

WOULD WE BE ETERNALLY SAFER IF WE WERE ALL GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE TO REPENT AFTER WE DIED?

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Hebrews 9:27-28 - “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

We all know we die. And we all know Jesus died. But our text seems to add needless words in describing these events. The writer doesn't just say **we** die. He labors the point that we only die **once**. And the writer doesn't just tell us **Jesus** died. He says Jesus died only **once**. So, in spite of the fact that it seems unnecessary to do so, we should at least investigate the possibility that our text must have some reason for this approach.

In fact, I think the wording of these two verses gives us a clue as to how to interpret them. Verse 27 introduces the **need** for verse 28. We all face **judgment** after we die. And verse 28 **answers to** the situation cited in verse 27. All of this is made clear by the way the writer launches his thoughts with the words “**And just as...**” in verse 27. He makes it clear that he's not just giving a **list** of ideas, but is building a **case**, an **argument**, in which the two events of the first verse (our death and our judgment) are somehow **provided for** in the two events in the second (Christ's death and second coming).

So the approach of our text is: “**just as**” these things happened, so **these other things** happened in response to them. They're related as problem and answer - as need and solution. Certain things are **appointed to man**. They are unavoidable and they are hugely problematic. And these things are the **reason** Christ came and died the first time and will come again a second time.

This is made even more pronounced by the careful and deliberate use of the **time** words in these verses. Notice, it is appointed for man to die “**once**”(27). And, not coincidentally, Christ, has been offered “**once**”(28). Then, just as after our one death another event follows logically on its heels - “**....and after that comes judgment....**”(27) - so after Christ's one sacrifice there logically follows another event - “[Christ] **will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him**”(28).

All of this is the freight we want to unpack in today's teaching.

1) IT IS APPOINTED FOR MAN TO DIE ONCE, AND AFTER THAT COMES JUDGMENT

This simple observation is troubling to a lot of reflective people. There are few things more difficult to accept than the idea that so short a time of human trial and probation should lead to so lengthy a time of judgement and reckoning. We are placed on earth, however long we live, for just a few short years and yet we are told the **consequences** of our actions in those short years extend for all eternity.

This seems to many to be a disproportionate justice. And for some it leads to increased personal indulgence in sin, with the **assumption** that God couldn't possibly bring eternal damnation on anyone for the fleeting moments of indiscretion in this all-to-brief present earthly life.

And yet our text seems pointed and clear. If words mean anything at all, and if God's decree is given any plain weight, it is starkly stated that “**....it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment....**”(27). And there are many references from our Lord's own lips that this judgment is an **eternal** judgment.

Our text says this judgment comes immediately after death. So there is no probationary period extending **after** this life. We die only **once**. Death doesn't usher in another chance at earthly life, or some other time for improvement in purgatory. **Following** this life, and **before** anything else, there is judgment for our earthly pilgrimage.

But what if there **was** another chance? I'm sure many are inclined to think if only we had just one more period of probation we would enter the second round more carefully. What if instead of dying **once** we all died **twice**? Surely we would give God more careful attention if we all had a second go around. If we could enter a **second** period of probation on this earth carrying all the experience of the **first**, heaven would, we think, end up much more densely populated. The heavenly throng would swell.

There's something else making this second chance proposal sound even more compelling. Surely, if God were truly loving and gracious and, indeed, as the Bible says, “**not wanting any to perish**,” then why would His love not manifest itself in this more generous way? Why would it not be “**appointed unto man twice to die?**” On the

surface this seems to be a good question.

After all, even those who hadn't yet died **once** would have the benefit of testimony from those who had already tasted the first death, seen the reality of the eternal world, and could now tell others of the need for holiness, without which, no one will see the Lord. Surely this would turn the careless from their wayward ways and bring a deeper attention and devotion to the Lord.

But would it? We already have striking teaching from our Lord in the rich man's request to Abraham to answer this question: **Luke 16:27-31** - "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— [28] for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' [29] But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' [30] And he said, 'No, father Abraham, **but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.**' [31] He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.' "

Note well, "***...if someone comes back from the dead!***" They won't listen even if someone they **knew** had been dead - a member of their own **family** - someone whose funeral they probably **attended** - returned with a message warning of judgment to come. Not even the verified testimony of their own deceased **brother** can soften a sinful heart. So **no**, we know it **isn't** true that those who hadn't died **once** would be turned from their sin by those who were on their second time around. The Bible says so.

"Well that may be, Pastor Don. But it doesn't settle it. Surely those who had already died once and were on their second chance - surely **these** would devote themselves to Christ. At least we would **eventually** get everyone to smarten up, even if it took the experience of death to bring them around!"

But this too is unlikely. It's unlikely because of the effect of sin on the person committing it. Sin not only brings **guilt**. It brings, just as surely as it brings guilt, **moral stubbornness and spiritual entropy**. It removes the capacity for repentance as surely as water removes the life from a fire.

This is something every person needs to reconsider: **Romans 1:21 and 32** - "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened....**32....Though they know God's decree** that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but **give approval to those who practice them.**"

Three steps cry out for notice. Their hearts are "***darkened***"(21), they "***know God's decree***"(32), and they **encourage deeper sin and disobedience, even in others** (32). This is more than merely being **lured** into sin. This is active **rebellion** - a commitment to deeper sin - with the **full knowledge** of its consequences. This is challenging God's moral compass.

