

Second Sunday of End Time - Last Judgment
November 11, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Hebrews 9:24-28 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

“The Substitute’s Sacrifice Secures Salvation”

Finally. Finally it's all over. At least that's what we thought would happen on Wednesday morning. All the obnoxious, negative campaign ads. The constant, incessant news coverage around the clock. All the near-apocalyptic predictions about what will happen if the other side gets their way. The extreme rhetoric that this just just be the most important (midterm) election and drastically, irreversibly change the course of history. We were waiting, hoping, praying it would all be over as soon as the last ballot was counted. And then we woke up on Wednesday morning.

Now, instead, we get more talk, more coverage, more analysis. Threats and tough talks and fights are in store for all of us. At least if we let it. Not to downplay the importance of being good citizens and doing everything in our power to exert a Christian influence through the democratic process, but this election season just shows the political process will never reach any ultimate conclusion. It can't. That's not what it is designed to do. It's always ongoing. It never will reach a goal where everything is accomplished perfectly with nothing left to be done.

And that just helps us see Christ in a different light and appreciate his work as amazingly unique. Today we are looking at Hebrews chapter 9, the final verses. We see in these verses that Jesus didn't go to the normal places to carry out his struggle, but took action in heaven itself. Jesus teaches us not to handle our issues the way we normally would, but did it with his own blood. And Jesus gets different results than what we can accomplish through our struggles, because Jesus brings eternal victory. In other words, Jesus did everything he needed to do. His only work left to do is you. To work now and here to give you absolute confidence through everything he accomplished.

Some people are so tired of politics and the constant sniping back and forth that they just tune it all out. At other times we can try to see through all the bluster and focus on the issues that really matter, that will really impact our lives and our communities. We can still breath a big sigh of relief when another election cycle is over though. In the Bible there are

certain topics that just keep popping up. Things like judgement and sin and condemnation are sprinkled throughout the Scriptures so we know they aren't just minor issues or just accidents in the bigger scheme of God's plans. And yet, if you're like me, those are all topics I'd just rather not deal with. They make me too uncomfortable. They're too big for me to handle and work out on my own.

And so we tell ourselves a message that will make us feel ok for avoiding these serious issues. No one is perfect, so it would be unreasonable for God to hold anyone to such an impossibly high standard. The people around me certainly aren't guiltless either, so I just won't worry too much. There are so many factors in my life that make it impossible for me to live up to God's demands. People around me cause me to mess up. The system is stacked against me. I don't see any benefits from trying to do the right thing, so I'm just going to live my own life.

There's another example of our avoidance that is all around us. People who have been studying the extreme language and name calling in current events and politics have discovered a root cause. We have turned these societal and governmental struggles into ultimate struggles. We make it our ultimate goal to change the world around us and make it the kind of place that will be most satisfying to us. So we have put ultimate hope in bringing about change in our world and society. So whenever someone disagrees with us or blocks us from getting what we want, it isn't something we can just brush aside. It is catastrophic to our view of how the world needs to be. Essentially we have as a society replaced religion with politics.

That's what makes Jesus so refreshing. He isn't some remote-controlled God that we maneuver wherever we want. Some computer programmed deity sent in whichever direction we sense the most urgent need at the moment. Jesus went where he needed to go: **"For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."** (Hebrews 9:24) Jesus knows we put too much hope in the things that don't matter ultimately. He understands how our televisions and smartphones cause to be outraged by the latest and most heinous. Jesus goes right where he needs to go. When he knew it wasn't about making appearances on talk shows or setting the record straight in lengthy interviews. He had to enter heaven itself with a solution that would set things right for all the people on the globe. He had to come up with something better than just avoiding the topics of judgment or pretending sin isn't really an issue.

Here's where it helps to understand the connection between the Book of Hebrews and the Old Testament. When you read through the Old Testament you realize God had given his people a very specific and very rigorous pathway for establishing and reaffirming their relationship with him. Disobedience to God couldn't just be overlooked, even if it was unintentional. God made it clear there was no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. Sacrifices had to be made. And you couldn't just come to God on your own. You had to bring your sacrifice to a priest and that priest would offer it on your behalf. So there were ceremonies and rituals that were just drummed into the people. Sin offerings, burnt offerings, guilt offerings, fellowship offerings.

