

Merciful Saviour, Judge Eternal

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to God's word then. And tonight Bob will be opening up for us this wonderful letter to the Hebrews again, which we look forward to very much.

For now we'll read Hebrews chapter 9, verses 11 to 28. That's on page 1006 in the Blue Visitors Bibles. Hebrews chapter 9.

I'll read from verse 11. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls, and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

[1 : 41] For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established, for a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.

And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood.

And without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. 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.

[3 : 13] 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.

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.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, on page 1006, and we'll have a moment of prayer before we look together at this passage. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. And they said, Were not our hearts burning within us while he walked with us on the road and opened to us the Scriptures?

[4 : 34] And Father, because the Lord is risen, we know that experience is not just something of the distant past. We ask that that same risen Lord, in his spirit now, will come to us, will take my words in all their imperfection, will use them to unfold faithfully the written word.

And so lead us to the Lord Christ, the living word himself, in whose name we pray. Amen. After Easter, always Easter, these are words I once saw in what used to be called the wayside pulpit

outside churches, and it is gloriously true.

I always felt it was very unfortunate the Church of England calls the Sunday after Easter Low Sunday, almost as if nothing had happened. Christ has risen, then we just get back to the ordinary. It's not Low Sunday after Christ has risen. Every Sunday, every first day of the week reminds us that he is risen. I want to go a little bit further than that and say before Easter, anticipating Easter. That seems to me one of the things that the author of Hebrews is emphasizing in this passage and later on, telling us that the people will live before the resurrection just as us will live after the resurrection.

[6 : 08] We're looking forward, as he's going to say in chapter 11, seeing it in the distance. See, at Easter, spring returns, and spring has returned very gloriously today.

We're conscious of time passing and our time passing. Nature is renewed every year. It would be nice to think we were renewed every year and became young again every time spring arrived. We know only too well that's not true. And we're reminded of our own vulnerability and humanity. Indeed, many of the hymns we've sung earlier on tell us that there is no hope that shines fuller and clearer than the one that shines from the empty tomb.

The empty tomb tells us because Christ is risen, we will rise with him. As you know, in the New Testament, Easter is a much bigger thing than that.

Resurrection is a much bigger thing. I want to draw your attention to a verse in Acts 17. You don't need to turn it up. You probably know this verse. Acts 17, 31.

[7 : 13] Paul, speaking to the philosophers in Athens, says this, God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and he has given assurance to everyone by raising him from the dead.

You're probably familiar with that verse. But think about it for a moment. It's a very curious verse, isn't it? Lazarus was raised from the dead. Lazarus is not going to judge the world.

Neither is Jairus' daughter, nor the unnamed young man, the son of a widow of a place called Nain, whom Jesus raised to life. Read about this in Luke 7. You see what Paul is saying and what the author of Hebrews is saying as well.

Resurrection means that the judge has been raised from the dead and therefore, there's an irreversible progress to the new creation. Nothing can stop it.

It's not just that we live our lives and at the end, there is death and then resurrection. Not just even that the world goes on until Christ returns. But since the judge has been raised, there is a future.

[8 : 24] Not just for you and me, but for the whole created order. And my title this evening is Most Merciful Saviour, Judge Eternal.

That comes from Cranmer's prayer book from the burial service. There's a realism there about death, but also robust hope in resurrection. We see what it's telling us.

The judge we meet on the last day is the saviour who gave himself, the priest and victim who died, the great high priest who has gone into heaven.

It will not be some other judge. It will be the one who gave himself for us and for our salvation. And that seems to me the message here, particularly in verses 27 and 28 at the end of the chapter.

Just as appointed for men to die once, 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.

[9 : 32] I'm not imagining anyone will remember this. I preached on this passage just before Christmas as a Christmas sermon. I'm not going to say the same things. You probably won't remember what I said anyway.

I had to look at myself to find out what I had said. But you see, there's an important point here. The great saving events belong together. Christmas and Easter are not so much separate events, but part of a whole great series of saving events by which God came into the world to redeem us and to redeem all creation.

Often used the illustration of an hourglass. All these events pass through this point in time. The death, the resurrection, and through these events in Jerusalem, on these three days, we have a glorious future.

Now, so often in Hebrews, past, present, and future blend together. Most merciful Savior, judge eternal. The judge we meet on the last day will be Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins and for our salvation.

I want to talk about three strands in this passage. Not so much verse by verse. This is like a tapestry where the threads are all woven together. And it seems to me that pulling them out would probably destroy the tapestry.

[10:58] It could be another way of saying I couldn't work out what the passage meant, but I'll do my best. First of all, there is an eternal plan. Carrying on from the previous section, the author has emphasized that the coming of Christ was prepared for long before.

The Old Testament sacrifice is genuinely, organically linked with the sacrifice of Christ, which opened heaven for all believers. That's really emphasized in verses 11 to 15, when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, perhaps the good things that are to come. As I say, it all hangs together anyway. And then in verse 14, through the eternal spirit, he offered himself to God. This was not an accident.

This was not something that just happened. This was planned long ago in eternity. So, you see what's being said in this passage.

