



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
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Good Shepherd Church - October 16, 2011

Sermon Title: When the Messiah Appears

Sermon Text: Hebrews 9.23-28

Related Texts: Philippians 3.20-21; Isaiah 6.1-6;  
Matthew 5.17-18; 2 Thessalonians 1.3-10

## I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

Have you experienced a "once in a lifetime" event? What made that experience so unique? What made it "un-repeatable"?

## II. Introduction

The author of Hebrews has identified Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, as the great high priest who, as he gave his life, put into effect a new covenant - a new "will" that extends an inheritance to all who trust in him. The author now points to another parallel from the older covenant in which the High priest entered the Most Holy Place annually, offered the sacrifice of atonement, then emerged (reappeared) from that inner sanctuary to declare God's atoning forgiveness. Jesus, the better high priest, has gone into the Most Holy Place - the very presence of God. Some day he will reappear. What will that day bring with it?

## III. Study the Text – Read Hebrews 9.23-28

- 1) Look at verses 23-24. How does the author summarize the ways in which Jesus' sacrifice is "better" than those offered under the old covenant?
- 2) Verse 24 emphasizes Jesus entering heaven and appearing there for us "in God's presence." Read about the experience of Isaiah in Isaiah 6.1-6. Why is he so overwhelmed by the presence of God? Why do the Seraphs (angels) cover their faces? Jesus enters the very presence (stands face-to-face with) of God "for us." When those who trust in Jesus come face-to-face with God will we be overwhelmed and terrified or will we do so unafraid? Why?
- 3) Verses 25-26 focus on the contrast between Jesus entering the heavenly sanctuary and the high priest entering the Most Holy Place in the Temple. Jesus entered once for all (see Hebrews 9.12) and the high priest entered once per year, year after year. What does this suggest about the efficacy or effectiveness of Jesus' sacrificial death? How have Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven ushered in "the end of the ages" (verse 26)? How has he completed or fulfilled the old covenant (see Matthew 5.17-18)?

- 4) Verse 27 has often been taken out of context as a severe warning that when a person dies they face the terrible and punitive punishment of God. While this is consistent with other scriptures (for example 2 Thessalonians 1.3-10) this needs to be understood in the immediate context of Jesus' sacrificial death. In other words, the author is saying "ordinary people die only once and then face God's punitive judgment... but that is changed." What has Jesus done to turn the threat of punitive judgment into the promise of positive rescue?
- 5) Verse 28 continues to reinforce the hope given to all who trust in Jesus. The author again refers to the high priest entering the Most Holy Place on the annual Day of Atonement. The priest enters, offers the sacrifice for atonement, then reappears - emerging from that inner sanctuary to declare to the people they are forgiven. In contrast to this, what will happen when Jesus - who has entered the Most Holy Place in heaven "for us" - reappears? Look at Philippians 3.20-21 to get a picture of what takes place when we enter the "very presence" of God either at our physical death or at the time of Jesus' second appearing. What do you think a glorified body is like? What do you think this moment will be like?
- 6) Back to Hebrews 9.28. How consciously are you "waiting for him" to re-appear?

#### IV. Theological Reflection

Jesus is the "better" high priest who has offered his own blood to purify human beings from sin, to enable sinful and un-godlike creatures to be able to enter the very presence of God. Jesus accomplishes what the Law and its regulations could not. He is able to purify a person within, not merely cover them so they are externally clean. As Jesus is now in the presence of God, interceding for us, he is also engaged with the Holy Spirit transforming us. That transformation will be perfected and made complete only after we enter heaven - at our physical death or at the day of Jesus' re-appearing.

#### V. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) Take some time to reflect on the nature of God's holiness and glory. Can you picture the "otherness" of God, that is, God's completely divine splendor and majesty, beauty and magnificence, purity and perfection?
- 2) When you reflect on God's "otherness" can you also picture the love God has for you - love that desires to be in relationship with you - forever?
- 3) Referring to Philippians 3.20-21, what does it mean to you to live as a citizen of heaven?
- 4) We cannot escape the inevitability of physical death or that Jesus will re-appear some day to completely establish the Kingdom of God on earth. When you think of these inevitabilities what comes to mind? Are you looking forward to being "face-to-face"

with God? Are you confident that Jesus has taken away your sin so that when he appears there will be no condemnation, instead a welcome and a completion?

*Jesus comes to gather his brothers and sisters, those who do not fear his coming but who trust him and "who are eagerly waiting for him" (9.28), and to take them home. He comes not as a wrathful judge, but as a savior. No longer is it true that "It is appointed that a human being dies once and faces the judgment." Now the truth is, "It is appointed by God that Jesus died once for all, and then comes the saving mercy.*

*Thomas G. Long*