

<sup>24</sup> For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model<sup>[1]</sup> of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us. <sup>25</sup> He did not do this to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another. <sup>26</sup> Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment—<sup>28</sup> so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but<sup>[2]</sup> to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

### **He's not your typical High Priest**

Two little boys were finding new ways to get into trouble. It's not that we were looking for trouble we went looking for fun and that often led to trouble. Depending on how much fun we were having determined the level of trouble we were in. And worst part of all of this fun was when mom would interrupt with, "Just wait till your dad gets home." Now I can't think of any examples, because the coming threat of the wrath of dad was rarely seen. The thought of dad's coming meant we were treading on thin ice and we ought to be careful. But dad's coming home wasn't always met with thoughts of terror.

"Dad's coming." wasn't just a threat but the moment we eagerly waited for. When dad gets home we'll open presents. When dad gets home we're going camping. His coming, depending on the context, was a signal of terror or joy.

If we found terror or joy at the arrival of our Dad how should we expect to receive Jesus when he comes again on Judgment Day? On Judgment day we'll finally have to answer for all that we've done or left undone? Should we be terrified or joyous? The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, "*We are destined to die once and then face judgment.*" But he also wants us to eagerly wait for Jesus coming with joy. We have Jesus. He's no angel. He's no Moses. He's no Joshua. He's no Aaron. He's not your typical High Priest. But he is our Great High Priest who offered a greater sacrifice in a greater temple so we can be sure and certain of our salvation and look forward to Judgment Day with Joy.

Jesus isn't your typical High Priest. A typical High Priest would enter the most holy place of the temple or tabernacle once a year on the Day of Atonement. A typical High Priest would stand before the Almighty God and account for the sins of the people. That sounds like a terrifying experience. The High Priest is going to stand before the Almighty. He dare not enter God's presence on his own terms. Aaron's sons tried that once, fire consumed them.

The way God prepared for his High Priest to come before him was written in Leviticus 16. There we find details as far as how to dress, bathe, and even prepare the sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the sins of his people. He took coals from the altar and two handfuls of incense so that the smoke would cover the mercy seat. He took the blood of the ram and sprinkled it on the Ark of the Covenant. This was done according to God's terms and only with the blood of the sacrifice.

With all of this, God taught his people a lesson about sin. Sin separates us. You can't come into my presence without sacrifice. Those sacrifices are a substitute for sin. *The wages of sin is death.* Death is what they deserve but there is a substitute and the sacrifice died instead. The Day of Atonement was a yearly reminder that all of Israel's daily, weekly, and monthly sacrifices and offerings were not able to permanently atone for sin. They needed something or someone more.

#### Part I:

We have no High Priest, no bull, no ram, and no temple. You aren't sprinkled with blood when you come to worship and I don't enter the Most Holy Place in order to sprinkle the rest of the blood on the Ark. We don't have the temple or the Ark anymore. A lot of things have changed but many still remain the same. We still must face

God for our sins. The day is coming and it is unavoidable. Do we really need to be worried? We must stand before God who is holy, knows all and sees all.

So what do we do? Do we try harder to do more good works than bad in order to make up for sin? Do we compare ourselves to those around us? Some think salvation is one great balancing act, we just have to have more on one side. Even more follow a conditional grace. It's the If... then... theology that is believed by too many. If I do the right thing then I will get good things. If I do the right thing then I go to heaven. That's not taught in scripture. God expects a perfect life. We dare not stand before God on our own terms. But that's what so many try to do, but my opinion doesn't matter only God's declaration. He says, "*The soul that sins, shall die.*"

We are sinners by nature. Maybe your sins of youth still nag at you. I remember many of the dumb things that I've said or done. Maybe those dumb things aren't that long ago but that doesn't matter you still did them and maybe you still feel the guilt and shame. Do we diminish the once and all sacrifice of God and say... "I need to do something more in order to be saved"? Do we try to add to what was already done? If only we can feel really bad then I can be sure. Far be it!

