

The Messiah's Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary

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[0 : 00] This morning. Hebrews chapter 9 beginning at verse 23.

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.

For Christ has entered. Not into holy places made with hands which are copies of the true things. But into 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. To put away sin. By the sacrifice of himself.

[1 : 07] 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.

On December 14 of 1998. I arrived home from high school. Late on a Monday evening. When I walked through the front door. My younger brother and sister.

Immediately greeted me. That was unusual. And presented me with a large envelope. They urged me to open the envelope immediately. Because it contained the answer.

To where I would spend the next four years. Of my life. In college. 15 years later. I still remember that event. I even remember that it was on a Monday. Without looking up the calendar date.

[2 : 05] Because. It brought me here to New Haven. And I've stayed here ever since. One might say it was. A defining moment. Of my life. What has been one defining moment.

Of your life. Maybe it was a moment of personal accomplishment. Of graduating from high school. Or college. Or submitting your PhD dissertation. Or landing your first full-time job.

Maybe it was a moment of relational establishment. The day that he called you on the phone. Unexpectedly. And asked you out to dinner.

Or the day that you noticed her. For the first time. Walking across the quad. Maybe you think back to her wedding day. When you vowed before God.

And witnesses. To love one other person. For as long as you both. Shall live. Maybe you remember the birth of your first child. Which changed your life forever.

[3 : 06] Even as a dad. Just looking on. It was an unforgettable experience. Maybe you look back on a spiritual awakening. Of some kind. A time when you were convinced.

That God was real. Or filled to overflowing. With the joy and power of the Holy Spirit. Or when you witnessed a dramatic. Or even miraculous answer to prayer.

All of these can be defining moments. But our defining moments are not always. Shining and glorious. Maybe you look back on a time of.

Professional failure. Or rejection. When it seemed like a door was slammed shut in your face. Never to be opened again. Maybe you remember not only.

The day that your marriage began. But also the day when it ended. And the divorce was finalized. Maybe you've never been the same. Since the death of a loved one.

[4 : 05] Who has left a hole in the world. That nothing. And no one else. Can quite fill. Maybe you were haunted by a painful memory. Of betrayal.

Or abuse. That continues to shape your sense of who you are. And your relationships with other people. Maybe you look back on a time where. God seemed to be totally absent.

Your prayers seemed to hit a brick wall. People in the church abandoned you. And you lost the faith. And fervor. That you once had.

Now what characterizes. A defining moment. Whether it is glorious. Or shameful. Whether it is joyful. Or painful. Is at least two things.

First. First. It cannot be. Or does not need to be. Repeated. You know. There are all kinds of things. That we do over and over. That are important and necessary.

[5 : 04] For our lives. Waking up. Going to sleep. Eating. Drinking. Going to the bathroom. Washing our hands. Paying. Getting a paycheck. Paying the bills. But these things.

For the most part. Are not. The defining events. Of our lives. Because they happen. Over and over. And they need to happen. Over and over. Because their effects. Don't last very long.

No matter how wonderful. Your dinner was last night. You'll be hungry again. Before the day's out. And simply the memories of it. Will not sustain you. No matter how refreshing.

Your last vacation was. You will likely be tired. And stressed out again. Soon. But defining moments. Don't need to be repeated.

Because their effects. Are both extensive. And enduring. It can't easily be replaced. Or displaced. By something else. Because its effects. Are so wide ranging.

[6 : 00] And comprehensive. We don't need to repeat. The same defining moment. Over and over again. Or perhaps we do all that we can. To avoid. Such an experience. Ever again.

Because its effects. Don't fade away. Over time. Now maybe. Looking at your life. Maybe you find it hard. To identify one defining moment. Above everything else. I would say probably most of us.

Don't live our lives. In light of only one. Defining moment. Defining experience. Most of us are influenced. By a wide range of experiences. Success and failure.

Acceptance and rejection. Joy and pain. Over time. Many of our defining moments. Fade into the past. And new ones arise. In their place. But you know.

If that is the case. If there is no one defining moment. That shapes us. Above all others. That consistently shapes. The rest of our lives. Then we are living.

[6 : 57] In a precarious position. We hope to maintain. Some kind of equilibrium. Some kind of balance. But we have no firm anchor point.

To hold on to. Some days we live in the confidence. Generated by our past successes. Other days we live in. The shame. Of our past failures. And sometimes our life is defined. Simply by.

The present moment. How I'm feeling. Right now. And that seems like. The most defining reality. Of all. Or perhaps in the future. We'll have another defining moment.

That outweighs everything. That we have experienced so far. Now this morning's passage. From the book of Hebrews. Speaks about one defining moment. That more than anything else.

Shapes the whole. Of human history. And this passage summons us. It calls us to anchor our lives. And our stories. In this one defining moment.

