

THE SAVIOR IS OUR SACRIFICE

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus came to be the greater temple (John 2:13-22).
2. Jesus came to be the greater Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:6-8).
3. Jesus came to be the greater sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-10).

Background Passages: John 2; 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus came to be the ultimate sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world and bring people into relationship with God.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The Passover along with the temple and its perpetual sacrifices revealed God's desire to be with His people and the way they could be made right with Him. These signs pointed to the greater way that God would restore people to Himself through Christ. All who trust in Jesus's once-for-all sacrifice are forgiven and made right with God forevermore.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus's sacrifice provides us with complete forgiveness and acceptance by God, we live with assurance and gratitude, obeying God's commands so we reflect our new identity in Christ.

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: Easter week is a vivid reminder of Jesus's purpose and work, the reason why He was born into this world as a human being. We focus on the cross and resurrection at Easter since this week commemorates these key events in Jesus's life. However, all the way back at His birth, the descriptions used of Jesus pointed forward to the way His life would lead to His sacrificial death. These descriptions also point back to the Old Testament as many of the images that foreshadowed His death were woven into the story of God from long ago—such as the temple and the sacrificial system.

DISCUSS: **What is the biggest promise you've ever made, and what makes keeping that promise difficult at times?** (wedding vows would be a prominent example, and these are hard to keep because we are people who are prone to shifting emotions; difficult things happen that make it hard to keep our word; our sinful hearts make us desire to break our promises; life is long and it's hard to stay true to what we've said over a long period of time)

TRANSITION: It's hard to imagine the faithfulness of God because we struggle to keep our promises. But while our promises may last a few decades at the most, God's redemptive story started in the garden of Eden, and God began a process that would come to fruition when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Jesus was the promised answer to God's eternal plan, and this plan would run all the way through a cross and an empty tomb. This week, we will consider three major images the Bible's authors used to describe Jesus as He began His ministry and show why they matter for us this Easter.

POINT 1

JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER TEMPLE (JOHN 2:13-22).

NOTES

MONEY-CHANGERS

Those in the business of selling or changing currency from foreign money to the correct currency needed. During the festivals, Jews from other countries with foreign money would need to change their money to what was acceptable for Jerusalem and what was acceptable for the temple.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Such was the holy, heavenly zeal of our Great Exemplar! His were no transient outbursts of ardor, which time cooled and difficulties impeded. His life was one indignant protest against sin;—one ceaseless current of undying love for souls, which all the malignity of foes, and unkindness of friends, could not for one moment divert from its course. Even when He rises from the dead, and we imagine His work at an end, His zeal only meditates fresh deeds of love.”¹

—John R. Macduff
(1818-1895)

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. **15** And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. **16** And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” **18** So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” **19** Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” **20** The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 2:13-22** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 13-16** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus was passionate that God’s temple be used for **worship** alone, not self-serving **greed**.

DISCUSS: What do you think of when you hear the word temple? (a place for religious worship; a place marked by beauty, often large and ornate; many times people travel long distances to see and worship in temples; in the Bible the temple was a place where God promised to dwell with His people; a place Solomon built that was designed exactly according to God’s specifications)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 17-22** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus came to be greater than the temple and to **fulfill** its true **purpose**.

DISCUSS: How is the temple of Jesus’s body better than the temple building? (the resurrected Jesus is eternal, never to die again, unlike the temple, which was destroyed; Jesus cannot be corrupted like the temple; the person of Jesus is infinitely better than an inanimate object such as the temple)

TRANSITION: The temple wasn’t the only Old Testament image that Jesus came to fulfill. He also came as the true and better Passover lamb.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 13-16 / The journey to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover was common for Jesus's family. Even from an early age, Mary and Joseph took Jesus there to honor the Jewish holy day, which commemorated the time when the angel of death passed over Israelites' homes in Egypt that were marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb. But now Jesus as a grown man, publicly identified as the Lamb of God, entered the city where He would one day lay down His life to spare His people from death. For now, however, Jesus entered merely to fulfill the law and worship God as was prescribed.

What Jesus saw in the temple was infuriating. It wasn't necessarily odd that people would be selling **"oxen and sheep and pigeons"** since many of those who came to worship would have traveled long distances and would not have brought their sacrifices with them. They would simply wait and buy the animal when they arrived.

What was appalling to Jesus seems to be two things. First, the money changers preyed on the needy. When the worshipers came, they had to have an animal, so some Israelites would take advantage of this and mark up the prices. The money changers also may have been charging unfair rates to exchange currency to buy the animals, thus robbing the people.

