

**HEBREWS 50  
(Hebrews 13:10)**

**We Have a Better Altar  
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**INTRODUCTION**

This entire book of Hebrews has been a comparison of Judaism with Christianity. It has broken down Judaism in its various parts and has shown each part to be vastly inferior to Christ. Christ is a better prophet than Moses. Christ is a better deliverer than Moses. Christ's rest is better than Joshua's rest. Christ is a better priest than Aaron. Christ's mediation is better than the mediation of the Levitical priests. The place of Christ's ministry in heaven is better than the place of Jewish ministry in the tabernacle.

In the book of Exodus the tabernacle was meticulously put together according to the pattern of things. Every board and every post was measured out and assigned its place. Each peg was numbered and laid in place. Each utensil and each piece of furniture was fashioned and placed according to God's blueprint. And the tabernacle was so constructed in the Book of Exodus. And what a glorious day it was when it was completed.

And in the book of Hebrews the tabernacle is dismantled piece by piece. Picture yourself standing outside the tabernacle. And see the workers drive up. And a dumpster is dropped off alongside the outer wall. And the workers begin to take it down. It seems that the whole outer structure comes down in a moment. Down come the skins that formed the curtains and the walls. Those old posts nearly fall down of their own rottenness and they are thrown into the dumpster. What took months to construct now takes minutes to take down.

As you stand there watching you notice the workers are carrying away the various items that for centuries were established in the most holy of all Jewish places. Look, there goes that once glorious mercy seat – that golden lid that covered the ark. And there goes the ark itself and all its contents. And as you glance to the side you notice that they are dragging that old veil away. It seems that it has been torn down the middle.

And as you watch the dismantling of the tabernacle, you notice that the workers are now pitching the holy utensils into the dumpster. There goes the golden lampstand. Two men pick up the altar of incense and they heave it up and over the sides. And there goes the table of showbread.

Suddenly, there is nothing left of the holy of holies and of the holy place. And then, the workers move on to what used to be the outer courts and they grasp hold of each side of the bronze laver where the priests washed their hands before they performed their service and the workers pick it up and cart it away.

The priests themselves and all of their holy garments are led away and they will never serve as priests again.

And in a few moments, as you stand there observing, there is only one item left standing. And as you gaze upon it one last time, you realize it is the last standing relic of that old Jewish religion. To the Jew, it is perhaps the most sacred of all the religious furniture. It is the altar where the blood of thousands of animals was poured out day after day.

Perhaps it is fitting that the workers have left the altar as the last piece of standing furniture because it is the last piece of Judaism to be removed in the book of Hebrews.

You will notice in Hebrews 13:10 that there is a final contrast that is offered for our instruction in this great book. And this final contrast centers on this last piece of Jewish furniture. The writer has torn down and cast away all of the other parts of Judaism, but he has saved the altar for last.

*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.*

Hebrews 13:10

You will notice in this verse that there is a “we” and there is a “they.” This is the way it has always been in human history. There are those who are God’s people and there are those who are not God’s people.

Abel belonged to the group called “we.” Cain belonged to the group called “they.” Isaac was a “we” but Ishmael was a “they.” Jacob was a “we” and Esau was a “they.” And on and on it goes throughout human history.

And the sorrowful truth of this verse in Hebrews is that there is a whole group of Jewish priests, who practiced the Mosaic religion day after day in the tabernacle, and in the end it appears that they fall into the category of “they” rather than the category of “we.”

*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.*

That is, we of the Christian faith, those of us who have cast our lot with Christ, those of us who have ceased our labors and rested in him, those of us who do not work for our salvation, those of us who place no confidence in the external acts of religion, those of us who have abandoned rituals and ceremonies as a means of salvation, those of us who place no saving significance to our national heritage, those of us who do not seek heaven through a sinful mediator.