[7 : 56] Verse 24. Verse 25. Says this. It says. Jesus Christ did not offer himself. Repeatedly. As a 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. To put away sin.

By the sacrifice of himself. In other words. The cross of Jesus Christ. The sacrificial death. Of the son of God. Is the defining event. Of human history.

It cannot be repeated. It does not need to be repeated. Because its effects are more extensive. And more enduring. Than anything else. Now for some of you.

That statement might sound odd. Really? The death of a man. Who lived 2,000 years ago. Is the most important event. In all of history. But even from a secular perspective.

[8 : 55] The person of Jesus. Has influenced the course of history. Far more. Than one would expect. Jesus never wrote a book. He never ran for political office.

He never had a lot of money. He neither married. Nor fathered children. He refused to lead a military uprising. Though some people wanted him to do that. He never traveled more than 200 miles.

From where he was born. He only gathered a small band of followers. During his lifetime. Most of whom deserted him. When his life ended. By being executed.

By the ruling Roman authorities. And yet. One could argue. That he has influenced subsequent history. More than anyone else. And his influence.

Has not faded away. Over time. It has continued to grow. Just a couple examples. The Bible. Especially the New Testament. Is the best selling book.

[9 : 53] Of all time. They don't even bother putting it on the best seller list anymore. Because it would always be number one. It's been translated. Into more languages. Than any other. In fact.

Hundreds of languages. Have been put into writing. And preserved. Because. Christians. Were committed. To translating the Bible. Into those languages. Communities of Christian believers.

Gather to worship Jesus. In every country of the world. Even where they are persecuted. And oppressed. Our calendar. The fact that we talk about. Living in the year 2014.

It doesn't matter whether you call it. B.C. and A.D. Or B.C.E. And C.E. It's defined by. When Jesus lived. On earth. It hinges.

On the life of Jesus. Many of the ethical principles. That we take for granted. Were first stated. By Jesus himself. For example. The golden rule.

[10 : 51] Do to others. What you would have them do to you. Now many people. Confucius. Buddha. Socrates. Had previously taught. The negative form.

Of that rule. Don't do. What you don't want done to you. What you do not wish for yourself. Do not do to others. But Jesus went further.

Stating positively. Do to others. The good. That you would want them to do to you. Love even your enemies. And do good to those.

Who hate you. Even if you've never read the Bible. Even if you've never considered Jesus. The shape of your life. And the world that you live in. Has been significantly influenced by him.

So if you've never considered Jesus. Let me urge you. Consider this man. Who has shaped the world. In which you live. Every day. In more ways than you probably realize.

[11 : 49] Read through the New Testament gospels. The record of what he actually said and did. Consider who he really was. The Christian claim is this.

That Jesus has influenced history so much. Because he was the one and only. Son of God. And in his death. The central purpose of his life.

Was accomplished. To do for us what we could not do. For ourselves. To offer himself on our behalf. As a sacrifice. For sin. Now of course that raises another question.

What about the idea of sin? Why do Christians talk so much about. Jesus making a sacrifice for sin. Isn't the idea of sin. A manipulative tool. That religious people use.

To make others. Feel guilty. Well the answer is. It depends what you mean. By sin. Many people. And some religious traditions.

[12 : 47] Think of sin. Simply as a list. Of certain behaviors. That we're supposed to avoid. And if you avoid. That list of bad behaviors. You can feel.

Good about yourself. You can feel better. Than all the people who do. And if you indulge. In those bad behaviors. Then you should feel guilty. And if that's how you define sin.

It's possible. To feel. Pretty righteous. At least most of the time. Depending on what you put in the list. But the Bible's description of sin.

Goes far deeper. Than that. In this section of Hebrews. Sin is described. Primarily as. Defilement. Or contamination. We might say. Or pollution.

Of our conscience. Jesus himself. Describes sin. In the same way. In Mark chapter 7. He said. There is nothing. Outside a person. That by going into him.

[13 : 42] Such as the food that we eat. That can defile him. But the things that come out of a person. Are what defile them. He says. For from within. Out of people's hearts. Come evil thoughts.

Sexual immorality. Theft. Murder. Adultery. Coveting. Wickedness. Deceit. Sensuality. Envy.

Slander. Pride. Foolishness. All these evil things. Jesus says. Come from within. And he says. They. Defile. They pollute.

Us. You see. According to Jesus. Sin is not only the bad things. That we do. It is also the good things. That we do. That are motivated by. Things like pride.

And envy. When we do community service. To make ourselves look good. Or so we can include it on our resume. Or so we appear at least as compassionate.

[14 : 39] As the norm. Of others around us. It is also the good things. That we fail to do. When we ought to. When we withhold love and affection.

From our spouse. To make them pay. For something that they. Said or did. That hurt us. Or when we're so consumed. By our. Our schoolwork. For example.