What we deserve is death. That's what the sacrificial system teaches us. It's a visual reminder of what sin deserves, even those sins that we don't see as significant. We might not have your typical High Priest but we have one nevertheless. We can't stand before God on our own. But we have Jesus.

We have a High Priest. But Jesus never entered the Holy of Holies that we know of. There was the incident when Mary and Joseph lost Jesus. But Jesus never offered a sacrifice there. We're not even sure the Ark was there in the temple and that's ok. Another lesson was being taught year after year. Even after the High Priest offered sacrifice, they still couldn't stand before God in the Holy of Holies. This taught that someday, someone was going to come and provide entry – not into the temple but into heaven.

This is where our lesson picks up. *For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model<sup>ff</sup> of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us* Jesus entered God's presence, not an earthly temple, which was a shadow of God's presence but he entered heaven itself. Jesus is unlike any other High Priest. He entered heaven. He entered without sacrifice or substitute because he was "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" This lamb had to be perfect, unblemished, spotless in order to be acceptable. And since Jesus lived that perfect life he didn't have to offer a sacrifice first for his own sins and then for the others. He stood before God and he offered his own blood. Jesus appeared once for all and made that once for all sacrifice. There is no reason to repeat this sacrifice. *But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself.* It's done. Our sins are covered. Jesus has offered a far greater sacrifice than the blood of bulls and goats. He is a far greater High Priest.

There, before God, he stands as the representative of his Church. This is what he is doing now, "*So that he might now appear in the presence of God for us.*" This means that as we gather around the altar on Sunday for worship, Christ absolves our sins and sprinkles his blood in the Sacrament. We are ushered into our Father's presence. The actual body and blood that were sacrificed for us are given to cleanse us from our sins so we might enter God's presence with our Great High Priest. This was done once for all.

There in heaven he continues his work for you. There he prepares a place for you. So when he comes again in glory we know how he will greet us, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*" (Matthew 25:34).

We are sure and certain because he has told us, "*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*" (Luke 21:28). We see these things with eyes of faith. These Words are written

for us so we can be sure and certain that we are forgiven. When Jesus comes again he will bring salvation to those who believe but those who do not will be met with what Malachi warns us about, an inescapable fire and an unending judgment. Hear the love and concern of God our Father who wants all to be saved and none to perish. He warns us well ahead of time. He then sends his son to intercede. He delays Jesus' return. He reaches out to us each day as another day of salvation, another day of his grace.

He provides a way for us to come and stand before him. We dare not approach God on our own terms. In his Word he tells us how to approach him in humility and joy. Through water and his Word he binds us to himself and brings us into his presence. In the Lord's Supper, the blood of the sacrifice is promised and put into the wine, and in this way it is sprinkled on those who take and drink. Jesus gives us his blood, sanctifying us, making us saints. He gives us his blood for the forgiveness of our sins, in order to remind us of the sacrifice of his body on the cross. This isn't an "If... then..." theology where we are never certain if we've done everything we should do.

We follow a different theology a biblical one that follows the example of the New Testament. We now live under a "because... therefore..." theology. Because Jesus died on the cross therefore you are loved by God. Because Jesus now intercedes on our behalf therefore we can approach God. We don't need the blood of bulls and goats anymore. We don't need to search for a temple or even the Ark. We have something far better.

Our lesson continues, "*having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but<sup>g</sup> to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*" We wait by remembering him and his words. We watch out for false teaching. We revere his name. We stand in awe of his work. We want to avoid offending him. We live for the one who lived, died, and rose for us. We wait to see him coming in salvation, not judgment.

Though you and your brother might have to answer to the wrath of Dad, you will never have to answer to the wrath of God. Jesus entered heaven itself, answered for all our sins, by his own blood. How will you stand before him on Judgment Day? Sure and certain. Rested and reassured you are welcome. I can't help you if you have to stand before your Dad but I can help you stand before God your King. I can point you to his Word and our Great High Priest.