

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #19

Hebrews 9:23-28

When we look down through these six verses, there are seven very significant words of theology that show up that, obviously, show us just how critical the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ is to our salvation.

First, there is the word “heaven” which shows up three times (9:23, 23, 24). In every use of the noun “heaven” is the article “the” preceding the noun. What this means is that the writer is stressing the fact that he is discussing “the throne of God’s heaven.” The third heaven is the place where God dwells. Hebrews is discussing access to the actual dwelling place of the Holy God. **Second**, there is the word “sacrifice” (θυσια) (9:23, 26). This particular word has to do with bringing a sacrificial offering to God. Jesus Christ brought Himself to God as the offering. He offered Himself as a sacrifice to God. **Third**, there is the word “blood” which was shed by His sacrifice, without which there is no possibility of forgiveness (9:22, 25). **Fourth**, there is the word “sin” (αμαρτια) (9:26, 28) which refers to all of the times where we have missed the mark of the righteousness of God. **Fifth**, there is the word “death” (9:27) which is the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23). **Sixth**, there is the word “judgment” (κρισις) (9:27) which refers to the judgment of God one faces after one dies. And **Seventh**, there is the word “salvation” (σωτηρια) (9:28), which refers to the salvation and safety one may have in a relationship with God in view of all of these realities. Just the mention of these words in the context of what Jesus Christ did clearly shows how critical His sacrifice actually was.

As we have been seeing in Hebrews, everything we have in our relationship with God is contingent upon the sacrifice and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. God is not satisfied or pleased with us, but He is totally satisfied and pleased with Jesus Christ. He is the One who opens the door for us to have a new covenant of grace relationship that gives us intimate access to God.

In this text, we learn more and more of the significance of the work of Jesus Christ. We may observe that **Hebrews 9:23** begins with a conjunction “therefore.” That conjunction “therefore” (ουν) is inferential, which means “therefore, so consequently” (Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 253). This connects us to the preceding point. Last time we were together we saw the importance of the blood of Jesus Christ in opening the door for a new grace covenant relationship with God. What this conjunction means is that the writer is now going to further develop some of the amazing realities of the superior sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As near as I can determine, the primary point is this:

THE SUPERIOR SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST IS WHAT OPENS THE DOOR TO SOME AMAZING REALITIES.

Now the “better sacrifices” refers to all of the law sacrifices that were offered at the tabernacle, including the Day of Atonement. If those sacrifices couldn’t give open access to God, then there is no sacrifice that you and I could ever make that can accomplish it either. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood puts us into a new covenant relationship with God, which opens a door for six amazing realities:

REALITY #1 – Christ’s sacrifice gives us access to God’s heaven. **9:23-24**

The O.T. tabernacle was a mere copy or shadow of the real heaven. Everything in that place was tainted by the touch of man and therefore everything in that earthly tabernacle needed to be cleansed by blood. As **verse 23** says, it was absolutely necessary that everything be cleansed in a tabernacle that was made by the hands of men (**verse 24**).

However, the point of these verses is that now we have access to God at His heaven that was not made with the hands of men, and it is Jesus Christ who gave us that access through His shed blood. In fact, when **verse 24** says He appeared in the presence of God, it literally means He appeared face-to-face with God. **Jesus Christ did not just go into the Holy of Holies which featured various things that indicated the sacred presence of God; He went before God face-to-face.**

Notice from verse 24 that He appears in heaven itself “for us.” Verse 23 says that things in the heavens had to be cleansed. Well what possible things in God’s heaven needed cleansing? The answer is the humans who go there. Things in heaven like God’s throne don’t need cleansing, we do. We don’t just have a High Priest who goes into the Holy Place once a year; we have a High Priest who is presently in heaven who takes care of all our sin problem in a face-to-face connection to God. He is the One who gives us the cleansing we need to be in the presence of God. **Do you see why we have access to heaven? Jesus Christ is there “for us.”** As H. A. Ironside said, He is right there to give us perfect representation in view of our “human frailty and tendency to err” (*Hebrews*, p. 112).

Now Christ did not have to carry a basin of His own blood back into heaven. He, Himself, is there. He is the sacrifice. When the veil of the Temple was torn in two, His access work had been completed. What must be observed here is that the only means of entrance into heaven is through the sacrificial work and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. This is the only thing that gives us access into the presence of a Holy God.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said you be very careful in trusting anything for your spiritual life that has been made by hands because it will not last (*Be Confident*, p. 106). Religions that teach a works salvation are devilish and they are missing this key theological reality. No sinful human can ever work his way into God’s heaven or God’s presence. God will not accept our works because we have been tainted by sin. In His sight our works are as filthy rags. It is Jesus Christ who opens up heaven to those who believe in Him.

REALITY #2 – Christ’s sacrifice was only necessary once. **9:25-26a**

This is an extremely important point for this shows the eternal value of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This point of Christ dying once is critical for it is also mentioned three times (**9:26, 27, 28**). Had Christ’s sacrifice been like the O.T. law, think about how many times Christ would have had to die since the days of Adam to take care of the sins of all sinners. He would have had to offer Himself over and over again. But Jesus Christ is God and He can take care of all the sins of the world in one sacrifice.

High priests of the O.T. law went into the Holy of Holies once a year and had to offer their sacrifices over and over again every single year. They had to offer sacrifices for themselves and for the people.

