

GOOD, BETTER, BEST

Hebrews 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION

- A. For an important business meeting, this company has hired a "just OK" translator to help them communicate with their **Dutch** associates. He botches the translation, calling a man "*very bendy*" instead of flexible and insisting that the associate sitting next to him needs a hug. **AT&T** says just OK is not OK
- B. Sears discovered a very effective marketing technique. Most appliances, tools, and equipment come in three flavors: Good, Better, and Best. The marketers at Sears are very clever. They not only know their product – they know people.
 - 1. Notice they didn't label these categories Bad, Mediocre, and Pretty Good. Nobody would put money down for something that is noticeably inferior. The worst you can do in buying an appliance from Sears is "Good." Many people will happily settle for this, except there is always the nagging question in our minds, "Why settle for the 'good' if you can have something 'better.'"
 - 2. One good reason to settle is *cost*. Notice that Sears varies the price according to categories. If everything cost the same, you and I would always opt for "Best." But Sears demands that we pay more for the best, or else settle for that which is less than the best.
- C. When it comes to matters of religion, there are also decisions between what is good, better, or best. Most of us want the best in this area too. Unfortunately, it's not quite so easy to tell which is the "Best" from that which is merely "Good." And again, unfortunately, even here the "Best" demands a higher price of us - we are tempted to settle for something less than the best, hoping that the "Good" will be good enough.

I. THE OLD LAW WAS GOOD.

This was the firm conviction of the Jewish nation before the coming of Christ. "It was good enough for Moses; it ought to be good enough for us too!" In fact, the Old Law was good.

A. It's Long and Respected History (by the time of the N.T.).

- 1. 2000 years of God's dealing with the Jews - first through Abraham, then through Moses and the Law.
- 2. 1500 years of Mosaic Covenant and the system that went with it.

B. The "System."

- 1. *The Law* - the standard by which men were to live.
 - a. Religious, political, legal, and social guidelines for Israel.
 - b. A maze of commands and prohibitions that were designed to teach men morality, justice, and right.
 - c. What if the standard proved too demanding? How did the Mosaic Law deal with the problem of sin?
- 2. *The Sacrifices* - the means of making amends.
 - a. Sin meant death (Gen. 2:17). Substitutionary sacrifice was prescribed – an animal could die in man's place.
 - b. The number of animal sacrifices **required** by the Law came to 1,273 per year. That number did not include sacrifices made by individuals for sins.
 - i. Daily - a lamb in the morning and evening.
 - ii. Sabbath (i.e. weekly) - two lambs in addition to daily offering.
 - iii. Monthly - two bulls, one ram, and seven lambs.
 - iv. Special - five major feasts, each with its own requirement for sacrifice.
 - c. Who could make the sacrifice for sinners?
- 3. *The Priesthood* - those who could approach God.
 - a. Physical descendants of Aaron.

- b. A special class of men was created to mediate between God and man.
- C. This whole elaborate system was an attempt to find a way for man to relate to God, to deal with the problem of sin and the separation (Isa.59:2) it causes between ourselves and our God.
 - 1. Then along came a bunch of upstarts (themselves Jews) who criticized the system. They claimed that the Law could not bring perfection, that the sacrifices were ineffective, and that the priesthood was tainted and temporary. These followers of the Carpenter blasphemed everything the Jewish leaders held as sacred.
 - 2. The book of **Hebrews** is a Christian's comparison of the old law with the new. The Law of Moses was good, but Christ was better. In fact, Christ is best of all.

II. THE LAW IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

A. The Law was a means rather than an end.

- 1. The Jews had come to see the law as the end all and be all – the perfect standard by which perfection could be attained.
- 2. Christians claimed that, while the Law was perfect, it could not make us perfect.
 - a. **Hebrews 8:7-13**
 - b. The old covenant is flawed by the unfaithfulness of the people - they were disobedient. It is "*obsolete*" and "*will soon disappear*" (8:13). In fact, the writer would later say: "*The law made nothing perfect*" and it is "*only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves.*"
 - c. A "new covenant" was needed - one written on minds and hearts (rather than stone tablets), one that would teach us of God and would truly forgive sins.

B. The sacrifices were a symbol, not the substance.

- 1. The Jews thought that animal sacrifices could cleanse them of sin and make them right with God.
- 2. Christians claimed that the blood of animals was only symbolic of another blood that truly cleanses sin.
 - a. **Hebrews 10:1-4, 11**
 - b. Bull blood cannot take away sin; it can only remind us that the wages of sin is death (vs 4).
 - c. A better sacrifice is needed – one that is offered "once for all" and has the power to remove sin.

C. The priests were imperfect men, not the pure priest we needed.

- 1. The Jews thought that their priest could make effective sacrifice for their sins. The Jewish system was founded on the assumption that a human priest could act as mediator between the people and God.
- 2. Christians pointed out major problems with these priests.
 - a. 5:3 – They had sins of their own. The very thing that made the people unworthy to approach God also made the priests unworthy.
 - b. 9:6-10 – They had limited access to God. They could only go into the Holy of Holies once a year, and then only the high priest could go in. People who sin moment by moment need a more frequent forgiveness than that.
 - c. 10:4 – They had ineffective sacrifices. Even when they stood before God, they had only animal blood to offer.

- D. What was the Christian alternative? The Christian insisted that the Law was good. It had its place and fulfilled its role. But it was never intended to be the last word from God. The Law was good, but Christ was better. The author of Hebrews makes that point repeatedly in his book. The words "better" or "superior" occur 15 times.

III. CHRIST IS BETTER.

A. Christ has a Better Covenant

1. Four times in Hebrews (7:22; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), Jesus is connected with a new or better covenant.
2. **Hebrews 8:6** (in the context of 8:7-13).
 - a. Jesus mediates a new covenant that is superior to the old, founded on better promises.
 - b. This is the covenant that writes God's laws on the hearts and minds of the people, that teaches them of God, and that assures forgiveness of sin.
3. "Perfection" comes through Jesus Christ. The Old Law could make nothing perfect – that privilege was reserved for Jesus Christ.
 - a. He has "*made perfect forever*" (10:14) those who belong to him.
 - b. He is the "*author and perfecter of our faith*" (12:2).

B. Christ is a Better Sacrifice

1. What kind of blood really cleanses sin?
 - a. Chapter 10 - not the blood of bulls and goats.
 - b. Only the blood of God's son.
2. **Hebrews 10:5-10**
 - a. Not a sacrifice but a person (vss. 5-9).
 - b. The blood of Jesus (the "second" sacrifice) rather than of animals (the "first" sacrifice – vs. 9).
 - c. This blood really works (vs. 10).

C. Christ is a Better Priest

1. **Hebrews 10:11-14**
2. The new priest is better than the old:
 - a. Offers only one sacrifice.
 - b. It is an effective sacrifice at that (himself).

D. Transition:

1. **Hebrews 10:15-18**
2. This is the new covenant that deals with sin.
 - a. Christ mediated the new covenant by:
 - i. Offering himself as sacrifice
 - ii. Playing the priest by bringing that sacrifice before God.
 - b. There is no need for any more sacrifice.

CLOSING: Christ is Best

1. He has everything we need.
2. But the best costs more – He costs everything you are, Lk. 9:23; Gal. 2:20.