When he says “We,” the writer speaks of those of us who prefer a priest after the order of Melchisedec rather than a Levitical priest; those of us who have looked beyond the Jewish High Priest and have seen the Great High Priest; those of us who come boldly to the throne of God in heaven rather than to a cubical in the Jewish tabernacle.

And when the writer says “they,” to whom does he refer.

*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. (v.10)*

It is clear here that when the writer says, “They,” he refers to the highest officials in the Jewish religion. Look at verse 10. “They” are those who serve the tabernacle. “They” are the Levitical priests; those who performed all those external acts of religion; those who cut the throats of the lambs; those who washed daily from the brazen laver; those who dressed in their fancy robes; those who kept the lamps burning; those who burned the incense; those who were under the Mosaic Law; those who taught the Law to all the people; all of those who did not work outside the tabernacle but who were fed from a portion of the sacrifices that were

brought to the altar; those who should have known religion on a higher plane but who did not; those who should have been the first to recognize Christ in the rituals but who did not.

There is a “We” and there is a “They” in verse 10 and sadly for the Jewish religion, those engaged in the works of Judaism are them and not us.

Now in verse 10 it says, “We have an altar.” That is, they had one, but we have a better one. The whole book of Hebrews has shown that what we have in Christ is better than what they had in Judaism. And now we are contrasting the altar of Judaism with the altar of Christianity.

They had an altar. That is, the Jews had an altar. Now the Jewish altar was not a comfortable, cushioned step where you might kneel and pray. Sometimes in churches today, the preacher might ask if you would like to come down to the altar and pray. But this is not what the Jewish altar was.

This altar was called the brazen altar because it was covered with bronze. And it was like a big barbeque grill. And it was the centerpiece of the outer court of the tabernacle. It was about 7 1/2 feet on each side and 4 1/2 feet high. And it was the place where the bodies of the sacrificed animals were consumed.

The first thing that usually comes to mind when we talk about the Jewish altar is that it was the place of sacrifice. It had tremendous spiritual significance in that it was a type of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ that would come later. So, the altar was a bloody place and if you were a little lamb without blemish it was an awful place. Now when the lambs were brought in to stand before the altar, they came willingly because they had no idea what was about to happen. They probably thought they were being led to their next meal. So, they came willingly. This, of course, was to typify that our Savior walked up Calvary willingly. Though Jesus knew the consequences of his walk, nevertheless, he came just like all those little lambs, meekly and willingly.

So you can easily see that the Jewish altar is first of all a place of sacrifice. But what may be less known is that the Jewish altar was also

called a table. It was a table because the Jewish priests were fed from the sacrifices that were brought to the altar.

*Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?*

I Corinthians 9:13

So you can see that the priests ate at the table of the altar. They partook of the sacrifices. It is what kept them alive from day to day. They ate the meat.

Now there were about five different offerings that were brought to the altar and these are described in Leviticus 1-5. There was the burnt offering. And when it was a burnt offering, the animal was to be cut into pieces and every part of the animal was to be burnt on the altar. The priests were not to eat of this sacrifice because it was a sacrifice entirely for the Lord. And the Lord would breathe in the aroma of that burnt offering and it was a sweet savour unto the Lord.

And there were sin offerings and trespass offerings

But there were other offerings that the priests were allowed to eat. There was the meat offering which was actually a meal offering. And the priests got their portion to eat.

And there was a peace offering where the fat was all burned up as an offering to God, but the priests got the front shoulder. Now the peace offering was an offering of celebration. And the priests loved these offerings because they got their portion and they would have a great thanksgiving meal from these offerings.

So, you see that the altar was also a table for the priests because they got to eat from it.

But, there were certain sacrifices that the priests were absolutely not allowed to eat. In particular, the priests were not allowed to partake of the sin offerings. They were not allowed to eat of the sacrifices that were made on the Day of Atonement. Remember, these sacrifices on that day were typical of that true sacrifice that atones for sins. These sacrifices on the

Day of Atonement were in no way intended for the sustenance of the priests, but for the atonement for sins.

