

Hebrews 9 “You Are Here”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! This morning, I want to show you that although waiting is a huge part of our lives, and that time's unbearable, so waiting is a feature of life and not a bug. It's part of life.

I'm going to use an old European folktale. It's likely from the 18th century or 19th century, something like that, just to sort of bring us into this. And this is how the story goes.

There's a schoolboy named Peter, and he's forever daydreaming, and his teacher sees him daydreaming in class. And, you know, what are you dreaming about this time, she asks.

And he just says how great it will be to grow up, and I just can't wait. And she says, be patient.

There's plenty of time for that. Being grown up isn't all fun, you know. And so, like, every—the thing about Peter, though, is that he's the kind of person that it's hard to enjoy whatever he's doing in the moment.

[1 : 24] Because he's always thinking, if it's summer, he's thinking about winter, you know, sledding and skiing and skating, whatever. And when it's winter, he's thinking about how great summer will be. And he's always daydreaming and can't wait for school to be over.

Now, I can understand that. But then on Sunday nights, he just wishes it was going to be holidays next day. And just because Sunday night means schools the next day.

Now, like every good folktale, as he's walking through the woods, he meets an old lady. And she's got this silver ball in her hand, and out of it is this gold thread.

And she tells him that if you accept this and you take this, you'll be able to pull that gold thread. And everything that you're waiting for or that you want to avoid, you can't because you can go forward in time.

But there's two things. You can't go back. You can't stuff it back in. And if you tell people about this, you tell anyone, you will die. So Peter says, that sounds good.

[2 : 28] Let's do that. Let's do that. I'll take the silver ball. Because he says, now how easy life will be. Because if it's summer and I want it to be winter, I can pull the string. And it's winter. And if it's winter and I want it to be summer, and if that's school and I want to be over, he can do that.

And so he starts to pull the string. So now he's an adult. And when payday seemed too far off, he gave the thread a little tug. And suddenly the week was drawing to a close.

And it was Friday night, and he had money in his pocket. And I was thinking, yeah, isn't that kind of how life goes? A lot of our waiting is about money. I can't wait until I have enough. Or I can't wait to get paid.

Or I can't wait until this happens. And a lot of our waiting is related to money. We've got a generation of people coming up that are just feeling the inflation in ways that my generation or not hasn't felt.

And so a lot of waiting has to do with money in this world. Now he's older now a little bit. He's married. And his wife announces that they're going to have a child.

[3 : 31] And Peter was overjoyed and could hardly wait. When the child was born, he felt that he could never want for anything again. But whenever the child was ill or cried through the sleepless night, he gave the thread a little tug, just so the baby might be well and happy again.

A lot of waiting in this world has to do with our children, right? Oh, I can't wait until they're this age or that age or this. Or, you know, there's a lot of things that we wait for for our children.

A lot of hard things. Going ahead. Times were hard. Business was bad. And a government had come to power that squeezed the people dry with taxes and would tolerate no opposition.

Now, again, this is from centuries ago. Nothing has changed. We are waiting on politicians all the time. We're waiting for this guy to get out or this one to get in, right?

There are so many things and we doom scroll because we're waiting for the next word on the best thing that's going to happen, right? We just do a lot of waiting relative to politics and governing. Now, as the number of his kids started to grow, the story goes, his house became more overcrowded.

[4 : 50] He would have to extend it. He would have to get a bigger house. For that, he needed money. He had other worries, too. His mother was looking older and more tired every day.

You know, there you go, right? We always think we're waiting. Man, if we had a bigger house, if we lived in a different neighborhood, there's a lot of waiting associated with that. And this brings up another point, too, because he was an only child and he had a mother and she was aging. When you have adult people in your life that are needing care outside of what you can offer, there's a lot of waiting involved in that. You're waiting for a place to land, a place to another place and all. There's so much waiting related to that. Okay. Too soon his mother died and as Peter stood at her gravesite, he wondered how it was that life passed so quickly, even without pulling the magic thread.

Right? Life happens when you're waiting for life to happen so often. See, if this resonates with you, we're getting close to the end of our story.

[5 : 56] One night as he lay in bed, kept awake by his worries. Anybody do that? He thought how much easier life would be if all his children were grown up and launched upon their careers in life.

Anybody in the house agree with that? I remember years ago, I got to speak at RUF here at UAH for the large group gathering and they were going through Ephesians.

And so it was at Ephesians 6. And that's the part where it says, children, honor your mother and father. And my big point was, here's the best way for you to honor your mother and father.

Get through college really quick. Get a job and move out. That was almost 20 years ago. I've never been invited back. Okay, here we go.

