

Sermon 27: Hebrews 9:23-28: What Jesus as a Better Sacrifice Secures...

OUTLINE

Perfect representation in heaven
Final payment for sin
Safety on judgement day

INTRODUCTION

What do we need that the sacrifice of Christ provides? The book of Hebrews has been making a very long list of the benefits from God's clearest and final word; to better promises fulfilled in the new covenant, and we are in a section that it discussing the benefits of Jesus being a better sacrifice to the OT sacrifices. Last week we looked at how Jesus sacrifice secures the promises given to Abraham and how it was necessary. Our portion continues thinking about Jesus as a better mediator of a better covenant by better promises continuing to argue the benefits that the better sacrifice of Christ secures. In 9:23-28 he will argue that the better sacrifice of Jesus secures three benefits. In v23-24 he will show that Jesus by offering a better sacrifice secures a way into God's presence where we have perfect representation by Him as our mediator in heaven. In v25-26 he will show that by a single offering Jesus has secured a final payment for sin. And in v27-28, he will show that by Jesus better sacrifice we will have safety on judgement day. These three benefits of perfect representation in heaven; final payment for sin; and safety on judgement day are our three points. And if you look down at v23-28 you will notice that they coincide with the 3 mentions of the word appearance. He appears in heaven to perfectly represent us, v24; He appeared on earth to offer Himself as a once off sacrifice for sin, v26; and He will appear again at His second coming to save us, v28. Every person needs these benefits, and every Christian has them.

Perfect representation in heaven

V23-24, 'Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.' Our text begins half way through a thought. The author has just been explaining the necessity of the death of Christ, v22 is clear without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Because sin is so serious and God so holy, the judgement of death is the necessary payment for the forgiveness of sin. And not just any blood must be shed for the forgiveness of the sins of those who bear the image of God who sin against the infinite holiness of God, for this reason, the blood of the Son of God was shed in payment for our sins. The author was showing how this blood was necessary to inaugurate the new covenant, just as blood was used to inaugurate the old covenant. He also spoke about how blood was used to sprinkle the temple and the articles in it. It is this thought that he now picks up on and develops.

We have already shown that the earthly tent was a type of God's presence. The three areas of the outer court, holy place and holy of holiness, represents the 3 heavens of earth, the heavenlies, and the presence of God. The holy of holiness with the ark and the cherubim represent the direct presence of God. The system

of priests, sacrifices, temple furniture and veils all plot out a pathway that our representative in the priest takes on our behalf into the presence of God. This entry into the presence of God is necessary because we are alienated from God but we need someone to get forgiveness and blessing from God for us. imagine in your mind then all these different parts, the priests, the furniture, the various veils. These need to be sprinkled with blood to be able to facilitate this ongoing access, and securing of forgiveness and blessing. But as the author points out, they were using animal blood, and sprinkling the type; but Jesus with His death accomplishes something better. Now it is agreed that there are some difficult ideas here, what does it mean that Jesus purified the heavenly things? One popular view is that Jesus purified the heavenly temple, which is the church. We are all part of the temple and Christ is the Cornerstone and He has purified us by His blood. This is true, and taught in other places but not what I think it means here. Many commentators suggest that just as blood cleansed the tent which was the way to fellowship with God; so the sacrifice of Christ has opened the true not merely typological way into the direct presence of God. The heavenly things then would be the heavenly equivalents to what the types symbolized, the way into God's presence.

But v24 is the focus of the main idea here. Jesus death brings Him, 'into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.' This is an idea that the author has already mentioned but he wants to show it again as a benefit of Christ's superior sacrifice. Because He has offered a better sacrifice in Himself; He has made a way not just into a typological version of God's presence, but the presence of God Himself. This was the last frontier that needed to be crossed and He has crossed it by His death. And now He stands, perfect in the presence of God, showered with authority, and privileges and powers due to being obedient and pleasing the Father. But note that the author says, He is there 'on our behalf.' We have said it several times but we should be willing to emphasize it as often as the bible does. We must not only think about what Jesus did for us when He died and rose again; but we must also think about what He is doing for us, now in the present, as our representative at the right hand of the Father. We must remember His ongoing ministry for our ongoing needs. Think on it, do you consider to fall into sin? Then remember that He is our advocate with the Father, 1 John 2:1, 'My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Rom. 8:34, 'Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.' He has justified you, establishing you as righteous, adopted, and has secured your eternal inheritance, His ongoing intercession in heaven makes sure that the sin that still remains in us cannot separate us from God's love. That picture in Zech. 3 where satan tries to accuse Joshua before the presence of God and the Lord rebuked satan, speaking about how he is a brand plucked from the fire and then dressed him in pure garments. The author of Hebrews wants you to know that the most effective priestly intercession in the most important place is being done by the most effective person for you.