Now when the people brought their sin offerings on the Day of Atonement, the animal was slain and the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat and on the altar. But the remains of the animal was taken outside the tabernacle (outside the camp) and burnt completely.

*And the bullock for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung.*

Leviticus 16:27

You can easily see that the priests had no right to eat of this sacrifice. The remains were taken outside the camp and burned completely. This was all done in this fashion so as to typify the true sacrifice for sins that was made by Jesus.

And our text says,

*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. (v.10)*

Now I would like to take a few minutes here and evaluate what all this means. Let's read verses 10 and 11.

*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burnt without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.*

They had an altar and we have an altar

Now it seems that some of the Judaizers were alleging that Christianity was an inferior religion to Judaism because Christianity does not have an altar. The altar was always the focal point of the Jewish religion. If there was no altar, there was no true worship. For God always

required a sacrifice. And so, the Jews might be saying, "You Christians don't even have an altar."

Ah, "But wait," says the writer of Hebrews. "We have an altar." We are not left with a religion without an altar. God always requires an altar and we have one.

There is a true altar and that altar is the cross where the true Lamb of God was offered for sins. When Christ walked up the road to Calvary he was walking to the real altar. When the Roman soldiers nailed him to the cross, they laid the sacrifice on the real altar. And when Christ died, he died on the real altar.

You see, the Jews had an altar and we have an altar. Their altar was a typical altar. Our altar is the real altar. And so, it says, "*We have an altar.*"

They (the Jewish priests) have no right to eat of our altar.

Why is it that under the Mosaic Covenant, the priests were not given a portion of the sin offering to eat? Remember, the whole offering was taken outside the camp and burned up. The priests were not allowed to eat of it. Why is that?

It is because the priests were all a part of that old religion called Judaism. They were a part of that old Law system. They were a part of that whole system of rituals and ceremonies. And that alone was not the same as partaking of the sacrifice of Christ. Wicked priests could perform the rituals all day every day, but they were not partaking of Christ. They were not allowed to eat of the sin offering.

You will notice that the writer of Hebrews puts it this way,

*They have no right to eat of our altar.*

That is very strong language. It is language of total exclusion. Christ died on the real altar, and they (those embracing the types) have no right to eat there.

This suggests to me that there can be no mixing of Judaism with Christianity. Christianity is not Judaism plus Christ. It is Christ alone. Being

a physical descendant of Abraham does not give one the right to eat of our altar. Being a faithful practitioner in the Jewish religion does not give one the right to eat of our table. Being a Levitical priest does not give one the right to eat of our table.

In fact, after Christ came, continuing in the Jewish religion excluded one from the altar of Christ. It says, "They have no right to eat."

Christianity is all Christ. It is not Moses plus Christ. It is not the Levitical priesthood plus Christ. It is not eating certain meats plus Christ. It is Christ and Christ and Christ alone.

We have all the respect in the world for Judaism from the time of Moses until Christ. But when Christ came, those rituals are done away. It is not OK to continue on in the rituals. To do so is a denial of Christ. The Jews practiced a true religion for 1500 years. But when they continued on after Christ came, they practiced a false religion. And when you continue on in Judaism, you have no right to eat of Christ's altar.

*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat.*

Their sin offering was burnt outside the camp to signify the death of Christ outside the camp.

Jesus was scourged within the camp. But when it came time to kill him, he was taken outside the camp and hung on a cross.

Now to be inside the camp was to be in a clean place, a holy place. And to be outside the camp was to be in an unclean place, an unholy place. And if you went outside the camp, you must wash yourself and be purified before coming back in the camp. Lepers were excluded from the camp. Outside the camp was a place of rejection. Inside the camp was a place of acceptance. And Jesus was taken outside the camp and crucified.

I. Jesus suffered outside the camp as a picture of his defilement on our behalf.

Jesus was taken outside the camp where he bore the sins of the world. Jesus became as an unclean thing on our behalf. Jesus was dragged outside the camp and flung down with the lepers and the outcasts.



