**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (26): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Three Appearings Of Christ”**

**Hebrews 9:23-28**

**June 30, 2024**

Have you ever noticed how many things in this world need to be saved? Time and money always need to be “saved.” Our natural resources need to be “saved.” Stray cats and dogs need to be “saved;” so do bald eagles and whales, and the poor neighborhoods and wetlands. It seems that most things these days need to be “saved.”

But whatever the term “saved” may mean to others, for Bible-believing Christians it conveys a glorious, two-sided thought: **(a)** deliverance from the judgment of sin and **(b)** reconciliation with a holy and righteous God. It’s also important to remember that this deliverance and reconciliation takes place in three stages. As is often said, in the *past*, we *have been saved* from the penalty of sin (justification). In the *present*, we *are being saved* from the power of sin (sanctification). In the *future*, we *will be saved* from the presence of sin itself (glorification).

In the verses before us today, our author clearly refers to each of these three stages of our salvation. In verse 26, Christ *has appeared* to do away with sin. That’s a reference to His atoning sacrifice on the cross, which is the foundation upon which our *justification* is based. In verse 24, He now *appears* before the Father on our behalf, interceding for us (7:25). That priestly ministry plays an important role in our *sanctification*. Finally, in verse 28, He *will appear* a second time. That’s a reference to His Second Coming at the end of the world, when we will be saved from the very presence of sin itself (*glorification*).

The context sets the stage for these three “appearings” of Christ. As we saw last week, during the time of the Old Covenant everything had to be cleansed with blood. The book of the Law was sprinkled with blood, the people themselves were sprinkled with blood, and the tabernacle and all its furniture and accessories were sprinkled with blood (Heb. 9:18-21). This principle was then summed up in verse 22: “*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood;* and the reason was then given: *‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*” (v. 22b).

From the earthly sanctuary and what was needed to purify it, the author now turns to the need for a better sacrifice to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary (vv. 23-24), a sacrifice that was offered once for all time (vv. 25-26). Then he looks forward to the time when our Lord will return to bring us our final salvation (vv. 27-28).

**A. Christ Now Appears in God’s Presence for Us (9:23-24):** “*It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices* (animal sacrifices)*, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 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*.” There are at least three questions that these verses raise:

**1 Q.** In what sense did the “heavenly things” need cleansing? **A.** Numerous explanations have been suggested by the commentators; but perhaps the simplest and best is found in the notes in one of our Study Bibles: “Human sin defiles everything on Earth, but the heavenly temple is beyond the corruption of sinful humanity. Already undefiled by sin, the heavenly sanctuary did not need purification, or cleansing. It was appropriate, however, for Christ’s blood to consecrate it, dedicating it to God and setting it apart for holy use. For sinful humans to be forgiven and welcomed into the presence of God, Christ’s sacrificial blood had to be offered in the heavenly temple on their behalf (10:19-22; 12:24). Our author’s reference to the “better sacrifices,” therefore, correspond to the “inferior sacrifices” of the Levitical system in *general* terms. But specifically, they were superseded by *one* sacrifice, namely, the once for all sacrifice of Christ (Cf. 7:27; 9:12, 14; 10:10, 12, 14).

**2 Q.** What exactly is this heavenly sanctuary that Christ has now entered? **A.** It is “*heaven itself*,” where He appears in God’s presence on our behalf. In contrast to the Levitical high priest who could only enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, Christ *remains* there for us, ministering on our behalf. At the same time, His presence has secured the way for us to follow Him there (6:19-20), and until that time comes, to approach the throne of grace with confidence (4:16).

**3 Q.** What exactly is our high priest doing for us there? **A.** In chapter 2:17 we have been told that He is strengthening us in times of testing and temptation; in chapter 4:15-16 we have been told that He sympathizes with our weakness and supplies the mercy and grace to help us in time of need; in chapter 7:25 we have been told that He is always living to pray for us! With such a great high priest supporting us, and praying for us, we can experience a progressive victory over sin’s indwelling power, which is what we call *sanctification*.

**B. Christ Has Appeared to do Away with Sin (9:25-26):** “*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. 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.*” Once again, we see our author’s emphasis on the perfection of the once for all sacrifice of Christ on behalf of sinners (Cf. 2:17-18; 7:23-27).

Under the old order, the high priests could only enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Year after year, the same ritual was repeated. It was basic to their ministry to offer the blood from animal sacrifices each time, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. But it was basic to Christ’s ministry that He did *not* do so. Rather than using the blood of an animal, Christ shed His own blood; and rather than His sacrifice having to be repeated, His blood is the once for all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. If His one offering was not enough, then He would have had to suffer death over and over and over again.

“*But*,” says our author, “*now he* *has appeared . . .*” (a reference to His incarnation), which culminated in His “*once for all*” sacrifice of Himself on calvary’s cross. From the author’s vantage point, this took place at “*the end of the ages*.” Why? Because *everything* that preceded the first coming of Christ was leading up to this momentous event. With this “appearing,” the long years of Messianic expectation and hope were ended, and “*the last days*” had begun (Cf. Heb. 1:2).

Once again, we see the supreme purpose of His first appearing: “*to do away with sin*.” Simply stated,when Christ died, He died the sinner’s death. By absorbing the penalty for sin that each of us deserved (death), He has forever satisfied the *justice of God*, and therefore turned aside the *wrath of God* against guilty sinners. The penalty those sins demanded has been forever absorbed in our *penal substitute*, and thus forever and fully and finally “*put away*.”

**C. Christ Will Appear to Save Those Who Are Waiting for Him (9:27-28):** “*Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 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*.”

In no uncertain terms, our author now explains that the universal experience of every single one of us is death, which is decisively final, and therefore unrepeatable. Then comes certain “judgment” (contrary to the misguided concept of reincarnation, and the thinking that physical death is the end of our existence). Likewise, Christ in His true humanity died once.

For what purpose? The answer could not be more clear: “*to take away the sins of many people*.” Literally, he writes “*to bear the sins of many*,” which is a direct reference to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:12; “*For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*.” The “*many*” are the “*many sons*” who will be brought to glory (Heb. 2:10), namely, those whom our sovereign God has elected to save (“TULIP”).

But the completion of the salvation that Christ purchased for us on the cross awaits His return; “*and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin* (the purpose of His first coming), *but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him*.” This final stage of our salvation is our *glorification*; for when Christ returns, we will receive our glorified bodies (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:35ff).

And for whom is this final stage of our salvation intended? For those who *say* they are Christians? No; it is for those who are“*eagerly waiting*” for Christ to return. According to our author, the eyes of the redeemed are on the Redeemer! Many professing Christians, of course, would rather that Christ *not* come for as long as possible so that they can enjoy as much of this world as possible. But the faith that saves is the faith that holds on to Christ as a *treasure* and makes us long for His appearing (Cf. Matt. 6:21, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*.”) This is yet another indication that we are truly born again!

“I’ve found a treasure, that can’t be taken;

Found a well that won’t run dry.

O worldly pleasure, be now forsaken;

Behold what love, what life is mine.

Christ is all! Christ is all; and my song shall ever be.

Christ is all, all in all;

And my song will ever be: Christ is all.”

In the past, He has saved us; in the present He is saving us; and in the future He will save us for all eternity. No wonder why “Christ is all”!