

BUT WHEN CHRIST APPEARED (Hebrews 9:1-14)

About four weeks ago I went to a chiropractor for the first time in a long time. They took a series of x-rays of my spine. When I saw my white spine in that x-ray, it looked to me rather like the leaning tower of Pisa. My spine curves in a direction it ought not to curve. It is a wonder to me that I don't fall down when I try to put on a pair of pants. Being the conservative man that I am, however, I take solace in the fact that I lean to the right.

I have had adjustments twice a week for the last several weeks. On Monday, they are going to give me a progress report, so to speak. I am going to learn how I am doing. I know that at some point they are going to take some more x-rays. I am not quite sure if they are going to do that tomorrow or later on, but it makes sense to compare old x-rays with new ones to see whether things are getting better.

We are all familiar with before and after photos. We see such things on commercials and infomercials. We see photos of men and women before they started that diet plan or began taking that diet pill, and then we see photos of those same people some weeks later. They have lost 30-lbs, 40-lbs, 50-lbs. The change is dramatic.

So it is with some body building device or machine that is being advertised. We see the before picture of a 99-lb weakling who in the after picture has been transformed into Greek god with bulging muscles and a chiseled physique.

You have seen those home makeover shows on TV. They show you the before footage of a rather dated, drab, and cluttered room that becomes by the end of the show a classy, attractive part of the house. The unimpressive before gives way to a stunning after.

The key portion of today's text is the first four words of Hebrews 9:11, "But when Christ appeared." The 10 verses of chapter 9 that precede those words constitute **the before** picture of the Jewish religion. The four verses that follow those words comprise **the after** of Christian redemption. We are going to examine what Christ accomplished when Christ appeared. Let's begin by reading our text—Hebrews 9:1-14.

But When Christ Appeared He Made the Limited Unlimited

In these first 14 verses of Hebrews 9, the author contrasts the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. Last week we referred to those two covenants as the Old Deal and the New Deal. The first ten verses of this passage are exclusively concerned with the Old Deal. The author focuses upon a place that he calls in v. 1 "an earthly place of holiness." He is referring to the tabernacle that existed before Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem.

The tabernacle was a tent that consisted of two sections separated by a thick curtain. The first section was called the Holy Place. Only priests could enter there, and the second section was known as the Most Holy Place in which only one priest could enter and on only one day of the year—the Day of Atonement.

In the first five verses of the chapter, the author details some of the items that could be found in the tabernacle. We believe that all of these things pointed to Christ. In the larger portion of the tabernacle known as the Holy Place, you could find a lampstand and a table holding the Bread of the Presence. The lampstand was a large candelabra with three branches on each side. It would hold seven candles with a reservoir of oil for each candle. The priests were to keep the candles lit continually not letting any go out.

This reminds the Christian that Jesus is the Light of the World, and He wishes to shine His light through us. In fact, He told us not to hide our light. We teach children the song, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine . . . Don’t let Satan snuff it out. No. I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.”

There were 12 circular, flat loaves of bread that adorned a table. There was one to represent each of the 12 tribes. The bread was replaced every Sabbath. The priests were allowed to eat the old bread once it was replaced with the new.

Jesus said of Himself that He is the bread of life. He is the bread that has come down out of heaven. He gives life to all who receive Him. Whoever feeds on Him will live forever.

Then, in the Most Holy Place, the most sacred piece of furniture was the Ark of the Covenant. It was like a small hope chest for the nation. Inside it were three items: there was a small urn holding manna. Manna was a sweet bread that fell from heaven every morning to feed God’s people during the 40-years they were in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land. Again, Jesus is the bread from heaven. Over and over in John 6, Jesus refers to Himself as “the bread that came down from heaven.”

In that ark there was also Aaron’s staff, a staff that had budded after it had been separated from the tree. You can read the story in Numbers 16 and 17. It is a dramatic story of confrontation. As often happens in large groups, there was a contingent of people who opposed the leader, in this case Moses. They wanted to know who died and made Moses King. “Why should we do what you say? Maybe we have our own ideas as to how to approach God. And why should your brother Aaron be our priest? What’s so special about him?”

