



Hebrews 9:24-28
Hebrews: Seeing Jesus Clearly
“The Greater Sacrifice”

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Palm Sunday

On this Palm Sunday, when we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem—the crowd waving palm branches, laying cloaks on the ground—there is a beautiful irony in the passage we're reading today. The crowd that welcomed Jesus was expecting a king who would deal with Rome. So, the palms were waved for a conqueror. And he was a conqueror—but Jesus came to deal with something far older and far more dangerous than any earthly power: His conquest was over sin and death, not Caesar.

We are in the middle of a series in the New Testament book of Hebrews. And just as Jesus' earthly life reaches its summit in this week between Palm Sunday and Resurrection Day, so Hebrews in many ways reaches its summit in chapter 9. And today we will be reading the last few verses of chapter 9.

As we've seen throughout this series, Hebrews draws comparisons between eternal realities and their earthly counterparts. The eternal ones are the originals—full and true; the earthly versions are copies and shadows. We've seen this with the tabernacle, the covenant, and the Levitical priesthood. Chapter 9 focuses especially on contrasting the earthly tabernacle with the heavenly sanctuary, including the ministry of atonement that took place in its innermost room.

Before we read, let me preview some things that will help you follow the passage. The phrase “Day of Atonement” (Yom Kippur) doesn't appear here, but everything described about what the high priest did refers to that day. It was the annual sacrifice, made by the priest on behalf of the people. The sacrifices took place in the courts of the tabernacle; then the priest alone would enter the innermost room—the Holy of Holies/Most Holy Place—carrying the blood of the sacrificed animals. While he was inside, the people waited. When he reappeared, that was the sign: God had accepted the sacrifice. Their sins were forgiven.

With that in mind, let's read **Hebrews 9:24–28**. This is God's Word to us today...

I want to just walk through this passage and explain some things to help us understand it better, because like so much of Hebrews it feels very foreign to us. And then we'll wrap things up with some conclusions and implications for us.

Verse 24 tells us what Jesus has done—and is doing—after the resurrection. **Jesus has entered heaven itself, into the presence of God, on our behalf.** This is contrasted with the earthly holy places the priests entered: spaces made with human hands, copies of the true things that exist in heaven. The Holy of Holies was just a shadow of the real throne room.

And what does Jesus do there? He “appears in the presence of God on our behalf.” **The Greek word for “appeared”—*emphanisthenai*—is not a passive, lurking presence. It was used in legal and royal contexts for a formal presentation before someone in authority.** Jesus appears before the Father not just as a petitioner, but as our advocate.

So, Christ's earthly ministry is completed on the cross, but it continues in his Heavenly intercession. The atonement is finished—it's a one-time work through his sacrifice on the cross, which we talked about a couple weeks ago and will touch on in the next couple verses—but his advocacy is ongoing.

Verses 25-26 reiterate the once-for-all theme and we see it again in verse 28 as well. If you feel like you keep hearing in Hebrews that Jesus died once for all, you're right. Hebrews states it five times. That repetition is intentional. **Unlike the Old Covenant priests who offer the sacrifice every year, year after year: Jesus does not offer himself as a sacrifice repeatedly.** And also unlike those priests, who sacrificed animals, Jesus offers his own blood for the atonement of sins. He is the better sacrifice.

So, the point being made here is that if Jesus' sacrifice were like the Levitical sacrifices, like the ones done under the Old Covenant that we read about in the

Old Testament, he would need to die repeatedly—as verse 26 puts it, “many times since the creation of the world.” Rather, because he is the perfect sacrifice, it happens once. The others were always imperfect sacrifices, which is why they had to keep happening. Not so with Jesus.

Verse 26 also says he came “to do away with sin”. “To do away with” is a Greek word that combines a prefix that means “without” and the root word that means “to place”. In the noun form as it appears here, it means, “without a place.” **And what no longer has a place? Sin. Sin has no place.** This is more than just saying “sin has no place in our lives” as if it’s acknowledging a truth that is an unrealized idealistic goal. Because the fact is, we do all have sin in our lives. But for those who are in Christ, who trust him and his atoning work on the cross, sin has no place in God’s view of us. When we put our trust in Jesus, that is who he sees when he looks at us.

