

Flawless Sanctuary

Intro:

Those of you who know Suzanne and I know that we enjoy home improvement projects. In fact, many of you helped us with The Well's own edition of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" after we moved here to Brighton. We bought a foreclosure and proceeded to remodel the entire interior in just 5 weeks! It was a lot of fun, but even more work.

I remember when we bought our house in Georgia. It was built in the mid 80s and the previous owners had done nothing to it. We bought it in 2001 and it was in serious need of updating. It was completely livable as long as you kept your eyes closed when you came into the house! The flooring in the foyer and kitchen was fake parquet linoleum; the kitchen cabinets were a medium-dark stained oak and the counter tops were the butcher block formica. Now, if that describes your house right now, I don't mean to offend your decorating taste, but it just wasn't our style! You had these 3 different wood grain and colors going on—and two of them were fake!

As we began to slowly remodel our house—we took about 8 years to remodel the interior of the house, not 5 weeks—we learned something very frustrating about the builder. The kitchen and all three bathrooms all had wallpaper on the walls. But as a short-cut, he put the wallpaper directly over the drywall without priming or using sizer first. That means, if you try to peel the wallpaper off, it takes all or a portion of the drywall paper layer with it!

Thankfully, we learned this lesson as we were working on our little powder room 1/2 bath. After we had finished removing the wallpaper—and half of the drywall paper layer—we took one look at the walls and decided to cover them with wainscot paneling! Needless to say, in the remaining bathrooms and the kitchen, we didn't even try removing the wallpaper. We just painted over it. But, the problem with painting over wallpaper is that you can see the seams and sometimes the wallpaper—where maybe it didn't adhere completely to the drywall—forms a bubble because the wallpaper swells when it gets saturated with the paint.

Thankfully, here at our Brighton house, only the kitchen was wallpapered and whoever put it up did it correctly. So, our demolition team was able to take off the wallpaper without damaging the drywall underneath.

Today, we're going to talk about the difference between having our sins covered and having them taken away. The Old Covenant—which we saw last week represented religion and man's efforts to make himself right with God—**The Old Covenant covered, but Jesus takes away.**

So, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Hebrews 9. If you don't have a Bible...

Read Hebrews 9:1-10

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As we dive into the text of Hebrews 9, we see that **Israel was constantly reminded of their sinfulness**. We talked about this last week. The whole purpose of The Law was to show Israel when they were breaking God's law. But there's more in this text. Look at verses 1-4.

Read Hebrews 9:1-4

We see that the tabernacle was set up just as God had instructed Moses. A few months ago, Jeff took us through a study of the Tabernacle and how every piece, every item symbolized something. The lampstand symbolized Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:12); the table of consecrated bread symbolized Jesus as the Bread of Life (John 6:35). These items were in the Holy Place where the priests performed their duties every day. Then, there was a curtain and behind that curtain was the Most Holy Place. This was the place where only the High Priest could enter and only once a year. In the Most Holy Place was the golden altar of incense which symbolizes the prayers of God's people.

Then, there's the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark is the original **stone tablets** containing the 10 Commandments and reminding them of **God's laws which they had already broken**, but there are also some other interesting items. I've read this chapter several times and I've always had the perspective that these items represented miracles that God had done—and that is true. But, it wasn't until I went back and read about these items that I was struck with a realization. These items were also reminders of some Israel's most grievous sins.

Let's take the **gold jar of manna**. God had delivered His people from Egypt. They had miraculously crossed the Red Sea on dry land and watched as Pharaoh's pursuing army was drowned in the Red Sea. **Exodus 16:1-3** says...

Read Exodus 16:1-3

By the way, when God delivers us from a situation—crummy job or a bad relationship— isn't it amazing how we find ourselves looking back with longing to what God had delivered us from? While we were in the original situation, we cried out to God, "God, get me out of this job, I just can't take it anymore!" So God does. He provides a new job, and it's not long before something comes up with the new job and you start longing for your old one thinking how much better it was. That's what Israel was doing. They had forgotten how awful life was as slaves in Egypt and now all of a sudden, Egypt looked so much better. They started complaining to Moses that they missed the all-you-can-eat meat and bread buffet back in Egypt.

So, God says, "You want meat and bread? I'll give you meat and bread!" I wonder if maybe God had planned to provide something better for them, but because of their **lack of faith** demonstrated by their constant grumbling, God granted their request when, maybe He had in mind to give them something else—like maybe a land flowing with

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milk and honey? Of course, God provided manna in the morning and quail in the evening and that's what they ate for 40 years!

And in verse 32, it says...

Read Exodus 16:32-35

I believe that the manna in the ark of the covenant served as a reminder of Israel's sin of a lack of faith in God for their provision as much as it did for the miracle of God's provision of the manna. What if God had had in mind something much better for His people than quail and manna, but because of their lack of faith and their desire to go back to the place God had just delivered them from, they God what they asked for instead—and for 40 years!

The third item we see in the ark is **Aaron's rod**. Honestly, I couldn't remember the story about Aaron's rod budding. I guess maybe it wasn't made into a flannel graph for Sunday School! But, we read the story about Aaron's rod budding and actually producing almonds in the book of Numbers. Here's the context of the story. In giving Moses the Law, God had set apart the tribe of Levi as the tribe all the priests who would serve before Him in the tabernacle would come from. Within that tribe of Levi, God chose Aaron and his descendants to be the lineage for the high priest. So, all high priests were Levites, but not all Levites could be high priests—only those descended from Aaron who was Moses' brother.