And that sort of system actually makes sense to people like us. We know avoiding sin isn't the answer. We realize we have to confront a righteous and holy Judge eventually, whether we like it or not. And so many times we feel like the things that are wrong in our lives are just beyond our power. Not what happens in Washington DC or Santa Fe or even city hall. My life. My family. My relationships that really matter. And it is a crushing realization that I can't control absolutely everything, get things back on track, make them turn out the way I want. There is a vulnerability that things are outside of my power.

But when the stakes are high, when it's about people we love, we simply won't allow ourselves to give up. So we adopt that mindset of the Old Testament believers. We follow the prescribed rituals. You do what you are told to do to handle your own vulnerability. You practice the ceremonies you have been told to do. You go to a higher power that can tap into something bigger and more effective than what you can give.

Here's something helpful about the book of Hebrews. It isn't just about connecting people to the Old Testament. It's about showing the superiority of Jesus. For the theme of the book, I like to remember "Jesus Is Better." All of those sacrifices of bulls and goats and sheep couldn't actually bring ultimate peace between God and his imperfect people. That's because those animals couldn't actually do anything about the guilt of sin that hangs onto every person. For that, we need Jesus. And he wasn't just a professional go-between for God and his people. The very Son of God himself took up the cause of humanity. He brought his own blood as the sacrifice. He didn't do it over and over, day after day, year after year. Jesus is better than the priests of the Old Testament and the sacrifices and even the temple itself: **"Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."** (Hebrews 9:25,26)

Today our nation celebrates Veteran's Day. Since it's a Sunday, I hope you get tomorrow off of work. But even if you don't, I hope you take at least a few moments to thank the men and women who served in the Armed Forces. We can recognize the sacrifices so many made to ensure our freedom. Even those who never faced combat put themselves at risk in ways most of us will never have to consider in our daily lives and jobs.

And when you pause to consider those sacrifices, I pray it sinks in just a little bit more the way your Savior handled your most pressing problems. Jesus came in the flesh to bring everything to completion. Jesus didn't just overlook sin, but he actually removed it by taking it upon himself: **"Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many."** (Hebrews 9:28) Jesus is better because he jumped in as your substitute to handle everything that is too much for you. Jesus offered his perfect life as the sacrifice to cleanse people from sin. His blood does what no animal, no offering can do. That offering was acceptable to God. Because God carried out his judgment against sin, every sin and every sinner, on Jesus. For people too afraid or ashamed to confront the reality of judgement, the death of Jesus is God's gift to sinners. Jesus cancelled the debt of sin before God by his death. Jesus provides

release from the debt we owe to God. Jesus stands as your substitute today to assure you of your restored, perfect relationship with God.

Jesus is your substitute. Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice. Jesus did everything necessary to secure your salvation. But that doesn't mean Jesus is done working for you. Hebrews tells us: **“Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”** (Hebrews 9:28) So Jesus promises to come back. But since he's already done everything necessary to take away your sin, now the only left will be to take you to glory.

Maybe you've heard of Brian Banks. Recently there was a movie made about his life story. He was a promising high school football player in line for a college scholarship. Maybe even a professional football career. Then he was accused of a terrible sexual assault. Falsely accused. But his lawyer thought things looked pretty bleak for him. So rather than try to prove his innocence and risk 40 years in prison if convicted, he took a plea deal. After five years he was released. Then he served another five years of probation. Then, his accuser recanted. She admitted that she made the whole thing up. He still wanted to go to court to overturn his conviction. See, he knew he was innocent all along, but he wanted to have the peace that came from knowing everyone else knew too.

Eventually he even got a shot at playing professional football. Too many things were stacked against him to make a successful career. But now, freed from prison and released from shame, he has a bigger goal. He was to help set free others who have been falsely accused. Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are free. In Christ Jesus you have the security that comes from having a Substitute who suffered for you. You have the certainty of knowing he paid the ultimate price in his blood. You are free. Free of fear and guilt. Free from trying to hide from God's judgment or trying to do enough to satisfy him.

That means as we look back on the events of the past week and look to the weeks ahead, you can reserve your outrage for something bigger than politics. Reserve your outrage for unbelief, rejection and sin. Actually, reserve your joy and generosity and gratitude for a world entangled in outrage. Show you have a better hope in Jesus. Through the encouragement of Scripture, you can stay grounded to persevere in faith and hope. You can continually find peace and joy in the truth of the Gospel. You can live confidently in Jesus. You are safe in the sacrifice of your substitute. Amen.

+ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will. Amen +