


JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

HEBREWS READING GUIDE

WEEK 14



JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

WEEK 14
APRIL 24, 2023



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A PASSAGE TO READ,

... SOME COMMENTS TO CONSIDER,

... THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK,

... A PRAYER TO PRAY.




WEEK 14

HEBREWS 9:1-17



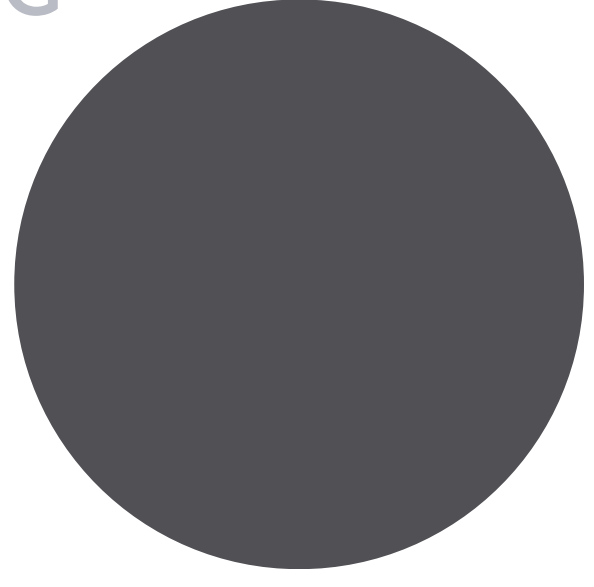
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DAY 1 LONGING FOR A NEW LITURGY

First read Hebrews 9:1-5.

The first covenant wasn't just a promise. It had ***“regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness”*** (v.1). In a word, it had its own liturgy. Professor James K.A. Smith explains that “Liturgies aim our love to different ends precisely by training our hearts through our bodies” (*Desiring the Kingdom*, 25). What our bodies do and where our bodies go, teach us how to love. Liturgies are everywhere. Wherever we look, someone or something is aiming to shape our deepest affection through what Smith calls “cultural liturgies”.

In Israel's case, there were practices (or regulations) and a place (a tent) which shaped their worship. These practices and place were meant to teach God's people about God's holiness and cultivate hearts of reverence and obedience. But as a liturgy, it was inherently flawed. After all, it was dependent upon human beings, and we don't always practice what God commands. And as beautiful as our churches and tabernacles may be, what we make “participates in the imperfection of the present world” (*O'Brien*, 307). The first liturgy is limited. Instinctively, we long for a new set of practices and a new place that won't wear out like the first. Something not dependent on human beings.

That's what the writer of Hebrews has been getting at ... Jesus gives us a new liturgy.

DAY 1 LONGING FOR A NEW LITURGY

1. Why do you think God wants to shape your loves and not just your habits?
2. What's shaping your worship right now? What ideas, longings, or circumstances are teaching you to trust or distrust the Lord?
3. How does the cross offer us a new liturgy?

Heavenly Father ...

Forgive me. Often I'm shaped and influenced by powers and ideas and liturgies which teach me to trust myself and not you. Remind me of your goodness today. Point me to the cross. Reshape me with the power of your love and grace.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 2

THE LIMITS OF THE OLD LITURGY

First read Hebrews 9:6-10.

Priests entered “the Holy Place” regularly and “the Most Holy Place” once a year to make sacrifices or atonement for the **“sins of the people”** (v.2,3,7). But this old liturgy has limits. Though all these **“gifts and sacrifices are offered [they] cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper”** (v.9b). You see, the priests were entering the presence of God. But they couldn’t stay there because their consciences are still riddled with imperfections.

Fortunately, the old liturgy was **“symbolic for the present age”** (v.9a). In other words, the first covenant was supposed to teach us that we needed new hearts, not just new habits.

Presence with God makes us whole yet our fracture souls keep us from God. Dallas Willard said, “The heart thus renovated and inhabited is the only real hope of humanity on earth” (*Renovations of the Heart*, 25). That’s the new liturgy.

Jesus taught a rich young man about this one day. The man wanted to know how to inherit eternal life. He had followed every law habitually since he was a kid. But Jesus told him, **“One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me”** (Luke 18:22). The man walked away, sad. *Why?* Because he realized the old liturgy had limits. He had new habits but not a new heart. He couldn’t stay in God’s presence. Through Jesus alone, we can remain in his presence forever because in him **“our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”** (Hebrews 10:22). Jesus gives us a new hear

DAY 2

THE LIMITS OF THE OLD LITURGY

1. What does it mean that God is holy?
2. How are you still being shaped by an old liturgy? What laws or habits do you think make you acceptable to God?
3. What do you think it means that Jesus cleanses your conscience?

Heavenly Father ...

Help me rest in your presence today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3 WE GOT SET UP

First read Hebrews 9:11-12.

