

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 14 November 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Hear We Not Thy Golden Bells?”

Hebrews 9:25-28

On April 29, 2006, Katie and I stood at a bus stop in Merryville, Indiana, along with our parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, pastor, and other family and friends. We were waiting for a bus which would take us to the Chicago airport; and from Chicago, we would catch a flight to Dublin, Ireland. This was the beginning of our life’s calling; and we knew that there would be no going back. I will never forget when we gave our parents one last hug, and then climbed into the bus, took a seat, and looked out the window at them. I’ll never forget the tears that ran down my dad’s face as the bus pulled away, nor the tears that were running down my own face.

But then, about a year later, in April of 2007, my parents came to Ireland to visit Katie and me. Though a year isn’t a very long time, it *seemed* like an incredibly long time to me. (It was the first time I had been separated from my parents for that long.) Many times I wished that I could sit down with my dad in person (not just over the phone) and talk with him. However, it was worth the wait on the day when I saw my dad walk through the stained-glass doors at the Dublin Airport, and run to give me a hug.

Yet, joyful though that day was, and excited though I was to meet my dad at the airport, it is nothing compared to the joy that God’s people will experience when Jesus Christ comes in the clouds of Heaven to receive us unto Himself. Our Saviour has been away for *what seems to us* like a very long time; but He *will* return. Jesus promised, **“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”** The famous hymn writer, Frances Havergal, described the wonderful day of Christ’s appearing in this way:

“Thou art coming, O my Saviour, Thou art coming, O my King,
In Thy beauty all resplendent, in Thy glory all transcendent;
Well may we rejoice and sing:
Coming in the opening east, herald brightness slowly swells;
Coming! O my glorious Priest, hear we not Thy golden bells?”

This is a beautiful hymn; yet, some of you may be a little confused by that last line, “Hear we not Thy golden bells?” If you don’t know what this expression means, you *will* understand it by the end of this message. (This is not a poetical expression that Havergal made up; it comes straight from Scripture!) However, before we can learn the meaning of the “golden bells,” we need to understand some important truths about Christ’s “appearing”--both His first appearing *and* His second appearing. That is what we will be talking about this morning as we examine the last few verses of **Hebrews 9**. The title of this message is **“Hear We Not Thy Golden Bells?”**

Read Hebrews 9:25-28.

I. Christ's first appearing (vv. 25-28a)

In these verses, Paul talks about two “appearings” of Jesus Christ. In verse **25 through 28**, he talks about Christ's *first* appearing 2,000 years ago. What was the purpose of Jesus' first appearing? Paul sums it up in **verse 26**: ***“But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”***

This is why Christ came to earth 2,000 years ago. His mission wasn't simply to show God's love--although He certainly did that. It wasn't merely to prove His deity by healing the lame, deaf, dumb, and blind—although He did this, as well. His mission wasn't simply to reveal truth to us about God—although He did that. His purpose was not simply to live a perfect, sinless life, as an example for us—although He did that. *All* these things were indispensable parts of Jesus' mission; yet, His ultimate purpose in appearing in this world as a Man was to ***“put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”***

By the way, please notice that Paul says about the *timing* of Jesus' appearing. He says that Jesus appeared once ***“in the end of the world.”*** (This literally means “the end of the ages.”) It may seem strange to us that Jesus' days on earth are called “the end of the world,” or the “end of the ages.” After all, we've been waiting for Christ's return for 2,000 years now; and as we look at the prophecies being fulfilled around us, it seems that the time of the end is *finally* drawing near. Are not *we* the ones who are living at the “end of the age”?

Well, as you read through the New Testament, you'll find that “last days” *began* with Christ's first coming to earth; and it continues to the present. Christ's coming to earth marked the *beginning of the last phase of human history*.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

The last 2,000 years have been called the ***“last days”*** because it is the last part of human history, during which the Messiah is dealing directly with man, by appearing on earth in person. To put it another way, the ***“last days”*** are the days of *the Messiah's visitation*. Christ has already visited us once; and He has promised to visit us again. We don't know what day or hour He will return; but when Christ finally does return to earth at the end of this age, it will mark the end of *man's* rule. An entirely new age will be opened up, in which Christ will personally rule and reign on earth!

With this in mind, let's return to the purpose of Christ's appearing. Why did Christ appear among us 2,000 years ago? Paul says, in **verse 26**, that He came to ***“put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”*** Paul describes this event another way in **verse 28** when he says, ***“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.”*** As Paul wrote these words, he was probably thinking about Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah in **Isaiah 53**.

Read Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12.

