

James Philip Thanksgiving Service - Dr W J U Philip sermon

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 7 and 9. Jesus, the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office.

But he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Therefore, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

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 : 38] 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.

And so, the apostle continues in Hebrews 13, verse 6, so we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What can man do to me? Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and follow their faith.

Jesus Christ is the same. Yesterday, today, and forever. Not long after he had his first stroke in 1998, a Christian publisher wrote to my father asking him if he would write a chapter in a book they were doing about coping with illness.

Why don't you do that, I said. I think you'd do it very well. No, he said. When I asked him why, he just quietly said this. I don't want to speak about myself.

[3 : 17] I only want to speak and write about Jesus Christ. And a true Christian leader is one who leads all who follow him not to himself, but to one place alone, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

James Phillips spoke the word of God to many, many of us here in this building today. And therefore, we will honor him if we follow him now and turn our minds to that one place to consider this Jesus Christ.

The same. Yesterday, today, and forever. That verse, of course, is often taken just in isolation and even by itself. It is a wonderful, wonderful verse, isn't it?

Especially at a time like this. God buries his workmen, but his work goes on. And the God of our fathers is our God too. Yesterday, today, and forever.

But there's so much more to this verse than that. In many ways, it's a verse that sums up the whole of the message of this letter to the Hebrews. And the key is in that last word, forever. It's one of the great words of this epistle.

[4 : 28] And it speaks of completeness, of the absolute finality of what God has done once and for all in the coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And so the emphasis is not so much that Jesus himself is unchanging, although of course that is wonderfully true. But it's that in his coming and through his work, he himself has changed everything.

Everything about this world. It's time, it's history, and it's eternity. And he's changed it forever. If I may quote James Denny, whose name you may possibly have heard of, in the death of Jesus Christ, he says, God has spoken the last word.

He has nothing in reserve. The foundation has been laid of the kingdom which can never be removed. It is this conception of absoluteness, of finality in everything Christian which dominates this book of Hebrews.

You remember how the letter begins, long ago, at 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, through whom he created the world.

[5 : 52] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

That is the Jesus that my Father's faith leads us to. Not a mere prophet among many. Not a Jesus who is a mere example or teacher. But to the one who is himself God's ultimate word of self-revelation to mankind forever.

And that revelation is intimately bound up in God's ultimate work of salvation for man forever.

Hebrews 1 goes on, He who upholds the universe by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

And that's what this letter is about. Finality. The uniqueness and finality of what God has made known in Jesus Christ and what God has done in Jesus Christ to deal with the guilt and the sin and the death itself that afflicts this our world forever.

And that, friends, is the message of the Gospel. And what a wonderful message it is in our world of uncertainty and turmoil and fear and death. There is nothing greater to be revealed by God.

[7 : 24] There is nothing more we need in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. We have it all. Jesus Christ and his salvation is all that we will ever need yesterday, today, and forever.

And perhaps the message of the Christian Gospel is nowhere better encapsulated than in these words that Nigel read from Hebrews chapter 9 which speak of these three great appearances of Jesus Christ our great High Priest.

His work in us in the past and in the present and in the future. His work that guarantees we might say our own yesterday and today and forever.

Let me remind you of what he says about this great and wonderful work of Christ's salvation. First, it is a work that is complete forever. And therefore it guarantees us absolute and total peace with God for all that is past.

Verse 26, he has appeared once and for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. That is why Jesus Christ came.

[8 : 36] And that's the heart of the Christian Gospel. Jesus came not to give us an example of goodness to follow. Not to be a great moral teacher that we should honour and respect.

Although, of course, today none or few honour and respect his morality. Not to just be the one who gives us some divine light. Not even to be one who just by identifying with us in his incarnation shares in our pain and griefs and woes.

No! All of these things are true, of course. But none of these things can ever give us what we really need. The true peace of a cleansed conscience.

No amount of moral effort. No amount of religious observance. No amount of devotion or sacrifice or penance or anything else at all can ever bring us real peace.

Can ever truly cleanse the human heart. And deep down we all know that, don't we? The if only I had never done that.

[9 : 41] Or the many, many if only I had done that. Those things that plague our minds. Of course, we willfully suppress these thoughts, don't we?

But sometimes, perhaps in the dark and the quiet of night time, perhaps in facing up to a real grief, sometimes we are confronted with reality.

The dis-ease, the foreboding that arises from a conscience that cannot be cleansed by anything in this world. Like the despairing cry of Lady Macbeth, out, out, damned spot.

What, will these hands never be clean? The answer, of course, is no. All the perfumes of Arabia will never sweeten this little hand.

And all the religion in the world, all the priests, all the sacrifices on earth cannot take away sin. All they can do, says the apostle, is constantly to remind us of our sin, of the great stain, and of our absolute helplessness to do anything about it.

[10 : 51] But, he says, Jesus Christ appeared once and for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And it's the atonement, the putting away of sin that explains the incarnation, the coming into our world of God the Son. To quote Denny again, in his action, he does something for us which we could never have done for ourselves, and which does not need to ever be done again.

He achieves something which we can look to as a finished work, and in which we can find the basis of a sure confidence towards God. And that is what makes the message of Jesus Christ good news, a gospel.

He has put away sin once and for all by the sacrifice of himself. And that guarantees us total peace with God forever.

That means, friends, that if you are Christ's, then nothing you have done, no spot or stain, nothing, however terrible it may be, nothing can ever bring back the guilt of your sin.

[12 : 07] it is a work that is finished, complete forever. But that's not all, although it is a finished work.

Secondly, he tells us it is a work whose efficacy is continuous forever, and therefore it guarantees us the transforming power of God for our present lives, now and forever.