That we're oblivious. To a depressed. Or grieving friend. Who needs our support. We don't even notice it. And we neglect. To do anything about it.

In other words. Sin is our natural. Self-centeredness. Martin Luther. A long time ago. Described sin. As being twisted in upon ourselves. Or curved in. Upon ourselves.

When we become our own reference point. And God. Is pushed out of the center of our lives. Now if we understand sin. In that way.

[15 : 36] In the way that Jesus describes it. In the way that the book of Hebrews describes it. It is no longer possible to feel. Self-righteous. We are polluted. We are contaminated.

We are defiled. In different ways. But we are all polluted by. Our self-centeredness. Our sin. And we are trapped. In it. And we even. In our polluted state.

We get used to our sin. We don't even recognize it. For what it is most of the time. It's sort of like living. Being raised. In Chernobyl. Breathing in nuclear radiation. Every day.

Hardly ever being aware of it. But the God who made the world. The God who made us. And everything in this world. Is not polluted.

By sin. He is absolutely pure. Perfectly holy. And like a searchlight. Piercing into the darkness. Of our hearts.

[16 : 32] His word exposes. Our impurities. His word is like a mirror. That finally enables us. To see ourselves. Clearly. Instead of seeing. Only what we.

Imagine. And project ourselves to be. But then the problem is this. Our impurities. Separate us from. A pure God. And the closer we get to God.

The more that we consider. Ourselves in light of his perfect justice. And his unfailing love. And his uncompromising truth. The more evident our. Impurities.

Become. And we see how great the chasm is. Between polluted people. And a pure God. But the message of the Bible is this.

That the God who is holy and pure. Has made a way for. Spiritually polluted people like us. To be cleansed. And to enter freely into his presence.

[17 : 32] Now from the beginning. The way of cleansing from pollution. Has always involved. The sacrifice. The sacrifice. Of another. You might think. Well why. Why is sacrifice.

Necessary. Well consider the following analogy. It's a simple one. But. A few weeks ago. I decided to make some nachos. Just. Chips. Cheese.

Throw them in the oven. 450 degrees. And then I got distracted. Until. I smelled the smoke. And the residue was stuck on the pan.

So I soaked the pan in hot water. Started scrubbing it. With one of those blue sponges. And gradually. The pan got clean. But the sponge got dirty.

And the more you use a sponge. To clean dishes. The more bacteria it accumulates. It's pretty gross actually. You know. Finally. It just. It stinks.

[18 : 31] And you have to throw it away. And the same principle holds. In spiritual matters. There's no way to clean up a mess. Without getting yourself.

Or someone else dirty. I mean. We even see this in our relationships. Right. There's. There's no way. To help someone. Who's struggling. With an addiction. With a pattern of self-destructive behavior.

Without. Inconveniencing yourself. And without bearing some of the anguish. Of their struggle. Yourself. There's no way to effectively resolve a conflict.

Between two parties. That are at odds with each other. Without bearing some of the weight. Of that broken relationship. On yourself. And not throwing it back on them.

And in the same way. The Bible says. There is no way. For spiritually polluted people. To be cleansed. And brought into God's presence. Apart from someone.

[19 : 28] Bearing the weight. Of our pollution. And in the Old Testament. Animal sacrifices. Were prescribed. To cleanse the people of Israel.

From ritual. And moral pollution. The book of Leviticus. Gives all the specifications. If you ever. Care to read it. Every time. That you forgot.

And broke one. And you broke one of God's laws. Every time that you failed to do. What you ought to do. To care for your neighbor. Every time that you touched something.

Associated with death. And became richly unclean. You had to offer a sacrifice. In order to be cleansed. And so you'd bring an animal. To the tabernacle.

Or the temple. And the priest would kill it. And then the priest would eat it. In the presence of God. Now the symbolism is this. You are polluted.

[20 : 24] You transfer your pollution. To the animal. The animal is killed. And the priest. Representing God. Eats. The pollution. And you go away.

Cleansed. That was the symbolism behind. The sin offerings. In the Old Testament. It was a symbolic way of representing.

The pollution being removed. And taken. By God himself. But the problem is. These offerings had to be made. Over and over again. Every time. That you failed.

But if you read the book of Leviticus. There's one sacrifice. That's different. From all the others. And we read about it. Earlier this morning. Leviticus 16. It happens only once a year.

On a day called. The Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur. The high priest would slaughter a goat. As a sin offering. Not just for one person's sin. Or.

[21 : 23] A few sins of one person. Or one family. But for all the sins. Of the people. And he would take the blood. Of that goat. Into the most holy place.

The place where no one else was allowed to go. At any other time of the year. The place that represented the very. Purest. presence. The place. The place. The place. The place. And then he would take a second goat.

And lay his hands on the goat's head. And he would. Confess over it. All the sins of the people. And send it out into the wilderness. The symbolism was this. On one day of the year. God provided a sacrifice.