But as soon as one trouble was solved, another seemed to grow in its place. Perhaps life would be easier if he retired. The trouble was that he didn't have enough money to live on.

[7 : 02] Wow. We're waiting for our 401ks to grow, aren't we? All right, here is how it ends.

Eventually, he runs into the old lady again.

He's an older man and he's really wished he had never pulled on the string. She gives him another chance. And this is how it ends, essentially along these lines. He said, I should like to live my life again as if for the first time, but without your magic ball.

Then I will experience the bad things as well as the good without cutting them short. And at least my life will not pass as swiftly and meaninglessly as a daydream.

The meaningless part is the thing that I think is important. There's so much that happens in the waiting. It really does. Waiting is a feature and not a bug of life.

But I think we need to think through, well, what can we do so that in the things that make us wait about life, how do we not become bitter? How do we become better?

[8 : 09] I think that's what we need to see this morning. We don't get to skip the hard things of life. Waiting is a feature and not a bug of life for sure. And see, the reason I'm going here is because I started to notice as we've been going through Hebrews, and especially Hebrews 9, that the book of Hebrews, you could look at it through the lens of time.

That it speaks of time. And it tries to help us locate where we are on God's timeline. And if we can figure out where we are on God's timeline, his redemptive timeline, we can set our expectations, maybe not get bitter, but get better.

This is the thing I want to know. And I want to learn with you about that. But it is about time. So take a look at Hebrews 1. And there it is.

Okay. This is how the book starts of Hebrews. Almost like Star Wars. Long ago and at many times. So it's already talking about way long ago, many times.

And in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things. The word last days.

[9 : 29] The way that theologians explain it and the way that we should understand it is that the last days begin with the first appearance of Jesus. His coming, his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

That's his first appearance. And the last days are from that point until his second appearance until he returns. And that's the way to understand it. And the reason why that's important is because in our text, all of chapter 9, and I'm skipping the first chunk of it.

Because there's a lot there and there's a lot to cover. But at the very end, it pulls together a couple of things. It looks at, and we've been looking at, the role of the high priest in the earthly tabernacle. We've been talking about it for weeks now. And the high priest on the day of atonement goes into the holy of holies.

And then he comes back out. So there's two appearances. The first appearance of the high priest where there's a shedding of blood and the animals and the blood is shed. And then he goes inside to the holy of holies and does his work there interceding on behalf of the people.

[10:40] And so the way that the author of Hebrews explains it is there's two appearances of the high priest. And so we need to understand what's happened with the first appearance.

What did the high priest do? And then what's going to happen at the second appearance of the high priest, our high priest Jesus. All right, there's the context. Let's read the text and let's see if we can figure out how to wait well.

Not get bitter, but get better. Okay? All right, hear now the written word of God. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood.

And without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Very important passage. Blood needs to be shed. And we see here what happens.

And it explains it really well. Here we go. Thus, it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites. But the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

[11:38] See, everything that the high priest did in the earthly temple and all the actions, all the rituals, everything was a foreshadow of the real thing, Jesus. It was pointing.

It was a pattern that was being set to say when Jesus comes, we can say now it's been accomplished once and for all. And perfectly and wonderfully, cosmically, transcendentally. All right? I think I'm in verse 24. For Christ has entered not into the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into the heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood, not his own. For then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages. And that's the word at the end of the ages. Anything that is approaching the second return is the end of the ages.

[12:40] Is it going to be another 1,000 years, another 2,000 years, another 1,000 seconds? We don't know. We're just in the end times. It's everything between Jesus first appearing and second appearing.

It comes at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 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.

Those who are eagerly waiting for him. This is the reading of God's written word. Thanks be to God. Okay, so two appearances, right? Two appearances. And all that was done in the first appearance has paid our sin.

It's covered completely our sin. And we know that Jesus will appear again, just like the high priest does as he goes into the Holy of Holies.

He comes back out. And we should eagerly be awaiting that. And this is where we enter the story. So imagine the first appearing of Jesus. The second appearing of Jesus, our high priest.

[13:52] We're somewhere here in the middle of all this. And as Will taught last week, Jesus is now just like the high priest.

He is our high priest. He's interceding for us. He's in the throne room of grace. He's there interceding for us.

And we now have access. But it's important to know, just like at Six Flags or at the mall, you have to know where you are. You know, you are here on the mall maps, right?

And so we are in between the two appearances of Jesus. And so that's important for us to know because in that time, there's just a lot of waiting. Life happens in that time.

And now, I know this feels really abstract. Okay, we're in between the two times of Jesus. And it can feel very abstract.

[14:51] Like, what does this have to do with me and my current situation? My timeline where I am right now, I didn't choose. You maybe didn't choose where you are right now.