In **Isaiah 53**, the LORD repeatedly states that the Messiah would ***“bear”*** our sins. By *bearing our sins*, Christ also *put those sins away*. By taking our sins upon Himself, and by paying the penalty for them, Christ judicially removed our sin from God's sight. And how many times did He do this? He did it ***“once.”***

Folks, I cannot overstate the importance of that word “*once*.” Paul certainly thought it was important! In **chapters 9 and 10**, Paul used the word “*once*” seven times; and, just to drive his point home, he used *two different Greek words* for “*once*.” Here in **verse 28** he used the word *hapax*, which means “once,” or “one single time.” Paul also uses the word *epiphax*. *Epiphax* is based on the word *hapax*; and it means “upon one occasion only, never to be repeated; once for all.” In **chapters 9 and 10**, the word *hapax* is used five times, and the word *epiphax* is used two times; and in the whole book of **Hebrews**, these two words are used a total of 11 times. Paul’s message is crystal clear: Jesus died once in history. His sacrifice does not “continue on” in any sense whatsoever!

Now, Paul reinforces this truth in two ways. First, Paul **contrasts Christ to the Old Testament high priests. (Read verses 25-26 again.)**

Those of you who have been here through this series on **Hebrews** should have a solid understanding, by now, of what Paul is talking about here. However, for those who haven’t been here long, I will quickly review. In Old Testament times, the **high priest** was the only man who was permitted to go into the part of the Temple called the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies was a golden box called the **Ark of the Covenant**; and the Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of the throne of God. The high priest went into the Holy of Holies one time per year, on the Day of Atonement. On that day, the high priest poured the blood of bulls and goats, which had been sacrificially slain, into a bowl. (This is what Paul is talking about in **verse 25** when he mentions the “*blood of others*.” He’s talking about the “the blood of creatures other than man.”) The high priest then took the blood of the bulls and goats into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkled it on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. When the high priest did this, the sins of the people were symbolically *covered* for another year, in order that God could accept them. Yet, it was only for a year. The next year, on the Day of Atonement, it had to happen all over again; and so it went on, century after century.

In contrast, Jesus Christ is our *true* High Priest. In fact, He is both our Sacrifice *and* our High Priest, rolled up in one! As our **Sacrifice**, He shed His blood in order to *remove* our sins; and as our **High Priest**, He *offered up* His life’s blood to the Father as the payment for our sin. As our High Priest, He is now seated on His Father’s throne in Heaven, where He intercedes to the Father on our behalf. His pierced hands and side are the eternal proof that our sins are paid for. They were paid for *once for all*. This means that there is nothing more to be paid.

Do you see how important the “once-for-all” sacrifice of Jesus is? If Christ’s blood did *not* have the power to remove *all our sins forever*, Christ would have had to suffer and die *innumerable* times, from the Garden of Eden until now, to keep on paying for our sins. This isn’t speculation; this is exactly what Paul says, right here in **verse 26!** (**Read verses 25-26 again.**) If Jesus’ one-time sacrifice on the cross were *not* enough to save you forever, then *every time* you commit even the smallest sin, Christ would have to come and die for you again. Folks, that is *not* going to happen! Jesus died once for our sin. Our sin’s debt is paid for in full.

Now, just in case Paul’s readers weren’t yet fully grasping the fact that Christ died “once for all,” Paul drives this truth home from one more angle. **He makes the point that death comes only once. (Read verses 27 and 28.)**

Verse 27 is a very important verse. It strikes down many false teachings! For example, it strikes down the idea of **reincarnation**. Reincarnation denies that death is real. How so? Because your spirit, upon death, simply moves into “another body,” as though you were changing clothes. Reincarnation also teaches that we are gods. Not surprisingly, these are the two very lies that Satan told Adam and Eve in the Garden! To this day, Satan is still re-packing the lie that there is no death, and that we are gods (or, that we can become gods).

Read Genesis 3:1-7.

Reincarnation is at the heart of *all* pagan religions, in one form or another. It is being pushed big-time in most movies today, in not-so-subtle ways. The movie *Avatar*, for example, pushes nature-worship and reincarnation in the most outright, blatant way imaginable. This movie is from the pit of hell! People who have been foolish enough to take their family to watch this movie have reported that their children’s world-view began to change immediately after watching it. This movie has incredible demonic power! Friends, I cannot emphasise this strongly enough: **Stay out of the cinema!** It is Satan’s classroom. Past generations of Christians called Hollywood “Hellywood,” and for good reason!

The Bible says that it is appointed unto man *once* to die. Now, there are some exceptions to this law—for those who are saved. God can override the laws of nature when He so wills. For example, there were a few cases in Scripture of saved people (such as Lazarus) who died, were resurrected back to *mortal* life, and died again. Also, physical death will not occur *at all* for those of us who are alive when the Rapture happens. However, aside from these cases, physical death occurs only once. By the way, death has *never* occurred more than once for an unsaved person. There is no “second chance” given to those who depart this life having rejected God’s way of salvation. If you are unsure of your salvation, don’t put it off! Receive Christ today! If you die without Christ, you will *not* get another chance.