Have you ever felt like it took you a long time to understand something? You know, like one of those moments when you look back on a situation or season and the dots finally connect? That's what's happening here. The writer of Hebrews has lined up all the ways the old covenant was limited in its salvific power. The priestly work of atonement was limited by this world (v.2), by the blood of animals (v.7), an imperfect conscience (v.9), and a constant need to make more sacrifices (vv.6-7). He was setting us up.

We can almost hear the intonation of his voice rise with excitement as he announces, **"But when Christ appears ..."** (v.11a). Jesus is everything earthly priests are not.

Jesus came from heaven (v.11a).

Jesus offers himself (see v.12a).

Jesus' conscience is clear.

Jesus secures **"an eternal redemption"** (v.12b).

In many ways, the old covenant was God's divine setup plan to help us to see and savor Jesus. The day Jesus rose from the dead, he walked home with a pair of grieving travelers. We're not told why, but they didn't recognize him. Instead of immediately revealing his identity, like we might suppose he would, he sets them up. He asks them questions. He listens to their story. He teaches them. Until they share a meal and Luke tells us, **"their eyes were opened, and they recognized him"** (Luke 24:31). There's no shame in being set up. God often works like this. It's not that he wants to keep something from you but rather because he wants us to see and savor the full picture when all the dots finally connect.

DAY 3 WE GOT SET UP

1. How have you seen God "set you up" to see and savor him more?
2. What does waiting on the Lord teach us? What are you waiting for right now?
3. How does the cross give us confidence that God will always show up?

Heavenly Father ...

Help me to trust you as I wait on you to connect all the dots.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOOKING GOOD AND BEING GOOD

First read Hebrews 9:13-14.

Religion gives us moral guidance and social structure. The more modern expression of spirituality (which is of course a very old idea) attempts to connect the aching soul with something bigger. We all long for a framework that makes sense of ourselves and the world. Even those who don't consider themselves religious or spiritual try to bring meaning and happiness to their lives through things like work, family, and achievement.

While each of these fulfills some semblance of goodness, they leave much to be desired. That's because, in the language of Hebrews, they can only **“sanctify for the purification of the flesh”** (v.13). Their effect is only skin deep. *But what if our need is deeper? What if our souls don't simply need the structure or the feeling of transcendence? What if they need resurrection?* You see, there's a difference between looking good and being good.

Therein lies the essence of the good news. Jesus is able to **“purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God”** (v.14). Our deepest ache is the soul-level healing of Jesus. He washes us clean and welcomes us to the Father's presence by freeing us from death, guilt, and shame (see Hebrews 4:16). What's more, in Christ, we find the moral clarity, intimacy with our Creator, and everlasting purpose we've been searching for. He doesn't just make us look some kind of way. Jesus restores our *very good* nature (see Genesis 1:31).

DAY 4 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOOKING GOOD AND BEING GOOD

1. Why do you think God cares about the way we search for meaning and purpose?
2. In what ways are you prone to settle for looking good or "purifying the flesh" rather than receiving the transforming work of the gospel?
3. How does Jesus make us good, whole, and clean?

Heavenly Father ...

*Thank you for making me good, whole, and clean before you.
Help me to live in that truth and beauty today, freed from death
and guilt and shame.*

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5

WHAT JESUS ALONE OWNS AND DESERVES

First read Hebrews 9:15-17.

Paul tells the church in Colossae that Jesus is ***“the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation”*** (Colossians 1:15). Then he goes on to explain that as the firstborn, Jesus is the rightful heir of all things; everything in heaven and on earth belongs to him (see Colossians 1:16-20). Yet by his miraculous grace, he wrote a will.

In that will Jesus has left what he alone owns and deserves to those who put their trust in him. However, a last will and testament ***“takes effect only at death”*** (v.17). This is a basic legal idea that the writer of Hebrews is using to illustrate the way our spiritual inheritance works. As death is necessary for a beneficiary to receive their earthly inheritance, so too Jesus’ death was necessary for ***“those who are called [to] receive the promised eternal inheritance”*** (v.15).

Therefore through Jesus’ death, we receive what Jesus alone owns and deserves. In him we become, ***“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”*** (Romans 8:17). What is true of him, becomes true of us. We become children of God. We receive eternal life. We enjoy shalom with the Father. We receive righteousness, glory, and joy.

DAY 5


WHAT JESUS ALONE OWNS AND DESERVES

1. What do this passage and idea tell us about the nature and character of God?
2. What part of your inheritance do you need to remember today?
3. How does this passage enhance your understanding of Jesus' death?

Heavenly Father ...

Even in this prayer, I'm enjoying a reward only your Son deserves. Your attention, love, and listening ear all are blessings of my gracious inheritance in Christ made possible by his death. I'm grateful. I'm humbled. I'm loved.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



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