

The Eager Anticipation for the Sufficient Savior

Hebrews 9:23-28

Stars make appearances. Famous people like to show their importance by appearing at all the right events. I am intrigued by the notion today that some people are not famous for anything substantial—they are famous for being famous. One of the controversies that raged through the golf and tennis worlds a few years ago was the paying of appearance fees. An athlete who is famous and followed was paid money simply to be at an event. Easy to see why. When Tiger Woods was at his best on the golf course, how many more people would attend an event he played at.

Now we come to this text and suddenly Jesus is making appearances. See in verses 24, 26 and 28? What is the author talking about? Is Jesus' appearing like that of mega-stars? Does He attend these events in these places at these times because He is famous? Has someone paid Him an appearance fee so as to draw the crowds? I think not.

Jesus is making these appearances because we, every one of us, face the enormous problem of sin, death and judgment. At the end of the day, what the New Covenant and its superior and sufficient sacrifice bring us, is Jesus appearing to deal with man's greatest problem and need.

The question being asked all through this text is simply this: how are sinful and sinning people welcomed in heaven?

²³ 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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁷ 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.

Our Present Need

(v.23-24)

Our author has been unfolding for us the superiority and sufficiency of the Christ in the New Covenant. In His priesthood, worship and sacrifice, Jesus brings to us what the Old Covenant could not. His sacrifice, its provision in death and proof in blood, brings the reality of forgiveness, freedom and cleansing we so need. From that truth we get this conclusion.

For Jesus' Cleansing of Heaven

(v.23)

Listen to what this is saying. It was necessary that the earthly tabernacle and priests and utensils be purified with the blood of sacrifices. In contrast, the heavenly things must be purified with better sacrifices. Now stop just a moment and think about what he is saying.

The heavenly sanctuary must be purified. How can that be? Careful readers and listeners would be asking a question: Why would the heavenly sanctuary need to be purified? The key is in asking, "Why did the earthly sanctuary need purification?" It was because of the

sins of the priests and the people. All that was in the Tabernacle had been sanctified and set apart. Yet the blood sprinkled purified it, not because the Tabernacle itself was defiled, but because defiled people were being atoned for there. Here is the “so much more” of this statement. And we understand it, not just by looking at this isolated sentence, but by seeing how this sentence leads us on to the rest of the paragraph. It is easy to lose the sense of the bridge if all we look at is one pillar all by itself. So, purification in or of the heavenly sanctuary takes place because of the application of the better sacrifice of Jesus. The point here is not to cause us to wonder about what is being purified, but to cause us to worship of the One who is purifying.

With better sacrifices. This is how it is possible. Sinners are welcomed in heaven because Jesus is their better sacrifice. There, His blood is applied to them and they are purified and forgiven. Here again the mercy and grace of God is magnified. He is exonerated and exalted. We may enter heaven because of the purification by the better sacrifice of Jesus.

For Jesus’ Entering Heaven

(v.24)

Jesus never entered the earthly Temple to offer sacrifice. The hand of God at the hour of Jesus’ sacrifice only entered the earthly Temple to tear the veil closing off the Holy of Holies in half. Jesus’ New Covenant sacrifice is not about entering copies and reproducing shadows and maintaining what was passing away. It is about realities and entering heaven and fulfilling and finalizing salvation’s work. Jesus finished His sacrifice on the cross. He was buried and rose again. Weeks later, He ascended and entered heaven’s hallowed halls.

There He appears. The word here means to exhibit by appearing in person. He showed by His appearing that the sacrificial work of salvation was done. And what Jesus did is *for us*. He makes his presence, his appearance in heaven as the finished sacrifice so that we might come to heaven. So the emphasis here is not to magnify our sinfulness, though it was great. It is not to magnify our Savior, for He is gracious. Jesus is now appearing in heaven, in the very presence of God, *for us*.

His Past Provision

(v.25-26)

How can we possibly have this amazing present reality? Because of the description of what Jesus achieved.

²⁵ 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.

In Its Contrast

(v.25-26a)

What Jesus has done for us is mercifully different. Notice that the author says that not only did Jesus not appear in earthly copies, but He also does not have to be sacrificed over and over again. The annual repetition was designed to remind that this was not yet the reality. If Jesus had to do what the Old Covenant priests did, then He would have had to suffer in sacrifice over and over again since the very beginning.

What was for Old Testament saints a daily or weekly or yearly event, has become for us a heresy. Jesus no longer must be sacrificed again and again. I want you to understand that those who in the mass offer Christ up again in an unbloody sacrifice are denying the sufficiency and finality of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Why is this so?

In Its Completeness**(v.26b)**

Because the massive concern of the Author here is to show that Jesus' sacrifice is a once for all event. He appeared at the consummation of the ages once and forever to do away with sin by the one-time sacrifice of Himself.

You see, when we come to heaven, to the presence of God, we come to a just and omnipotent Presence blazing with holiness. And we come sinful and stained and corrupted and defiled. So we must believe in Jesus, not in a soft-fuzzy way. But in the concrete reality of truth. Let's look together at those statements of truth.

He has appeared once. The word here means to make visible. It is a reference to His incarnation. He took a body and made the invisible spirit that is God forever visible. He did this once. It is not repeated. He came in physical form in human body. He does not come to us in dreams or visions or in bread and wine. In His body He died. His body was raised from the dead and was glorified. In that human body He ascended into heaven. There He appears for us. Precious truth this.

What He did in that appearing is once for all. It is final and finished. There is no more sacrifice for sin. The effect of Jesus' sacrifice is so perfect, so complete, so final that its effect goes on and on century by century and rises up into eternity.