Second, it seems that Jesus was concerned that all of this was happening in the temple. The location was wrong, especially since Jesus explicitly condemned them for turning His Father's house into a marketplace. This site was meant for worship. The buying and selling and trading had apparently taken over the temple, such that the temple's real purpose was hidden behind the marketplace of buying and selling.

Jesus responded by driving out those engaging in this behavior. The passion of Jesus in this moment is striking. He fashioned a whip and then drove out the money changers and overturned the marketplace. His motive was clear—He was zealous for

His Father's house. He had already made this point when His parents left Him in Jerusalem many years earlier. Jesus had to be concerned for His Father's house, and that house was to be used to worship His Father.

VERSES 17-22 / After Jesus's jarring actions in the temple, the narrative shifts to the perspective of those watching. Jesus's disciples seem to have had some glimmer of understanding, recalling Psalm 69:9, about being zealous for God's house. Others, however, asked for a sign. This contrast between those who believed and those who did not will continue throughout the Gospel accounts, with those who do not believe often asking for a sign.

Jesus answered them, but not directly. He equated Himself with the temple. He knew that those who asked for a sign would soon ask to take His life. So He told them to destroy the temple and He would raise it up in three days. Now, clearly at this point, no one understood all that Jesus was saying. John was writing years after Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, so hints like this are woven throughout the gospel story to show that Jesus was already pointing forward to His death from the beginning of His ministry.

The Jews who heard Jesus make this claim were indignant: "How can this be?" they asked. "It took us forty-six years to build this building. There's no way you could rebuild it in three days." Of course, the God who created all things can do anything He wants according to His holy will, but Jesus wasn't speaking of the physical temple. He was speaking of His body, an even more astounding feat of restoration. Jesus would, in fact, fulfill the temple's purpose through His death and resurrection. He would offer Himself for sin, once and for all, so that all of His people could worship God forever, not in a temple made with human hands but through the person of Jesus Christ.

POINT 2

JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER PASSOVER LAMB (1 COR. 5:6-8).

NOTES

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Corinthians 5:6-8** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-7A** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

As the **church**, because of Christ's saving work and sacrifice, we are to pursue **holiness**, not letting sin continue to take hold.

DISCUSS: How should the church treat sin and sinful people? (even as we show grace to sinful people, sin should be taken seriously; though we are made righteous because of Jesus's sacrifice, our response should be a pursuit of holiness to be more like Christ; if Jesus took worship in the temple seriously, so much more should we take our holiness/sinfulness seriously being that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7B-8** commentary to emphasize the key doctrine (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #58: Christ as Sacrifice: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the **sins** of the **world**. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the **cross** was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

TRANSITION: As the promised Passover lamb to fulfill God's plan for the salvation of sinners, Jesus proved Himself to be the sacrifice greater than any ritual or animal in all of the Old Testament. These all pointed forward to sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for us.

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Beginning the day after Passover, lasting seven days, the Jews were to eat pure, unleavened bread (Lev. 23:5-8). The Passover was celebrated in one day, like Jesus's one act of sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. But this feast was seven days, representing the disciples' continual pursuit of holiness.²

COMMENTARY

VERSES 6-7A / Here, the apostle Paul was addressing sexual sin in the church in this particular part of his letter. There was sin among the Corinthian church members that was heinous, but even worse, the sin had gone unaddressed by the church. Rather than acting to halt the sinful actions in their midst, they seemed to be going along like it wasn't even happening. The contrast is evident between this passage and the one we just looked at in John 2. There, Jesus was angry that money changers were making a mockery of the temple and no one was doing anything to address the sin. Here, Paul was concerned that sexual sin was making a mockery of the church and no one was doing anything to address it.

Paul accused the Corinthian believers of **“boasting,”** as unrepentant sin makes a mockery of God's name. Like Israel of old, the church should expect God to discipline them for blatant disregard for His name. If they go on sinning without fear of judgment, then they are boasting to God that they can get away with sin without repercussion.

Paul used the image of leaven to illustrate that just a little can make a big difference: a little leaven can spread throughout the dough and make it rise. So also, a little sin can make its way through the church and spoil it. The church of Jesus is pure, without the leaven of sin, by virtue of the righteousness that believers have been given by God through Jesus. So they must clean out the old leaven of sin so that they function as the holy people God saved them to be.

VERSES 7B-8 / Having made the point that Christians should actively seek to remove sin from the midst of their lives, both individually and corporately, Paul then declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of an Old Testament type and shadow, saying Christ is the **“Passover lamb.”** First, we'll clarify what Paul was saying. Second, we'll explain why what he was saying mattered for the issue at hand.

