Once Is Enough!
Hebrews 7:23-28; 9:23-28

There are many things in life that we have to repeat over and over again. Think about your daily routines. What would happen if you did certain things only once, then never did them again? Personal hygiene would suffer, ignorance about current affairs would reign, and in time, we’d starve to death!

There are other things we do in life that take place only once, and others that should. We are born once. We are children once. We are teenagers once. Ideally, though not always in reality (for reasons sometimes justified but often unjustified), we marry once until death parts us from our mates. Some things in life happen once, and once is enough!

Likewise, there are some things that God does, and once is enough! Our text this morning consists of two passages from the letter to the Hebrews (7:23-28 and 9:23-28). Together these passages tell us about the greatest of those once-for-all acts of God. Listen to what the writer said. Read text . . .

A profound argument, a simple reality

The letter to the Hebrews is no easy read.

As I’ve said before in this sermon series, the writer was sending this “word of exhortation” (13:22)1 to Christians who were apparently Jews who had become believers in Christ, but who for some reason may have been contemplating giving up their faith in Jesus and returning to the ways of their previous Judaism.

Hebrews is an intricate theological work. It reads much like a sermon, and in fact may very well have been a sermon that was put in the form of a letter, maybe for distribution among various churches. It focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and what who he is and what he has done means for believers in terms of our faithfulness to him. The author continually stresses how Jesus and what he has done is “better.” He is superior to the angels and to Moses. His high priesthood is better than the levitical priesthood of Aaron and his descendants. The new covenant that Jesus mediates is better than the old covenant. He ministers in a better sanctuary (the heavenly rather than the earthly tabernacle). He has offered a better sacrifice (himself) than the sacrifices prescribed under the old covenant. And his work is based on better promises than those of the old covenant.2

But despite the depth of the writer’s arguments, the simple message of this passage rings clear: Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice of himself saves us completely from our sins.
What the writer says

Beginning at 6:13 and continuing through the end of chapter 10, the writer presents a sustained argument about how Jesus Christ, our great high priest, offered himself and his own blood in the heavenly sanctuary as a sacrificial offering to atone for our sins. He focuses on several things that I mentioned a moment ago—how as “a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (5:6), his priesthood is superior to the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants, how he guarantees and mediates a better covenant and ministers in the heavenly sanctuary rather than in the earthly tabernacle, and how his sacrifice is better than the sacrifices that the levitical priests offered, both in its nature and its effect.

In the last part of chapter 7 (7:23–28), the writer states that there were many levitical high priests whose ministry was temporary because of the reality of death. But Jesus’ priesthood is permanent, because though he died, then rose from death, “he continues forever” (7:25). As the author puts it: “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25).

Describing Jesus as “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (7:26), he declares that Jesus did not and does not need to offer up sacrifices on a continual basis as the levitical priests did, because “he did this once for all when he offered up himself” as a perfect sacrifice (7:27).

In the second part of our text (9:23–28), the writer summarizes and restates his argument that Jesus is a better high priest, the mediator of a better covenant, and a better sacrifice. In the ancient world, many believed that that certain earthly structures, institutions, and activities were actually copies of heavenly structures, institutions, and activities. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, expresses this same idea about Moses seeing the pattern or the model for the tabernacle when he was on Mount Sinai (Acts 7:44). Here the author says that “it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified” with earthly offerings of animal sacrifice, “but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (9:23).

He then restates the heart of his argument—that Christ entered heaven itself “to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24). But it wasn’t to offer himself as a sacrifice repeatedly like the levitical high priest on earth. No, he offered himself and his blood as a once-for-all sacrifice “to put away sin” (9:25–26). Understand that—he has appeared once for all at the consummation of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself! And just as humans die once, then face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to deal with sin, and will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who wait for him (9:27–28)!

So in terms that would be meaningful and understandable to people with a strong Jewish Old Testament background, the writer declared the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice of himself for our sins. When it came to Christ’s sacrifice of himself, once is enough!

A word for us

But what does his argument say to us today? It may sound strange to our ears, but his message is clear: Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice of himself saves us completely from our sins. Christ died for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead victorious over sin, death, and Satan. And once is enough!

Consider for a moment some important implications of this truth.

First, we are all sinners, and we will all one day stand before God to face judgment. The first fact is assumed here (we stand in need of forgiveness of sins precisely because we are sinners!).
The second is stated explicitly. The author is certainly in agreement with the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:10-11 and 23, where he doesn’t argue but simply states the reality of human sinfulness.

Even the best, the most moral, the most upstanding among us has sinned and continually fall short of the glory of God. It’s like trying to swim the Atlantic Ocean—the Olympic swimmer may get farther than others, but no one can make it all the way across! Some are better, some are worse; but we are all sinners! And we will all one day stand before God!

Second, no human effort or religious observance, not even the Old Testament law, can take our sin completely away and set us right with God. Humans have tried for centuries to be right with God by their own efforts, but always to no avail. The Old Testament law pointed to the necessity of Christ and the reality of his sacrifice, yet people wrongly tried to use it to earn God’s favor, thinking they could make themselves right with God by their efforts to keep the law.

We humans are like a person who’s terminally ill, but is unwilling to submit to the one and only treatment that will bring a cure. The patient tries every kind of home remedy, other medical treatments, and alternative medicine, only to find that there is still one and only one cure. Nothing else would work!

The fact is that no matter how well we do or how good we are by human standards, our sins and our sinfulness are still there! There is nothing we do can take them away! But there is hope. There is a cure. And here it is . . .

Christ died once, and once is enough, because his sacrifice of himself saves us completely when we put our trust in him. That’s the good news of the Gospel! Jesus gave himself for us on the cross, offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins. He is both high priest and sacrifice, and through his resurrection he lives forever to intercede for us with the Father! He came once to deal with sin by the sacrifice of himself; when he comes the second time in glory, it will be to culminate our salvation as we are raised like him and he sets everything right in new heavens and a new earth! All who trust in him will experience the fullness of his salvation, will stand forgiven at the Judgment, and will dwell with and serve him in the new creation forever! It is only by his blood that he shed through his sacrifice of himself that we can be forgiven and set right with God!

The old hymn 3 is right:

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
These two passages may seem strange to our way of thinking, but in them the writer declared
the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice of himself for our sins.

It’s just that simple—Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice of himself saves us completely from our
sins.

So the question is, how are we responding to him and to this truth about him?

Are we trusting in Jesus?

Or are we depending on our own efforts or goodness to earn forgiveness of our sins? That’s a
dangerous thing, an eternally dangerous thing!

If you don’t know him, won’t you put your trust in Christ this morning? He is the only one
who can save you. He shed his blood for you on the cross, giving himself as a sacrifice for our
sins. He did it once, and once is enough. But you must trust him to save you, and give your life
up to him, just as he has given his life up for you. Will you?

And Christian, when you miss the mark and fail the test, don’t despair! Remember that he
died to take away sin. Confess it to him and trust him to forgive you, cleanse you, and empower
and enable you to walk with him.

Another old hymn\textsuperscript{4} expresses it so well:

\begin{quote}
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me!
\end{quote}

He has died for us once and for all; and \textit{once is enough!}

\begin{footnotes}
\item Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version\textsuperscript{®}.
\item Robert Lowry, \textit{Nothing but the Blood}, The 2008 Baptist Hymnal, 223.
\item Lidie H. Edmunds, \textit{My Faith Has Found a Resting Place}, The 2008 Baptist Hymnal, 454.
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