Now, what is Paul’s point in reminding us that death comes only once? Let’s return to **Hebrews 9**, and find out. (**Read Hebrews 9:27-28 again.**) Do you see Paul’s point? He’s saying that just as men die only once, so *Christ* died only once: and in that one death, He paid sin’s price. Paul’s point is that Jesus, like every other man, was appointed to die *only one time*. He was not appointed to two, or three, or ten, or a million deaths; only one. Thus, in order for us to have the hope of eternal life, Christ *had to pay sin’s debt completely* in that one death.

Brethren, it really does matter what we believe about Jesus’ sacrifice! Any religious system that denies Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice is denying the Gospel. This is why we, as God’s people, cannot participate in “the Mass” The Mass is not simply a slightly different form of the Lord’s Supper. It is not merely a *little* “off-base” in its theology. The Mass is a blatant denial of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Christians in past ages were burned at the stake for refusing to go to the Mass, because they knew that if they took it, they could be denying the true sacrifice that their Saviour made for them! Listen to what the Catechism itself says about the Eucharist:

“When the Church celebrates the Eucharist...the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains *forever present*. ‘As often as the sacrifice of the cross...is celebrated on the altar, *the work*

of our redemption is carried out. ' It is...a sacrifice. In the Eucharist, Christ gives us the very body which He gave up for us on the cross, [and] the very blood which he 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

All the catholic religions of the East and the West teach that whenever the Eucharist is celebrated, Christ is being sacrificed again. They teach that the wafer is literally turned into Christ's flesh, and that the wine is literally turned into Christ's blood, and that Christ is "sacrificed" again, as He is literally eaten by the worshipper. This teaching is called "transubstantiation." Yet, what does the Bible say? The Bible says that Christ made *one sacrifice for sins*, on the cross. Any religion that denies this truth is denying that redemption is finished. It is also adding a human work to salvation, by saying that one must physically eat the bread (which has supposedly been turned into Christ's body) in order to have eternal life. But what does the Bible say? The Bible says, "***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.***"

To partake of the Eucharist (even if you're merely doing it to "keep your family happy") is to declare that you do not believe that Jesus' sacrifice is really finished. To take the Eucharist is to deny the Gospel itself! You cannot say, "Well, I don't really believe that Jesus is being sacrificed again; but I'll do it just to 'keep the peace' in the family!" God can no more accept such a compromise than He could accept someone's throwing a pinch of incense on the altar to Caesar and calling Caesar "Lord," even though he didn't really mean it. God doesn't see it that way! God demands utter loyalty to His Word and His truth, no matter what the cost.

Read Daniel 3:8-18.

Old Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego *could have* reasoned, "We don't really *believe* that that hunk of gold is a god; so, if we bow down and act like we're worshipping it, God won't hold it against us." Yet, they didn't think that way. They knew that if they bowed to the idol, they would be blaspheming their God; and if it meant that they would have to die in the flames, they still would not bow down! They obeyed God rather than man; and because they were obedient, God used them to show Nebuchadnezzar and all his realm who the true God is!

Christ has already made His first appearing. The purpose of His first appearing was to "***put away sin by the offering of himself.***" Have you trusted in the saving work that Christ came to earth to do? Or are you clinging to the good things that *you* do? If so, those good things aren't good enough. Jesus died for you once; and in that one sacrifice, He paid it all.

Christian, are you standing up for the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Do you fearlessly proclaim this message to others? A faith that is worth suffering for is the only kind of "faith" that pleases God! It is the only kind of faith that is worth anything.

II. Christ's second appearing (28b)

In **verses 25-27**, we read about Christ's first appearing. In His first appearing here on earth, Christ came to "***bear the sins of many.***" Now, in the last half of **verse 28**, we read about Christ's *second* appearing. Let's read it again. (**Read verse 28b.**)

In this second half of **verse 28**, Paul is speaking about Christ's second coming. However, he isn't talking about Christ's *return to earth* at the battle of Armageddon, when He will set up His 1,000-year Kingdom; he is talking about the event that will occur seven years *prior* to Christ's return at Armageddon. He's talking about the event that the Bible calls the "blessed hope." He's talking about the Rapture--the "snatching away" of all God's New Testament-age saints from this world.

How do I know this second "appearing" is the Rapture? Because the Bible says that when Christ comes back to earth to set up His Kingdom, "***every eye shall see him...and every kindred of earth shall wail because of him.***" When Christ returns to earth at Armageddon, the *whole world* will see Him descending to the Mount of Olives on a white horse, to execute vengeance on His enemies. However, when Christ appears in the Rapture (seven years *before* Armageddon), He won't touch down at the Mount of Olives: rather, He will appear *in the clouds of Heaven*, for the purpose of catching up His saints to be with Him; and *only His saints* will see Him. *That* is the event that Paul is talking about here. Paul specifically says that Christ will appear "***unto them that look for him.***" Only those who are truly saved will be looking for Him. To them, and *only* to them, will Jesus manifest Himself on that day. The lost people who are left behind on earth will *not* see the Lord: instead, they will see the Antichrist, who will make his debut on the world stage just after Christ takes His saints away.