First, Paul said that Jesus is the Passover lamb, sacrificed so that people could be spared death and judgment. Though sacrifices were offered regularly, the sacrifices during Passover were a time of unique remembrance of how God delivered His people from slavery by having the angel of death pass over the houses of those marked by a lamb's blood on the doorposts (Ex. 12). Because of their obedience and faith, those that were covered by the blood of the sacrifice were spared from God's judgment, and those who were not were judged by God.

In a much greater way, Jesus is the perfect Passover sacrifice. Only the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ can and does remove our stain of sin from the Father's presence. Jesus's death on the cross did not provide merely an escape from the physical death of a child, it provided escape from the eternal judgment of God's wrath. Those who trust in Jesus are symbolically covered by His precious, innocent blood and spared from the judgment their sin deserves. And Christ is **“our”** Passover sacrifice, meaning that it was His action that created the church. He died not only for us individually but for the church, the people He desired to create for Himself.

Second, why does Jesus's Passover sacrifice of Himself matter for the issue of sin in the church? Paul was clear: Since Jesus is our sacrifice, we should live pure and holy lives. Since Jesus offered Himself for sin to pay the price that our sin deserves, we should not placate sin in our lives or in the church. To continue to engage in our former sinful ways would be to bring the leaven of sin back into the church. Instead, God's people should pursue the **“unleavened”** ways of holiness, purity, and love. These characteristics were the marks of Jesus's life, and they must define the church for whom He died. The Israelites were expected to celebrate the Feast of the Unleavened Bread in conjunction with the Passover (see Ex. 13:1-16). This feast would serve as a precursor to the unleavened holiness that would define God's church.

POINT 3

JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER SACRIFICE (HEB. 10:1-10).

NOTES

1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. **5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; **6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. **7** Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” **8** When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), **9** then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 10:1-10** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-4** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The Old Testament sacrificial system was **incomplete** because sacrifices had to be offered **continually**, not being able to take away sins forever.

DISCUSS: How would you feel if you had to offer sacrifices for sin year after year? (I would know that sin is serious and that it cost the life of the sacrificial lamb; I would be grossed out to deal with dying animals and bloody sacrifices; I would get tired of offering the sacrifices every year; I would probably get a little complacent offering sacrifices routinely; I might notice that there needed to be some other sacrifice that could do for people what these sacrifices could never do)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-10** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus's death for the once-and-for-all forgiveness of sins both **justifies** (makes us right with God) and **sanctifies** (makes us holy like God).

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-4 / In this passage, the author of Hebrews (whose identity is unclear) mentioned **“the law”** as a summary of the Old Testament law given to Moses and referring to all aspects of Israelite worship, including the sacrificial system. The use of **“shadow”** here makes it clear that this law wasn’t the focus of God’s saving work in the world. Like a shadow, it was meant to draw attention to the fact that something else—something bigger and more permanent—was there as well.

The author then made it clear that there was a huge problem with the sacrificial system of the law because it could never make a person holy. By God’s grace, sacrifices could appease God’s wrath for a time, but they could never deal with the problem of sin in a permanent and lasting way. Case in point: The worshipers had to keep coming back each year to offer the same sacrifices.

The fact that God was not satisfied with sacrifices was a common theme through the Old Testament. For example, David said that God does not desire burnt offerings but a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:16-17). The prophet Isaiah mockingly provoked the people to consider that God did not want them trampling His courts with their half-hearted sacrifices (Isa. 1:11-13). Jeremiah also lamented the inadequacy of sacrifices and instead called God’s people to hear and obey God’s voice (Jer. 7:22-23). Amos wrote that sacrifices were not enough and that God wanted justice and righteousness instead (Amos 5:21-24). Micah stated that instead of sacrifices, the people should do what is just, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Mic. 6:6-8).

Not only was it clear that those who offered the sacrifices were not forgiven forever, the very process of offering the sacrifices meant that they were consistently provoked about the reality of their sin. Here the writer described this as having a guilty **“consciousness of sins.”** Every time worshipers would go to the temple and

offer sacrifices, they would be reminded of their own sinfulness. The death of the animal would prompt an awareness of the depth of their sin and the fact that these worshipers couldn’t do anything to satisfy God’s wrath for sin forever. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin. This was no surprise, neither to God nor to those who offered these very sacrifices.

