

Hebrews 9:24-28

Second Sunday of End Time: Last Judgment

November 7, 2021

"It's not what you know but who you know that makes the difference." You have probably heard that statement, maybe said it yourself. Personal connections can outweigh other qualifications. We used to say it about getting a job, although now with the shortage of workers in many places it might not be as essential. But maybe to get the job you really want it still is the case. Knowing someone on the inside can also be important for admission to exclusive clubs or to receive other privileges. We might protest that it is unfair, but that's the way life often goes.

Who you know is also the key factor when it comes to today's focus on the last judgment. The text from the book of Hebrews reminds us of that vital personage.

KNOW THE COMING JUDGE

- I. He's Christ, who entered heaven for us
- II. He's Christ, who sacrificed himself for us
- III. He's Christ, who is bringing us to heaven

Jesus, who is the coming judge, isn't a new person on the scene. He has a background and a history with us. He entered heaven for us. The text drew attention to the point that Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary. The Old Testament worship, with which the readers of this letter were familiar, occurred first in the tabernacle and later in the temple in Jerusalem. Those places of worship had been designed by God. He told the Israelites at Mt. Sinai how to set up their portable worship structure as they journeyed to the Promised Land, what items to put in it and how to offer their worship. It served for many years, first on the journey and until they were well settled in the land. Later on the temple was made a permanent building, following the same basic design, although much grander in size and materials with the wealth of Solomon's time.

Important events occurred in those holy places. The believers brought their sacrifices to the temple. There were many kinds: sacrifices for sin in general, sacrifices that sought forgiveness for particular sins that had been committed, sacrifices that expressed dedication to God and others that showed fellowship among the worshippers. Religious festivals were held at the temple, some with required attendance. These events often pictured the coming Savior as well as reminding the people of God's blessings on them in the past and in the present. The Word of the Lord was proclaimed at the house of God.

The structure was called the house of God because it was a sign of the Lord's presence among his people. He called it his dwelling place. When Solomon dedicated the temple that special appearance we call "the glory of the Lord" occurred as the sanctuary was filled with smoke. Its happening indicated that God had taken possession of the place. So the people properly had a love for the temple. It was a special place.

Jesus went to something greater. "He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence." Yes, he was really there in God's presence, not just a sign of it or in a copy of God's dwelling. He was also there as more than a visitor. Twice in my life on trips to Washington, D.C., I have gone on a tour of the White House. It was exciting to see, but I was only a tourist, and one of many, the most recent time being screened and rescreened and viewing only limited areas. Some people have the privilege of being invited personally to the White House for a dinner or a meeting. That's quite an honor, but they are still just guests. Only the President and his family can say, "This is my house; I live here." They belong there. Jesus was in heaven because he belonged there. He went to show himself as the perfect and acceptable sacrifice for sins.

Clearly, he is the greater one. The message of the writer was to stay with him. The recipients of the letter were Jewish Christians of the first century who were now wavering on whether to stick with Christianity or to return to the old ways of Judaism. The letter repeatedly shows how Jesus is better. He was the fulfillment of Old Testament features which pictured him and what he would do. We don't need to rely on pictures when we have the real thing. Much of the Old Testament foreshadowed the Savior, but once he had come, the types and shadows were no longer needed. Know and cling to Christ.

So, what does this text say to us? There's no temple for us to return to. It was destroyed long ago and today a Moslem mosque stands on the site. I don't think we find much attraction to those old animal sacrifices, with all the blood and the stench of burning meat. But we may have an improper regard for outward forms. Those forms can be structures if we cling to a particular building where we have a cherished history. They can be styles of worship, hymnals or language used. Outward forms can be special because of longtime use, connection with a key event in our life or family history, or maybe our personal role in providing them. But never let the form be more important than the message of Jesus. Our focus must always be on honoring Christ, the Savior and the coming judge.

What we need is not merely to know who he is but what he has done. He's Christ, who sacrificed himself for us. Again we see his greatness in a comparison with something from Old Testament worship, in this case, the earthly priests. They brought the animal sacrifices for the people each morning and evening plus special ones. The high priest had a key role each year on Yom Kippur or the Great Day of Atonement. He entered the Most Holy Place to put sacrificial blood on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant as a covering for the sins of the nation.

