

November 9, 2003
Last Judgment

“Once to Die and Then the Judgment”

HEBREWS 9:24-28

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary 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 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

“I would not mind dying.” Those were the shocking words I heard from a radio talk show host recently. The man talked openly about his feeling of emptiness with this life, and his desire to pass from this phase of life into the next phase. In fact he said, “I would not mind entering into the next phase of a thousand different phases in life waiting for me in the future.”

Is that what happens when we die? Do we pass into another phase filled with challenges and opportunities? After that phase is completed, do we go into another phase and another? Are we like this plastic bottle that gets recycled and improves with each recycling? No, according to the words just read to you “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” There is no second chance, or third chance, or entering into different cycles of opportunity as taught by those who believe in reincarnation.

It is appointed unto man, once to die, and then comes the judgment. Think of what a blessing it is to know that you already have in Jesus what is necessary to make it through judgment and enter into the place Jesus has prepared for you. You are ready for your hour of death or the end of the world which ever comes first. You are ready because of the perfect life Jesus lived for you, the perfect death he died for you. Because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, you know that your heavenly Father accepted everything Jesus did for you, in your place. When death comes you can joyfully proclaim, “Bring it on! I am ready because of Jesus.” This morning we want to focus on these words, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment.”

1) Don't place your hope in second chances

There are no second chances to believe. That the book of Hebrews teaches us by speaking about the once for all sacrifice that Christ made for sin. The Jewish people wanted to go back to believing that repeated sacrifices in the temple made them acceptable to God. The book of Hebrews tell us these sacrifices, repeated year by year, month by month, and day by day served as copies or pictures of the one great sacrifice Jesus would give for us. “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one.”

When a soldier goes off to war he takes with him pictures of his wife, or family or girlfriend. He keeps looking at these pictures again and again to remind him of his family. It is not the same as actually being with them, but it helps to keep focused on the family, especially when death is near as it is facing so many of soldiers in Iraq this morning.

The Old Testament tent and temple served as a copy or picture of what was coming in the future. Once a year on Yom Kippur, the high priest entered into the inner sanctuary of the temple, the holy of holies, and carefully sprinkled blood from a bull on the golden cover of the ark of the covenant, that was surrounded by the cloud of God's glory. After putting blood on the gold cover for himself, he sacrificed a goat and put its blood on the cover for the people. The name "Yom Kippur" actually means "day of the cover." It was a day when the priest pictured how the sin of the world would be covered and paid for by the blood of Christ. These priests also offered daily sacrifices in the temple to picture how the blood of Jesus would someday pay the price for sin. When John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." The Old Testament sacrifices were like pictures in the wallet of soldier. They served to remind the people again and again of what Jesus would do for the world by sacrificing his precious blood for sin.

When Jesus came into this world, he did not have to offer sacrifices again and again to picture what he would do. Hebrews 9:25 says, "Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the priests enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own." Once he did the job, he completed his work, and it did not have to be repeated again and again. Imagine for a moment a soldier coming home from battle to meet his wife and family. However, instead of holding his wife, and taking his child in his arms, he looks at the pictures in his wallet. That's what the Jewish people wanted to do. They wanted the Old Testament sacrifices and rituals that pictured Christ more than Jesus himself. By going through the yearly cycles of Yom Kippur and Passover and other sacrifices, Jewish Christians were beginning to think they could add to what Christ had done for them. Any and every attempt to supplement what Jesus has done for us, will ultimate supplant what Christ has done.

What has the modern Jew done with Yom Kippur, the great day of atonement? Listen to these words from a website that explains the meaning of this celebration for the modern Jew. "The name "Yom Kippur" means "Day of Atonement," and that pretty much explains what the holiday is. It is a day set aside to "afflict the soul," to atone for the sins of the past year. On Yom Kippur, the judgment entered in these books is sealed. This day is, essentially, your last appeal, your last chance to change the judgment, to demonstrate your repentance and make amends." For the modern Jew this is a day to make amends, to feel anguish and affliction for sins of the past, to call someone on the phone and say, "I am sorry." They believe this annual journey of anguish over sin contributes to salvation and actually helps to the change the judgment. It's the religion of second chance, the religion of going through phases in this life and in the life to come to make yourself worthy. Remember what we said a few weeks ago about a man named Ernie who told my brother, "If I just try and do one good think each day it will be OK for me in judgment."

I like going through different phases of life. It is the fall of the year, and soon we will celebrate thanksgiving, and I can already see the turkey roasting on the BBQ with just the right amount of mesquite charcoal. We are already thinking of Christmas, and Christmas

for Kids, and Advent. As we go through these cycles of life, and cycles of worship, we might easily think that how well we perform, and care for others, and share our blessings, and show love and kindness will all add up to give us a second chance on the day of judgment, to pass the test when we stand before God, and the book is opened and our name is called out.

God's word tells us this morning there are not second chances, no opportunities to redeem ourselves and get it right the second time or third time. "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment." I have gotten out of being docked points for a traffic ticket by attending a traffic school in San Luis Obispo. I cannot get out of the problem of sin in my life, by hoping for second chance. Let's be honest about ourselves. As we pass through cycles and phases of life, whether Christmas or Thanksgiving, giving birth to children, getting married, going to first grade, or going off to college, we do not pass through these cycles with flying colors. The truth is that when the roll is called up yonder, without Jesus, I have no hope and neither do you. The psalmist says, "If you should mark iniquities who can stand?" Sin is falling short of the mark of God's glory, shattering our relationship with God. Romans three puts us all in the same category of being without hope when it says, "There is none who does good, no not one." Like a glass bottle that is shattered into thousands of small pieces we have no way of recycling ourselves and restoring ourselves, even if we are given a thousand life times to try and get it right.

2) Place your hope in the once for all work of Jesus

In striking contrast to the Old Testament priests who repeated sacrifices every year, we have the sacrifice of Jesus that only had to be done once.

Our text tells us, "Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself...Christ was sacrifice once to take away the sins of many people." Jesus did not have to go through eons and endless ages of recycling and being reincarnated to get finally get it right. He did it all once, and he did it perfect. When Jesus celebrated Jewish customs with his parents, such as going to the temple for the Passover celebration, he was always perfect, he never had to say, "I will try to do better next time." Jesus never had the regrets you and I have later in life when we think of how we mistreated other kids, laughed at them unfairly, teased them, fought with brothers and sisters, showed disrespect to parents, or get angry with people.

Jesus also gave the perfect sacrifice for our sin, that never needs to be repeated. Our text says, "And he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. Jesus is coming back a second time, but not to complete the suffering necessary to pay for our sin. He did this the first time, and he did it perfectly. 2 Corinthians 5 says, "He became sin for us who knew no sin." Isaiah 53 says "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." It also says, "The punishment for our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed." Jesus was so sure that the suffering was done right the first time that he spoke these words before he died, "It is finished." To prove the work was done the Father raised Jesus to life again. That is why Romans 4:24-25 says, "Christ was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification." Our pronouncement of being righteous and pure before God depends not on anything we do in life, or any cycles that we pass through, but purely on the basis of the one thing Jesus did to rescue us.

Jesus is coming again, but it is not complete his pain and suffering for sin. He is coming with salvation to those who are waiting for him. O dear friends, give up all hope of trusting in second chances, and trying to make yourself worthy. Accept the reality you can do nothing to improve yourself. Trust in what Jesus and his once for all, perfect sacrifice that never has to be repeated. Then joyfully wait for judgment day or the hour of your death, because you are worthy, not because of how you handle changing cycles and phases of life, but because of the once for all perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Amen