

Hebrews 9:24-28

²⁴For Christ did not enter a handmade sanctuary, a representation of the true sanctuary. Instead, he entered into heaven itself, now to appear before God on our behalf. ²⁵And he did not enter to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise he would have needed to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And, just as it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment, ²⁸so also Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Confident

I.

There are confident people out there in the world. Even when challenges or obstacles are thrown in their path, they seem to know just what to do to overcome them. Confident people are able to act with decisiveness.

Wouldn't it be nice to always be confident?

Things don't always go your way. Your opinion is rejected. Your efforts at the job never seem to be appreciated. You are constantly criticized for not doing the right things or saying the right things—whether in a relationship, or at work, or when you volunteer for things. Perhaps you get angry. Maybe you begin to doubt. Do I have what it takes? Should I be in this relationship? Am I cut out for this profession? You *wish* you could be confident about everything; you wish you could be confident about *something, anything*, but there always seem to be doubts.

II.

There were doubts. There was a decided lack of confidence. If a person wanted to be confident, certain choices needed to be made. One could identify as many different things—the list of acceptable things. Other things were *unacceptable*; to identify as something unacceptable had consequences. In other words, if you chose to identify in a way that was unapproved, life could become rather difficult.

Doubts ran rampant in the Christian community at the time the Letter to the Hebrews was written. Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians had begun to be more intense around A.D. 64. The *Jewish* religion was established and approved, but Christianity was not.

We don't know who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews, or exactly who the audience was. But the readers were definitely experiencing persecution because they were Christians. The writer says: "Sometimes you were publicly shamed by insults and persecutions... ³⁴Indeed, you also sympathized with those in prison, and when your possessions were seized, you accepted it with joy, because you knew that you yourselves had a better and lasting possession" (Hebrews 10:33-34, EHV).

Insults and persecution were not uncommon for Christians. Having their property taken from them was not unusual, and even being thrown in prison. Still, "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4, EHV). The persecution hadn't gotten to the point that Christians were being put to death for their faith when the Letter to the Hebrews was written.

The Hebrew Christians must have wondered how long it might be before they *did* shed blood because of their faith, however. The fact that it hadn't happened yet didn't make them very confident.

The pressure was intense to turn back to Judaism. If these believers just followed the *old* ways, things would be much easier. They wouldn't experience persecution any longer. They had confidence in the old religion.

But just because it was comfortable, was it right? Was confidence in the old ways misplaced?

"Don't abandon your faith in Christ!" That's what the writer to the Hebrews urged them. They were new to this understanding of Jesus, to be sure. He wanted them to be confident; he wanted them to know that Jesus is superior in every way to Judaism.

The writer spent more than half his Letter showing the Hebrews how Jesus is superior to the Old Covenant and the Ceremonial Law. They were familiar with tabernacle and temple worship. He calls those worship facilities: "A copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" (Hebrews 8:5, EHV).

Tabernacle and temple worship revolved around a series of animal sacrifices. The sacrifices were to teach people how serious sin is. Sin demands a life as payment. Sin requires the shedding of blood. But those sacrifices didn't bring a permanent sense of confidence. They had to be repeated again and again, year after year, day after day.

III.

Every year, on the Great Day of Atonement, the highest and holiest festival of Old Testament worship, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place in the temple. Only on that one day was he allowed to enter.

Before he was allowed to go in, the High Priest had to go through seven days of intensive preparations. There were special purification ceremonies. To be confident enough to enter, everything had to be performed exactly to God's commands, with no mistakes. A special sacrifice had to be made for the priest; he had to take a bowl full of blood as he went in to the Most Holy Place to stand before the altar where God had promised that his presence would dwell.

I wonder how much confidence the High Priest of the year would have when he entered the Most Holy Place. It was dark in there, and smoke from incense filled the space, making his eyes water. Only by counting his steps could he figure out when he should turn and face the altar. The rope tied around his waist was there for some sense of confidence. If he didn't come out in a timely way, the other priests would pull him back outside. All of this reminded the Jewish people year after year of what God had told Moses: "You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20, EHV).

The new way—the way of Christianity—was better, the writer told the Hebrew Christians. Jesus is superior.

"For Christ did not enter a handmade sanctuary, a representation of the true sanctuary. Instead, he entered into heaven itself, now to appear before God on our behalf. ²⁵And he did not enter to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own" (Hebrews 9:24-25, EHV). A copy. That's what all the high festival days of the Great Day of Atonement really were. The High Priest going through all those preparations was intended to foreshadow what Jesus would do.

The preparations of the High Priest were nothing compared to the preparations of Jesus. From the time he was conceived in the womb of Mary until the day he hung on the cross,

Jesus made the preparations perfectly. He lived completely without sin, obeying everything the Father commanded him.

Rather than sacrificing an animal before appearing before the throne of God, he shed his own blood on the cross. The blood that was needed to pay the price for sin was much more precious than the blood of many animals. “But now he has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26, EHV). It was the blood of Jesus himself that made the real payment for sin.

IV.

Those old sacrifices didn’t give confidence. They pointed to the One who gives real confidence. “And, just as it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment,²⁸ so also Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:27-28, EHV).

Jesus’ “once and for all sacrifice” mentioned just before this puts into context “the sins of many.” As John the Baptist also said, Jesus is “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, EHV).

“And he will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28, EHV). Sin has been paid, once and for all. When Jesus comes at Judgment Day, he will come bringing the final glory of your eternal salvation with him.

Wouldn’t it be nice to always be confident? Wouldn’t it be nice to be one of those confident people that seem to know just what to do to overcome every obstacle? Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to act with decisiveness?

You might not be confident all the time at work or school or in your relationships. You might not always be confident when you volunteer at church or other charities.

But there *is* something about which you never need to doubt; something in which you can always be confident. You can be confident of God’s love and forgiveness. You are confident because of what Jesus, the Great High Priest, has done for you and for everyone. You can expect his return for you in confidence. You can expect it because it is done. Amen.