What He did brought history to a climax. The first and second coming of Jesus are seen as the end of the age. What is stretched out between them is a kind of extension of the end- it is the mercy and grace of God calling out the elect to inherit the blessings of those comings. So the cross to the crown is not merely another human event. It is the climax of history.

What He did took care of sin. I pray that you see this with eyes of faith. The substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus dealt with sin. It paid its penalty and debt. It crushed its power. It will consummate in freeing us from its presence. What an encouragement this is to each of us who struggle so much with our own sin and weakness.

What He did was to sacrifice Himself. He gave up His life. It was not the death of bulls or goats or pigeons. It is not the sacrifice of chickens or grain. It is not the sacrifice of religious routine that saves. It is not even our own sacrifice. It was and is and is eternally, the full and final and sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Himself and Himself alone.

Jesus' past provision is in one, supreme, sufficient and final sacrifice of Himself that dealt with sin.

Our Future Hope**(v.27-28)**

This text brings us face to face with the greatest problem of person's life. What do you think is your greatest problem? You probably thought about your finances, or a physical problem, or a spiritual struggle. Maybe you feel like your children or teens - or maybe your parents. Some may point to spouse or job. Maybe you think church is your greatest problem. I am sure that some would think somewhat more Biblically and say, "Sin is my biggest problem."

Loved ones, all of these are sometimes distracting or destroying difficulties which consume our time and attention and efforts. But, we all, each one of us from the youngest child here to the oldest seasoned saint here, faces an enormous problem. And what makes it all the more difficult is that there is no escaping this problem.

²⁷ 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.

In Its Principle

(v.27)

For you see, verse 27 says that man is destined or appointed to die and then to face judgment. Here is our biggest problem. We all will die. And when we die, we will face judgment. Princess Diana knows this well. John Denver knows this well. Malcolm Forbes has faced his maker.

It is a divine appointment. Death is not a the end of a natural process but at a God appointed moment. Death is inevitable because God has appointed the day of our birth and the day of our death. A certain number of days have been set for by God—not Satan, not my enemy, not cancer and not me. God works this appointment into the fabric of all His sovereign purpose and planning. (Piper)

You will die once. Let us put away any thought of reincarnation. You are not coming back with hope of doing better next time. You will live. You will die. You are not coming back to die again.

After death, judgment. This is the most terrifying prospect in all the universe—that we might be met after death with a holy and angry and omnipotent God holding us accountable for whether we trusted Him and treasured Him and worshipped Him and followed His ways in this life. In this text at this point, the judgment following death is a terrifying and furious fire, a great act of divine justice and vengeance on those who may claim to be God’s people but are only external Christians. Judgment will be eternal torment in the fire and brimstone of hell where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

But this is not the end of the story.

In Its Provision

(v.28a)

For our salvation and encouragement and hope, this text tells us that Jesus joins us in death and judgment. Just as man dies and is judged, so Jesus. Jesus’ death is judgment. His death is a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people.

It is a sin-bearing work. This is the heart of Christianity, the heart of the gospel and the heart of God’s great work of redemption. When Jesus died, He bore sins. He took sins on Himself and then received the judgment that was due for sins Himself. He became the substitute for our sin and our judgment.

It is a substitutionary work. This is not the popular gospel today. But it is the truth of the Word of God. Jesus bore the sins of many. Those whose names were written down in the book of life had their sins placed on Jesus. That is why here and in other texts, the *many* are referred to. I do not like the term *limited*. But I love the term *particular*. Jesus took the sins of the many for them. Jesus took my sins for me.

Jesus dies and comes to judgment. But not on His own account. What He did was done for us—the many, the ones that He now appears in heaven for.

In its Prospect

(v.28b)

Jesus appears in heaven now for us because He appeared once and for all to deal with sin at the cross. Having done this, He will yet appear, not to judge sin in us, but to rescue and

save us from judgment upon sin. As one translation puts it so well, “Not to bear sin, but to bring salvation.”

Here is the life transforming hope. Jesus will appear a second time to bring salvation. In His first coming He dealt with sin. In His second coming, He delivers His own.

But notice carefully the wording here. It answers a very important question— who are *the many* in the first part of verse 28? For whom is He bringing His salvation at His appearing? The answer is given at the end of the verse. He is coming for those who “are eagerly waiting for Him.”

If you ask me how you can know if you are going to be welcomed in heaven; how you can know that your sins are dealt with; how you can know that Jesus is appearing in heaven for you now; how can you know that you will be shielded from the awful wrath of the judgment of God and be brought into eternal life, I have the answer. Here is the answer: *trust Jesus in a way that makes you eager for Him to come.*

This eager expectation for Jesus is simply a sign that we love Him and believe in Him authentically. There is a phony faith that wants only escape from hell and entrance to heaven and access to blessings, but has no desire for Christ Himself. That kind of belief does not save you. It does not produce an eager expectation for Jesus to come. It would rather that Christ would wait as long as possible so that you can have as much of this world as possible. But the faith that really holds on to Jesus as a treasure and hope and joy is the one that makes us long for Jesus to come. That is the faith that saves.

Reflect and Respond

What faith building and hope giving words these are:

Jesus is now appearing in heaven for us. This gives us freedom of access and conscience into the very presence of God.

Jesus has appeared and once for all, dealt with sin. What a balm for sin-weary souls.

Jesus will appear to bring the full reality of salvation to the many, to you who trust Jesus in a way that makes you eagerly anticipate your sufficient Savior.

I urge you and plead with you to turn from the world and from sin and turn to Christ. He has appeared in heaven for you to purify you of sin. He will appear once again at the end of days. Believe and bow to Him so that at His appearing, you will rejoice.

