

²⁴ 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. ²⁶ Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so 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. (Hebrews 9:24-28)

Christ-Centered Certainty

We would like a little bit more certainty in life, or so we might think. We could use some more “sure things” and guarantees. Sometimes it is nice to be spontaneous to break up the monotony, humdrum, same thing different day. Not having any plans but just going and doing something can be exciting. I've always wanted to just hop into the car, start driving, and see where the freedom of the open road takes me while leaving behind responsibilities and expectations for a time. Surprises can be fun! The unexpected card or gift can make you feel special and loved. Then again, the unexpected diagnosis of a disease can leave you feeling alone. The surprise news of a family tragedy leaves us facing a different type of uncertainty. Not knowing what you are supposed to do next, not having a plan while staring down the unknown future leads to feeling paralyzed and crippled. We know that any of those can happen at any given moment because so much of life is uncertain. Some have said the only certainty in life is uncertainty. As we go day-by-day that seems to be more and more true.

Then again, our world isn't constant chaos of never knowing what is going to happen. While there are plenty of things you can't plan for and others that will surprise, there are things that we are fairly certain will happen. The writer of this letter called Hebrews takes us to one of those certainties in chapter 9 where he takes us back to the worship life of Old Testament Israel. For the Israelites they were certain on that one day of the year the High Priest would dress in white robes and sacrifice a bull and a goat for his sins and the sins of the people. They were certain that he would enter into this hand-made temple, a holy place set apart for God. The people could not go before God on their own; they needed someone to go for them. If they tried, they would die. They were certain the High Priest would do what he needed to do for them. They depended on it. So one day out of the entire year the High Priest would enter into the nearly pitch dark of the Most Holy Place to stand before God's presence on behalf of God's people. The people would

be waiting, watching, and not entirely certain he would return. There was always the possibility that he wouldn't. If he did something wrong, God might strike him down on the spot. But when he did return they were certain: God has accepted the sacrifice. Our sins are covered. We are at one with God.

At the same time, it should have been certain to them that this wasn't enough. It should have been certain because next year on the same Day of Atonement they would see the High Priest do it again. More blood. More death. Without blood there was no forgiveness. Without death there could not be life. Payment must be made for sin.

That's a certainty that we have too. Something has to be done about all the bad things that we do and all the good that we fail to do. Sure we can try and ignore them. But that doesn't work the best. You know the sins that you have tried to forget. You try to bury them deeply certain that no one will find out. But they tend to pop up in the memory bank at the most inconvenient of times leaving us in cold sweats certain you will have trouble sleeping.

So we try and excuse them. We point to the certain plans that have fallen through that led us to lose our tempers. We point to the people who frustrate us, what she said, how he expects too much. We point at the seemingly impossible situation and that's why we didn't tell the whole truth. We become pretty good at it too convincing ourselves this certainly is a good reason for what we did. But if we are honest with ourselves, stop talking, and hear what we are saying, those excuses are just that: excuses.

So we try to make up for the hurtful words that we say. We are certain we can outweigh how we were selfish. We are certain that if I do a certain amount of right things we can cancel out how we broke that trust. But when we see the broken relationships and how things just aren't the same as they used to be, we are certain we don't know what we are supposed to do to fix this.

Something we can be certain of is that, unless Jesus returns first, we will die. Only God knows when and how that will be, but there is date on a calendar that He is certain to call you out of this world. As the writer states it in v.27, **“People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”** As certain as we are to die as the result of our sins, so we can be certain that we will stand in judgment. Death is not the end. Death is not destruction. You won't be waiting around in limbo until Christ returns given another chance. When you die, it will be your personal judgment day. You will stand before God and answer for every cruel thought, every word spoken about someone behind their back, and everything you have done or failed to do. You can be certain that if you try to defend yourself in

that courtroom with excuses, pleading ignorance, a report of all your good intentions and fine things you have done, you are without hope.

The High Priest could not do it either. He couldn't stand before God by himself, he had to offer animals' blood. And even then all the blood of beasts slain on Israel's altar could not do away with sin. We needed a substitute. We needed someone to take our place.

So, **“Christ has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away sin by the sacrifice of himself”** (v.26). This is why Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, took on flesh, and born of the Virgin Mary. He didn't come to be a good teacher. He wasn't here to set up a new set of laws by which we are supposed to live. He came to take your place. He sacrifices himself on the altar of the cross once-and-for-all to do away with sin. No amount of gold or silver could pay your debt. You owed too much. But by his innocent suffering and death and the blood that pours out of our perfect Savior from that cross you are at one with God. The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world—that means you.

But after all the uncertainty we face and the sins we fall continue to into, is it enough?

God's Word answers that: **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”** (Romans 4:25). Because Jesus lives we are certain that God accepted Jesus' payment for our sins. He was raised to life so already today you are justified, that means your verdict is, “Not guilty,” of sin.

“But how can you be certain it's for me? For you? You don't know all that things that I have done.”

You're right; I don't. What I do know is that Jesus sacrificed himself to take away all sin. What I do know is what God promised you and has made you at your baptism. Jesus takes your sin-stained hands into his nail-marked hands, washes you clean with the blood of Lamb, and declared you God's holy child. And God does not lie. Unlike the High Priest of old who only was allowed into God's presence one time a year, your Great High Priest is constantly before God's throne for you. **“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”** (v.24). Jesus has ascended into heaven as your Great High Priest, stands before the Father and reminds him: “You cannot punish him as his sins deserve. You cannot hold her sins against her. You already punished me so he has peace with you. You turned your back on me on that cross so you might welcome her. See I have washed him of every stain, wrinkle, and blemish. See I have made her

sins that were red as scarlet so that they are white as wool. You raised me from the dead and accepted my sacrifice—you must forgive them for my sake.” And he does. And he always will.

But how can you be certain?

That’s why we are here. As we gather for worship, through his called servant, Jesus forgives your sins. And what is forgiven on earth he promises is forgiven in heaven. Your Great High Priest gives you his actual body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper—the very thing he sacrifices once-and-for-all—to cleanse you every sin so that he might bring you into God’s presence. We hear it with our own ears. We touch it with our hands and mouth. Do not doubt, believe.

Just as certain as it is that we will face judgment, so we can be certain, **“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”** (v.28). Christ will come again. This time it won’t be in lowliness, to carry our burdens, bear our sins, to suffer for them, to die. He already did that. Once is good enough. It is finished. This time he comes to bring you salvation. That which we hope for, look forward to, and is already ours through faith, will be our reality. We will no longer live by faith, but by sight. With the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, every eye will see Jesus return a second time. Those who have already died will burst forth from their graves. For those still alive, we will be gathered together and we all will be judged. But you have nothing to fear. You do not stand in judgment on your own. The same one who judges is the one who pleads your case before God. He has already wiped your slate clean. He’s already paid for all your sins. He’s your Great High Priest who sacrificed himself once to take away your sins. There will be no surprises. There is no uncertainty. With your own two ears you will hear Jesus himself say, “You are not guilty. Come and enjoy the kingdom that I prepared for you.”

So we wait eagerly for him. We do not know the hour or day, we know he will return. We go forth from here with the Lord’s blessing knowing that for Jesus’ sake the Lord is smiling upon us and we have peace with him. We need not fear the terror of the grave or coming judgment. God is for us! He’s on our side. We hear our Savior Jesus who testifies to these truths, “Yes, I am Coming soon.” And we say with Christ-centered certainty, “Yes, come Lord Jesus.” Amen.