

Hebrews 9:24-28.

²⁴ 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.

We Wait for the Return of our Great High Priest

- 1. He presented himself as an offering once for all***
- 2. He will come again to bring salvation***
- 3. His work is for us.***

Every year they waited with great anticipation. They waited for the high priest to emerge from that Most Holy Place. Two times each day the common priests entered the tabernacle’s Holy Place, once in the morning, once at night. The common priests tended to the oil lamps, these priests offered incense daily, they replaced the bread of presence every Sabbath. But only once a year would the high priest enter the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood of animals on the Ark of the Covenant.

On that great day, the Great Day of Atonement, the people waited for the sacrifice, for the sprinkling of blood on the Ark, the symbolic reminder that God demanded death for sin. The high priest, the earthly mediator between God and men, would carry the blood of animals into this Most Holy Place, stand before the symbol of God’s presence, and would and make an offering for the sake of the people. And the people, who surely could not enter into such a holy place, would wait. They would wait for their high priest’s return. They would wait for his declaration of atonement. They would wait for the assurance of their peace with God. Every year this was the high point of their worship, this was the Day of Atonement. With great anticipation they would wait for their high priest; with great joy they would receive him; for the work that he did was for them.

A large portion of the book of Hebrews, including the verses here in chapter 9, detail how Christ’s work as our Great High Priest was similar, but superior, in every way to the work of the Old Testament high priest. And so today we consider how it is with great joy that we wait for our Great High Priest’s Return. Christ Jesus presented

himself as an offering once and for all. Christ Jesus will come again to bring salvation. And his work as High Priest is for us.

The author of the book of Hebrews writes his letter to a group of Jewish Christians who are being pressured to give up the peace of Christ Jesus in order to return to the old covenant along with its old ceremonial laws, the customs, the sacrifices, and festivals. There was a strong pull of nostalgia and tradition to have everything like it was before in those days gone by, the glory days of the Jewish people. But this would not be an innocent return to a cultural heritage, but this would be a return to something that no longer held any significance. Christ had come, the sacrifices had been fulfilled in him. And so in detailed manner the writer to the Hebrews expounds on how Christ is superior to the old system, the old covenant.

We know from our catechism days that Jesus is our Prophet, our King, and our Priest and the very name Christ means that he is the Anointed One. Yes, Jesus is the one God the Father chose to fulfill these roles to their fullest. As our ultimate High Priest, Jesus did not enter a man-made tabernacle or temple for the sake of the people, but he entered heaven. He did not stand before the symbolic presence of God, but he stands in the very presence of God. He did not offer the blood of animals as a symbolic payment for sin, but he presented himself as a sacrifice for sin, his blood offered once and for all to do away with the curse of sin.

On Calvary's cross Jesus served as both the ultimate high priest and the spotless Lamb of God as he willingly offered himself as the atoning sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. On Calvary's Cross Jesus shed his blood once and for all to make atonement for sin that anyone who believes in Jesus now has forgiveness that covers all their sin, now has peace with God. Jesus has ascended to heaven the Most Holy of places, and now he stands in the presence of the almighty God on our behalf. He presented himself to the Father in heaven to show himself to be the perfect and acceptable sacrifice for our sins. And because the blood of Jesus purifies us from all unrighteousness we can enter the Most Holy Place, we can enter heaven. How appropriate that the curtain in the temple was torn in two when Jesus died. The old order had been fulfilled in Christ Jesus, we have been clothed with Jesus blood and righteousness, and now we have direct access to God. Heaven and its blessings are open to us now as we live by faith, and when Christ comes again we will appear with him in glory and realize these blessings fully.

The new covenant in Christ is clearly superior. The sacrifices of the old covenant were never meant to stand on their own to bring salvation, but their purpose was to point to the new covenant in Christ. This was always God's plan; to reconcile the world to himself not through the blood of countless lambs, but through the priceless blood of the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus.

This transition from the old covenant of ceremonial laws to the new covenant in Christ seemed to be a difficult transition for some, and understandably so. It wasn't easy to just flip the switch and let go of the old customs and change to something new even if it came out of the old. And so the Hebrew people to whom this letter is

addressed, these men and women, who were once proud old covenant Jews were being pressured and pulled back into the old arrangement. They were tempted to look to the old familiar ways of sacrifice and ritual for salvation rather than to Christ who had fulfilled all of this for them. And therefore, the writer pleads that his readers would not abandon the rich blessings of the new covenant for the empty ritual of the old. His words called these people to see how great Christ's sacrifice is and how generous it's reward. There was too much at stake to let go of Christ and once again cling to the old ways.