Well, in Numbers 14, there is the story of a rebellion that rises up within Israel. There is more grumbling going on and then there are the workings of a *cou d'état*—a mutiny. The rebellion actually included some of those within the priestly line. Korah, who was the grandson of Levi was the ringleader. The leaders of the rebellion approached Moses and Aaron and challenged them. These Levites were saying, "Hey, were good guys. In fact, we're just as holy as you two. Who are you to set yourselves above us." In other words, they didn't like the fact that God had chosen Aaron as the high priest and they felt that they should have access to God like Aaron did.

In Numbers 16:8, it says,

Read Numbers 16:8-11

To make a long story short, God tells Moses to bring Korah and his rebels before Him the next day, the earth opens up and swallows Korah and all his followers. Skip down to verse 41 to see what happens next.

Read Numbers 16:41-45

Moses and Aaron again intercede to God on behalf of the people and God relents and does not destroy His people. So, God tells Moses to collect the rod or staff from the leader of each one of the 12 tribes of Israel. He put them in the tent of meeting before

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the ark of the covenant. God tells them that whichever tribe leader's staff buds is the tribe He has chosen as the priestly line.

Of course, they go in to find that not only has Aaron's staff budded, but it also produced almonds—another miracle. But, do you see that it also represents Israel's **rebellion**? God had appointed the priestly line but even after the earth opened up and swallowed Korah and his followers, the people grumbled against God. And in Numbers 17:10, it says,

Read Numbers 17:10

So here, in the Most Holy Place, inside the ark of the covenant are some items that served as constant reminders of Israel's sin. Over the top of the ark of the covenant is the mercy seat or atonement cover. And it is on this cover that the priest would sprinkle the blood of an animal once each year on the Day of Atonement. Look back at Hebrews 9.

Read Hebrews 9:6-10

Year after year, the high priest performed his responsibility on the Day of Atonement, yet **the people remained distant from God**. Under the Old Covenant, God was unapproachable. He was separated from the common Israelite and there was absolutely no hope for anything different. If you did happen to be the high priest, it was an incredibly fearful thing to enter the Most Holy Place. It was far from an intimate relationship with God, and definitely not a friendship.

And **the sacrifices of animals only covered their sins**. It didn't remove their guilt. The passage says that the sacrifices were only food and drink offerings or ceremonial washings. They were external regulations. So, everywhere the people of Israel went, they carried the stone tablets of the law, the jar of manna and Aaron's staff with them as a reminder of their sin and rebellion against God's laws. And each year, the high priest had to enter the Most Holy Place with another sacrifice to cover Israel's sin. But, they still had guilty consciences.

Religion and engaging in religious activities can only cover or hide our sins. Our churches are full of people who put on their happy face and act as if everything is right in their life, yet they carry with them a guilty conscience. They still feel separated from God. Maybe that's you.

This morning, our teaching is divided up into two parts with a reflection after each part. So for our first reflection, I have some questions for you.

First, **what religious activities have you tried to cover your sins?**

Second, **what reminders of your failures do you carry with you wherever you go?**

Third, **do you feel distant from God?**

Explain reflection #1.

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I think an interesting study would be to look through Scripture and find the biggest “buts” in the Bible! There’s a really big but in this chapter, because the first part of the chapter lays out the reality of living under the Old Covenant, under religion. Let’s keep reading in Hebrews 9.

Read Hebrews 9:10-14

The sacrifice of Jesus cleanses our conscience. Remember, the tabernacle is a copy of the real tabernacle in Heaven. This passage says that Jesus entered the real Most Holy Place—the one where God sits on His throne—and He put His blood on Heaven’s mercy seat. The animal sacrifices made people who were ceremonially unclean outwardly clean, but the blood of Jesus applied in Heaven’s Most Holy Place cleanses our conscience.

He is able to cleanse our conscience because **the sacrifice of Jesus takes away our sin**. It doesn’t just cover it up, it is actually removed! In John 1:29, when John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he said,

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

Verse 26 says,

“...He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

And again in Verse 28 it says,

“...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many...”

Psalms 103:12 says,

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

Unlike the Children of Israel, our sins aren’t just covered and we don’t have to walk around with the constant reminders of our sin. If we have asked for the sacrifice of Jesus to be applied to our sin debt, Jesus has removed our sin from us! He literally took all of our sin on Himself on the cross and absorbed the full wrath of God that we deserved.

Under the Old Covenant, only the High Priest could enter God’s presence in the sanctuary. But because of **the sacrifice of Jesus** that removes our sin, **we become a flawless sanctuary**.

1 Corinthians 3:16 says,

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?”

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Yes! Jesus cleanses our conscience, takes away our sin and then His Spirit sets up residency inside of us!

As we come into our second time of reflection, I wonder, **has Jesus cleansed your conscience?** Or, are you still riddled with guilt. If you have trusted in His sacrifice for your sin, Scripture is clear that He has removed our guilt. He has cleansed our conscience. You don't have to live with a guilty conscience!

Second, **has Jesus taken away your sin?** If not, let Jesus take it away! You can only cover it up with religion, but He can take it away!

And last, **have you become a flawless sanctuary where God's Spirit lives?** Once our sin has been removed, God's Spirit lives in us. We're no longer separated from God. We can enjoy a relationship—a friendship with God the way it was meant to be.

Explain Reflection #2.

Pray.