One more thing in verse 26: We read that Jesus appeared “at the culmination of the ages.” Hebrews is not saying Jesus arrived near the end of the chronological timeline. **It’s saying his appearance *was* the end—the completion of the old age and the inauguration of the new.** (Old Covenant and New Covenant) We are not waiting for the story to *get* important, like a scoreless baseball game that’s only had 3 or 4 baserunners all game that, at least for a lot of people, isn’t very exciting to watch until you get to the 9th inning when all of a sudden, it’s intense. We live on the far side of the most important event in cosmic history. The decisive battle has been fought and won. What remains is not the culmination, but the public manifestation of a victory already secured.

That victory will be fully revealed when Jesus returns. This brings us to the final verses, which speak of his eventual return.

Verse 27 grounds what follows in a universal human reality: people die once. Sorry to break it to you, but we all die, and die only once. So too, **Christ was offered once to bear the sins of “many,” which echoes Isaiah 53:12.** When it says that Jesus died “for the sins of *many*,” it doesn’t mean Jesus came for

less than everyone—he died for the sins of the whole world. But not everyone places their faith in him, so the result is that he bears the sins of *many*.

Verse 28 tells us he will appear a second time. Think back to the Day of Atonement. The high priest entered the Holy of Holies, and then — crucially — he came back out. That second appearance was the announcement that the sacrifice had been accepted. The people’s sins were covered. **Christ’s return is like that second emergence: the full, public declaration that his sacrifice is accepted, sin is dealt with, and salvation is available in its fullest expression.**

So, he is not coming the second time to atone for sins again, because he already has done that, and it is finished. It is “Once for all.” Rather, his return is to bring salvation to those “who are waiting for him” as verse 28 puts it. It is to bring them into eternity with God their Creator, to bring us home.

There are many questions that this passage opens up: what will his second coming look like? How will we know when his return is imminent? What will the experience of Christians who are living on earth be when he returns? What about those who have died – what’s their experience of time in waiting for Jesus’ return? Scripture addresses some of those and we touched on some of them about a year ago when we went through 2 Thessalonians, because this topic comes up there as well.

But here’s what Hebrews gives us: Jesus will return, and in the meantime, we wait. The verb there in verse 28 is used 7 other times in the New Testament and 5 of those are translated “eagerly wait.” Jesus’ return is something for us to look forward to, and to anticipate. It’s a joyful anticipation, and it gives shape to how Jesus’ followers live.

So, what does this mean for us here on the Eastside in the 21st Century? Two points of application this morning:

First: Receive the finished work of Christ—and stop trying to finish it yourself. Christ appeared once to put away sin—not to just reduce it, not to

begin a process for your effort to complete by being “good”—such as in our jobs or volunteering in the schools or youth sports programs, and doing stuff to try and make up for all of our mistakes and sins. It’s not that we don’t engage in those things.

For instance, I’m volunteering as a Little League Baseball umpire this spring for 8- and 9-year-olds. It’s about the scariest thing I’ve ever done – especially when you have to call out your own kid on a third strike when he just watched it go down the middle of the strike zone. Rather, we serve and work and play and live knowing that with Jesus: It is finished. His shed blood covers us. So, we volunteer and serve in roles not to try and make up our past sins, but to reflect the light of Christ into the world.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that donkey, the people were cheering for him and waving their palm branches. They had no idea they were witnessing the beginning of his last week that would lead to the cross where he would cry out, “It is finished.” But that’s where the week’s events led. And there’s grief and sadness later this week. But as a result of what Jesus has done on the cross, sin and its eternal impact is put away and we simply receive it, like a gift, because that’s what it is. So, we don’t add to what Jesus has done—rather, we *receive* and *trust* what he has done.

Second: Live with joy! 😊 Because of the work Jesus accomplished on the cross, because he is even now appearing before the Father as your advocate, and because his return is something we eagerly anticipate — because of all that: live with joy! 😊 Be joyful! Work with joy! Play with joy! Get out of bed with joy! Take out the garbage with joy! Eat your vegetables with joy! (Except onions?) Serve with joy! Like when you call out your own kid on a called third strike as a volunteer umpire, do it with joy! Serve next Sunday with joy! And of course: let’s worship with joy!

So, lift up the palm branches in praise because Jesus is the greater sacrifice, and the only one we need. No palm branches? No problem,

because God gave you your own palms: Lift them up! Clap them together.
Make a joyful noise to the Lord.

Give an Amen! Amen? (Amen!)

Give an Hallelujah! Hallelujah? (Hallelujah!)

Give a “preach another hour, pastor!” ...Just kidding. We’re wrapping up
right now.

These verses, and this day—Palm Sunday—call us to carry that joy into every
Sunday—and every day of the week—as we follow Jesus *together*, in
community, leading one another and others toward him as well. Let’s
pray...Amen.