

## **RELIGION IS NOT ENOUGH** **(Hebrews 10:1-18)**

You and I are familiar with “just enough.”

- We have just enough money to make it through the month.
- We have just enough energy to make it through the day.
- We have just enough time to make it to the store.
- We have just enough gas to make it back to town.
- We have just enough hope to hold on,
- . . . and we have just enough faith to carry on.

While our common experience is to have just enough, our perpetual fear is that what we have and who we are, are not enough. We fear that there will not be enough money, enough time, enough people, enough experience, enough success.

Worst of all is that the fear that we are enough. We fear we do not have what it takes. We are afraid that we are not strong enough, not smart enough, not talented enough, not pretty enough, not good enough.

Today’s text tells us about something that we adhere to, that we rely on, that in the end, is just not enough. That thing is religion. Religion is not enough. The problem is not that we aren’t religious enough; the problem is that religion itself is not enough. Religion is imperfect. Jesus commanded, “You must be perfect as your Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Our imperfect religion is not up to the task of making us perfect. It is insufficient. It is deficient. It is just not enough to do the job, to make us what we need to be.

Let me tell you about a gospel song that dates back to 1873. It has been covered by stars such as Loretta Lynn and Johnnie Cash and Dolly Parton, and even Willie Nelson, as well as many others. You have likely sung it in church, but it has probably when some time since you last did that. The chorus reads:

Give me that old time religion,  
Give me that old time religion,  
Give me that old time religion,  
It’s good enough for me.

It matters not whether a particular religion is good enough for you. What counts is whether that religion is good enough for God.

There is a verse in that song that goes:

It was good for Paul and Silas,  
It was good for Paul and Silas,  
It was good for Paul and Silas,  
It’s good enough for me.

Paul and Silas had been brought up in an old religion. They discovered their old religion was not good enough. The author of Hebrews claims that religion was not enough. We are going to work our way through the first 18 verses of Hebrews 10, but let's just start with vv. 1-7 because those verses are enough to illustrate that Paul's old-time religion was not good enough back then, and it is not today.

I want you to notice three truths:

### **Religion Is Not Enough Because Our Sin Remains**

The Jewish religion, as is true of any religion, does not carry enough weight to forgive sin. According to v. 1, the old, Jewish faith could not make perfect those who adhered to it. Despite the fact that sin sacrifices were made every day and every year, none of those sacrifices were sufficient to take away sin (v. 4). All they were successful in doing was reminding the worshiper that he was sinful and in need of forgiveness. According to v. 3, those sacrifices were simply annual reminders of sin.

I have discovered that for many people, I am a reminder of sin. When people know that I am a preacher, they became a little more conscious of the words they speak. They will speak as they normally do, using what I will call "colorful language", and then they will see me and say, "Oh, pardon me, Reverend" or "Uh, excuse me preacher." This happened just the other day. After apologizing to me, this man's sister or relative said to him, "I think you are apologizing to the wrong one," and then she pointed upward to remind him that there was Someone Else who heard what he said.

When we are constantly reminded of our sin, we can become weighed down by a sense of guilt. Many people look to religion to find relief from their guilt, but religion lacks the ability to take away your sin. Claiming you are Christian and joining a church isn't even enough. It occurs to me that the vast majority of my sins have been committed since I became a Christian and since I joined the church.

Unresolved guilt can make us crazy or at least make us do crazy things. Let me tell you about Sarah. Sarah had her share of heart-ache. Her only child died when the baby was less than six-weeks old. When her husband died at the age of 43, Sarah was left quite alone. She moved to California for peace and quiet. She bought some acreage and an existing eight-room farm house. Some time later, several relatives came to live with her; so, she had the house remodeled

Although Sarah was a widow, she was rich, very, very rich. She lived in the late 1800's, and by today's standards, she would have been a billionaire, a multi-billionaire.

Once Sarah began remodeling her house, she couldn't stop. With her wealth, she was able to employ multiple carpenters who continued to make improvements and add on to the house. Those carpenters worked for 38-years. By the time they finished, the house covered 6 acres and featured 6 kitchens, 13 bathrooms, 40 stairways, 47 fireplaces, 52 skylights, 467 doors, 10,000 windows, 160 rooms, and 1 bell tower. The floor plan was bizarre, to say the least. Corridors were put in at random. Some led nowhere. A set of stairs led to a ceiling that had no door, and one door opened to a blank wall. There were tunnels, trap-doors and secret passageways.

What would drive a wealthy woman to become so eccentric, so driven, so compulsive? Legend claims that Sarah had *visitors* every night. The story goes that a servant would go to the bell tower at night via a secret passage and ring the bell. Sarah would then go into the “blue room,” which was reserved for her and her guests. She would stay there until 2:00 A.M. Then the bell would once again ring. The visitors would depart, and Sarah Winchester would go to her room.

Who were the visitors? Legend has it they were United States soldiers killed on the United States frontier. They were slain Indians torn apart by the bullets that struck them. Both soldiers and Indians were killed by that new invention, the repeating Winchester rifle. It brought millions of dollars to the Winchester family but death to thousands of others. It also brought haunting experiences to Sarah Winchester, heir to the Winchester fortune. She was left with a guilt that went unresolved. To atone for the fact that she was living off of blood money, money that was earned at the expense of so many lives, Sarah sought to provide a home for the dead.

Like Sarah, many are left with unresolved guilt. Unlike Sarah, instead of adding on to a house, they turn to religion. Their religion teaches them to do, to work, to be better, to try harder. They look to religion to save them, to take away their sin, and to wipe away their guilt.