No high priest could ever leave the Holy of Holies and say, that settles all the sin issues; it is finished. Furthermore, never once did any high priest think about offering his own shed blood. But the onetime sacrifice of Jesus Christ finishes everything forever. It opens the door for us to enter the throne of God's heaven. When He cried, it is finished, that is exactly what He meant. He had died one time to settle all of the judicial matters of God so that all of our sins could be forgiven.

What this means for us is that when we believe on Jesus Christ one time we are forever saved. Under the O.T. law, because the sacrifices were offered over and over again, one could never have the confidence that all their sin-matters had been resolved. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ resolves everything once for all and forever. You can know that you are forever saved and that your sin-case against you is gone.

Those who think they can lose their salvation do not understand the value of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Those who think they can lose their salvation tend to look at themselves or others and not the onetime substitutionary value of Christ's sacrifice.

REALITY #3 – Christ's sacrifice put away sin. 9:26b

Now you do not want to miss what is revealed here. Jesus Christ was manifested for the purpose of putting away sin. Jesus Christ did not come into this world to deny sin. He did not come into this world to soften the idea of sin. He did not come into this world to redefine sin. He did not come into this world to eliminate any thought of the penalty for sin. He did not come into this world to call sin a mistake or a disease. He did not come into this world to, as S. Lewis Johnson said, "lull us into a false sense of security" about sin (*Hebrews 9:23-28*, p. 4). **Jesus Christ came into this world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**

The verb "He has been manifested" means He came to make visibly clear that He is the only One who can put away sin by Himself and His sacrifice. One time in a decisive moment in history Christ came to put away sin.

That word "put away" (αθετησις) is one that means to do away with something, to nullify it, and to make it of no value (G.Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 11). Jesus Christ came to offer Himself in order to make it possible for our sin-case to be done away once and forever so that we could have access to God and to His heaven. **Notice carefully that the noun "sin" is singular and in Greek it is articular.** The sin is the whole condemnatory case against humanity. Jesus Christ came to resolve that case so sinners could have access to God.

I doubt seriously we even begin to realize what it takes to "put away" sin. No religion can put away sin. No religious activity can put away sin in the sight of God. You can go to church every time the door is open and you can be involved in all kinds of religious things. You could

be confirmed or baptized. You could tithe your money and work on every committee. You could do all kinds of things and none of it can put away your sin. You can be very religious and very lost. You will not put away one sin on your own. Only Jesus Christ can do that.

Some of the most beautiful liturgy that ever existed was the liturgy of O.T. Israel. It was more impressive than the Catholics, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians, or the Reformed. Those O.T. rituals were something to see, but they could not put away sin. Never could any Israelite say, "I was saved by keeping the Mosaic Law." Never could any Israelite say, "I was saved because I participated in the great liturgy of the Day of Atonement." Liturgy cannot put away sin. It is Christ's sacrifice alone that can put away sin.

REALITY #4 – Christ's sacrifice settles the matter of death. 9:27a

Death is an intimidating reality. None of us know when it will get us or how. But if the Lord tarries it will get us all. Without Christ's sacrifice we are in serious trouble.

Now a comparison is made between the death of men and the death of Jesus Christ. Men die one time and it is an appointed time. The reason every person dies is because every person is a sinner. **Christ also died once and it was an appointed time, but He did not die because He was a sinner. He died to "bear the sins" of many. His death was not a penalty for His sin but a sacrifice for our sins.**

You and I have a death coming that is not voluntary. If the Lord tarries we will all die. We all received the death penalty because of the sin of Adam and there is not one thing you and I can do to get out from this penalty. It was not so with Jesus Christ. His death was not due to His sin and His death was voluntary. He died one time for the sins of all humanity.

Now of course there is a right way to die and there is a wrong way to die. The right way to die is by faith looking straight at Jesus Christ in an eager way. The wrong way to die is to die without believing on Jesus Christ.

REALITY #5 – Christ's sacrifice settles the matter of judgment. 9:27b

Most when facing the subject of death totally neglect this part of it. Often you will hear people say, may he die in peace. Well he may or may not, because when he dies there is the judgment of God. What makes the difference in how we die is how we are related to Jesus Christ.

All of Scripture speaks of a coming judgment for everyone. Ecclesiastes 3:17 says "...God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is there." Paul said in Romans 14:12, "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God."

The judgment of God after death is a scary proposition without the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

REALITY #6 – Christ’s First Coming concerning sin means there will be another coming concerning salvation. **9:28**

The next time Christ appears it will not be for the purpose of sin but salvation. The word “appear” (οφθησεται) comes from a Greek word that means to behold or see.

It is interesting that this verse does not say at His Second Coming, but at His second appearance. What is actually stated here is that when believers see Jesus Christ the next time, their salvation will be final.

The first time Christ appeared, He appeared to offer a sacrifice of Himself to take care of the sin issue. The next time He appears, He will appear “without reference to sin” for the matter of salvation.

This eschatologically refers to the Rapture of the Church. We learn some key doctrine here and that is, only believers will see Jesus Christ at the Rapture. The eager awaiting refers to God’s people in the Church Age longing for God to finish His program and Rapture us.

In view of the fact that we will be judged, it is critical that we know when we die and when we face judgment that all of our sins are forgiven. The only possible way for this to happen is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and the only way we may appropriate this to our sin-case is by faith, not works.