

Christ Takes Our Sins Away November 11, 2024

Hebrews 9:24-28

24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. 25 Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; 26 for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the 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 (NRSV).

Christ takes away our sins. OK, that's it, we got the message, we can go home now and live happily ever after. I am pretty sure you are glad like me that Christ takes our sins away. Prior to the advent of Christ, the voice of God was proclaimed through the prophets. Their testimonies were to call out sin, call for repentance, and prepare for the coming of Christ. Hebrews affirms that God has been present through the prophets where upon God's voice was heard throughout Israel. Now God speaks much more clearly through Christ. The Son is superior to all of the prophets and the angels. He is the Son of God. The Old Testament law was given directly by God to Moses an intermediary. The word of God was given directly by God to the prophets who were also intermediaries. The word of God was then given to us through the through the Son of God. Jesus is not an intermediary; we get the word directly from God through the Son of God.

The book of Hebrews was not written to a specific church like other New Testament letters. It was written to a larger group of people, to the Jewish Christians that were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. With its canonized placement in the Bible, it is written for all Christians, everywhere, for all of time. In contemporary society, the church continues to wrestle with how to understand God and Christ and live as Christians in a hostile world. In the time of Moses, God made a contract with the Jewish people. Promising to protect them and bless them if they were obedient. If only they would obey the obligations of the contract. God knew that people are inherently selfish and far from perfect and do not have perfect obedience. So, God set up a sacrificial system to remind the Hebrews of their sins and receive God's forgiveness for their transgressions.

Sin is a capital offense; it requires the death penalty. God allows a sacrifice, a blemish free perfect animal, the best a person may have to give, as payment for their sins. The animal dies instead of the sinner. The problem with this system is that the people kept on sinning. So, the sacrifice had to be repeated. But with Jesus Christ, the sacrifice is valid forever. If he were merely human, or just a prophet, then the sacrifice would have to be repeated. The sacrifice that Jesus made is different from the Old Testament sacrifice. His sacrifice is once and for all, the end to the ritual of annual sacrifice. Now, due to the sacrifice of Christ, we are free of guilt and free to serve God. We receive God's forgiveness because the sacrifice has already been paid for all of us and for all of our sins.

Worship in practice has been a way to approach God and seek forgiveness. The high priest served as an intercessory in the holiest place on earth. The laws, traditions, and rituals were treated as holy and practiced for thousands of years. These ingrained traditions are not easy to give up. The Hebrews of the New Testament were challenged

with abandoning their holy rituals and their status as God's chosen law abiding people. God's agreement with Abraham is no longer the deal because God gives the people a new covenant. Not like the old one which is now obsolete and out of date, but a new and improved covenant. Jesus is superior to the biblical heroes, angels, and high priest. The temple is not a human built building; it is superior, in heaven. The sacrifice is superior to an animal sacrifice. The prophets predicted this. The covenant is a new agreement. Faith is much more important to God than obedience to laws and the practice of rituals. Biblical heroes are not praised for rituals but for obeying God. Rituals do not save people but faith in trusting in the invisible God.

Christ came to set things straight. He entered into the sanctuary of heaven itself in order to advocate for the faithful. He did not need to make repeated offerings of annual animal sacrifices of blood that is not his own. He sacrificed himself and shed his own blood (actually he did not shed his own blood but allowed it to be shed) for the very specific purpose of removing our sin. Christ will appear a second time. Not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

The grave could not hold the living Jesus and we are forever grateful for paying this debt that we can never repay. The forgiveness of sin does not come cheap. It takes the shedding of blood. We tend to favor the self, forget our own wrongdoing, suppress memories of sins and dwell on our good deeds. When we do recall sin, we tend to minimize the importance. But the innocent victim had to be slain for us to be purified. The shedding of blood makes it clear that the forgiveness of sin is serious business. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.