Religion, however, lacks the power to accomplish that. Nowhere in this Book does it ever say that religion is the secret to being saved and successfully dealing with your guilt problem. Judaism doesn't save the Jews. Islam doesn't save the Muslims. Buddhism doesn't save the Buddhists. The Church of the Latter-Day Saints doesn't save Mormons. You may not agree with me, but I would even go so far as to say that Christianity doesn't even save Christians.

For you and I to be saved, we need something other and something more than religion. You may think this is odd coming from a Baptist preacher, but I am not a fan of religion. Religion alone can ruin a person. It can make him proud, rob him of compassion, and turn him into someone that doesn't look like Jesus at all.

Religion is not enough because our sin remains.

### **Religion Is Not Enough Because God Is Not Pleased**

Look at vv. 5-6. Notice also the beginning of v. 8. The words that are quoted here actually come from David, from Psalm 40:6-8. God did not take pleasure in watching lamb and bulls be slain. David recognized this. Listen to what he wrote in Psalm 51:16, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.” In v. 17, David lays his finger on what God really wants: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

The prophet Isaiah thundered against God's people because even though they were religious, they were not moral, and they were not godly. In the first chapter of the book that bears his name, Isaiah records the words of God:

- 11 “What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?”  
says the LORD.  
“I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams  
and the fat of fattened cattle.  
I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
- 12 When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with  
all your ceremony?
- 13 Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts;  
the incense of your offerings disgusts me!  
As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days  
for fasting—  
they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings.
- 14 I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to  
me. I cannot stand them!
- 15 When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look.  
Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen,  
for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims.
- 16 Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil  
ways.
- 17 Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed.  
Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.
- 18 “Come now, let’s settle this,” says the LORD.  
“Though your sins are like scarlet,  
I will make them as white as snow.  
Though they are red like crimson,  
I will make them as white as wool.

Isaiah makes it clear that it is not religious ceremony that God is looking for from us. It is not about religion; it is about a relationship with Him. When we come to Him, He is the One who will make our scarlet sin as white as snow and our crimson sin as white as wool.

Last Sunday morning I preached from Luke 15. That chapter has three stories that are told back-to-back. I focused on the first half of the third story. All three stories about something that is lost and is then found. In the first story, one out of a hundred sheep is missing. The shepherd goes in search of the lost sheep. When he finds he sheep and returns home with it, there is much rejoicing.

Jesus then applies the story: “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need to repentance” (v. 7).

The second story is about one coin that in ten is missing. The lady of the house turns

the house upside down in an effort to find the missing coin. She sweeps every square inch of the floor until she finds that missing coin, and when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors, and they rejoice with her.

Again, Jesus applies the story: “Just so, I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (v. 10).

In the third story there is a lost son. In fact, you could say there are two lost sons. The younger son is lost away from the father’s house, but the elder son is lost in the father’s house. He is like the Pharisees and scribes who grumbled about God caring for sinners.

In time, the younger son returns, and the father throws a party. He explained to his servants, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” And those within his house celebrated.

Everyone that is, except the elder son. He resented the grace that his father showed to his brother. The father then explains the purpose of the party to his elder son: “It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

When a sinner turns from his sin and turns to the Savior, there is a party in heaven. Heaven doesn’t throw a party when you join the church. They don’t serve cake and punch when you become a Baptist. They celebrate greatly, however, when you repent, when you turn from your sin and turn to Jesus. That is when the streamers are hung in heaven and the shouting commences.

So far, we have seen that religion is not enough because our sin remains and because God is not pleased. Let’s look at one last truth.

### **Religion Is Not Enough So We All Need Jesus**

It is not about religion; it is all about Jesus. Our text teaches that God prepared a body for His Son. That is what we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus came to us as one of us. Verse 10 tells us what Jesus did in His body, and how we are blessed by what He did.

Unlike the priests who offer sacrifice after sacrifice, Jesus gave Himself once and once is all that was needed. Look at v. 14. Verse 16 reminds us that our old religion was inadequate; so, God did something new. He established a new agreement with man. Instead of writing a list of laws and rules on tablets of stone, He decided to put His laws and His will on our hearts and minds.

You don’t need religion; you need Jesus. He can do for you what religion can’t. He can do for you what you can’t.

His name was Christopher Hitchens. Before his untimely death from cancer in 2011, he was one of the leading atheists in the world. In 2007 he published a best-seller entitled, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. He went on an extended book tour and debated a number of high-profile Christians including some well-known evangelical thinkers.

In 2010 he was interviewed by the unitarian minister, Marilyn Sewell. She is not an evangelical at all. Instead, she is rather liberal in her theology. At one point in the interview, Sewell said:

The religion you cite in your book is generally the fundamentalist faith of various kinds. I'm a liberal Christian, and I don't take the stories from the Scripture literally. I don't believe in the doctrine of atonement (that Jesus died for our sins, for example). Do you make any distinction between fundamentalist faith and liberal religion?

Listen to Hitchens' reply. I think it was spot-on.

I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian.

This observation came from a man who doesn't even believe in the existence of God, much less that Jesus was His Son. Ms. Sewell didn't quite care for that response; so, she sought to change the subject. Regardless, Mr. Hitchens' hit the nail on the head. If you don't believe that Jesus is the Christ, that He died for sin on a cross, and that He arose from the dead, you are not a Christian. You can be religious, but that religion is clearly not enough to save you.

When you stand before God, He is not going to ask you about your denominational affiliation. He is not going to ask you to defend your theological beliefs concerning the Lord's Supper or your understanding of end times prophecy.

What matters is what you did with Jesus.