You're waiting for a job or you're waiting on a diagnosis. You're waiting for a door to open. And everybody else seems to be just kind of moving just fine. And as you compare, it gets hard to wait. And maybe your location on God's timeline, you are here. Maybe that time right there is a time of waiting for clarity. You're waiting for clarity. You're waiting for God to show you something and it hasn't come.

And you're praying prayers and you hope they land on God's ears, but it doesn't feel like it. And you're waiting for someone in your life, someone you love dearly, to change.

You need to see change in their life because you know the path they're on is not good for their souls, let alone their lives. And you're waiting. And it never comes. My beautiful bride, Sherry, reminds me often that waiting is active because we are looking to Jesus to lead and we're looking to Jesus to rest in.

[16:10] We have to take our eyes off of our circumstance, the thing that we're waiting for, or the reason, you know, we just have to take our eyes off of that and put them on Jesus. Will's third point last week in the sermon was Jesus provides purposeful rest.

And so I'm going to go there because I'm going to say this, that what waiting is in between the two appearances of Jesus, what waiting is, is actively resting in Jesus.

And Will last week cited Matthew 11, come to me all you who are weary and burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.

And you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. So I'm going to suggest two things, okay? Try to keep it simple.

I'm going to suggest two things. Two things that you can do to actively rest in Jesus. The first thing is rest in his first appearance, which has happened.

[17:14] Rest in his first appearance, which has already happened. Jack Miller, some of you may know who he is. He wrote many letters when he was alive.

He's sort of the father of sonship approach to spiritual formation. But he would write letters to missionaries and people he was mentoring.

He just wrote a number of letters. His daughter, after his death, pulled together some of those letters. And it's a book called *The Heart of a Servant Leader*. And he was writing a letter to a missionary who was newly out on the field.

Listen to what he says, the primary work that this missionary is to do. Getting the glory of Christ before your eyes and keeping it there is the greatest work of the spirit that I can imagine.

And there is no greater peace, especially in the times of treadmill-like activity, than doing it all for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Here it is.

[18:10] Thank much on the Savior's suffering for you on that dreadful cross. Thank much of your sin that provoked such suffering. And then enter by faith into the love that took away your sin and guilt.

And then give your work your best. Give it your heart out of gratitude for a tender, seeking, and patient Savior. Part of what you can notice about the earthly tabernacle with the first appearing of the high priest and he does all his activities and he gets the blood and he goes into the Holy of Holies.

Once he's in the Holy of Holies, he's out of sight. And I think that's how I can feel about God sometimes, that he's just not there. And so what I'm asking myself to do more often, and I'm saying I commend it to you as well, is that there is something that we can do to sense God's presence when he doesn't feel there.

Develop a rhythm and a habit of approaching the throne of grace with confidence, as the author of Hebrews says many times.

And I'm going to suggest that you do it this way. Because you want to learn to do this before, during, and after periods and seasons of a lot of waiting. And waiting for us means you just don't know the outcome.

[19:36] You don't know why you're here. You don't know why, you know, you lost your job. You don't know why there were layoffs. You don't know why the doctors died. You don't have any idea.

But develop a posture and a rhythm that looks something like this, where you can just take a deep breath, like Will was telling us earlier.

I like to have coffee, but I like to just sit, take a deep breath, put your phone away, turn it off. Let God take care of the world. Let God take care of the world.

Draw near the throne of grace. Again, you want to be still and you can go. You have access now to the throne of grace. That's what the author of Hebrews is trying to pound away at.

We have access now. We can go be with Jesus in the throne of grace. And then when you're at that place, ponder.

Think through what does it mean that there is no longer any wrath left for you, that Jesus paid the penalty. Ponder what that means. Sit and ponder.

[20 : 42] He has no wrath left for you. You have access into the arms of Jesus. There you have it all. You lack nothing. You have nothing to prove, protect, or lose.

And it's there in the arms of Jesus that you can let go of outcomes. Everything that you're waiting for, you can say, Lord, I give it to you.

The outcomes are yours, not mine. And you rest in his arms. Now, I think the best picture of this is Psalm 131.

My heart is not proud, O Lord. My eyes are not proud. I can't figure out how all this is going to work out. That's the posture to take in his arms.

Now, listen to this. But I have a stilled and quieted my soul. You're in his arms. Your soul is quiet. He's giving you rest.

[21 : 43] And it's just like this. Like a weaned child with his mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me. A weaned child doesn't need to nurse.

The way that Psalm 23 starts, the Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need. As a weaned child, you can just go to Jesus just to be in his arms.

I'm saying that we have to do that more often. Just go and be in his arms. Because as a weaned child, we have everything we need in Jesus' arms.