I won’t tell the whole story. I encourage you to read it for yourself, but in Numbers 17, Moses instructs all the people to provide a staff from each tribe with the name of the tribe inscribed on the staff along with the name of a leader from that tribe. Aaron’s name from the tribe of Levi was inscribed on one of those 12 staffs. Each staff was placed in the tabernacle. The next day, Moses went into the tabernacle. He discovered that Aaron’s staff alone had budded. God caused a dead stick to blossom. It was clear that God had chosen Aaron to be the High Priest. That blossoming stick with Aaron’s name on it was put into the Ark of the Covenant. It was confirmation that we approach God in the way He prescribes. We don’t get to choose our own way of coming to God. We come to God His way or we don’t come at all.

The NT teaches that Jesus died on a cross. His body was placed in a tomb. Three days later, that dead stick blossomed. He came to life. We come to God through Him.

The last item placed in the Ark were two stone tablets. It was upon those tablets that the finger of God had inscribed the Ten Commandments. God had clearly told the people

how they were to live their lives.

- The tablets were placed in the Ark.
- The Ark was placed in the tabernacle.
- The tabernacle was placed in the center of the Jewish camp.

Whenever the people moved from one place in the desert to another, the tabernacle would be erected in the center of the camp. God's word was to be the centerpiece, and it was to govern the conduct of God's people.

Jesus is the Word. He is the only One who has fully obeyed God's commandments. Now, we look to Him and to His Word to govern our conduct.

The worship of God's people in the Old Deal was beautifully arranged, but it had a glaring problem. It was far too limited. The only ones who were allowed into the Holy Place were priests. The people were kept away from the tabernacle. They had to stay on the outside. Of the priests, there was only one who could enter the Most Holy Place, and he could only do that one day out of the entire year. The Old Deal was severely limited.

But when Christ appeared, all that changed. The doors were thrown open wide. The curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple was torn from top to bottom. Access to God was made available to all. You don't have to go to a building to meet with God. You don't have to go through a person to confess your sin and get forgiveness. You can go directly to God wherever you are.

We read in Revelation that there are 12 gates to heaven. There is an angel stationed at each gate. Each gate is guarded so that nothing impure nor anyone unclean will enter it. While the gates are guarded, we are also told that all the gates are open, and they will never be shut.

There is open access to heaven through Jesus. The Old Deal offered limited access, but the New Deal grants unlimited access. The only limit is that you must go through Jesus and Jesus alone.

But When Christ Appeared He Made the Temporary Eternal

Compare vv. 8-9a with v. 12. In his commentary on Hebrews, F.F. Bruce, a great Scottish, biblical scholar wrote that the first 10 verses of chapter 9 deal with "Temporary Ritual" while vv. 11-14 are all about "Eternal Redemption."

In the Old Deal, there was no end to the sacrifices that had to be made, but those sacrifices didn't really atone for sin. What they did is that they pointed forward to one sacrifice yet to be made that would bring eternal redemption. They pointed forward to Jesus' death on the cross.

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We read in Hebrews 5:9 that Jesus was "the source of eternal salvation." There was nothing temporary about what Jesus did.

Much of what we do, however, is temporary. We engage in stop-gap measures. This happens in government all the time. Congress has the responsibility of passing a federal budget every year. Years can go by without them actually doing what they are obligated

to do. Instead, they pass continuing resolutions to keep government going. Then, every so often, the government is about to run out of money; so, congress has to raise the debt limit to allow the government to borrow money to do things that we can't pay for. I heard the other day that we had to borrow money from China to buy arms to give to Ukraine.

It seems we never get around to solving our problems like the debt crisis. Instead, we just kick the can down the road hoping somebody else at some other time will have the courage and resolve that we lack to come up with permanent solutions. In the meantime, we specialize in temporary fixes. Instead of building new roads, we will wait until enough people complain, and we will just keep filling in pot-holes.

The Old Deal was full of types and shadows, but Jesus is the real deal. He didn't come to put a band-aid on our sin problem. He died to solve it forever. He brought about eternal redemption.

But When Christ Appeared He Made the Inadequate Adequate

The Old Deal was limited, temporary, and inadequate. It was limited in terms of access. It was temporary in regard to time. Finally, it was inadequate in that it didn't bring about forgiveness for all of our sin, only some of them. Look at v. 7. When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkled blood on the Mercy Seat, that sacrifice was only good for the unintentional sins of the people. The Jews drew a distinction between intentional and unintentional sins.

An intentional sin is one you do while knowing full well that what you are doing is wrong. That is outright rebellion. I would venture to say that most of our sin is intentional. We aren't usually tricked into sinning. We don't accidentally fall into sin. We most often jump in with both feet. Afterward, if we are real believers and haven't allowed our consciences to be seared, we feel badly. We experience true guilt. We say, "Why did I do that? I knew I shouldn't, but I did it anyway."

