

# Redemption Applied

Hebrews 9:23-28

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My name is P.D. Mayfield, and I am assistant pastor here—associate pastor of discipleship and congregational care. And it's a privilege to serve in that role, particularly with community groups, but also just in the care of those here at Columbia Presbyterian Church. Those that we minister to here and through into Columbia and the region, just as we get to participate in God's redemption. And the beauty of where we have been in the Book of Hebrews—we are focusing on the ministry of Jesus. And what the church does now is in response and is empowered by his ministry of where he is even today. So if you have your Bible with you today, please turn to Hebrews 9:23-28.

Last week Pastor Randy spoke about redemption accomplished, and this week I will begin talking about redemption applied. These two sermon titles are based off the one book title by John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. And it's a book I highly recommend if you've never read it. It's a little book. It packs a punch. I first read it when I was in college, a young Christian growing in my faith, exploring and studying the Bible for the first time for myself and exploring all the beautiful riches of God's grace in his salvation through Jesus. And that book was very impactful in my walk as a young Christian. And the beauty of what's found in that book comes from Scripture—passages like what we'll look at today. Please read with me in your own head, follow along as I read out loud. We can do that sometimes, but today we won't. A reading from Hebrews 9:23-28.

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. 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. [ESV]

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

God our Father, we rejoice at the reading and hearing of your Word, particularly this passage, knowing that our Savior stands in victory. And we give you all the praise and all the glory. And we ask you by your Spirit to give us understanding from your word. Help us to apply it to our lives—our day-to-day, moment-by-moment opportunities of claiming Christ, professing him with our mouth, living with him by faith, that we are abiding in our union with him. Nourish us by your Word, and later as we partake of your supper. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

The office of the president of the United States is determined by a process. First a person declares that they intend to run as a candidate. Then there is this long, protracted journey, and each passing election cycle it seems like that road gets longer—with speeches and interviews, commercials and counter-commercials, and traveling the country in order to meet with various groups of people. And in addition to that, in our day and age of technology, then comes the hours and hours of commentary associated with the life, the character, the suitability of each candidate. That's just the beginning. And

after the process then culminates with political parties nominating their candidate, next comes Election Day. And when the results are counted and presented fairly quickly these days, the winner is announced. And we declare that, yes, this person is going to be the next president of the United States. But that person does not officially begin to take the office until 12:00 p.m. on January 20<sup>th</sup>. After all the run-up, our imaginations associate the work of the president with the location of his residence or hers, in the future, perhaps. And that location is the White House. Everything that came before was necessary and important, but each component of the process is on a trajectory that has a chain of events. These necessary reactions that are linked together, where we see it moving to a singular purpose. The executive branch of our government functioning and working and taking action in office.

Now, I don't use that as an example to conflate what's happening here in the Book of Hebrews. But certainly it's an example of comparison. Because today's passage connects the work of Jesus' atoning sacrifice with his present location in heaven itself, where he is in the presence of the living God. It is there that Jesus presents what he performed on the cross. In heaven, Jesus is presenting what he has performed. And that being the atonement of our sins. And it's because Jesus has entered into heaven itself, his atoning sacrifice applies all the benefits of his redemption to those who believe. He is accomplishing redemption, and he is applying redemption. In the passage we're going to look at today, we're going to look at the facets of this part of his salvation that is interconnecting with his ascension and our anticipation.

You see, Jesus entering into heaven itself is called his ascension. Though the word is not mentioned in this particular passage, the author of Hebrews writes more about the ascension of Jesus and its consequences than any other part of the New Testament. We need to take notice of that. The Book of Hebrews speaks about Jesus's ascension more than any other place. Verse 24 says that "Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself." Now, how did he enter there unless he had ascended? Now, I don't claim to understand the metaphysics of this. And the Bible doesn't seem to be that interested in telling us those details of those mysteries. But the word used for "ascend" is pretty much an insignificant word that just means a going up, in an upward direction, an upward motion. And as an event, we know that Jesus' ascension occurred at Pentecost, which was 40 days after his resurrection. Luke's gospel ends by briefly describing Jesus's ascension where he says that he was parting from them and being carried up into heaven. Later on, Luke goes into more detail in the Book of Acts 1:6-11, where he describes it like this:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Jesus himself refers to his ascension all the way back in John 3 when he's talking to Nicodemus. He says, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." [John 3:12-13] Later on, John again talks about Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling. They were taking offense at what he had just said prior about Jesus saying "I am the bread of life." And Jesus says, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" [John 6:61-62]

Going from the lesser to the greater. If they can't understand the spiritual realities and the heavenly realities of Jesus offering himself, being the very bread of the living God offered to his people, how can they begin to fathom his ascension? Now, that was all before the ascension. We have John giving the account to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. In John 20, he tells Mary, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" [John 20:17]. And of course there are many other places where Jesus talks about going away, returning to his Father.