But we not only have the ongoing need of our sins, but the ongoing needs of living this life for Him. We have pains and trials, we have burdens and feel crushed having no more strength of our own. 4:14-16, 'Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to

the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'

This intercession goes on securing the benefits that He has already paid for by His death. You can imagine the relief of the OT on the Day of Atonement when the priest comes out having secured the light of God's favour and forgiveness for another year. Well now realize that you have a full time high priest in the Holy of holies who has paid with a better sacrifice, opening up a permanent line of access for you to enter, whose perfection continues to run interference as it were for any inadequacies in us. His sacrifice was so effective it broke the pattern, no need to exit, no need to repeat.

Final payment for sin

V25-26, 'Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' Not only has Jesus better sacrifice secured a perfect representation in heaven; but it has also definitively dealt with sin. Here the author is leaning into the idea that if a sacrifice is sufficient it will only have to be offered once. The fact that the OT sacrifices needed to be repeated are offered as proof that they were to be surpassed by Jesus one off sacrifice. The single offering for sin that the author is referring to is not an offering of Himself in heaven, but when He died on the cross for our sins. You will notice that he uses logic to show that it would be absurd if Jesus had to die over and over again, then He would have had to be put to death from the foundation of the world, from the very first sin that Adam and Eve committed. Notice the important details mentioned in v26. He 'appeared', this is talking about the eternal Son, becoming a full human being when He was born of a virgin to be a representative for us.

He appeared for the purpose of dying once, not over and over and over again.

A single, precious, infinite in value payment of His life in payment for sin.

This was for all of the sins of all of God's people, whether it is OT or NT, whether it is our sins, past, future and present.

He did this 'at the end of the ages'. This phrase is describing the end of the OT era and the dawning of the new age where the powers of the age to come begin to break in. the era when sin had not yet been answered, when satan had not yet been defeated, when death had not been broken, when the powers of the age to come through the outpouring of the Spirit had not yet happened, the end of that age. Jesus death stands in the middle of history being the turning point that moved us from the age where sin and death dominated to the age where sin and death have been given their due date and a guarantee of being overcome. 'to put sin away.' What a profound effect. Nothing else has been able to do it. No human effort, no religious system, even the system of the OT acted as a temporary bandage until Jesus came. He makes an end to its guilt by His death; an end to its dominion over us by His resurrection; an end to its very presence in us, when He will one day resurrect us from the dead. He has healing for the shame it has caused, He restores what the locusts have eaten, we will have more in His kingdom than any world of sin could hope to offer. The heart of unfaithfulness that gives rise to a constant source of sin He has changed and won, all of the terrible effects it has wrought will all one day be undone. 'by the sacrifice of Himself.' Many are ashamed to think of the death of Christ in terms of a penal substitutionary atonement, but here it is clear, He died as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. it could not be clearer.

Because Jesus only has to offer up His life in sacrifice once we reject the Roman Catholic teaching of the Mass. They believe that the Mass is a sacrifice, a bloodless sacrifice. Calvin was right when he highlights that given the argument of the context without blood and without a death you cannot speak of a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. they do not have a table but an altar, and they have a priest who says certain words and the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the essence of the body and blood of Christ. Because of this they teach that the Lord's Supper can forgive venial sins, penance is needed for the forgiveness of mortal sins. Now we do not doubt that there are wonderful blessings to be had when we have communion, Christ is present by His Spirit to confer the benefits of His death upon us. But the table is not a bloodless sacrifice which forgives so called venial sins. it is completely contrary to the point of this text to think that thousands of bloodless sacrifices of Christ are being made at any one time all over the world, when the text clearly says that He has made one sacrifice for all sins and does not need to repeat it.

