
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Christ's Superior Covenant (Hebrews 8:1-9:28) **Christ's Covenant and Acceptance – Part 3 (9:23-28)**

The one year period from mid 1491 to mid 1492 was one of the most eventful in history. Do you know what happened during this time? To begin with, to King Henry VII of England and his wife, Elizabeth of York, was born a son whom they named Henry-Henry VIII. Just a few months later, in 1492, an Italian sailor from Genoa named Christopher Columbus set sail under the flag of Spain with the hopes of finding the eastern shores of Indies. It would be in that same year that a son would be born to the Tyndales of Gloucester England, a family of moderate means that would eventually send their son William to Oxford.

Historically speaking, this was an eventful year! For you know that Columbus discovered the new world in 1492. Henry VIII would go on to be the King who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, opening the ways for Protestantism in the English-speaking world. And William Tyndale became one of the world's greatest linguists and the first translator of the original Scriptures into the English language. Each of these men, as well as their achievements had an impact on succeeding generations. But one thing these achievements did not do was to have an impact upon any generation that went before them. No one just 100 years before these men was affected by these men. No one at the time of Christ was affected by these men. Honestly, it would be impossible for the lives of these men to affect the history that came before them. But, there is One life and One man whose life affects both individuals in the subsequent generations after Him as well as individuals in every generation before Him and life is the life and person of Jesus Christ.

As we have been noting, the events of the life of Christ are the only means by which persons of every generation since the time of Adam can have the assurance of acceptance by their Creator. No other person and no other events of humanity can boast or even come close to offering such a blessed assurance as noted in Romans 8:1 –

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Of all the events we might celebrate; of all the events that will transpire in our lifetimes and in the lifetimes of our children and their children, be they bitter or sweet, discouraging or joyous, full of tragedy or triumph the event or series of events that impact all of humanity is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beloved, the only cause for genuine joy in this life is the life of Christ and His securing of the adoption as sons of God those among a hostile and God-rebelling humanity. Truly I say to you, those who are “in Christ” – those who have been overwhelmed by the life of Christ, who have come to love the Lordship of Christ manifested in and through their lives and who trust alone in the saving ability of Christ to present them spotless and unblemished in the presence of God – these are those who know what it means to be accepted by God, to be loved by God, to be the special objects of His mercy and grace.

As we have been examining Hebrews 9:15-28, we have been noting the means by which God, through Jesus Christ, accepts us as these beloved sons of the kingdom. Let me remind you that in Hebrews 9:15-17 we saw how believers are accepted, that is found favor with God by the very “death of Christ” – as the death of Christ is said to be the event that ushers in ultimate and final saving aspects of the New Covenant as promised in Jeremiah

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31:31-34. Additionally, we have seen in Hebrews 9:18-22 how we are accepted by God through the “blood of Christ” – seeing how being sprinkled with the blood Christ marks us, consecrates us as being of special use and service to God. This morning we conclude Hebrews 9, noting in verses 23-28 how we gain acceptance before God, we enjoy the privileged status as beloved of God not by what we do, but rather by the very “appearing of Christ.” It is the appearing of Christ that I greatly desire to unfold to you today, seeing how it is that through the appear of Christ we have acceptance with God. May I then humbly submit to you that Hebrews 9:23-28 reveal three appearings of Christ, each of which present Jesus to us in such a light as to reveal glorious aspects of His person and His work.

1. The Appearing of Christ as our Advocate (9:23-24)

23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...

Our text begins by reminding us that all of the furnishings and utensils of the tabernacle, including the tabernacle itself, along with the book of the Covenant – the very laws of God written down by Moses to the people of Israel – that all these things were “**cleansed with these**” – that is cleansed with the blood of animals. I would have you keep in mind that the word “**cleansed**” – which we first considered last week, means “to be made free of admixture” or, in other words, “to be made pure.” According to the testimony of Scripture, the tabernacle, its furnishings, the book of the Covenant and even the people were all sprinkled with the blood of animals to “set them apart” or consecrate them as a people marked by God for His special purpose – in this sense then they were cleansed. And just what was His purpose for Israel? We read in Exodus 19:5-6 these words –