But there's more. We all know from our **one** life that the chances of repentance diminish the longer sin is justified. When do any of us find sin easier to forsake - with its very **first** commitment or **after years** of repeated willful indulgence? And if someone lived his whole life **knowing** it was appointed unto man **twice** to die, who would willingly forsake sin in his first time around? Sin's hold would deepen beyond words as we all procrastinated, **planning** for a second chance after our first death.

You see, if the second period of probation is to have even the **appearance** of an advantage then we would have to have **memory** of the first life and the scene of judgment at its close. After all, this is what is alleged to cause carefulness the second time around.

But that consciousness of the first life would also be our undoing. It means the second season of probation would be entered not only with the **fallen nature** with which we all entered the first, but also with a **conscience already hardened** through the baggage of an entire life of sinful practice. Desires and habits would emerge fully formed. So however hard it was to forsake sin in the **first** life, it would be infinitely more difficult to forsake it in the **second**.

The second probationary period would be lived with moral senses even more blunted than the first. And the prospect of another entire second life, with our natural assumption that it would be as full and long as the first with all sorts of time before we died again, would bring its own tendency toward deeper procrastination and more arrogant carelessness.

So we are beholding not the **unreasonableness** of God in decreeing we all die but **once**. It is nothing but His wisdom and His compassion. The effects of sin are put on a **shorter leash**. We are told **in advance** we must live **this** life with devotion and earnestness. In advance we are lovingly told it is appointed **once** to die and after that

comes the **judgment**. The preciousness of each single day encourages us to invest each one with eternal significance.

2) JUST AS WE DIE ONLY ONCE SO CHRIST WAS OFFERED ONLY ONCE TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY

The writer labors to use the same singular reference to Christ's sacrificial death as to our own - **Hebrews 9:27-28** - **"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."**

The first part of this sequence we've already studied. The awful fact of death is made so **final** in that we only do it **once**. There is no escape from this appointment. So serious is sin and so relentless is its grip that it drags all down equally and finally to the grave.

And it's precisely to shift our attention from our one death's finality and certainty that the apostle uses the very same term to describe Christ's death on our behalf - **"...having been offered once to bear the sins of many..."(28)**. He need not die **again** to bring forgiveness and payment for those sins that drag us all down to the grave. And those sins are the very **root** and **power** of death.

There is something precious here. If Christ died to bring an end to sin's reign, and if in His death He not only brought **forgiveness** for my guilt but actually **conquered** the power of death, and if He offered this sacrifice **only once**, then there is nothing else to be done to save us all not only from **sin and guilt** but also from the **grave**.

Look deeply at the Father's heart - our **Creator's** heart - more full of loving concern than any could ever imagine - **that** heart, that would have done absolutely **anything** - and would have gladly done it a **thousand times** had it been necessary- **could think of not one more thing to do to deliver us from sin and death**. There was nothing additionally needed or possible. That's why we call this **"Good Friday!"**

This is, in fact, the writer's whole argument in this great chapter of Hebrews - **Hebrews 9:25-26** - **"Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, [26] for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."**

3) PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THIS ARE EAGERLY WAITING FOR JESUS TO COME BACK TO EARTH A SECOND TIME

Hebrews 9:28b - **"....so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."**

With all my heart I believe the church is right on the edge of abandoning what the New Testament calls the **"blessed hope"** - the triumphant Second Coming of Jesus Christ back to this earth. And please note that last sentence. I fear - and this fear is reinforced at the vast majority of Christian funerals I witness - that we center more on our dying and **going** to be with Jesus than on Jesus **coming** back to this earth.

True enough, and precious through and through, is the teaching that those who die in the Lord go to be with Jesus - **"which is far better."** And yes, **"absent from the body is present with the Lord."** But that's not what I'm living for and yearning for. Our text says we're waiting for Jesus to **"appear a second time."**

Here's why. My dying and going to be with Jesus - as wonderful as that is - does **nothing** to rid this world of sin and rebellion. My dying and going to be with Jesus does **nothing** to bring this whole Christ-rejecting world to its knees and acknowledge my Jesus as God the Son, King of kings and Lord of lords. My dying and going to be with Jesus does **nothing** to undo the Fall and the rule of Satan, and war and hatred and disease and the bondage of a thousand false religions. And I long for all those things!

What I'm longing for is God's finished work of **new creation**. It was **paid for** on Good Friday. I'm waiting for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells **righteousness**. And I'm longing for life in a resurrected, glorious body - one just like the risen body of Jesus Christ. And that's what Jesus is coming back to do.

The Second Coming of Christ **used** to be talked about a lot more than it is today. And I want this church to help change that. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ isn't the same as the Christian's departure at death. It's better - **way** better.

I still remember years ago getting emails all from churches and pastors all abuzz with the movie "**Heaven is For Real.**" I'm stunned that so many in the church feel they suddenly have something more hopeful than the New Testament. I'm tired of hearing of all that these "**near dead**" and "**post death**" people claim - with the help of a team of script writers - to have seen. There's usually no account of judgment or the cross. Please don't tell me about it and expect me to get excited about it.

Jesus didn't see things on a hospital operating table. Jesus conquered the **grave**, and He rose in a **new creation body** like no one else ever has. And He's coming back to this earth to reward and judge and establish His new creation. There is nothing offering more hope than that. And that's what I'm waiting for.