For those of us who understand how complete the work of Christ is, we might wonder why anyone would want to go back to a system of sacrifice and ritual. But there are still those who do. There are those who may not look to the rituals of the temple and tabernacle for salvation but they look to other man-made rituals and practices to work out their salvation. There are even those who are looking forward to a day when the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the ancient rituals and sacrifices will be reinstated. Some Christians are even looking forward to such a day. As part of our End Times bible class on Tuesday nights we have been talking about such false teachings connected with the ideas millennialism. This brand of false teaching is much more popular than you might think and is prominent in books, movies, and other literature that is labeled Christian. Such false teaching robs a person of the confidence that we have in Christ and his sacrifice.

Scripture makes it clear. Christ is the key. He is the one who makes certain our salvation. He is both our true High Priest and the ultimate sacrifice, the only sacrifice that we will ever need. Jesus was sacrificed once and for all for the sins of all people of all time. The sins that you committed in your youth, the sins that you committed this morning, the sins that you will commit tomorrow and the next day, all those sins have been covered; they have been paid for by the precious blood of Christ. And those who believe in Jesus have the peace and confidence that this message brings.

Satan seeks to rob us of that joy of that confidence. He might not use some far-fetched millennialist teaching to rob us of the peace and joy, but instead he quite often much more devious. He may sneak into your heart and mind and use your own doubts and fears, your own sordid past and your own accusing conscience. He seeks to rob you of your confidence that Christ has indeed forgiven you. And so this message of complete forgiveness in Christ our Great High Priest and sacrifice serves as your protection. It serves as our mighty shield. It serves as our holy armor against those enemies that would seek to rob us of our peace.

On this Veteran's Day, I thought it would be fitting to consider some words that Lt. Carey Cash once wrote about the enemies that attack us, especially from within, those enemies that seek to rob us our peace in Christ. In 2003 Lt Cash was a U.S. Navy Chaplain, with the First Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment, which was the first unit to cross into Iraq at the start of the Iraq War. And in his book "*A Table in the Presence*" he writes of the help and the deliverance the Lord provides when we battle with the inner struggles that we all face. He writes, *The truth is, whether we are infantrymen in*

Baghdad or civilians safe in our own hometowns, all of us need to claim Christ's victory as our own, because in the end, we all face the same enemies. Fear, worry, doubt, discouragement, despair, temptation, the rising power of unbelief—these things attack us constantly. And they are often just as destructive, just as fierce, and just as unrelenting as evil men lurking in the streets of Baghdad. But if God can deliver an isolated, cut-off battalion of U.S. Marines surrounded by enemies in the belly of the beast, can He not deliver us from the enemies that assail us in our daily lives? (p. 237)

The message that our Great High Priest gives to us is a message of joy, of victory, of complete deliverance. God delivers us. Christ offered himself willingly. The blood of the spotless Son of God cleanses us and makes us at one with God. Peace washes over our troubled conscience when by the Spirit we behold our heavenly Sacrifice and believe “by his wounds we are healed.” And now God has given us his precious means of grace to shield us from doubt, to chase away guilt, to silence an oversensitive and accusing conscience. He assures us with grand detail and elaborate design of the cleansing forgiveness that we have in Christ which does so much more than any mere sacrifice. He assures us of the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Finally, there are two little words in verse 24 that I want you to take note of: **for us**. They might be two small words, but they make all the difference. They give us confidence as we wait for the Day of Judgment. These two words give us peace on this and every day. The price our Savior paid was *for us*. Jesus went to his death *for us*. And now he stands in very presence of God interceding *for us*. His life lived perfectly in our place. His blood offered and sprinkled upon Calvary's altar is *for us*. His victory was won *for us*. This is our joy. This is our peace that we have in full display not just one day a year, not just one day a week, or even twice a day, but every moment of every day the Lord holds out to us the forgiveness that Jesus Christ has won for us. Once and for all Jesus gave his life for you and me. You and I are covered by his blood. His work of salvation is completed. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He is the Great High Priest who has made us right with God and goes to the Almighty Father on our behalf.

And now we wait. We wait in peace. We wait in eager anticipation for our Savior to peel back heaven's curtain and emerge from that Most Holy Place. We don't live in fear of judgment, but we wait with our heads lifted high. We wait as victorious believers for the day of our final salvation. We wait for the trumpet call of God, which will announce that Jesus is coming and we will stand with him in the presence of the Holy God without fear and for all eternity. And so we wait in eager anticipation for the return of our Great High Priest. Amen.