

November 8, 2009
Last Judgment

“Once to Die and Then Comes 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.

This past week my barber found out that I was a pastor. As he was cutting my hair, he asked if I knew anything about 2012. He had seen the trailer for the new movie "2012" that will open in theaters in about a week. The film shows the world experiencing disasters and flooding of epic proportion. It also shows people who knew disaster was coming because the Mayan calendar ended in December 21, 2012 indicating a huge change was coming to this earth. They secretly put together large ships that could be used to survive the change similar to the ark that spared Noah,

We know great changes will come to our world when Jesus returns. We cannot use the numbers in Bible to try and predict the time of Jesus return. Our Savior told us clearly that no one knows that day or the hour of his return. The same thing is true about the end of our lives here on this earth. We don't know when we will die but we do know for certain that death will come to all of us. We are told in the verses just read to you, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." We are destined to die, and we are destined to stand before God in the final judgment, but we do not know when this will all happen.

How do you get ready to meet the Lord if he returns in glory this week, or if this is the week the Lord has chosen for you to pass through the doors of death? Our hope for passing the test and making the grade does not depend on our repeated efforts to make ourselves worthy as all religions of the world teach. Our hope is based on the once for all payment for sin that Jesus made when he gave his life for us on the cross.

Repeated works cannot save us

The book of Hebrews was written to dear Hebrew Christians who were being drawn back into thinking they could have a better standing with God if they added some of the old Jewish religious rules, rites and regulations to once for all sacrifice Jesus made at the cross. Our text tells us that these religious practices of the Old Testament were copies or images of what Christ would do for us as our text says, "For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. He entered itself, not to for us in

God's presence."

Think of the beautiful copy or picture of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins portrayed for us by on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, that inner room of the tabernacle or temple. He dressed in elaborate garments and then took the blood of a bull and put it on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant for his own sins. Then he took the blood of a sacrificial goat or lamb and placed it on the same gold lid for the sins of the people. This important annual event served as a copy or picture of what was coming in the future. It pictured the blood of Jesus that would be shed for us and allow us to enter into the presence of God. As the writer to the Hebrews says, this was only a copy of what Jesus would do when he sacrificed himself for us. Other Old Testament ceremonies such as the Passover celebration and Sabbath laws also served to point to the blessings that would come through Jesus. These rules and regulations were never intended to serve as a way to earn favor with God and be accepted by God. They were copies of what was to come.

The Old Testament priest had to offer sacrifices again and again. He was never done with his job of pointing people to the blood of the Savior that would be shed for us. Jesus was not like this priest whose work was never done as we are told, "Nor did he enter heaven again and again the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with a blood that is not his own." Let me draw a comparison to the Christmas decorations that are put up in your home. These decorations serve to remind people of the blessings that came through Jesus. The candles or Christmas tree lights remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. The green trees that we bring into our homes remind us of the new life that is ours in Jesus. There is rich symbolism in the decorations we use to point to Jesus. How foolish it would be if we let these decorations that point to Jesus actually become more important to us than Jesus himself or become necessary for us to be saved. How foolish it was for these Hebrew Christians to bring back the ceremonies that pictured Christ who was to come and make these ceremonies part of the source of salvation and peace with God.

There is a huge difference between our faith in Jesus and what other religions of the world teach. All religions of the world without exception teach that repeated acts of loyalty to some god and repeated acts of kindness to other people can actually over one lifetime win favor with whatever God you believe in. And some say that we will have more lifetimes to get the job done as we are reincarnated in another life to hopefully improve on what we have done in this life.

To illustrate how all religions operate let me draw a comparison to how we tamed kittens on the family farm. In the spring of the year the mother cat would have her kittens and hide them in the bales of hay. It was our job to tame the kittens before they became wild or feral cats that no one could control. We did this by luring them out of their hiding places with food and milk and we even knew how to mimic the calls of the mother cat. We treated the kittens with kindness and love, petting them as they drank their milk. Eventually they would come running to us for food or even let us hold them. All religions of the world teach that people can tame some god and lead that god to love them by their repeated efforts to follow the dictates of that religion and by showing love and kindness.

Just listen to what modern Judaism does with the day of atonement or Yom Kippur. Here

is how one website describes the meaning of that day. "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." The beautiful ceremony that pictured what would happen to Jesus is used to try and make amends for past sins and get on the good side of God, taming him as you might tame a little kitten.

Satan is very good at trying to get us to focus more on what we can do than what Jesus has done for us. When our faith is weak, and we are crying out to the Lord for help, Satan likes to tell us we have never done enough to make ourselves worthy of God's love. He tells us we need to pray harder, shed more tears, bring about more changes in life, and maybe even add certain religious rules and regulations to be truly worthy. It never works. It just leads us to see even more how far we fall short of what God expects of us. Our sinful human flesh craves to put our trust back into ourselves and not lean fully on the once for all sacrifice Jesus made on the cross.

The completed work of Christ does save us

There is a word that keeps repeating itself in these words of our text. Perhaps you noticed it. It is the word, "Once." "But now he has appeared **once** for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die **once**, and that to face the judgment, so Christ was sacrificed **once** to take sins of many people." You only go through the doors of death once in your life. After you die, you face the judgment. At the point of death all the grades are entered in, and the final judgment happens at the end of the world when you must stand before the judge to give an account for how you lived your life. Remember the time you failed your first driver's test when you failed to slow down enough for the car common through the uncontrolled intersection. Your mom or dad told you it was OK because you could do it again a second time and they were sure you would pass. There are not second chances after you die.

How sad our lives would be if our hope of standing in the judgment depended on our numerous attempts at trying to fight against sin and improve ourselves or make up for what we have done wrong. A careful examination of any part of your life as a child, a husband or wife, a worker on the job, or a student in school will reveal huge failures to measure up to God's glory and his expectations. In Romans 7 the Apostle Paul reveals that he did not even know what sin was until he came to understand the full meaning of the word coveting or desire. How shocked he was to realize for the first time that even the desire to do wrong is subject to God's wrath and punishment on the last day. I cannot hope to balance the bad with good because the bad is so bad, and good is also bad or marred by sin.

What a blessing it is to hear this morning that Jesus appeared once on this earth to do away with sin. Jesus never had to do something over again to correct any mistakes he made. I thought of how handy the redo button is on the computer. Sure beats the old days of typing and using white out doesn't it. When the opportunity to show love came to Jesus in his life on this earth, he only had to show perfect love once. When it came time to die he only died once and he sacrificed himself only once for the sins of many. All

the religions of the world call people to do things over again and again to try and make yourself worthy. Only in the Christian faith do you have Jesus make a once for all sacrifice on the cross.

Jesus came to this earth once, but he is coming again. Our text tells us, "He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." The work of paying for our sin is done, but there is one thing Jesus has not yet completed. He is still planning for that day when he will come and take, his beautiful Bride, the Church, to the place he has prepared for you. We rejoice in what Jesus did for us and we also rejoice in what Jesus is still planning to do for us when he comes to take us home. What if someone asks you what you think about 2012 and the end of the world? May Jesus give you the Holy Spirit to share with them the fact that that death could come at anytime and that Jesus wants us putting our trust in his once for all sacrifice, not the feeble attempts we try to save ourselves. Amen.