

Hebrews 9:24-28 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. ²⁵And 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. ²⁶Otherwise 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. ²⁷And, just as it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment, ²⁸so 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.

Have you ever heard of a Faustian bargain? You know the concept even if you've never heard that term. It refers to German folklore about a man named Faust who agrees to sell his soul to the Devil in exchange for worldly knowledge and pleasure. So he enjoyed things for a while, but he paid the price for it eternally. In all the stories like that, the person loses far more than he gains.

That kind of story has been told all kinds of times. Often the Devil twists the person's words and intentions. For example, someone sells his soul to the Devil so that he will never die. He seems to have figured out a loophole, right? Well, he ends up getting framed for murder and is sentenced to life in prison. So he is stuck in prison with no hope of death bringing his sentence to an end. Satan even presented Jesus with a Faustian bargain by telling him that he will give him all the wealth of the world if only he would bow down and worship him. It didn't work.

This letter was written to Jewish converts to Christianity who were experiencing persecution. If they gave up on Christianity and went back to Judaism, the persecution would end. This letter shows them that that would be a Faustian bargain. Their earthly lives would be better, but they would be rejecting the very Savior that Judaism was pointing to. Jesus Is Our Perfect High Priest. He died for you, he intercedes for you, and he will return for you.

God gave his Old Testament people some very clear pictures of what their Savior would do for them. Maybe one of the clearest ones was of the high priest. He offered sacrifices for the people and was the intermediary between God and them. In this text the author is specifically talking about the sacrifice that was offered on Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. This year it fell on October 12.

That was the only day that the high priest, and only the high priest, could go into the Most Holy Place in the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant was. The Ark was basically a rectangular box with statues of angels on top of it. It symbolized God's presence with his people. A thick curtain blocked the way in so that no one could look in. That curtain pictured how sin separates us from a holy God.

On the Day of Atonement the high priest would go into the Most Holy Place with the blood of a sacrifice. He would sprinkle some of the blood on the lid of the Ark. Symbolically then God could not see what was inside the Ark, namely, the two tablets of the Law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. All he could see was the blood of the sacrifice.

The author of this book shows one key characteristic of this sacrifice, **“the high priest enters the Most Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own.”** Every single year that sacrifice needed to be offered. And you know that this was not the only sacrifice that was offered. There was one at the beginning and ending of each day. There was some every Sabbath, every new moon, and every festival. This constant repetition showed that those sacrifices really weren't getting the job done.

All of those sacrifices only had value in that they pointed people ahead to Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross. They taught the people that **“without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.”** They taught the people the concept of substitution. Instead of them dying for that sin, the animal died instead. They taught the people that sin is serious business. What was happening to that animal should have happened to them.

What those Old Testament sacrifices could never accomplish, Jesus' sacrifice did. We read, **“But now [Christ] has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”** Unlike those other sacrifices that were constantly repeated, Jesus' sacrifice was one and done. The word translated **“take away”** is another picture of forgiveness. Basically the judgment that we deserved is gone because it was placed on Jesus.

Do you remember what happened when Jesus died on the cross? Matthew tells us, **“Suddenly, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom.”** Jesus died right about the time of the evening sacrifice. So the priests there would have heard this unearthly ripping sound, turned around, and suddenly they were able to see into the Most Holy Place. That showed that we aren't separated from God anymore because of Jesus.

This is also why we call our clergy pastors instead of priests. You don't need me to offer a sacrifice for you. Jesus' one sacrifice is all you need. You don't need me to go to God on your behalf. The Apostle Peter wrote about you, **"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."**

Jesus Is Our Perfect High Priest. He died for you and he intercedes for you.

Another picture that God gave in the Old Testament era was the Temple itself. It too was a symbol of God's presence with his people. That's why when the Babylonians began invading, no one would ever have believed that the Temple would be destroyed. That would mean that God had turned his back on them even though they are his chosen people. The reality is that God hadn't abandoned them, they abandoned him. The smoldering remains of the Temple would show the damage their sin had done.

The Temple was also a picture of Jesus specifically. That's where they came to offer sacrifices for sin. Jesus' one sacrifice would really pay for every sin. That's where they came to pray to God. Even when they were away from it, they would pray in the direction of the Temple. Jesus is the one who won the right for all of us to come to God in prayer at any time and in any place.

In this text we see that the Temple was even a picture of heaven itself, **"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."** Since the Temple showed God's presence with them it was also pointing them ahead to the place where we will be in his presence face-to-face forever.

