

Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come. Amen.

FOR US!

Hebrews 9:24-28 | The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost | November 15/18, 2018

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our righteous Judge and loving Savior,

Have you ever received an unexpected gift? The flower delivery truck pulls into the driveway and delivers a dozen long-stem red roses to your door. “For me?” Fellow employees down at the office call you into a break room where you find a birthday cake covered with candles? “For me?” Just before deer season your dad hands you a brand new rifle complete with scope. “For me? I can’t believe you did this for me!”

It feels good when friends and family go out of their way to do something nice for us. But when God does it for us undeserving sinners, it’s astounding. Through God’s Word before us today we’ll see how our God graciously goes out of his way “FOR US!” Jesus Christ our Savior appeared once for us. And he will appear again for us.

I. Christ Appeared Once For Us

It’s unclear who wrote the letter to the Hebrews, but its message is quite clear: Christ is superior. The unknown author wrote to Jewish Christians who thought they still needed to keep the old ceremonial law. For 1,500 years they had

kept the religious code God gave through Moses with all of its ceremonies and sacrifices. This system of ritual had a purpose. It was meant to point forward to the coming Savior. But there was no longer any need for sacrifice or Sabbath day to point forward to the Messiah. He had come.

These new Christians struggled with this. They had followed the Law of Moses all their lives. Their people had done so for centuries. Sadly though, for the most part, the Jewish people had forgotten the real purpose of those laws. For them the rituals weren’t about looking forward to the Messiah. They were about getting right with God. They thought that if they just followed the worship rules, God would accept them. The author of our text writes to show them the danger of such an attitude. They were focusing on an inferior—really, a hopeless way to salvation. They needed to see the superiority of Christ.

That’s exactly what we hear in the words of our text: **For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands 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.

Under the Old Testament system the high priest offered burnt offerings to atone for the sins of the people. He offered daily sacrifices. The high point of this sacrificial system came in the fall on the great Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would sacrifice a bull, take a bowl of its blood into the Most Holy Place of the temple, dip his hands in the bowl, and sprinkled blood on the Ark of the Covenant. He then did the same thing with the goat's blood. He would then place his bloody hands on the head of the scapegoat, symbolically placing on it the sins of the people. The scapegoat was then sent out into the wilderness to die. This was repeated year after year after year. Sadly, many thought that just going through the motions of this sacrificial system saved them from their sins. They missed the gospel content of the ceremony. They had forgotten the promised Savior.

We sometimes make failed attempts to gain God's forgiveness, don't we? Sometimes we think we can make up for the ugliness of our sins with the beauty of our good deeds. When we feel guilty we put a little extra in the collection plate or pray a little harder. After a night of sin we think that an hour in the Lord's house will put us in his good graces again. We think if we make a sacrifice here and there, if we try to be good, we'll be OK. But such sacrifices do nothing to get rid of sin. In

fact, trying to earn our own forgiveness is sin. And it will never work.

What we can't do for ourselves Christ did for us. And what he did works. **He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.** Christ is a high priest unlike any other. In fact, as the hymn writer puts it, he is **"himself the victim and himself the priest"** (CW 309:1). He sacrificed himself for us. He came to the cross not with someone else's blood but with his own precious blood. He shed that blood. He gave up his life to pay for our sins once and for all. The Lamb of God doesn't need to keep sacrificing himself. **"It is finished"** (John 19:30). Every last sin is paid for. Because of Jesus' once-and-for-all sacrifice we are forgiven. Because of Jesus' perfect blood Satan is defeated once and for all. Because of his complete redemption we are no longer slaves to sin. Because of his empty tomb death is emptied of its power once and for all. Eternal life is ours.

The world just observed the centennial of the end of the First World War. During that war there was a young French soldier who was seriously wounded. His arm was so badly mangled that it had to be amputated. The surgeon stayed by his bedside. When the young man woke up the surgeon told him the bad news: "I'm sorry to tell you that you've lost your arm. He was surprised at the reply: "Sir, I didn't lose it; I gave it—for France."

Jesus didn't lose his life. He gave it—for us. And he took it back again—for us. And

he ascended into heaven—for us. He entered God’s presence. He didn’t do so to see God. He did so to be seen by God. He presented himself before his heavenly Father and his Father accepted him as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus did all of this for us.

And that’s just his first appearance. He’s coming again. What’s he going to do for us then?

II. Christ Will Appear Again For Us

We regularly confess in the creeds that Jesus is coming again to “judge the living and the dead.” Every human being, dead or alive, will have his day in court. Does that thought frighten you? Does the thought of standing before the judicial bench of the all-knowing, all-seeing God scare you to death?

No one likes to go to court. Court is a scary place, whether you’re contesting a speeding ticket or on trial for murder. Court is a place where evidence is examined, charges are brought and punishment is handed down. That’s why people do everything they can to stay out of court.

Your day in court is coming. You are going to be judged. And there will be no appeal. **People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.** You live. You die. You face judgment. Once. That’s how it works. Through his prophet Malachi the Lord himself gives us a vivid description of this judgment: **“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be**

stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” (Malachi 4:1).

Doesn’t sound like much fun, does it? For the unbeliever it won’t be. It will be a day of unimaginable terror. Yet you don’t have to fear that day. In fact, you can look forward to it. You can wait for it with eagerness. You can pray for it earnestly, because the One who will appear as your judge is the One who first appeared as your Savior.

Jesus is your judge. **“The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son”** (John 5:22). Perhaps our fear is that Judge Jesus will expose all our crimes. To be sure he knows them—every single one. But don’t forget he also paid for them—every single one. Jesus’ second coming isn’t about our sins. **He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.** Jesus is coming again to give us everything he won for us on his first visit.

He’s coming again for us. Right now we enjoy the peace of full forgiveness. But when Jesus comes again we will enjoy the peace of a sin-free existence. Right now we enjoy an abundant life filled with God’s blessings. But when Jesus comes again we will live in a paradise of blessings we can’t even imagine. Jesus is coming again for us! And we eagerly anticipate that day, whenever it may be. So what do we do while we wait? How do we fill the time?

I don’t know about you, but when I know I’m going to be waiting I try to pass the

time constructively. When I go to the doctor, the dentist or the DMV, I usually bring along a good book. When we're going to be in the car all day we bring music and movies and books on CD. And, of course, these days we always have our phones to play with.

As we wait for Christ's return God wants us to use the time constructively. In love for him who has done everything for us it is a joy to do so. It is a joy to gather in his house, receive his forgiveness, praise his name and encourage one another toward a life of love and good deeds. It is a joy to study his Word with fellow Christians and in our favorite easy chairs at home. It is a joy to serve him by prioritizing the time on our calendars, the money in our wallets and the talents he has given us for service in his kingdom. It is a joy to serve our neighbor in love by doing our jobs to the best of our ability. It is a joy to share the precious good news of the one who came for us and is coming again for us. It is a joy to live for him, because he lived and died for us.

It's always wonderful to receive a surprise gift. What wonderful, surprising gifts our God has given us. Forgiveness. Life. Salvation. Everything. "For me?" you ask. Yes. For you!

S.D.G.