This is the eternal plan, which is not just saving souls, but a new creation. If you compare verse 14, what did he come for?

[12:13] To purify our conscience, and then compare that with verse 23. It was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, and the heavenly things themselves by better sacrifices than these.

So, you see, the first purifying is saving us from our sins. The first is salvation from our dead works, which cannot save us.

The second purifying is nothing less than the restoring of creation. creation. Probably related to the casting out of Satan from the heavenly places, which you read about in Revelation 12.

We read that he was overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Probably related to that. The whole universe is to be remade and renewed.

I can't remember exactly where this reference comes, but in one of the science fiction novels of C.S. Lewis, not the Narnia stories, but the science fiction trilogy, for the first time, one of the characters comes across blood.

[13:24] You've never seen blood before. And he says this, was this the substance with which Mal-Eldil, the name for God, redeemed the world? Was this the substance with which he redeemed the world?

Not just redeemed humanity, but redeemed the world. And the resurrection has not only made that possible, it's made it certain. So, the eternal plan involves nothing less than the restoring of creation, and the eternal plan involves the dealing with sin.

Look again at verse 28. So, Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear the second time not to deal with sin, but to save those who are waiting for him.

Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is what prevents the entering in the new Jerusalem. That's what John says in Revelation. Nothing that defiles will ever enter there.

And verse 26, he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. This word put away is a very, very strong word. He's completely eliminated.

[14:39] And it's rather like that great verse in Psalm 103. as far as the east is from the west, so far as he separated our sins from us.

Now, there isn't a geographical point called the east and another geographical point called the west. It means an infinite distance. It's so far gone that you'll never be seen again.

And the resurrection has confirmed this. And the point I've made several times before is that these old sacrifices were real pictures.

The body was really cleansed by the sacrifices. They weren't simply ideas dreamed up by the people of the time.

This was God teaching his people and teaching us that the way into the holy place was by sacrifice. In the end of Genesis chapter 3, the way to the tree of life is barred.

[15:42] It's barred by the cherubim and the flaming sword. Adam and Eve cannot get back to Eden. And that remains barred until the one son who did not fail took the flaming sword of God's judgment for all his brothers and sisters who believe in him.

So it's an eternal plan. The plan that was devised in unthinkable long ages ago when the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, devised the plan of salvation which would redeem humanity who believed and would also restore the universe and remove the curse.

You see, there's not just an eternal plan. Secondly, there is present grace. Look at verse 24. Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands.

Notice once again, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven himself, now to appear in the presence of God. It's this phrase, on our behalf.

He's gone into the presence of God on our behalf. And a couple of things about this. It shows the importance of the ascension. Hebrews particularly emphasizes the doctrine of the ascension.

[17:02] resurrection. He only mentions resurrection once, actually, in chapter 13, in the great doxology, the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep.

But everywhere the ascension is emphasized. Because without the ascension, the work is incomplete. What happened to the body of Jesus after the 40 days?

Where did he go? this is the glory and victory of the ascension as they anticipated in the Old Testament. Psalm 24, lift up your heads, O you gates, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in.

Who is this King of Glory? It's this wonderful psalm which I think rightly throughout the Christian centuries people have applied to the ascension.

See the conqueror, mounts in triumph. See the King in royal state, riding on the clouds, his chariot to the heavenly palace, again, welcomed back and glorified.

[18:07] So the importance of the ascension. What about the practical importance of the ascension? When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within.

There are not a lot of words about sin here, aren't there? Verse 13, defiled. Verse 14, dead works. Verse 15, transgressions.

And of course the words sins and sin in 22, 26 and 27. They make a shudder and so they ought. But upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

That's, he appears in heaven, not just as a sign of his victory, he appears for you and me. Are we crushed with the memory of past sins which the Lord has forgiven long ago but which we cannot forgive ourselves?

Are we struggling with present temptations that make us wonder if we are Christian at all? Are we terrified of future sins which we fear will disqualify us?

[19:22] As I've said before, remember all sins were future when he chose us before the worlds were made. And the resurrection proves that he has the power to forgive.

Paul says in Romans chapter 4, he was given up to death for our sins and raised again for our justification. The raising again, the ascending into heaven means that God has accepted the sacrifice.

And when we struggle with these things, we need to remember that God has pronounced us justified. That's not an excuse to sin, of course.

If we think it's an excuse to sin, then we haven't truly been justified, have we? But surely the point is that when he says this, who can, as Paul says in Romans 8, who shall condemn us?

It is Christ Jesus who died, rather who is risen again. And the assurance that when we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

[20:30] It's in John's letter. And John goes on to say, whatever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all things. See, we don't know all things, do we?

We don't know all things about other people's sin, do we? We don't even know all things about our own sin. When we come in repentance to the risen and ascended Lord, he will forgive us.

Remember, in an earlier chapter, the author had warned against deliberate, blatant disobedience. Now, of course, that will take us away from the Lord. But, if we fall, if we get it wrong, if we lapse and come back to him, he's waiting to receive us.

remember, there is no fall that can ultimately harm the child of God, provided we get up again.

Upward I look and see him there.

