropriate the victory He has accomplished. Their success over these enemies of their souls is because of His cross of Christ.

The offering up of the Son of God to Father is of unspeakable value and everlasting efficacy — His offering has the power to perfect all of them that are sanctified — utterly to the end of time. The Son's incarnation and sacrificial death constituted the work of redemption given Him by the Father.

By the sacrifice of Himself He brought us into a state of sanctification wherein is complete pardon, infinite privileges, and the nearest possible relation to God. Believers are being conformed to the likeness of their Head. This is true of every single person that knows God.

Our Savior found pleasure in doing the Father's will. Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15:14).

Because of Christ's victory, the outstanding feature of the new covenant is the promise that God will no longer remember their sins. This stands in contrast to the continual remembrance of sins under the old covenant. Christ blotted out the sins of His people beyond recognition when He offered Himself up to God on our behalf. His death ushered in a new covenant and abolished the old order.

CONCLUSION: God's action in telling us that Christ should be the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8) is for the believer's faith and comfort. God's promises to the saints are annexed to God's eternal counsels to give His Son on our behalf. Here is where our faith rests; not only in Christ's historic death, but also in the revelation of the heart and character of God—displayed in the eternal counsels redemption.

Therefore, a study of the eternal counsels not only reveals Christ's love and obedience in His willingness to do will of God, but these counsels also reveal God's heart disposition toward elect in giving His Son. God's eternal counsels form the ground of the believer's hope (Heb 6: 13-20).

What an awesome thought that an eternal decree lies behind the virgin birth in Bethlehem, and behind the spectacle of Calvary -- an eternal decree consisting of a covenant between the Father and the Son for the salvation of our souls.

All the promises of the gospel made to us have as their ultimate foundation the eternal counsels redemption. Christ is God's mystery. "By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16).

Christ is the storehouse of all graces. He bears a relationship to the Godhead by nature so that we, being found in Him (by union with Him), have right relatedness to the Trinity, and have the gift of sonship in Him. Christ our representative is God's Son by His divine nature, that we might be (in Him) sons of God by adoption through His grace (Rom 8:29).

Our mystical union with Christ was planned by the Father. We must continually meditate on the completeness of this bond to our Head. His life and death are mine; He, in my nature, assumed my sins, punishment, wrath, and shame. From communion with His Person issues forth communion with His benefits.

Let us more frequently consider the benefits of, and the redemptive significance of, the hypostatic union. The Holy Spirit knit an indissoluble knot between our human nature and Christ's deity—all that we might have perfect representation before God Almighty. "Behold, our dust and ashes were forever assumed into the unity of God's own person!" (Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*).

The eternal counsels of redemption do not constitute a bare plan to give a people to Christ. God's eternal counsels embrace the very names of those who will be given to the Son. We must personalize our text. In our meditation, let us sink into the depths of God's love in this – that there never was a point in eternity past when He did not contemplate and foreknow each elect individual as being in the Son. For this is what is meant when Christ said to His disciples, "Rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Lu 10:20).