He became as an unclean thing.

II. Jesus was taken outside the camp to be separated from his people Israel. They would have nothing to do with him and so they cast him outside the camp and locked the gates. And he died as an outcast from Israel. Jesus Christ was a man without a country. He was thrown outside the gates of the city and exiled by his own people. He was disregarded by his people and disenfranchised. He was taken outside the camp and crucified.

III. Jesus was taken outside the camp to identify him with the nations of the world.

Let me say that inside the camp corresponds to the religion of Judaism. Inside the camp was where all the ceremonies were performed. It was inside the camp where the Jewish religion was practiced. Outside the camp corresponds to the nations of the world.

And Jesus was flung outside the camp where he died not for the sins of the nation of Israel exclusively, but for the sins of the world. By casting Jesus outside the camp, the Jews said, "We want nothing of this man." And Jesus died outside the camp so that he could save many outside the camp.

IV. Jesus suffered outside the camp to make sanctification outside the camp.

As we said before, inside the camp was considered a holy place and outside the camp was an unholy place. Israel was formerly considered a holy nation and the nations of the world were unholy. Inside the camp was holy because that is where God dwelt. The cloud of God's holy presence rested over the tabernacle and came into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. And during Israel's 1500 years before Christ, God's presence made the inside of the camp holy.

But when they would not have Christ any longer inside the gates, they cast him out. And when they cast God outside the gates, holiness left Israel. And they took Christ outside the gates to Calvary and crucified him. And Calvary became holy. Christ sanctified the ground outside the gates. Now, if you walk up the hill to Golgotha, take off your shoes for it is holy ground.

Now salvation has gone to the world and sanctification has gone to God's people in all the world. The gospel has been preached far and wide to all nations. And Christ is willing to save all those who were formerly unclean outside the gates.

But what has happened inside the gates. Why, it has become defiled. Inside the gates of Judaism is emptiness and uncleanness and death. The ceremonies which were so rich in meaning before are now empty works. They have cast Christ out and darkness reigns inside the gates.

V. What must a Jew do to be saved?

He must go outside the gates. He must bow in humility and admit to the world that there is no power in Judaism any longer. Christ was expelled from the city and one will only find Him outside the gates. This is why it is so difficult for Jews to be saved. They must turn their backs on that old religion and admit that after all their religion was just a type and it was all about Jesus.

Jews must admit that when they cast Jesus out, their city became defiled. When they cast holiness out, it became unholy within. And they must admit that salvation is now not found within their gates but without.

Look at verse 13.

*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

VI. We have an altar where we have a right to eat.

Those locked in Judaism have no right to eat (v.10). But by contrast we do have a right to eat. In fact, this is how we appropriate the sacrifice of Christ. We must eat of it.

*And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

John 6:35

Notice in this verse that Jesus is the bread of life. Obviously, when you are hungry you eat bread. But how do we appropriate Christ? How do we eat the bread of life and drink the living water?

We come to Him and we believe on him. This way of salvation is so simple that it confounds the wise and it offends the proud. It is so simple that all one must do is come and believe.

But the message to the Jews was that they must come outside the gate. You will never find Christ in the Jewish temple, but you will find him outside the gate on a hill called Calvary.

### The Lord's Table.

This morning we will observe the Lord's Table. This is not an altar that we are coming to this morning. We don't have an altar in this church because there is no more sacrifice to be made for sins. The Jews brought sacrifices to their altar continually as a picture of that one great sacrifice. But being on this side of the cross, we have put away those old pictures and we observe Christ and him alone.

The Lord's Table is not another sacrifice for sins. Were we to eat and to drink these elements as a sacrifice for sins, we would invalidate the work of Christ which he performed once for all on his altar. Rather, we eat and drink these elements as a faithful act of obedience and as a memorial of his sacrificial death.

Let us remember that there are no more works to be done for our salvation. We lay all our confidence in his work.