

**The Glory of the Cross**  
*Sermon 3- The Cross and Sacrifice*

Passages: Hebrews 10:1-14  
John 15:9-17

Today is *Anzac Commemoration Sunday*, the day when churches and communities around our nation engage in *spiritual reflection* on both the atrocities and the heroics of war. Indeed, later on today, I will be standing in front of a crowd outside the Penshurst RSL, sharing in public some of the same thoughts that I want to share with you now; namely, **the essence of sacrifice** and the parallels between our Anzac soldiers and Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

If you look up the definition of **sacrifice** in the dictionary, it says something like this: **Sacrifice--** "*a voluntary giving up of something valued; forfeiture; a relinquishment; an offering.*" It's clear that, in every case, sacrifice is both painful and costly. We might sacrifice our health, our home, our livelihood, even our lives for the sake of others. But, *we will only do this when our sacrifice is understood to benefit those we love.*

Here are just a few examples:

Parents will make sacrifices in order to provide for their children

Students will make sacrifices in order to get good grades and please their families.

Workers will often make sacrifices to ensure they stay employed and are able to provide for their families.

Employers will make sacrifices to ensure their employees are happy.

Athletes will make sacrifices so that they might improve, become the best in their sport and win accolades for their country.

Ordinary citizens will make numerous sacrifices (pay taxes, obey laws) in order to be acknowledged as genuine members of the local community and wider society.

Soldiers will make sacrifices for the protection of their country and the freedom of the world.

When you list all these amazing sacrifices, done by people every day, it's easy to see that the idea of **sacrifice** is a *common ideal* amongst human beings. In fact, in every culture on earth, in every race and nation, we honour and esteem those who make sacrifices. We see sacrifice as an act of love and a sign of commitment. To make sacrifices for someone else shows a most wonderful side to our human nature; the willingness to deny yourself on another person's behalf. No wonder it is universally applauded! (It's also no wonder why we tend to look down on people who *refuse* to make sacrifices for others—we generally call these people '*selfish*'!)

Surely, this is one reason why Jesus Christ has always been such a popular figure around the world! Not only is He known as a great moral teacher, but *His sacrifice on the cross* has stirred peoples' admiration for generations. How often have you heard people quote His words from John 15:13—“***No greater love has a man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends***”. How often have you seen references to His crucifixion as the epitome of all sacrifices? For this is why He said He had come to earth! He told His disciples: “***The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many!***” Clearly, He came to sacrifice His life on our behalf!

And yet, having said that, the full story of Jesus' sacrifice really *only begins here*, in this *human* notion of sacrifice. You see, unlike all other sacrifices that we, human beings, may make, Jesus' sacrifice stands out for two reasons:

**First**, when Jesus gave up His life for us, He was not doing this *as a mere man*—**He was God in human flesh!** That means that when He gave His life for all people... even for those who stood opposed to His ways of love and grace... it wasn't mere heroics or a selfless act of kindness. **It was a divine movement**, from heaven to earth. It was God who was giving up His divine life for us!

Let me read to you from **Philippians 2**.

***Phil 2:6-8*** ***Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!***

Why is this idea so important? Think about it: Whenever we, human beings,

sacrifice ourselves for others, it's only for our friends, our family, or for our own country. Never do we sacrifice for our enemies—and by inference, we are saying that they are not *worthy* of our sacrifice.

But the funny thing about Jesus is that, when He sacrificed His life, He did it **even for His enemies!** He gave His life for those who hated Him...for those who nailed Him to the cross. That's why His sacrifice is so unique! In it, we find *a divine pity for all people*. God gives His life for the entire human race because he thinks we are *worthy* of it.

The **second** thing that makes Jesus' sacrifice unique is that it fulfilled the role of blood sacrifices in the Old Testament. Now, before we can fully explore this idea, we need to consider the very human problem known as sin. Many of us think of sin as if it were some sort of moral failure. We generally think of people as *naturally good* and that, from time to time, we simply *slip*; we commit a moral error. To us, that is sin.

But the Bible speaks of sin in far larger terms. According to the Bible, sin needs to be seen as a **disease** that has infected the entire world. Sure, on the outside, some of us look healthier than others, but the reality is that we are all sick to some extent. Sometimes our sickness shows up in public—we get angry, we lie, we cheat, we steal, we hurt others. But most often, our sickness is fairly invisible to others; it lies just below the surface, and we work hard to keep it hidden!

That's why the Bible can declare that ***“There is no one righteous, no not one!” “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”***. We're all sick! That's just the way it is. And that's exactly why God came to earth in Jesus Christ and gave up His life on the cross! You see, only the divine blood of Jesus can make us whole again. Only the life-blood of God has the power to restore me to my original humanity. Let me finish the verse that I just quoted from Romans 3, verses 23 and 24: ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and have been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood.”***

There's a lot I could say about these verses, but the essential point I want to make is this: When the Father sent the Son into the world, there was a divine plan in mind. ***“God presented Him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement”***. That means that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross was

designed to **deal with** (to ultimately heal) **our disease of sin!**

How was His sacrifice supposed to work? Well, as we all know, our disease of sin shows itself most often in acts of *selfishness*. ***“We like sheep have all gone astray, each to his own way.”*** But as Jesus offered His life-blood to the world in pure and perfect *selflessness*, this divine *selflessness* came with enough potential power that it could overcome all the human *selfishness* of sin in the world! In other words, as people looked to the cross, **Jesus’ selflessness was available for all, to be the antidote to our selfishness.**

But there’s more to it than that. Whenever the Bible speaks about Jesus’ sacrifice, it makes a point of mentioning His *blood*. Here are a few examples:

***Eph 2:13*** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*

***Heb 9:14*** *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ...cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