That's resting. That's waiting. Go there regularly. Maybe even fall asleep while you're in his arms. That's okay. He knows you're tired of waiting.

You can let go of outcomes because Jesus has his arms around you. And when you're in his presence, what you're saying is that you accept his wisdom and his timing for everything you're waiting for.

[22 : 52] And it's all going to be okay. That's what it means to take his first appearance. Where he paid the penalty for all of your sins. There's no wrath left for you. All that's left is the loving arms of Jesus.

You can go and be there. I commend it to you. Now, the second place you rest is in his second appearance. Because it will happen.

1 John 3. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us. That we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. We're weaned children of God.

We have everything we need. Because Jesus has paid the penalty. We can go in his arms. We are weaned children. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Dear friends, now we are children of God. And what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears. There's the second appearance of Jesus. We shall be like him.

[23 : 58] For we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope. Of his the second appearing of our great high priest. Everyone who has that hope. Look what it says.

Everyone who has that hope. In him purifies himself. Just as he is pure. This is saying that as we think about that second coming. As we think about what that means.

Our souls are purified. That is amazing and transcendent. This is. Really? Yes. Everyone who sins breaks the law.

In fact sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared. First appearance. So that he might take away our sins. This is living between the two appearances of our high priest.

Described really well here. Now what's amazing about the second appearing of Jesus is. There will be an end of all evil. An end of all worrying. An end of all waiting.

[24 : 59] It's one day it's going to go away. And we long for that because no one really warned us. How painful it is to watch your children go through hardship.

Watch a dear friend struggle with addiction. And lose. We're waiting and waiting and waiting. And it's painful. No one warns you that life isn't linear and predictable.

Even when you do things right. Waiting. Is resting in Jesus. But it's letting go of outcomes. Waiting is letting go of outcomes and resting in Jesus.

But the other part of it is we actually do hold on a outcome. We hold tightly to the outcome that is certain. That Jesus will return.

And our salvation will be full and complete. We have to hold on to that while we're letting go of outcomes. Here and now in between the two appearances. It's both end.

[26 : 06] Because here's the deal. One way or another. You're either going to go to see Jesus. Because it's been appointed man once to die. Death rate is one per person. We're all going to make it. Or you'll be here when he returns.

And it is certain. It is certain. Because as high priest. Jesus followed a pattern that was laid.

And he fulfilled it perfectly. And we know as a result of that. He will fulfill the next part of that. Which is his return. To save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

As verse 28 says. So Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many. Will appear a second time. Not to deal with sin. That's over. That's why you can be in his arms. You're a weaned child.

You have nothing that you need. Because you have it all in Jesus. He will appear a second time.

Not to deal with sin. But to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. The fullness of salvation will explode in the world.

[27 : 06] And everything will be renewed. And it will be amazing. And spectacular. We're to think a lot about that. We're to eagerly anticipate that. See you're. See first appearance.

Second appearance. You're here. You and I are here. And being here is tough. A lot of waiting. But one day we'll be there.

To see Jesus. For life to make sense in a way that we can't even imagine. You know when you lay me down to die. You lay me down to live.

It's so true. But here and now. There's uncertainty. We're waiting. We don't know what the outcomes are. And we do want to let go. And the question is how long oh Lord.

But we need to think often. About the there. While we're here. Right. Second Corinthians 4. Paul says. Being here between the two appearances of Jesus is light and momentary.

[28 : 07] They're light and momentary waiting. Light and momentary trouble. They're achieving for us an eternal glory that far awaits them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary.

What is unseen is eternal. And then Romans 8 says. I can't even really consider the sufferings of the current time. Right. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that has been revealed in us.

We're to think a lot about that glory. What it's like. And you know. Here's the deal. I'm going to close with this before we go to the table. When new heavens new earth is described in Revelation.

It says things like it's you know gold this and you know. It's trying to describe something in ways that we can understand it. And so it's going to be better than streets of gold.

It'll be better than that somehow. And in the same way when God. Jesus gives a clue about his return in the beginning of forever where there'll be no more waiting.

[29 : 10] It's something like this. Luke 12. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you. He will dress himself for service. And have them recline at table.

And he will come and serve them. And then when you pair that with Revelation 19. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb. We try to imagine like what a wedding would be like.

A forever wedding. Like what. You know. What is that a pattern of? Because the author of Hebrews has been saying all along. The rituals at the tabernacle. The things.

The high priest. And the things that. All of that is a pattern. All of it's like a parable. And the true story is going to come. So when we say what's the wedding feast that lasts forever. What is that like? Or how about this.

What does it mean that Jesus is the wait staff. At that wedding reception. We go. I don't know. What is that pattern for?

