

Heaven Is Yours through Christ!

Hebrews 9:24-28

Nov. 17, 2024 (Pen. 26-B)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

For Christ did not enter a handmade sanctuary, a representation of the true sanctuary. Instead, he entered into heaven itself, now to appear before God on our behalf. And he did not enter to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise he would have needed to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And, just as it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment, so also Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb. 9:24-28 EHV)

Dear fellow believers in Jesus Christ, our great High Priest:

A sanctuary is a quiet place where one can be undisturbed and safe, where one can meditate, alone with one's thoughts. For some, their sanctuary is out in the woods, maybe in a tree stand during hunting season, alone with nature and God. For others, their sanctuary is a room in their home where they can lock the door and have some peace and quiet. And at St. Paul's, we consider this church a sanctuary, a place where we are present with God himself.

The Old Testament believers had a "handmade sanctuary" that was called the Most Holy Place. It was a cube, 15 feet long, 15 feet wide, 15 feet high, built as part of the tabernacle, and then years later in King Solomon's temple, only twice as large. This was where God himself dwelled. No one could enter it except the high priest, just once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest entered carrying the blood of a sacrificed bull and a sacrificed goat, to teach the Israelites that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (v. 22). Sin needed to be atoned for in order for them to enter God's sanctuary. And because the people, including the high priest, kept on sinning, they had to repeat that sacrifice and the high priest would keep on entering the Most Holy Place "year after year with blood that is not his own."

The writer to the Hebrews—Christians with a Jewish background—pointed out that Jesus Christ was a greater High Priest than the Old Testament high priests. Unlike the high priest who had to do the sacrifice again and again, Jesus "has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Once, not many. And a sacrifice of himself, with his holy, precious blood, not with the blood of animals. And regarding the sanctuary, "Christ did not enter a handmade sanctuary, a representation of the true sanctuary. Instead, he entered into heaven itself, now to appear before God." When Christ died, he committed his soul to heaven, and was accepted there because his sacrifice took away the sins of the masses—of all. In all these ways, Christ proved to be the greatest High Priest.

Our text tells us that Jesus entered heaven before God "on our behalf." He did this because we could not enter heaven on our own behalf. Our text explains, "It is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment." The psalmwriter tells us, "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3,4a). But you and I don't have pure, sinless hearts. Therefore, we cannot enter God's holy place when we die. Instead, we face the judgment. Our soul would be placed in hell, and on the

Last Day, Judgment Day, we would forever be consigned to hell and eternal death because we have sinned.

This is why Jesus appeared “once and for all.” As we die once and face the judgment, “so also Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many.” The holy High Priest, Christ, took sin away from us and offered himself as the sacrifice to atone, pay for each and every sin. When it says “the sins of many,” don’t think that means, “many people, not all people.” It’s in the same sense as when Paul wrote to the Romans (5:18,19): “Just as one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people, so also one righteous verdict led to life-giving justification for all people. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous.” It’s clear: “Many” equals “All.”

You and I are part of that many, many billions of people. And yes, we will die, unless the Last Day comes first. But do not let that trouble you. The Lord Jesus Christ died and entered heaven “on your behalf.” He is now in heaven, representing you and me, interceding for us. When our consciences weigh us down, when we feel that overwhelming sorrow over the sins we’ve done, look to Jesus. The sacrifice he made is on your behalf. The sanctuary he entered is on your behalf. You and I are now forgiven, and now, heaven itself has been opened for us!

But what about that coming judgment? Yes, we will face Judgment Day, but at the same time, Christ “will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him.” On Judgment Day, Christ will appear again, described in Revelation this way: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him” (Rev. 1:7). There will be horror and mourning because Christ will come as judge of all, and all will stand before him.

But there are also “those who are eagerly waiting for him.” They will hear the amazing verdict of the Lord: “Not guilty!” They will see Jesus not as Judge, but as Savior, for he will come to save us from this sin-infested world, to save us from our sin-infested body, to save us from the devil, death, and hell itself; he will take us to heaven, and “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his heavenly body,” in the words of the apostle Paul (Phil. 3:21); he “will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Yes, **Heaven Is Yours through Christ!**

Isn’t it any wonder that we are “eagerly waiting for him”? And we know that he will take us to that eternal sanctuary, not because we’ve been so good or that we’re comparatively better than others, or even because we belong to the right church. No, it’s all because of his grace, that we receive through faith in Jesus. So as we eagerly wait for that day to come, for the trumpet call to wake the dead and the sight of our Savior appearing in heaven, let’s be sure to keep up in the faith of Christ, keep listening to his message, keep believing the wonderful truth that **Heaven Is Yours through Christ!** Amen.