Why do I say this? Why do I go down this path? Well, it's because the biblical writers demonstrate that Jesus referred to his own ascension, and they accepted it as an actual event. And just like Jesus's physical resurrection, Jesus's disciples would later go on and bear witness to Jesus's physical ascension. Now, if we're getting into redemption applied, what does his ascension into heaven actually do? Verse 24 says that Jesus appears in the presence of God on our behalf.

This is the focal point of his saving work. All the way from his incarnation, the Son of God becoming man, fully God, fully human, taking on flesh and dwelling amongst his people, he lives a perfect life and goes on to die on the cross. Not only to die, but he goes on to be raised from the grave. Jesus appears in the presence of God as our high priest, offering himself and making intercession for us. We need the cross. The cross is utmost of importance. But it's not until Jesus ascends into the presence of the living God that it actually makes that validated and ratified and actually brought into a way that the living God then accepts the sacrifice—the sacrifice done and performed and accomplished, and then presented.

Verse 25 and 26 recalls again the differences between the repeated sacrifices of the Levitical priests and Jesus's one-time sacrifice. His was a better sacrifice that more perfectly purified the heavenly things. Now, that speaks to verse 23 a little bit where it talks about how so much more does the sacrifice of Jesus have to be better to purify the heavenly realities, if the blood of the atonement, the blood of the sacrifices of the Levitical priests, was purifying the material, physical sanctuary on earth which were copies and shadows. Now, this doesn't imply that the heavenly sanctuary needs to be purified as if it's polluted with sin or needs to be cleansed. But rather, it's just showcasing how Jesus is a more excellent and more effective sacrifice, which was needed to be made in order to bring God's people into God's presence. Not so that God can dwell in the sanctuary of the Holy of holies, veiled by the mercy seat and the incense and the veil—but rather, that in our union with Christ, we are now in the presence of the living God as we share in the life of Christ. This mystical union that we have with Jesus.

Verse 26 stresses other things. It shows that Jesus has appeared once. It is a single, unique occurrence that does not repeat. Likewise, Jesus appears at the end of the ages. He doesn't just show up at the right time of the fulfillment of all things with perfect timing, as if he just—now is the time and now he's supposed to show up. No, he shows up, and by doing that it actually makes it the time of fulfillment. And what is this time of fulfillment? Of course, it's where Jesus appears to put away sin. His sacrifice sets it aside. It removes sin. Think about that. There is certainly forgiveness. But think about the next step. It's removed. Sin is no longer part of the equation, as Jesus has ascended and is in the presence of God.

So again I ask, why is Jesus's ascension so significant? Well, if Jesus's resurrection vindicated him from his death, then Jesus's ascension validated what the cross began. One author put it this way:

The work of atonement was not completed until something had been done in heaven that ratified what has been done on the cross. At the point the sacrifice is completed and Christ has no need to enter heaven to offer himself again and again, as the Jewish high priest did on his annual visit, the act of sacrifice and the offering of sacrifice are thus theoretically indistinguishable. But they form a unity, and neither is effective without the other.

Did you catch that? The work of Christ on the cross is in unity with his work of his ascension in the presence of God, as he enters the Holy of holy, and he is in his resurrected form, he is a sacrifice that is

once and for all. He offers himself sinless on our behalf, who are full of sin. And he sets it aside. He removes it.

And so these benefits of our salvation in Christ are many. But just briefly discussing five of them, we see the differing aspects of the one salvation accomplished by the work of Jesus Christ and how it's then applied to those who are new creations in Christ. And that's where we'll begin. The benefit of salvation even begins there with regeneration, and how it deals with how a dead sinner comes alive. How a dead sinner, who is made alive, comes to the living God—being reborn from the Spirit. And in our justification, it deals with how a guilty sinner comes to a holy God. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift. And once we're justified, we experience adoption as sons and daughters. We are declared righteous by the work of Christ, and then we are welcomed into the family of God, going from a guilty sinner to being a loved sinner, where we can cry, "Abba, Father," because we have received adoption by the Spirit.

And in this family relationship that we have with the living God, we go on to experience the work of God's grace in our life where he continues to grow us as he sanctifies us. And we're in a place as a saved sinner where we take on the features of that family. We begin to take on the accent of his speech. We take on the mannerisms of his gestures. We take on the words of his speech. We take on the actions of his life. In those ways that we are growing in Christ and imitating him, we become more like him. This fruit of the Spirit leads us to further sanctification, until the time when we can experience that time of future glory when we go from being dead sinners and guilty sinners to alive and free and loved and adopted and made holy. We come to a place where we experience perfect communion with God as we experience complete joy, complete knowledge, and complete peace in his presence. There is a future experience of that to come.

