

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. This is God's Word.

Dear Friends,

An older pastor once told me that there are some church traditions we need to get rid of in order to move forward, but as we get rid of some of those traditions he made sure to point out that we shouldn't get rid of the ones that he liked. I have found that as I get older it is harder to accept change. I like things the way they are and am not as willing to change as I once was.

As the New Testament church was forming there were a lot of changes and some people were having trouble with all this change. Were they justified in being upset because this was a purging of the old traditions or was this something that went deeper – something that required these changes?

The writer of this letter has been making a comparison of the Old Testament high priest and Jesus as our perfect high priest and now he comes to the summary of what that means for all of us and why changes were necessary. As we consider this portion of scripture we want to see, **“The Freedom found in Christ's Perfect Sacrifice.”** How, **“It is a Better Sacrifice by Far,”** and how, **“It Leads to a Better Place.”**

I. If you lived during the Old Testament times and were of the tribe of Levi, you didn't have to worry about trying to figure out what occupation you were going to have. If you were male, you would become a priest or temple helper. You had no choice. That is what you would be trained to do.

Your job would be to offer sacrifices of oxen, sheep, goats, lambs, doves, and grain on the altar in front of the temple of God. These sacrifices were made according to God's Law handed down on Mt. Sinai. Hundreds if not thousands of animals were sacrificed every week. It was an unending job and took a lot of manpower because these sacrifices were never sufficient enough to pay for all sins for all time. They were being offered by men who had to sacrifice for their own sins first before making a sacrifice for the people. We might say, “An imperfect sacrifice made by an imperfect person.”

Yet this sacrificial system which God set up for his people had a purpose. It emphasized two things: 1) The spilling of blood was necessary to pay for sin and 2) the blood would come from a substitute – i.e. you could not atone for your sins with your own blood because it wasn't good enough.

But as we compare old and new we see that Christ's sacrifice was different. **“²⁴ For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”** He appeared in heaven before God the Father in our place. He presented himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins – a perfect sacrifice made by a perfect Savior. The most important part of this sermon text is that he appeared **for us**. He didn't have to plead for his sins first like the priests in the temple because he was without sin. He stood before God to plead our case as Satan, the accuser, tries to keep us for his own. And Jesus wins the verdict of “Not Guilty” for us every time. That is what Christ, our Savior, does **for us**.

This verdict is ours only because his sacrifice was perfect. As true man Jesus lived a perfect life under the Law **for us** and suffered in our place on the cross. Jesus was also true God so that his sacrifice would be sufficient for all people for all time. It would not have to be repeated time and time again as the Old Testament sacrifices did.

How do we know this? Christ rose on Easter morning to assure us the payment for our sins was complete. Nothing else needs to be done. Yet it is so easy to fall into the mindset that our own actions somehow help us on our way to heaven. It is easy to think that since I have led a good life, God has to let me into heaven. God doesn't have to do anything and we certainly don't deserve anything but because of God's great love for us he took action.

Jesus Christ paid for those times when we think we might be good enough to participate in our salvation and comes to us through his Word to remind us that only his sacrifice was sufficient – only his sacrifice was perfect. And it his perfect sacrifice that leads us to a better place.

II. When we talk about a better place, especially in church, people think about heaven. Heaven is where we want to go but how do we get there? **“²⁷ Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”** We will all face judgment – whether it is at our death or when Christ comes again.

Those words – death and judgment – create fear and uncertainty in the hearts of many people. People try to avoid death and prolong their life here on this earth. Anything to stay young forever. And if death can't be avoided – and it can't – then they still try to avoid judgment. In the past many people were cremated and had their ashes scattered, not because it was more economical, but because they thought they could avoid judgment in this way thinking that God could never put their body back together for Judgment Day – but nothing is impossible for God.

Judgment will come for everyone and the verdict is either heaven or hell. **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** (Mark 16:16). Faith in Jesus, our Savior, the Perfect Sacrifice for our sins, is the only way to heaven. There is no other way, no other path, no other name by which we can be saved. Jesus Christ has

done it all for us and our redemption is complete. That is why Christ came into the world and he ascended into heaven after his work here was done. Our redemption is complete but the story of redemption is still incomplete because we are waiting for Christ to come again – his second coming.

He will come again not to make another payment for sin, but for the final judgment. Those that have died will be confirmed in their judgment while those still on earth will face judgment. That will be a great day! Things will change. John tells us, **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”** (1 John 3:2). And the Apostle Paul says, **“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”** (Colossians 3:4). As children of God, through faith in Christ, our Savior will come to take us to be with him forever. What a joyous day that will be for all believers – for you and for me.

No longer will we have to worry about sin or anything else. When Christ appears he will give us a glorified – perfect body – and he will take us to be with him forever.

I don't like change but I look forward to the great change Judgment Day will bring for me and for you and for all believers. Until that Day, may the perfect sacrifice of our Savior and the knowledge that he has prepared a better place – a perfect place for us – bring us peace and comfort as we look forward to his glorious return. Amen.