

“Christ Will Appear a Second Time”

Some bumper stickers catch your attention. This one did for me. For a while, it seemed like every Sunday as I drove home from church, I would catch a glimpse of it. The sticker said, “Jesus is coming. Look busy.” It’s the sort of sticker that makes me wonder about the person who would put it on their car. Do you really suppose that you can fool Jesus by looking busy? Do you really have an idea what it means that Jesus is coming? Do you really believe that he is?

While I might wonder about the person who puts that sticker on the car, there are things in all our lives that might make us wonder whether we really understand and believe that Jesus is coming again. It is easy to get caught up in our everyday dealings, in work, in school, in family activities. It is easy for us to focus on our bank accounts and our retirement plans, on our politics or our leisure activities. In fact, it is easy for us to go through our days without even giving a passing thought to the fact that Jesus is coming.

Our text today and our service on Last Judgment Sunday remind us that Jesus is coming, that he will return, or in the words of our text, that “he will appear a second time.” As we have already heard in our Scripture lessons, the message of Christ’s return ought to strike terror in the hearts of sinners. But that same message is glorious news for believers in Jesus Christ.

That message of good news was exactly what the Hebrew Christians needed to hear. We don’t know for certain what human author God used to write the letter to the Hebrews, but in the letter we get a glimpse of the people to whom it was written. They were Jewish people, well versed in the Scriptures and practices of the Old Testament. They were familiar with worship at the temple and the system of regular sacrifices which God had established for his people. Some have even wondered if some of these Hebrews had previously been priests themselves.

But these Jewish people had become Christians. They had heard the teaching of Christ and his apostles, and God had used it to work faith in their hearts. They had come to believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin.

And they also faced earthly consequences because of their faith. They had already suffered persecution because of their confession. At the time this letter was written, they were threatened again, to the point that many were tempted to simply go back to their previous ways of Judaism.

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage the people not to turn back to Judaism, but to remain faithful to Jesus. The book points out that Jesus is superior to everything that Judaism has to offer. In the section before us this morning, Jesus is described as a superior sacrifice to the Jewish sacrifices. Our text tells us, ²⁴**“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. ²⁵Nor 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. ²⁶Then Christ**

would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Year after year the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place, first at the Tabernacle and later at the Temple. There behind a heavy curtain was the Ark of the Covenant, the visible representation of God’s presence there among the people. But the Priest could only enter into God’s presence with the blood of sacrifice, both for himself and for all the people he represented. The sacrifices were never complete. The people always stood in need of forgiveness.

But all of that changed with Jesus. As the Great High Priest, he offered himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. With his own blood he entered the true temple of God to atone for sin once and for all. It didn’t need repeating. His sacrifice removed the sins of the Hebrews, and it removes your sin and mine as well.

We are not tempted to turn back to the Old Testament sacrifices. They were never a part of our lives or of our experience. But we are constantly tempted to turn away from Christ and to underestimate the importance of his sacrifice. The whole concept of sacrifice teaches us why Christ’s work was so important. No one can ignore sin, because God does not ignore sin. Year after year, day after day, our lives are full of sin. The Apostle Paul recognized this and exclaimed, **“what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing”** (Romans 7:19). He also testified, **“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature”** (Romans 7:18). And he ultimately came to this conclusion: **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”** (Romans 7:24).

That is sin. We are completely unclean to the point that there is no good in us. That is why sin deserves death, and why we deserve death because of our sin. It isn’t that we make a few mistakes or that we have room for improvement. We are thoroughly rebellious against God and except for his work in our hearts would always turn away from him.

That is why God instituted a system of sacrifices for his people. Year after year, day after day, they would see how seriously concerned God was about their sin. They would see that sin required the shedding of blood.

But all those sacrifices paled in comparison to the one to which they pointed. Once for all, one sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die. Far more precious than any animal, this sacrificial lamb was God himself clothed in human flesh for us.

And he will return. He is not coming back to finish something as if his work of sacrifice were incomplete. But he is coming back. **“²⁷Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸so 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.”**

Our text holds before us death and judgment. When the time of grace that God has given us as our lifetime comes to its end, we will be judged. Those who hold to their sins will be judged guilty. They will be sentenced to the eternal punishments of hell. The day of judgment for them will be dreadful and fearful, but there will be no escape. And we cannot pass through the season

of the End Times without recognizing that hell is what all people deserve because all have sinned.

But we who through faith have been cleansed in the blood of Christ will be welcomed into eternal salvation. For us the judgment means God's proclamation of "not guilty." And by faith we wait eagerly for that proclamation. Notice how this passage describes believers, as "those who are waiting" for Christ to return.

Through faith, we have the assurance of our salvation. As Jesus says in today's gospel, "**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life**" (John 5:24). Our life has taken on new meaning. We no longer live to serve ourselves and our own interests, we live to glorify God. We live to share his message of salvation. We live to encourage others through God's Word. We live lives of joyful anticipation of eternal glory.

Another passage says it this way: "**[O]ur citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body**" (Philippians 3:20-21).

Jesus is coming. It is not a call to us to "look busy." It is a reminder to us of what is really and truly important. It is not money or fame, riches or power, entertainment or anything else that passes away. What is important is knowing and believing that Jesus is our Savior and that he will come to be our judge. What is important is hearing his Word so that our faith may be strengthened to serve him and hold fast to him. What is important is that our sins have been washed clean in the waters of baptism and that our souls are fed in the Communion meal. Jesus is coming. Look to him for your salvation.