Verse 24, Christ has entered into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. You see, there's nothing remote or merely forensic about this gospel of Christ.

He is our ever-present personal Savior, our great high priest, our advocate who constantly draws us into the very presence of our heavenly Father through the power of his risen life.

We read in Hebrews 7, Jesus is a priest forever and therefore he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him. Why?

[13 : 11] For he ever lives to make intercession for them. The Christ who was our substitute in death is also our substitute in life.

He appears in the presence of God on our behalf. That is, when we draw near to the Father through him, it's no longer our tainted lives that he sees anymore.

It is Christ's perfect life. For our life is united to him forever. And that's what guarantees our fellowship with him today and tomorrow and forever.

I know that while in heaven he stands, no power can force me to depart. And that's so precious. Not even the power of my own folly and stupidity and sin.

Not today, not tomorrow, not ever. Behold him there, the risen lamb, my perfect spotless righteousness.

[14 : 15] My life is hid with Christ on high, with Christ my Savior and my God. It's no longer I and my life, but Christ and the power of his risen life that pleads my position in the Father's house.

But there's more even than that about this position that we have in Christ. There is also in the gospel the possession of that life in our life now. It's not just that we are in Christ, hidden with Christ in God.

It's that he is in us. Christ is in you, says Paul, the hope of glory. And just as Jesus ascended bodily into heaven, now to appear for us in the presence of God, so he has sent his spirit into our hearts now to unite us so that we truly are his forever.

And so Paul can cry out, it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And that's what it means to be a Christian believer.

How my father used to love to preach on these words, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Listen to him explain better than I could ever do, the true glory of what that means.

[15 : 33] It means, he said, that he who created the rugged grandeur of the everlasting hills may indwell a human heart to impart a similar moral rugged grandeur.

He who brought into being the beauty and the fragrance of the rose may come to lives stained and marred by sin and transform them with a similar moral and spiritual grace.

he who holds the universe in being by the word of his power may make men's hearts his dwelling place. And can it be that he will not be able to keep those hearts in order?

The transforming power of God for our present lives because of the continuing efficacy of the finished work of Christ forever. The ancient 6th century hymn grasped the magnitude of it.

His the nails, the spears, the spitting, reed and vinegar and gall. From his patient body pierced blood and water streaming fall, earth and sea and stars and mankind by that stream are cleansed all.

[16 : 48] And, said my father, he who has accomplished and will accomplish the total reconciliation of all things in the universe, will scarcely be stretched by the task of clearing up these lesser

disorders of our own little personal world.

The warring instincts within us, the hopes and fears and dreads, the petty animosities that corrode our spirits, the bitterness, the grudges, the secret pride and vanity, the envies, the jealousies, the ambitions, all that creates disorder within us.

Oh, the glory of it. And the indescribable astounding hope that it holds out. Do you see? He appears now for us and in us with power forever.

And friends, therein is the power of the gospel. Life-changing power to touch the deepest springs of our beings, you and me, and to transform them and to heal them.

Even those parts of us that are most grotesquely misshapen and crippled by sin, the hidden corners and the tainted parts of our personalities, to transform them and make them every day, little by little, more and more truly human, more and more into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[18:17] Christ. And even that's not all that this gospel implies. But thirdly, it is a work that promises consummation forever.

And therefore, it guarantees the triumphant purpose of God for the future. Verse 27 and 28, 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.

Our world lives in fear, especially in these days. Fear of the future, fear of the unknown, fear of death.

But for those who are in Christ, all such fears are banished. Forever. Even death itself has no sting left because He has released us from the fear of death and above all from the fear of judgment.

I know that today that whole idea of judgment is so foreign to our modern ears, but the Bible takes it absolutely for granted and it tells us to take it very seriously.

[19:35] It is appointed for man to die once and then comes judgment. But do you see what a wonderful comfort and peace there is for those who have thrown everything onto Jesus Christ our Lord.

The day of judgment has become, he says, the day of salvation. Christ will appear a second time not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

Someone said to me just this week, an abiding memory of theirs of my father was of him standing in this pulpit, mouthing the words of the prophet Isaiah eye with feeling and emotion as though they were his own.

He will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away every tear from all faces and it will be said on that day, behold, this is our God.

We have waited for Him that He might save us. We have waited for Him. Let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation. that great consummation is the purpose of God for this universe and it is guaranteed triumphantly and forever in the once and for all finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[20:55] There is a future for those who eagerly await for His coming. There is, wrote my father, a minor note in the music of the Christian life.

But this minor movement is not the final movement of the divine symphony. But it leads on to a glorious consummation whose crashing chords and sonorous harmonies remove all tensions and answer all questions.

As Paul put it elsewhere, light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

He will appear a second time not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him and to usher in the glory of the kingdom which shall be forever.

That is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and great indeed it is. And friends, that is the message that my father lived and proclaimed.

[22:11] It's the message that made him the man that he was and made this defunct hopeless church the church of the living God that it became. Some of you I know heard him preach it many times and it rejoices your heart today as much as ever it did.

But some of you here may have never heard that message before. And some of you, some of you perhaps having heard it in days gone by, have slipped away from serving the Christ that you once loved.

You've lost your first love and you know that that's true. And so I would say to all, all of us here today, what my father would say to you and he would say it pleadingly with eyes full of love and full

of compassion.

Don't hold back from this Jesus Christ. Don't let this opportunity, even today, pass you by. Give him and keep on giving him the unreserved submission of your heart.

and you will find the joy of Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. The joy that he looked for and eagerly awaited and has now himself entered into through the mighty gates flung open forever by our Lord Jesus Christ who alone is the King of glory.

[23 : 47] and one day you also will share in that joy with him. Remember your leaders who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life. Whose faith follow? Follow. Amen.

And to God be the glory.