Paul knew the reality of this struggle. Listen to how the NLT renders Romans 7:18-21 and then vv. 24-25:

¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. ²⁰ But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong

. . . ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So, you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

In regard to intentional sin, the Jews talked about sinning against God with a high hand. We read in Numbers 15:30,

“But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people.”

In the previous verses of Numbers 15, the Jews are told about the sacrifices to make if they sin unintentionally. An unintentional sin is one done out of ignorance. It is when you do something wrong without realizing it is wrong.

Atonement in the Old Deal was inadequate. It didn't deal with all sin, just some sin. That created a real problem. Look at the latter part of v. 9 through v. 10. In the Old Deal, people were left with guilty consciences. That is why David cried out as he did in Psalm 51. Look at the inscription of Psalm 51 and vv. 1-4 and v. 7. He threw himself upon the mercy of God. That was his only hope. Look also at vv. 16-17. He knew that animal sacrifices wouldn't cut it. All he could offer God was a broken heart, and he believed that is what God was looking for from guilty sinners such as himself.

What about the sacrifice Jesus made? What sin did His atonement cover? Look at the contrast in vv. 13-14 of our text in Hebrews 9. In the NT, there is no distinction between this sin and that sin. In the NT, sin is sin, and all sin is deadly. We are told in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death.” Our hope lies in the second half of that verse, “But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” One of my favorite verses is Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The next verse tells us that we have been “set free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

The author of Hebrews goes on in chapter 10 to show how Christ has overcome the inadequacy of the Old Deal. Look at 10:1-4, 11-12. Jesus sat down because His work was done.

One of the great hymns of our faith is “Hallelujah, What a Savior!” It appears in our hymnal as hymn #175. Verse four would have to be my favorite verse of that hymn:

Lifted up was He to die
“It is finished!” was His cry
Now in heaven lifted high
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

What a Savior, indeed! His atoning death was thoroughly unlimited, gloriously eternal, and completely adequate. His sacrifice was enough. All of the happened because Christ appeared.

We have been talking about before and after. We have looked at what things were like before Christ came. Then, because of what He was able to accomplish when He came, we know what is possible for us who live on the other side of His coming.

Let's make this personal. If you claim to be a believer and follower of Jesus, picture in your mind what a before and after photo of your heart would like. What were you like before Jesus came into your life? What are you now after you have been walking with Jesus for years and even decades? Can you tell a difference? Can others tell a difference?

His name was Woody. He and his wife Vera lived behind the church I pastored on Monkey Island. Vera came to church every Sunday. Woody hardly ever darkened the door of the church building. Many pastors and revival preachers had tried to win Woody

to Christ through the years. I tried too, but like them, I didn't get very far. Woody said when he was ready, he would make that decision. Woody was in his 80's.

I was fearful that Woody would die without every making a decision for Christ. In my mind, I believed that you don't come to Christ when you are ready. You come to Christ when He calls you. I still believe that.

In His great grace, one day God called out to Woody, and Woody trusted Christ. He did so without the help of a preacher or an evangelist.

He came forward one Sunday at the end of a worship service. I had the privilege of baptizing Woody, the octogenarian, the same Sunday that I baptized a boy who was about 10.

Some weeks later, Vera told me about the change she had seen in Woody. He read His Bible. He was interested in the things of God. He had experienced a true change from the inside out. There was dramatic difference between the before and after photos of Woody's heart.

What about you? Are you different from who you used to be because of the work of Jesus in your life?

When we talk to others about the Lord, we often ask them the question, "Are you going to go to heaven when you die?" I have come to believe that is not the best question to ask. People typically reply, "I think so. Maybe so. I hope so." It is hard for people to answer a hypothetical question.

I think a better question to ask is, "Are you a Jesus follower?" That is a simple question that can be answered with a "yes" or "no." If the person follows Jesus, they will go to heaven. If they don't follow Jesus, they won't.

Let me ask you, "Are you a Jesus follower?" If you are, you are different from who you used to be. Your before and after pictures are incredibly different. They are different because Christ appeared.

I have some more good news. Christ is going to appear again, and because He is coming back, you will have another set of before and after pictures. Your after Jesus comes back picture is going to be so much better than your before Jesus comes back picture.

Jesus appeared 2,000 years ago, and praise God, He's coming back again. Are you ready?