

Heb. 9:1-10 – A Picture of Pre-Christ Worship – Lesson Summary

They say a picture's worth a thousand words. At times I'd beg to differ. If you've ever played Pictionary with a bad artist you understand. It's usually only after time's run out and they've told you what the drawing was supposed to be that you see any resemblance at all. Fortunately, the author of Hebrews isn't a bad artist. In fact, as He's inspired by God, our great Creator, he "paints a picture" of pre-Christ worship in order to emphasize the superiority of Christ in our worship today. The author is reminding his audience of how God had instructed His people to worship Him. He emphasizes the tabernacle and the priesthood in order to show that they were always pointing toward Christ.

When you consider the first 10 verses of *Heb. 9* there are **two distinct sections**. *Heb. 9:1-5* deals with **the place of worship** while *Heb. 9:6-10* describes **the priest's role in the practice of worship**. These concepts are somewhat foreign to us but they would have been familiar to the author's audience. As former Jews, these details and practices would have likely become routine to them at one time.

As we look at the details of the tabernacle it could be easy to gloss over them. However, each item present had a very distinct purpose as it pointed to an aspect of God's character and the coming work of the Messiah. The establishment of the tabernacle signified our call to gather as believers. It's not uncommon today to hear people say that they worship God in their own way. People argue that the church is irrelevant, that they could worship the same in nature, or that they prefer their own quiet times with God. While these are essential aspects of our personal walk with Christ, they are not to replace the importance of gathering as a body of believers. I confess that at times I have wrongly viewed the tabernacle as a portable tent rather than the gathering place of God's people.

The outer court housed the alter, a constant display of our need to be forgiven of our sins. The laver was a reminder that we are all unclean before a holy God. In the Holy Place the design of the lampstand was a direct reference to the tree of life. It should serve as a reminder of the story of God's desire to be with His people. The bread of the presence is a reminder of God's care and became a food offering to the Lord. The alter of incense placed directly outside the curtain leading into the Most Holy Place served as a reminder of God's continued interaction with His people. He was and is not a God who is distant and disconnected. He's a God who "heard the cries of the people". (*Ex. 3:7*) The curtain into the Most Holy Place signified our separation from God.

In the Most Holy Place the Ark was a declaration of God's covenant promise to His people. The golden urn of manna reminded them of God's sustaining care. Aaron's staff served as a reminder that God kept His people alive in the wilderness. The tablets were another reminder of God's covenant promise. They served as a reminder that God drew the people to Himself (*Ex. 19*) and then provided a way in which they could live and experience the fullness of God's presence and joy (*Ex. 20*). God first drew them to Himself before calling them to obey His laws. We do not earn God's favor in order to approach Him. He's already done so by His grace.

The author is very intentional in his presentation of the place and priestly practices of pre-Christ worship. In the remaining verses of *Heb. 9* the author will show how all of these details testified to the coming work of Christ their Messiah. The rituals were never meant to be the means by which we enter into God's presence. It is only by the means of God's grace and mercy through Christ that we are restored to our Father. It would be His cries to Heaven that would go unanswered, His blood shed, and His death that would provide the eternal forgiveness that no earthly sacrifice could. Like the audience of Hebrews, we need to remember the work of Christ. We need to remember that God had a plan for the Messiah throughout eternity and He is returning again to claim the people of His church.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What are some rituals that you go through in life? How might you struggle with living your Christian life as if it's about behavior and not the heart?
- 2) When you consider the three types of sin; commission, omission, and ignorance, where do you struggle?
- 3) How does the picture of the tabernacle and the priestly roles enhance your view of Christ?