Texts like this one show the value of studying the Old Testament today. It talks about Jesus too! The prophets, priests, and kings were supposed to be pictures of how Jesus is our perfect Prophet, Priest, and King. All of the laws either showed people how much they need the Savior or giving them pictures of how he would be the Savior they need. We can combine the Old Testament prophecies with the New Testament reality to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus is our Savior too.

Jesus has some important work to do between his ascension and his return on the Last Day. This text says that he appears **"before God on our behalf."** The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, **"Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!"** The Apostle John wrote, **"My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."**

Why would we need Jesus to do that? It's not like God the Father is still plotting for ways to punish us but Jesus is there to calm him down. He would be a sorry excuse for a Father if that was the case. We know that he cannot forget about Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross for us. Even though it occurred 2,000 years ago, it is just as fresh in his mind as if it had just happened yesterday.

This is not for our heavenly Father's benefit. It is for ours. Every believer has a conscience. That's a good thing. It's a blessing from God. It is God's Law written on our hearts. It helps us keep our sinful natures under control. Unfortunately our consciences can become, shall we say, a little hyperactive. Maybe there's some sin you've committed that you continually beat yourself up over. That can even lead us to think that Jesus died for a lot of people, but probably not me.

Jesus remains a permanent witness to our forgiveness. So our consciences can scream about our guilt all they want, but God still declares us to be not guilty. It doesn't matter if you feel forgiven or not. That's what God said you are and so that's what you are. So if you ever worry that you've committed the one sin that is too many or too big, Jesus says, "No, I died for that one too. You are forgiven. You are God's child."

Jesus Is Our Perfect High Priest. He intercedes for you and finally he will return for you.

The old church year will come to a close next Sunday and the new one will begin on December 1 with the first Sunday in Advent. In these Sundays we are taking some time to remember that Jesus is going to return again in glory on Judgment Day. In this text the author makes an illustration but he is also stating an important truth, **"²⁷And, just as it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment."**

Most people would prefer not to think about that day. No one on their own likes the thought of being held accountable for everything they have done. No one would want a video of their worst sinful moments in life put up on YouTube for everyone to see. The reality is that a judgment has already been passed. Jesus himself said, **"The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."**

But while this life is still going on, there is still time for that judgment to change. Unbelievers can hear the Word and be brought to faith. Unfortunately it is also possible for believers to reject the Word and fall back

into unbelief. May God graciously preserve us from that. But once someone dies or Jesus returns in glory, that judgment is set in stone. There won't be a second chance.

So Judgment Day is a day to take seriously. We can use it to help keep our sinful natures under control. There would be nothing worse than for us to stand before Jesus, knowing that he died for our sins, but that we didn't care enough to stick with him and now it's too late. But for believers it is not a day to live in fear of or try to push off as long as we can. Even if we miss out on something we've been looking forward to in this life, what is that compared to being in heaven forever?

We read, "[Christ] **will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him.**" It's not like Jesus brought sin with him the first time. The author's point is that the first time Jesus came here it was all about sin. He wasn't going to sin—not that he actually could—but he would be perfect in our place. He would take the punishment for every sin on himself on the cross.

The second time Jesus comes to this world, it will be all about salvation. Yes, that salvation is already ours. Heaven is ours now. The only issue is that we aren't there to enjoy it just yet. That's why it's often pictured as an inheritance. If you are in someone's will you will be getting something, but you have to wait. When Jesus returns, then faith will be replaced with sight and we will finally understand how great heaven is.

So we wait. Jesus says no one knows when he will return so don't waste your life guessing. Just be patient. God will not let this world go on one second longer than it needs to. The reason why Jesus hasn't returned yet is because he knows that there are some people out there who don't know him yet. He wants to give them time to come to faith in him. That's a really good reason to be patient too.

But we will also wait eagerly. I love all the earthly blessings that God has given. He has showered us with so many—far beyond anything that we could ever deserve. But I'm getting sick and tired of sin. I'm tired of fighting against it but then giving in to it anyway. I'm sick of watching people I love struggle and suffer. I look forward to the day when I won't have to deal with it anymore, when I will be able to look my Savior in the face and thank him personally.

Jesus Is Our Perfect High Priest. He died for you, he intercedes for you, and he will return for you. We don't need to make any Faustian bargains, no matter how tempting they might be. Otherwise we would be acting as if God has not blessed us sufficiently. We know that we have everything we could ever need in our Savior Jesus for this life and for eternity.