All aspects of God's salvation is by the free grace given by Jesus, received by faith and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had to ascend, he says, because until he did, the Holy Spirit would not come. The process of his salvation continues in the work of the Spirit and the life of the believer and in the life of his church. And again I ask, why then is Jesus's ascension so significant? Because if it was not so, you and I would not possess any of these things. Praise God that we do. Praise God that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, that he was a Messiah that was a suffering servant, that though he was not a transgressor, he took on the transgressions of the people and set sin aside. Praise God that he is not just a dead martyr, decaying in a tomb. But no, Jesus raised from the grave. And praise God that he was with his disciples for 40 days, teaching them and instructing them about what they were to do as witnesses—what was to be the mission of the church, how the church was to embody and appropriate our identity in Christ. This is what he did in his last days, and then he left. And he left so he could send the Spirit. The Spirit is the one who applies what Christ accomplishes in his atonement. The Spirit applies these benefits of God's grace.

And so as we move towards the end and as we begin to soon partake of the Lord's Supper, we again direct how the ascension then informs our participation of his return. This is verse 27 and 28. How the author of Hebrews is further connecting the flow of God's redemption through Jesus. And he is now putting in view these things that have not yet come to pass, which we see in Jesus' return. Just as the man or the two men speaking to the disciples saying, "Just as Jesus was taken up, he will return again." And the author of Hebrews references that judgment comes at this time. And that's certainly the case, but that's not his main focal point in this passage. He's certainly acknowledging it, but the author of Hebrews is focusing on the occasion for Jesus' return. It's not to deal with sin anymore. That's already been dealt with.

He returns because he has conquered. He returns because he has triumphed over death, and sin will be no more. What is being focused on is God's final salvation in Christ, when all things that have been set in motion and the trajectory of redemptive history is fulfilled in Christ's return. When people who have placed their hope in Christ for their redemption will experience the joy of his salvation. When he comes again and puts everything back to right. When he puts everything the way his creation ought to be.

This, my friends, will be a celebration. No time for mourning over sin. Sin has been dealt with. This will be a time of rejoicing. One writer says, “All the blessings which he won for his people in his first appearing will be theirs to enjoy in perpetual fullness at his second appearing.”

We live in the anticipation of that day to come. We go to bed giving thanks for the day that is now over, and we wake up looking forward to the day ahead, and longing that each day might be the day he comes back. Long for it. Have it shape your hopes. Have it shape your dreams of what your life can be—not because of anything of your own power. It’s because it is a reality that is bought and paid in full and accomplished in the cross of Christ and where he stands in victory in the presence of the living God. And this impacts our worship. We do not remember a man in the grave that just shares our fate. No, we worship the God-man who indeed died but was raised to life. And he entered into the presence of God so that we might share in that life. A life of worship rooted in Jesus’s salvation shapes our prayers and leads us to action that participates in God’s redemption in doing redemption in the world.

And this is where the table into play. Because this is what we need. We need grace daily. We need to embody what he has declared. We have to appropriate our identity in Christ. And we need him day by day. And so he provides means of nourishment, of growth, of the ways that we can grow in our faith, that we thrive and abide in Christ as we persevere in the struggle, in the challenges, in the strife of our lives, in the deaths we experience on the news, in the glimmers of hope as we experience and witness weddings—all of these things, the ups and downs of life, we must persevere. And God gives us grace. He gives us the power to live, the motivation to love, and the reason to praise him with our lips and our lives. Because this is once and for all, folks.

The errors of the table and the church throughout history has been on either extreme. One saying that this is some magical conjuring of God’s existence in bread and wine, transforming them. On another extreme, we just say, “No, they’re just a way we remember Jesus.” No, my friends. The power of what is happening in the ascension is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that as we are joined in Christ, we are feeding on him—not carnally, not physically, but we are experiencing the real presence of Christ as he stands in the presence of the living God now. This is a ministry of the Holy Spirit mysteriously to us in our spirit as we feed on Christ in the heavens above. We are taken there. And we share in fellowship with God and with one another.

And my friends, as we persevere, this helps direct our minds and our hearts from two extremes—either being skeptical and cynical, afraid and despondent, defeated, forgotten, ignored, and hopeless that these things are not yet realized and may never be. And on the other end of the other extreme, it corrects and redirects our mind and our heart from being over-realized and triumphalistic that this is now perfectly experienced now. That is not our experience. Our experience is the already not yet. And so we interact with Jesus now. We don’t interact with Jesus on the cross. We don’t interact with Jesus in the grave. We interact with the Jesus who has ascended into the heavenly sanctuary of God himself and is in his presence making intercession for us. So as we move to the table, take one quick moment. Ponder these things in your heart. And as you partake of these common elements, be mindful of how this indeed is a celebration of God’s work in our lives. Let’s pray.

God, prepare our hearts to take your table, your supper of bread and wine, which we celebrate as juice. Bless us with your grace. Show us your mercy. Give us strength to endure, as we seek to understand afresh the power and the benefits of your salvation. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.