5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

We see that Israel was marked out by God to be those through whom He would reveal Himself to the nations as the one true God and Savior of mankind. Of course, Israel did not obey, but failed God through their rebellion. But their rebellion was planned by God to reveal to mankind that, in the words of Romans 3:20, “**by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight...**” It would not be by the works of sinful man that people might be saved, but by the works of one holy Man, the man Christ Jesus. But I would have you note that the same purpose is presented to those under the New Covenant as to those who were under the Old, namely that those who trust in the work of Christ, who have been sprinkled by the blood Christ, are those who, according to 1 Peter 2:9, are -

A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

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Just as Israel was marked by the blood of animals to be the proclaimers of the grace and mercy of God to the nations, so today the Church has been marked with the superior blood of Christ that each one of professes the name of Christ would be a proclaimer of the excellencies of God, particularly as it relates to saving men from the ultimate destination of their condition, a Christless, joyless, miserable eternity in the fiery recesses of Hell.

Hebrews 9:23-24 reveals to us that the blood used to cleanse the people and the tabernacle under the first covenant, that these were merely pictures or copies of greater or **“heavenly things.”** What are these **“heavenly things?”** There is much speculation here. Some believe these refer to specific items in the heavenly tabernacle. Some believe that it refers to Jesus Christ, whose life, while never inwardly tainted, did bear our sins and needed to be cleansed by His own death. Some believe that the heavenly things needing cleansing are the people of God themselves. Maybe it is one or maybe it is all these things, but the truth of the matter is, all these things are said to have been cleansed with “better sacrifices” which is a reference to the one great and final blood sacrifice of Christ for these **“heavenly things.”**

But what I truly would have you notice in these verses is the building climax being pursued. Hebrews 9:24 reminds us that Christ did not enter **“a holy place made with hands.”** This true, for Christ is of the wrong tribe, Judah, not Levi – to have ever legally entered the earthly, man-made copy of the true tabernacle. It is interesting to note that the Jews considered the outer court of the tabernacle as a picture of earth, the holy place as heaven and the most holy place as the throne of heaven. But Jesus did not enter the picture, rather He entered the reality. He went **“into heaven itself”** – that is into the heavenly holy place – something no Levitical High Priest did our even could do and now look at what is said next here – **“to appear in the presence of God...”** Jesus entered not the picture, but the actual presence, before the very throne of God. As wonderful as it is that Jesus was so accepted by the Father so as to be able to appear before the holy presence of God, I say to you that such knowledge is of little benefit to humanity. But please not that our text did not end as two simple words add the greatest of profundity to this first mentioned appearance of God – for Jesus did appear in the presence of God not for His own benefit, but **“for us.”**

The blessed truth is that Jesus appeared before God, for us – to represent us, to be, in the words of 1 John 2:1, our Advocate, our representative who pleads our cause before the Father. And just what is it that Jesus pleads? Does He argue with His Father that one who stands condemned as a sinner, deserving death, should be accepted by the Father due to his own reformed life, or community service, or general good will toward man? No, beloved, we have an Advocate who states that He Himself is the propitiation, the adequate and sufficient stay of the wrath of God for sinners who have by divine enablement come to Him. Our Advocate states before the jury of heaven that He died for the sins and in the stead of His people (Matthew 1:21).

Beloved, those who are truly “in Christ” have acceptance with God; they have the joy and love God; and they have the securing or assurance of God that they belong to God and God belongs to them. If Christ did not appear before the Father on our behalf, no one could ever stand in the presence of God. But Jesus appeared “for us” – the “us” referring to those whose lives have been radically changed by the Spirit of God to love Him and serve Him for His glory. Let us praise God for such an Advocate who has appeared for us.

