

Better Things

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Hebrews 9:24-28

Hebrews 9:24-28 ²⁴ For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are copies of the true*, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵ not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another-- ²⁶ He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷ And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Which is more important, the size of the diamond ring your husband gave you, or the size of the love that ring was meant to represent? Hopefully you all answered correctly. If not, you'd better see me after class.

The ring is only a copy or shadow only an imitation of the greater thing, the real thing. Even though the ring is something that is physical and solid, nevertheless it is love not the ring which is the greater thing, the real thing.

Similarly, the writer of Hebrews compares the physical things which are only copies to the heavenly things which are real. Christ has not given us those things which are shadows and copies, but rather he has given to us the greater things, the real things, the heavenly things.

The book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews, that is the Israelites, specifically those Israelites who were now Christians. Many of these Hebrews were thinking of the glory of the temple, and the gold articles in the temple, and the priests with their robes and hats, and all the grand ceremonies and sacrifices that were a part of the Old Testament worship service. They were comparing these things to the Christian worship service which didn't have a splendid temple, and didn't have all the grand ceremonies. They were tempted to return to this old form of worship. The writer is pointing them to understand that these earthly articles and ceremonies are not nearly as important as the better things that Jesus has given to us.

With the writer of Hebrews we are going to take a look at the earthly copies and see how what we have in Jesus is far better, Better Things.

The first thing mentioned by the writer in chapter nine and one of the first things you would see when walking into the temple was the seven stemmed candelabra. This candle represented the

Holy Spirit and his power at work among God's people. In the book of Zechariah God points to this seven stemmed candlestand and says “**not by human might but by the power of my Spirit.**”

Now we don't have a seven-stemmed candle, but what do we have instead? In revelation we see Jesus standing among the seven candle stands. Those candles are called both the seven spirits of God and the seven churches. On Pentecost that Spirit was poured out in power upon the apostles. The sign of the Spirit's presence was tongues of fires on the heads of the apostles, as though God had plucked the flames off the candle in the temple and put them instead on the heads of the apostles.

We don't have a seven-stemmed golden candle in our churches. Instead, we have the Holy Spirit at work, burning among us, as the Gospel is preached. This is the heavenly thing of which the temple candle was only a copy.

The next thing you would have seen in the temple was the table with the showbread. On this table, every sabbath twelve fresh loaves of bread were placed. The old one were taken away and eaten by the priests. Also on this table were cups and plates and utensils, in short everything that you needed for a meal. The table was set as though you were about to sit down and eat and twelve loaves of bread were set on it. This was a symbol that God fed his people the twelve tribes of Israel, and a reminder of the day when his people would sit down to feast with him.

Again, we don't have a table set for a meal and twelve loaves of bread. What do we have instead?

We have Christ who said to us, “I am the bread of life which came down from heaven.”

We have the Lord's Supper and the bread which contains the very body of our Savior. We come to the altar not to see loaves of bread which we cannot eat, but to eat the bread and partake of the true body of Christ.

Rather than a symbol that sits on the altar, Christ has given us his own body to eat and drink and through it to nourish and refresh our souls.

After this you would go past the temple veil and enter the Holy of Holies. There you would find the ark of the covenant which was a box containing:

1. Some of the Manna which God gave the Israelites in the wilderness
2. The rod of Aaron which budded
3. The tablets on which were written the ten commandments, which Moses carved

We could easily spend a whole sermon on each of these individually but notice that all of these items are representative of God's gracious works among his people. He gave them Manna from heaven. He gave them the Levites and the line of Aaron as priests to serve the people the word of God. He gave them his word.

Again, we have not the copy but the fulfillment. Christ died, ascended on high and gave gifts to men. The gifts he gave are the pastors and teachers and evangelists. They had a single tribe of men, but we have as the Psalmist reminds us: "such a great company of preachers." The number of pastors and teachers is so great that you can choose between them if you want.

200 years ago, people generally had only one or two sets of clothes. They didn't have to waste time trying to decide what to wear. But we are so richly blessed that we might often waste time trying to decide what to wear today. In the same way it is a sign of how richly blessed we, how great the company of preachers is, that we can choose between many churches and pastors. I'm not saying that we should, only that we could. Once again we have the better things.

Also, in the Holy of Holies is not a throne of judgement but the mercy seat of God. This too was only a copy. It was a copy of the true seat of mercy which waits for us in heaven. A seat to which Christ himself came with his own blood and the sacrifice of his body on the cross. A sacrifice which made atonement for our sins before the living God.

No one other than the high priest once a year was allowed to enter before this earthly copy of the mercy seat of God. Even the sacrifice which the priest brought did not open the way to this earthly copy. The sacrifice which Christ brought into heaven has opened the way not to the earthly copy but to the heavenly reality, to the very seat of God. We can now enter the holy place of heaven.

Last year during Advent we talked about the words of the prophet Isaiah praying that God would "Tear open the heavens and come down."

Through his sacrifice Christ has torn open the way not to the earthly copy of the mercy seat but to the true heavenly throne of God itself. Again, Christ has given to us not the earthly copy but the heavenly truth.

Finally, our text mentions "eagerly waiting." This too was a symbol from the Old Testament which is fulfilled in our day. They waited daily for the return of an earthly priest. We wait for the heavenly priest to return.

In the Old Testament when the priest went into the holy place or on the day of atonement the holy of holies, the people waited outside. It was not enough that the priest went into the temple. They needed to see him come out again, then they would know that the sacrifice was complete. You may remember that when Zacharias was detained by the angel, the people waited for him outside.

In the same way our high priest has gone into the heavenly temple, and we wait with eager expectation for his return. When he returns our salvation will be complete. We wait not for the

return of another earthly priest but for the return of the heavenly Priest. In this also we have received the better things.

Jesus is the greater high priest who gives to us not earthly copies but real heavenly things. He has given us not that candle stick but the flame of the Holy Spirit. He has given us not the show bread which could not be eaten but his own body of which we all partake. He has given us not the tribe of Levi but a host of messengers of the gospel. We wait not for the return of an earthly priest, but for the return of Christ at which time all things will reach their fulfillment. Christ has given us better things. Amen