This promise of Christ's second "appearing" is the promise that Jesus gave to His disciples on the night of the Last Supper. It is the promise that He will "***come again, and receive***" us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. (By the way, that word "receive" has the idea of receiving in an embrace!) The promise of Christ's second "appearing" is the promise that we read about in **1 Thessalonians 4**. It is the promise that Christians will be "***caught up together...in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.***" It is the promise that God's people will be changed from mortality to immortality "***in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.***" It is an event that can happen at any moment. For those who did not know God, and are left behind, it will be terrifying when the Christians disappear; but to those who are saved, it will be the most joyous day that they will ever experience!

Now, what is the *purpose* of Christ's second appearing? The purpose of His *first* coming was to "***put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself***": but the purpose of His *second* coming will be to **finish the promise of salvation**. Paul says that Christ will "***appear the second time without sin unto salvation.***"

Now, what does this mean? Why would Christ appear the *second* time unto "***salvation***"? Isn't salvation done? Didn't Christ accomplish our salvation in His first coming? Yes, He did. The thing that is necessary to *purchase* our salvation (Christ's death on the cross) was accomplished 2,000 years ago; and in God's eyes, our salvation is already complete. However, we haven't *received* all the promises that are part of the "salvation package"--*yet*.

We who are saved have already received full forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the indwelling Holy Spirit; but when Christ appears in the clouds to receive us to Himself, He will deliver the final promise of salvation, which is **the resurrection of our bodies!** On that day, Heaven will ring with cries of praise from God's people, as our High Priest steps down from His throne, emerges from His heavenly Temple, and appears in the clouds for His people. On that day, our whole "spirit, soul, and body" will be presented blameless to God.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

This brings me back to the hymn we sang earlier. Allow me to repeat the words again:

Thou art coming, O my Saviour, Thou art coming, O my King,
 In Thy beauty all resplendent, in Thy glory all transcendent;
 Well may we rejoice and sing:
 Coming in the opening east, herald brightness slowly swells;
 Coming! O my glorious Priest, hear we not Thy golden bells?

What did Havergal mean by “Hear we not Thy golden bells?” Well, here’s the answer.

Read Exodus 28:31-35.

I wish I had time to talk about all the details of the high priest’s robe. The patterns and colours of this robe are filled with pictures of salvation! However, I would like to focus on the bottom hem of his garment. From the bottom hem of the high priest’s garment, two golden objects dangled. First, there were little golden **pomegranates**. Why pomegranates? Because pomegranates are filled with hundreds of seeds. (In fact, the average pomegranate contains about 613 seeds!) This is a picture of the *fruitfulness* of our High Priest’s ministry. As Christ went to the cross, He saw His “*seed*” (in other words, the souls who would be saved); and He knew that by His sacrifice, He would “*justify many.*”

But then, there were the bells. Why did the high priest wear bells? Because when the people heard the sound of the bells as the high priest was coming back out of the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement, they knew that he had successfully presented the blood on the mercy seat, and that their sins were symbolically covered. They knew that the high priest had done everything perfectly, and that he had *not* been struck dead. The jangling of the bells meant that their high priest was alive, and that he had successfully interceded for them.

Extra-biblical records tell us that when the high priest emerged from the Temple on the Day of Atonement, the people went wild with praise to the LORD. When the children of Israel heard the golden bells as the High Priest emerged from the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement, it indicated that their sin had been symbolically taken care of--*for one more year.*

However, when our *true* High Priest steps from his heavenly throne, emerges from the heavenly Temple, and comes in the clouds to appear for us, He will come as the High Priest who has already put away our sin *forever!* There will be no more sin debt to be paid when Christ returns, because He paid it all 2,000 years ago. That’s why Paul says that Christ will appear “*without sin*” (literally, “*apart from sin*”). His purpose, when He appears in the clouds, will not be to deal with our sin, because it was already dealt with. His purpose, when He returns, will be to complete the last promise of salvation—which is the resurrection of our bodies. Our High Priest is coming, folks! Christian, do you not hear His golden bells? They are ringing out the good news that “*Salvation is done; and He is coming back!*”

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, “Do you know for sure that your sins have been put away?” There is nothing like the blessedness of *knowing for sure* that you’re saved! If you have the slightest doubt in your mind, please don’t put it off! Trust in Christ alone, and be saved!

Christian, do you think of Christ's appearing with joy? Or are you uneasy about the thought of His return, because something isn't right in your walk with the Lord? If so, don't hide your sin. Go to Christ for cleansing! John said, ***“But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”***