***HEB 10:19-22*** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...*

***Heb 13:12*** *And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.*

***1 Peter 1:18-19*** *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

***1 John 1:7*** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

***Rev 1:6*** *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...*

If you have any familiarity with the Old Testament, you’ll soon realize that this talk of Jesus’ blood is connected back to an ancient ritual of the Old Testament, when the blood of animal sacrifices was thought to somehow minimize the effect of sin on earth. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament,

worshippers were commanded to come to God (in the Tabernacle or Temple) with a blemish-free animal. As the worshipper placed its hands on the animal's head, he/she became connected to that animal. Then, when the animal's life-blood was poured out and sprinkled on the altar and on the worshipper, it was as if a transfer was taking place— that person's sin was being transferred to the dying animal while the animal's life was being transferred to the worshipper. It wasn't a legal transfer, but more like a spiritual blood transfusion! In effect, **God was establishing a way through which the healing of sin could take effect in His people through the life-blood of animal sacrifice. This is what Biblical sacrifice is all about!** God takes human sin so seriously that He sacrifices what is, obviously, very precious to Him...an animal that He created... and in love, He offers it to human beings to cover their sin with blood.

Let's see if we can make this idea a bit more personal. Imagine that I've just made a hash of a particular relationship—I've hurt a friend by saying something stupid. Now, that my disease of sin has become public and I realize how much I've offended my friend, God commands me to come to the Tabernacle and bring one of my best animals with me. And so, I go out to the farmyard and I say to myself, *"What an idiot I am! I've messed up God's good world by ruining a relationship that He so generously gave to me. Who can rescue me from my bondage to sin's grip?"* As I choose a blemish-free animal to kill, I suddenly realize that God has given me the answer to my problem of sin. I can be saved by the blood of this animal... an animal that (relationally speaking) is purer than I am. After all, an animal is innocent of sin; An animal is free of sin's grip. And so, as I slit its throat and splash its blood over the altar and on my earlobes, I pray to God: *"May your gift of this animal's pure life-blood overwhelm the disease of my sin. May it purify me from the outside in."*

Essentially, my prayer is for *healing...that I might be healed of my disease of sin!* And that is exactly what God wants for every human being! God, who is the author of life, hates to see His world fall apart in the deathly breakdown of relationships. That, of course, is exactly where our disease of sin is taking the human race. And that's why God wants, more than anything else, to cover our sins in the blood of the innocents. Indeed, when you see it this way, you begin to understand how much this must have cost God throughout the Old

Testament epoch as He ordered thousands and thousands of His beautiful creatures (bulls, goats, lambs, doves without any obvious blemish) to be

slaughtered for the sake of human sin. And yet, that is the price He was willing to pay—that is the *sacrifice* that God was willing to make-- to **contain** the spread of our disease.

I say **contain** because the Bible is clear that the blood of bulls and goats could never **cure** us of our sin; it could never fully **take it away**—it could only **cover** it for a while. Nevertheless, that blood still had something of a positive effect throughout the Old Testament period, for *it held the disease of sin in abeyance until the real remedy could come!*

And here's where we get into a *New Testament understanding of sacrifice*. You see, from the first days of His ministry in Galilee, Jesus was known prophetically as “**the Lamb of God**”. These words from John the Baptist tell us that Jesus would eventually die...His blood would be poured out... to heal humanity's disease of sin. “***Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***”

You all know that today is **Palm Sunday**, right? So tell me, why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem that day? Why did He even go there when He knew that all the religious leaders of the Temple were so openly opposed to Him? Why did He approach the hornet's nest when He could have so easily stayed away?

Given what we've talked about so far, the answer is quite simple: **He came to destroy the Temple and overthrow every false use and understanding of sacrifice!** You see, the Temple's sacrificial system has become abused and severely corrupted. Every day, hundreds of animals were being killed in Jerusalem...but killed under the false illusion (the pagan belief) that their blood was being offered to God, to somehow appease His anger. It is this false view of God that Jesus came to destroy! It is this false understanding of the nature of sacrifice that Jesus came to overturn! In actual fact, **Jesus came into the Temple to declare Himself the perfect and the final sacrifice, the sacrifice that comes from heaven to earth; “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”** Only in the sacrifice of His divine blood, flowing from heaven to earth, would God's house be restored to a place of healing and become the house of prayer for all nations that it was created to be.

Keep these ideas in mind as I read, again, today's passage from Hebrews 10. Close your eyes and listen carefully to the heavenly pattern and the

divine blood that flows from heaven to earth to heal our broken world!

**Heb 10:1-14** *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect (make whole again) those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

*Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’ ” First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

*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. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

Now, in the light of all this, the greatest question we can ask ourselves is this: **How do we avail ourselves of His sacrifice?** I mean, we love to talk about the great sacrifices made by the Anzacs...or by our parents...or the sacrifices that we had to make in life to get where we are today. We love to honour people who have made sacrifices for our country...for our freedom...for our future. We build monuments and erect statues! We have holidays! It's great. They are important to our identity and form an essential part of our cultural heritage...

**But** do they even come close to the sacrifice that God made for us on the cross? God took on our human flesh in Jesus Christ order to love us back to life with His own blood. **What should we do with that?**

Well, on the night before Jesus was crucified, He took bread and wine and

**He showed us what we should do**-- he commanded us to continually remember His sacrifice every time we eat the bread and drink the cup. And He wasn't simply talking about doing it in church on Sundays. He was talking about making every day a memorial to His blood! He was asking us to live all of life from inside His sacrifice...that by His blood, we might be enlivened... animated... and empowered by His sacrifice on the cross. That we might now live **sacrificial lives** for others within His sacrifice.

Surely, when you see it this way, as God's sacrifice for us...as God coming to personally heal us through Christ's blood...you can finally grasp the **glory of the cross!**

Let's pray.