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2. The Appearing of Christ as our Atonement (9:25-26)

25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:25-26 continues much of what has been an ongoing theme in Hebrews 7, 8, 9 and will even be found in 10 – the all-sufficient, once for all, never to be repeated, totally perfect, eternally satisfying blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are presented here with a contrast between atonements, between the atonement of the Levitical priesthood and the atonement of Christ. Remember that an “atonement”, Biblically speaking, is a costly payment by which the righteous demands of God’s holy justice concerning sinners is met thereby replacing the wrath of God with the peace of God. To put this even more simply, an atonement is a costly payment whereby sinful man may be accepted by the Holy God.

- Under the Old Covenant, Levitical priest offered up only symbols and fast fading pictures of the true atonement.
- Under the New Covenant, Christ would be the reality to which all the previous sacrifices pointed.
- Under the OC, the priest would offer an animal for the atonement. Under the NC, Christ offers Himself.
- Under the OC the priest would offer atonement repeatedly yet under the NC Christ offers Himself but once.
- Under the OC the priest offered the blood of animals, blood that never flowed through the veins of men.
- Under the NC, Christ shed His own blood, the blood of the Son of Man, revealing that He fully identified with man. This in itself is evidence of our acceptance with God, namely that God became like us, to do for us, what we could not do for ourselves.
- Finally, let me note that under the OC, the priest who offered the repeated sacrifices did so because not one, nor not all of their sacrifices could take away sin. Beloved, do you see where we are going? Now, under the NC, *“once at the consummation of the ages [these last days] He [Jesus] has been manifested [meaning- He has appeared] to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself [to be our atonement].”*

Jesus **“has been manifested”** – that is, He has appeared as man at His incarnation, He has appeared on the cross as our atonement, as the only one who reconciles us to God, and His atonement will continue to be the means by which our sins may be put away. And unless our sins are put away, unless we are cleansed, that is “made free from admixture” – the complete removing of our sinful nature and tendencies - we will never be accepted by God. Let us praise God that He has provide so full, so complete, so wonderful, so sufficient an atonement in Jesus Christ that we who have been called to Him, who are being conformed, I pray daily, to the image of Christ, may rejoice in so great a salvation and also may greatly proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Let me make one more important observation from Hebrews 9:26. There has been a word often repeated in the book of Hebrews that I would now briefly expound upon. Halfway

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through the verse we read this – **“but now once at the consummation of the ages...”** O beloved, such an emphasis placed upon the atonement of Christ – it was **“once.”** Some six times in the book of Hebrews we are told of the one time nature of Christ’s work. Christ came *once*. Christ died for our sins *once*. Christ offered himself as a sacrifice to put away our sin *once*. Remember that we began by noting that even great historical events only effect the subsequent generations. By way of illustration, if I came into wealth, wealth enough to provide for me, my children and my children’s children to live in great prosperity, what benefit would this have upon my parents, or my grandparents or even my grandparent’s parents? None. No man can change history – no man save One – who came once to put away not only the sins of all those who came after Him, but also, as we noted in Hebrews 9:15, His one act was sufficient enough to provide **“redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant.”** If the life, death, and resurrection of Christ can effect those whose lives had already been lived before His atoning death on the cross, how much more are the lives of those who came after His atoning death to be affected? And Church history records vast numbers of men and women whose lives were so affected by the atonement of Christ that they themselves could know nothing else but be continual beacons of the light and life of Christ. O beloved, may our light so shine. May God give us a burning passion to so love Christ, to so desire the glory of God and to so go and preach the life-changing message of the Gospel to the lost. Jesus came once. He only needed to come once. Nothing else can be added to what Jesus Christ has completed with finality! Is this what you truly believe? Is this what you constantly manifest? That Jesus appeared once to be the perfect and only atonement for sin?

Beloved, it is far easier to confess in here that you so trust Jesus alone, but it is quite another thing to live it out. Many of us have connections with Roman Catholics who we know are trusting in the repeated re-crucifixion of Christ in the Mass as necessary for their forgiveness and acceptance by God. But Christ died once and it was finished! But before we point the finger only at the Catholic Church, let us note that even Protestants are often profoundly guilty failing to live the sufficiency of the one sacrifice of Christ. Too often the picture is painted that if one simply walks an aisle during a service – then they will be saved. Somehow, the idea of moving from the pew to the front of the church is seen as having saving power. Maybe this is not your thinking, but there are many who attend church this very hour who will think that if they can only get up enough nerve to walk down the aisle, they will be saved. The problem is that Scripture teaches that Jesus has already accomplished all the saving work. Acceptance by God is by faith in what Jesus did, not by the nerve to walk an aisle. Jesus is our atonement – Jesus alone satisfies. He satisfies God the Father and He satisfies me.