We made an end of all my sin. So, there is present grace there, as well as an eternal plan. And, finally, there is future glory.

[21:41] Now, it's not just the Old Testament looks forward. In a very old sense, the New Testament looks forward. Remember how the Bible falls into expectant silence.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus. This event mentioned in verse 28 has not yet happened. So, the resurrection means the judgment will come.

You see, the old sacrifices were provisional, if you like. They pointed forward to the cross. But, just as the cross is able to save those of us who live thousands of years after it, so it is able to save those who live thousands of years before.

By faith, by faith, by faith. And the world will be judged. Interesting to think of how the Bible often talks about judgment.

Psalm 98, glorious passage of the new creation, the rivers clapping their hands, the fields rejoicing. Why are they rejoicing before the Lord?

[22 : 47] And why are they rejoicing before the Lord? For he comes to judge the world. For the cursed and groaning creation, that is a cause for rejoicing.

The Savior will be the judge. It's his judgment which will make way for the new creation. And notice this once again, verse 28.

In so many ways sums up this whole passage. He will appear a second time not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

He will bring full salvation. resurrection. That is to say, and on this resurrection morning, a resurrection evening rather, living forever as physical beings in a physical heaven and earth.

Now remember the whole thrust of the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews is always urging us not to look at the shadows, but at the reality.

[23 : 58] Hebrews is always saying, these old sacrifices, they were real, they were solid, but they were copies. And what's going to come will be even more real and even more solid.

See, the old tabernacle, the old priests, the old sacrifices were real. But we mustn't make the mistake that's so often been made that we are replacing these tangible, outward realities with some kind of airy-fairy intangible reality.

Look around at this beautiful world on a spring evening. The world is full of suffering, of trauma, of evil and despair.

It's also full of beauty. One day that this world is going to look even more beautiful than it does now. A world without the curse, a world without suffering, not an airy-fairy intangible shadow lens.

That is why many people do not look forward to the new heaven and the new earth because they make it boring, frankly. They make it sound as if all it's going to be is singing endless choruses.

[25 : 17] Bad enough doing that for half an hour on earth. Imagine doing it for all eternity. Even the hallelujah chorus will get a bit dull after the first half century.

No, look at what the Bible has to say about the new country. Of course we will praise the Lord God, all of us with beautiful voices.

Of course there will be the equivalent of what we are doing now, but that's only one picture. The other picture is the desert blossoming like the rose, the wolf lying down with the lamb, little child playing in the serpent's den, the holy city in Revelation 21 and 22.

That's what the new creation is going to be like. There is no use, said C.S. Lewis, trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant humans to be purely spiritual creatures.

He likes matter. He made it. And that is so important. The new creation. The grass will be greener, the sky will be more blue, everything will be rejoicing.

[26 : 34] It's anticipation, as I say, the passage I quoted from Psalm 98. You see, the risen Lord is not a spirit. The risen Lord is flesh and blood.

You know what Paul says in Philippians, we await a Savior from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies and make them like his glorious body.

That's why our ancient creeds, like the Apostles Creed, we said together this morning, doesn't say I believe in the immortality of the soul, but I believe in the resurrection of the body.

The immortality of the soul was an idea that plagued the early church, the idea we become disembodied spirits. No, says the Bible, that's not going to happen.

We're going to have a body like his glorious body. We're going to be everything we were made to be. Now, I know when I've said this in various places, some people have thought this was just not spiritual enough.

[27 : 37] They've said, but what about being with Christ and rejoicing in him for himself? But you see, the point is this. He's not, the Bible isn't saying we'll have God plus these other things to supplement the weaknesses in God.

What he's saying is, we will see the Lord in an environment which is perfectly adapted for us to enjoy him. You think of this, even on earth, if you're with your loved ones, when you're with them in

an especially beautiful place, that does add something, don't it?

It does add something to the whole experience of being together. I think that's an illustration of what the new creation will be like. We will be with him, and we will be with him in a world where we can perfectly enjoy him.

So as we finish, just a couple of things. Notice this, to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

You might be feeling, well I'm not eagerly waiting for him actually.

I'm eagerly waiting to get married. I'm eagerly waiting for my new job. I'm eagerly waiting to go to university. All these kinds of things. But you see, this is not primarily feelings.

[28 : 54] This is about the goal to which everything on earth is moving. Not wrong to hope for these other things and to wait for them longing. These are the kind of things that make us human.

It's that beyond these and bringing all the wonders, wonderful things we experience in this world to a true conclusion, will be the new heaven and the new earth.

You see, to see the Lord will fulfill all our deepest longings. We'll be exactly what we were made to be. As the Apostle John says, when we see him, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, who has prepared for those who love you such things as the human heart cannot imagine, help us indeed to lift our eyes to the risen Savior, the advocate in heaven, as we battle with the problems and struggles on earth.

And indeed, realize that it is his grace, the fact that he has risen and ascended and will come again, that will keep us on the journey.

[30 : 11] And now, as we're about to meet around your table, we pray that as you have fed us on Scripture, you will feed us on bread and wine, and that we may rejoice as we see the Lord, in whose name we pray.

Amen.