Those actions of the priests needed to be repeated either daily or yearly because animals couldn't actually remove human sin. It takes the death of a person to pay for a person's wrongs.

Consider the work of Jesus Christ. He offered himself, shed his own blood when he suffered and died on the cross. Remember who was doing it. Jesus was the God-man, the very Son of God here on earth as a human being. Our Lord became the servant of all and gave his life in payment for our sins. There was no high priest like him.

As the text stated, "Now he appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Christ came as the culmination of the prophecies and types presented in the Old Testament. He was the goal God intended, had promised and aimed for. Everything God had foretold came into focus in Christ. All the past was leading to the cross. All the future is guided by it. He did away with sin. It is gone from our record; the slate is wiped clean. The punishment was endured. The payment is completed.

Since the verdict has been announced, there is no repeating of the act, unlike those endless sacrifices of the past. There is no need to do it over since it was complete in its effects. It can't be done again. So why would anyone try? Jesus did it once for all.

Not only did Jesus sacrifice himself for all time, but he also did it for all people. He died for Germans, Americans, Africans, Japanese and more. He died for Republicans and Democrats and independents—for that matter, for communists and socialists, too. He died for Packer fans, Bear fans, Viking fans, for mask wearers and anti-vaxxers, for people with Covid and for those as healthy as a horse. He died for the sins of the baby born yesterday and for the senior citizen longing for the end of life. He died for absolutely everyone. He is a great Savior. How could anyone possibly turn away from him?

Therefore that great Savior, that high priest, was for you. You are forgiven; your sins are paid for. Have no doubts whatsoever. Sometimes we can read the Word of God and feel, "That's nice to hear, but God couldn't love me like that. I'm too bad. I'm not worth the effort." Be assured, he does love you like that and Jesus did it. He sacrificed himself for you. He has saved you.

III.

That assurance is what produces confidence on the day of judgment. We know the coming judge. He's Christ, who is bringing us to heaven. We will face judgment. It follows our earthly life. "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." We live, we die and we are judged. There is no second round (or more, as some religions of the world teach). Right now, our life on this earth, is our time of grace, that is, our opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved. We either come to faith or we don't. Our eternity is known when we die. Our soul goes at that time to either heaven or hell.

Christ is the judge who sees the heart and will pronounce the verdict. "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." Like us, Jesus was here for an earthly life and he will be back for the judgment. That next time it won't be in lowliness to sacrifice himself. He will return in glory, receiving the recognition he deserves as he sits on the throne with everyone appearing before him to have their eternity made public. That day is coming, getting closer with each passing day. He hasn't told us when it will occur, but we can take his word for it, it's on the way.

How does that make us feel? We could be fearful. Think of it. We must stand before the judge who knows everything, even what's inside our hearts. We try to make a good impression on the outside, but he sees through it. We understand why the psalm writer prayed, "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you." Our goose is cooked. That's why people shy away from the thought of judgment. Some try to deny it will happen or that we are accountable to God. But it's hard to escape the voice of a troubled conscience. Judgment fills many with feelings of doom and gloom.

But no—that's not how the Christian looks to the end. We have joy. "Lift up your heads," Jesus said, "because your redemption is drawing near." The judge comes, it stated here, "to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." He's coming to take us to heaven, our home for eternity. It's a wonderful home, pictured in the Bible as a place of beauty, peace, safety and happiness. There will be no troubles, no temptations to bother us, no sadness to detract from it. All will be in perfection.

If you knew the judge of an earthly case he would likely recuse himself. If unable to do so, he would still find us guilty if he is honest and that was the verdict we deserved. In this case the judge has already paid the penalty for us and he has announced the verdict before we enter the courtroom. Our judge, Jesus Christ, has won salvation for us with his life and his death in our place.

Be waiting for him. That means to be in faith. Faith comes and faith grows stronger through the means of grace, the gospel of Christ in Word and sacrament. Know and grow in the Word. Look forward to heaven. Your Savior promises it to you.

Know that coming judge. Know him as your Savior. Then you won't be afraid of the Last Judgment. You will be ready.