To cleanse the people. From their sins. So that their sins would be removed. As far. From them. As the east is from the west. The slate could be wiped clean.

Once. Every year. But the book of Hebrews points out. That has to keep happening. Once. Every year. Year.

[22 : 21] After year. It goes on. And says the same sacrifices. That are continually offered. Over and over. Every year. Can never make polluted people. Perfect.

You see the animal sacrifices. Were never enough. Because an animal. Can never be. A sufficient substitute. For a person. They were only meant to point forward. To something better to come. When God himself.

Would come in the person of Jesus Christ. And take. All of our sin. And guilt. And our pollution. On himself. That's what it says here.

Jesus Christ. The pure son of God. Became a human being. And offered himself. As an atoning sacrifice. To purify us. From all our pollution. By taking it on himself. That's what verse 26 means.

When it says. He has appeared. Once for all. To put away. Sin. By the sacrifice of himself. To remove it. From us. Verse 28 says.

[23 : 22] He was offered once. To bear. The sins. Of many. To bear. The weight. That we cannot remove. From ourselves. And when Jesus died on the cross.

He took our place. The one who is pure. Bled. And died. And he took all our dirt. On himself. He took all our pollution.

So that we could be purified. When we come. To him. And he rose from the grave. Victorious over death. To demonstrate to the world. That his sacrifice was complete. You see.

Unlike every other sacrifice. Unlike every other attempt. That we. Have made. To make up for our sins. To atone for our guilt. It never has to be.

Repeated. Or added to. Or replaced. Because its effects. Will never fade. You see. As a side note. This is why. God became a man.

[24 : 19] And lived on this earth. Only. Once. You know. If God had to come into this world. Over and over. In every generation. Then this would never be.

A truly defining moment. Of human history. His work would never be done. But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Is the defining moment.

Of human history. It marks the end. Of this present age. The fallen. And polluted. And dying state. Of the world. And it marks the beginning. Of God's new creation. That is breaking.

Into this present world. And will one day. Be fully displayed. When Jesus returns. You see. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Is the defining moment.

Of human history. And it is worthy of being. The defining moment. Of each of our lives. You see. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 14] That he made. Surpasses our most brilliant. Personal accomplishments. It restores our relationship with God.

Which outlasts. Our most significant human relationships. It anchors us. Like nothing else. Through times of failure. And rejection.

Through painful losses. And betrayal. Through dark times. When God seems far away. Because those experiences. As difficult as they are. Do not ultimately define us.

Anymore. And most of all. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Prepares us. For the defining moment. That we will all face. In the future. Verse 27 says.

It is appointed for human beings. To die once. It is the one defining moment. In our future. That we can all count on. That will outweigh.

[26 : 11] And displace. All the defining moments. Of our past. When our relationships. Will be cut off. When our accomplishments. And even others. Memory. Of them. Will begin to fade.

When our sensations. Will cease. And our bodies. Will decay. When we die. There will be no second chance. To relive this life. And Hebrews says.

There will be no way. To escape. From the righteous judgment. Of a holy. And pure God. But if we have been cleansed. Purified.

By the sacrifice. Of Jesus Christ. We can face even. Our death. In a whole new way. Jesus Christ died once.

And unlike everyone else. He came back from the dead. Whole. And alive. He faced. God's judgment. And he came.

[27 : 06] Through it. Because he was pure. And he was worthy. And not only that. He endured death. And judgment on behalf. Of us. Of all who will turn to him.

And his sacrifice. Was accepted. That's what his resurrection proves. In the. Temple in Jerusalem.

When the high priest. Entered into that most holy place. Every year. To offer the one sacrifice. On behalf of all the people's sins. To purify them. From that past year.

The people would eagerly wait. For him to come out. And when he appeared. They would rejoice. Because that was a sign. That his sacrifice. Had been accepted by God.

And Jesus' resurrection. From the dead proves. That his sacrifice. Was fully accepted. And we can eagerly await the day.

[28 : 01] When Jesus will return. And he'll appear a second time. To say welcome home. And to usher us into God's presence. Once and for all.

In Jesus Christ. We can face. The future. Whatever comes. We can face even our death. Without fear. Without denial. With confidence and hope.

In him. What's the one defining moment. Of your life. Above all others. May it be. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. For you.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord Jesus we thank you.

For the love that you showed us. And being willing to bear the weight. Of our pollution. Of our sin. Of our self-centeredness.

[29 : 03] Our broken relationship with you. Our broken relationships with one another. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And taking that burden so that we might not bear it alone. So that we might not be crushed by it.

But that you might fully pay that price. We pray that your sacrifice would define us more than anything else. That you would give us humility and love for others in the midst of our successes.

And that you would give us confidence and hope. Even in the midst of failure and loss. Lord that you would be the anchor for our souls.

We pray this in your name. Amen.