Let me put a question to you in light of what this text is teaching. If Jesus died once for all of our sins, past, present and future, why do we still pray for the daily forgiveness of our sins in the Lord's Prayer? Turn to John 13:10, 'Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."' Jesus is washing His disciples feet, Peter refuses and Jesus makes this statement. So which is it, if you are a believer, are you completely clean, or do you need your feet washed? And the answer is yes. If you have trusted in Christ, you are justified, you are adopted, you are no longer enemy but friend and in a saving relationship with God, you are completely clean. But you go on in the Christian life and sin, you do not get unadopted, unjustified, and fall under condemnation. You come asking for forgiveness, not to be rejustified, or readopted, but to be cleansed and renewed from the effects of sin. You are coming as a child to a Father not a criminal looking for absolution from a judge. All the punishment for all of our sins is paid for, but you have gotten your feet dirty. You come knowing that Jesus death is enough and has already made available the cleansing you need. You come with the same faith and confidence in His death, knowing that He is willing to forgive and restore and has already paid for it and so will apply it, you come with the same repentance towards sin not being apathetic because your sin is already paid for but mournful because you hate it more than ever. But you come knowing that His once off death pays for all your sins, confident that the forgiveness you seek is already available and willingly given.

Safety on judgement day

V27-28, 'And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.' The author really wants to drive home what the death of Christ has secured in relation to one of our own greatest needs. In v27 you will notice that he lays out the path that all human beings have to take because of sin. It has been appointed for man to die once. Death exists because sin exists, right now because of God's appointment according to His holy justice against the sin of Adam we are under the condemnation of death. But that is not the worst thing that can happen to us, we die because we are sinners, and then after that there is the inevitable and inescapable reality of judgement, a judgement according to works where our lives are measured against the perfect law of God. Let us stop and allow these hard realities to sink in. Every single one of us is

subject to death. We cannot choose to live forever or escape the power of death. We are not powerful enough to escape this reality, this is something we are all under. Dying once is the general reality of our experience, the author is not denying the experience of someone like Lazarus or others in the Bible that experience a resurrection. No he is alluding to the fact that each of us only gets one life to live and it will end in death. Apart from those who are alive at the second coming of Christ, we will all taste this death.

After death is the intermediate state. When you die your soul leaves your body. Your body is destroyed but your spirit lives on in one of two states awaiting the judgement. Jesus revealed to the thief on the cross that the day he died he would be with Jesus in paradise, Paul talks about being absent from the body yet present with the Lord. 2 Pet. 2:9 talks about those who die not trusting in Jesus but dying in unrepentance and unbelief, 'then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.' This is not a soul sleep but a conscious existence, one described as being under punishment. There are those who pretend that there are second chances after death, but this is wishful thinking. The Catholic teaching of purgatory is not in the bible but is something that was added to the bible. There is no notion of annihilation where we cease to exist, the teaching of being absorbed into the ocean of God is pantheistic lie which portrays God as an impersonal existence and you being absorbed into that impersonal God when you die. The teaching of reincarnation where you go through successive lives paying your own way through good deeds and suffering until you ascend the wheel of reincarnation is another eastern lie not in the bible. We have one life and then we must give an account for it, no redos.

Then one day Jesus will return, and there will be a universal resurrection and every person who has ever lived will be judged before His throne. Now you will notice that the author is deliberately trying to help us see a parallel between us, who die and then face the next major event the day of the Lord, likewise Jesus dies and He too will be present at the day of the Lord. But because of who He is, and the death that He has died, the terrifying controlling reality of living, dying and being judged is no longer the inescapable reality of our lives. Christ was offered, this is the language of sacrifice again, once not many times. To bear the sins of many, this is alluding to Is. 53:12, 'Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.' He bore the punishment for the sins of many, He is the one who propitiates the holy justice of God satisfying the demands of His law against our sins. because our sins have been fully dealt with, He 'will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.'

He is coming again, not to die for sin again, His single death was enough. Yes He will come to judge those who would not turn from sin and submit themselves to Him. But please see the good news if you are a believer, to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. I don't know if you have ever been terrified of judgement day. I have. I have lived with a mortal fear of judgement for years as a young believer. It consumed my every thought and I had no peace. To think of standing before Him, Him seeing all my sin, knowing His unchangeable justice and my terrible sinfulness, there was no greater terror than that. But in truth, every Christian can be eager for that day. True you will see more of His holiness than you could have conceived, the power of His majesty will be overwhelming,

but He is our Father. It will be our wedding day when we are united with our bridegroom. It will be the best of all days when all evil is judged, all pain ended, all sin expunged, all distance closed, all mysteries answered. Because His sacrifice is so great, His single sufficient sacrifice, that day is not a day of terror, but we long for it. This eager waiting makes us not only able to face what is coming, it also sustains us when times get hard. The pain may be overwhelming, the losses crippling, the sin so dark, evil seems so strong, but He is coming and we can hang on because we know our sins have been forgiven and He is coming to save us.

Because He has given Himself for us we have a perfect representative in heaven; full and final payment for sin; and a great confidence and longing for the day of His return.