3. The Appearing of Christ as our Anticipation (9:27-28)

27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

In these final two verses we are presented with a general principle of humanity. From the time we are born, we are on a crash course with death. Most people do not like to consider this and painstakingly avoid the subject. But the declaration of Scripture and the experience of life confirms that death is the normal course of man. We read in Hebrews 9:27 –

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“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”

Is this true for all. I would call your attention to the present tense of the main verb **“is appointed”** – this tells us that such an appointment is always true. This was not simply written to speak of the condition of that original audience, rather it became true from the moment sin entered into the world. Men are appointed to **“die once.”** This is true even for those who have been forgiven of sin and no longer bear its judgment. The death of the believer yet reminds all that death is a part of life. And so long as the Lord tarries, this will continue to be the truth – each one of us has an appointment with death. We can even include a certain typo that may drive the reality of this verse closer to home. In the word “men” take out the “n” and what do you read? “It is appointed for me to die once and after this judgment.”

And this text is clear that what follows death is not soul-sleep or purgatory, but rather **“judgment.”** Many may play around with the reality of this to come up with some softened version of what this means, but the reality is this, if we have not embraced God's judgment upon Jesus Christ as our Atonement who appeared at the cross, if we are not depending upon Jesus Christ as our Advocate, having appeared before the Father “for us” - then we face the wrathful judgment of God upon death. God will call everyone to account one day. You will be reminded that God Himself created you, gave you of His air to breath, supplied you with His food to eat, and provided you with common grace day by day. The question you will have to answer as He calls you to account is this – “Have you obeyed His command to repent of your sins and trust in His Son?” Will you find acceptance? Is Jesus your one and only Anticipation – your only hope of eternal life?

In Hebrews 9:28 we find the answer as to how one comes to experience the acceptance by God. Men are appointed to die – so was Jesus. After the death of men comes judgment. At the death of Christ the sins of His people were judged. Acceptance before God does not come by man dying for himself, but rather having Christ die in his place. The first coming of Jesus Christ was to **“bear the sins of many.”** But notice what is stated concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ. At this second coming it is said that Jesus will “appear” [here’s our word] to gather together **“those who eagerly await Him.”** His first coming dealt with sin. His second coming has nothing to do with atoning for sin for our text says that this final appearing is **“without reference to sin.”** For those who have come to Christ, sin is no longer an issue. Those have been paid for. What is at issue now is the characteristic of the one who has had his sin taken care of. He is of those who **“eagerly await”** the return of Jesus. Jesus is his one and only Anticipation? Oh how we ought to long for the return of Jesus! What will Jesus find you doing when He returns? Consider 1 John 2:28-3:3

28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

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This passage brings us full circle. How do we find acceptance before God? Certainly not in ourselves. Jesus is our Advocate, appearing before the throne of God “for us” – calling us His own, pleading for the Father’s work of conforming us to the image of Christ. Jesus is our Atonement, the one who cleanses us from the admixture of sin, purifying and marking us as God’s people, making us right and ready for eternity with God. And Jesus is our Anticipation, the one we long for and pray – “Even so Lord Jesus, come!” And until you come physically, please come spiritually into every aspect of my life. Fill me with Your singular devotion to God. Fill me with Your passion for purity of life. Fill me with Your constant compassion for the lost. May my soul desire to imitate you and proclaim that salvation has come. Let me close with these questions -

Who do you want representing you before God?

Whose work do you trust as complete and sufficient to enable you to stand before God?

Who is the anticipation of your heart? He’s been here once already to cleanse from sin. The next time He comes it will be to gather those who eagerly long for His coming having experienced cleansing of their sin.

Soli Deo Gloria

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