VERSES 5-10 / How was God to remedy this problem? Quoting Psalm 40, the author connected two people: David and Jesus. Long before Jesus, God raised up a person—King David—to provide care and leadership for sinful Israel. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, David penned the words of Psalm 40, which put sacrifices in their inadequate context. Yet David’s words did more—they were a precursor to the far greater King, Jesus Christ, who could (and would) come to do what David could not—lead His people into freedom from sin. Jesus would deal with the issue of sin once and for all.

Here, the author of Hebrews took the gist of David’s words from the psalm and put them into a conversation between God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Son, knowing that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, acknowledged that the Father prepared a human body for the Son to come to this earth and do the perfect will of God (Ps. 40:6-8). This was the triune God’s perfect plan to save sinners. There would be one final sacrifice—yet this time, it would not be an animal sacrifice but the death of the very Son of God.

The author then showed how Jesus is not only the way that sinners are forgiven but also the way they are empowered for holy living. His death both justifies (makes us right with God) and sanctifies (makes us holy like God). Jesus did both of these by offering His body once and for all. This Easter, and every Easter, we celebrate because Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin to make it possible for Christians to stand before God the Father forgiven and to walk in a new and holy way of life.

MY RESPONSE



PACK ITEM 9: HE GAVE THE BELOVED: Pass out copies of this bookmark to remind your group of the great and gracious sacrifice of God in Christ.

Because Jesus's sacrifice provides us with complete forgiveness and acceptance by God, we live with assurance and gratitude, obeying God's commands so we reflect our new identity in Christ.

HEAD:

Jesus is the perfect temple, the perfect Passover lamb, and the perfect sacrifice. He is the perfect sacrifice for sin because the death He died, He died once and for all. The Old Testament pictures of the temple and sacrifices were but a shadow of the future hope that is found in and through Jesus Christ. The temple and animal sacrifices were good, but they were inadequate because they never offered a full and final way for sin to be accounted for. Jesus, however, is a perfect temple who, through His body, brings people into a right relationship with God. He was the perfect payment for the sins of God's people because He willingly offered Himself as the only perfect sacrifice in place of sinful human beings.

How do the Old Testament shadows of the temple and the sacrificial system help you understand what Jesus did?

HEART:

Temples and sacrifices are not common images for most of us today. But these ancient images are meant to provoke the heart. They are stirring reminders of the glory of God and the price of sin. Anyone who saw the temple or offered a sacrifice within would have seen clearly that God's dwelling among men was a spectacular gift and that holiness was required to worship God as He deserved. These images can help us as well. We need to be reminded of these themes, not so we can re-create the temple or the sacrificial system but so we have a better and deeper appreciation for Jesus Christ, who came to fulfill these images through His life, death, and resurrection.

What distractions and offenses against God's holiness do you need to repent of to honor Christ?

HANDS:

Christians should pursue holy living because of what Jesus has done, but we are not saved on the basis of our perfection at being holy (since we can't achieve perfection on this side of heaven anyway). Praise be to God that though we pursue Christlikeness and holiness, our faults and sins are covered by Jesus's blood. That grace and good news of salvation despite our sin is something to be shared.

With whom will you share the good news of Jesus's perfect sacrifice and not having to achieve perfection ourselves for salvation?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"True love will motivate us to make sacrifices that might even cost us our lives. Such sacrificial love makes God's heart glad. This kind of love is worth it."³

—Africa Study Bible

POINT 1: JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER TEMPLE

(JOHN 2:13-22).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“From the Lord’s point of view, what he saw in the temple was an outrage! The money changers claimed their business was a necessity—changing foreign currency into Jewish currency because foreign money was not acceptable for offerings in the temple. Authorities tell us that the money changers charged as much as two hours of a working man’s wage to change a half shekel. They charged the same amount again for every half shekel they gave in return for a larger coin. So if a man came in with a two-shekel piece, he would have had to pay an entire day’s wage just to change his money! This brought a lot of money into the temple.”⁴

POINT 3: JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER SACRIFICE

(HEB. 10:1-10).

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Even though most of us don’t live in cultures that make animal sacrifices, we understand the concept of sacrifice nonetheless. Sometimes we give time and energy to worship God or serve the church, and that could be a sacrifice for us. Done rightly, these acts of sacrifice are a way that we worship God and show our love for Him. Done poorly, we can mistakenly think that these sacrifices make us right with God and we can forget that we are forgiven solely on the basis of what God has done for us in Jesus.

References

1. John R. Macduff, *The Mind of Jesus* (Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), “Twenty-Second Day: Holy Zeal” [Logos].
2. Tommy C. Hagle, *Journey Through the Tabernacle, The Journey Series* (WORDsearch, 2009), 53.
3. “John,” in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International, 2016), 1534.
4. R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 66-67.