

Last Things: Jesus *and the Saved*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 8:1–5; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:24, 25; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:23; Acts 3:19–21.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began’ ” (*Acts 3:19–21, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The Bible’s teaching on Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, His second coming, and the resurrection of the dead stand together as a message of hope for those who have placed their trust in Him.

The history of the great controversy between good and evil has had many pivotal moments; the climax, though, was at the cross, where Satan’s ultimate defeat and destruction were ensured. At the same time, biblical prophecy points to a “time of the end” (*Dan. 12:4, 9*), a period in salvation history with its own significance in terms of the relationship between the Lord and His people. Events within this “time of the end” period are described as “eschatological,” meaning “last things.”

In this week’s lesson we will look at three special events within this general period of the “last things” that have immense spiritual implications: Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of those who died in true faith.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 22.*

The Heavenly Sanctuary: Part 1

Fundamental Belief no. 24 opens with the following words: “There is a sanctuary in heaven—the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man” (*see Heb. 8:2*). One of the matter-of-fact assumptions of the Bible is the existence of a heavenly sanctuary (*Ps. 11:4*).

Read Hebrews 8:1–5. What is the main point taught in these verses?

The earthly sanctuary is portrayed as a type, or pattern, of the heavenly one; this means that, at a minimum, the former has some functional correspondence with the latter. The earthly sanctuary, then, teaches us a lot about the heavenly; despite that whatever the earthly sanctuary meant to the people of Israel, its true significance was found in the heavenly and what was to happen there. Through the efficacy of sacrifices and priestly ministry, the earthly model taught us about the realities of the heavenly sanctuary. The ministrations of the earthly sanctuary were God’s means of teaching the principles of salvation to His people, a foreshadowing of the “real thing”—which is Christ’s ministry (*Heb. 9:9–15*), both through His death and then His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary.

Ministry in the earthly sanctuary taught that while the shedding of blood was necessary (*Heb. 9:22*) to atone for sin, there was still the need for a priestly mediator between sinners and a Holy God as a result of that shed blood. The ministry of the priest in the Most Holy Place cleansed the sanctuary of sin and required affliction and repentance on the part of the people. Thus, judgment also was highlighted as an integral part of the total ministry of salvation.

What is fascinating, too, is what Hebrews 8:1, 2 say, which is that the goal of all the previous seven chapters in the book is to point the reader to the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and the position of Christ as our High Priest in that heavenly sanctuary. It’s hard to understand how anyone could not see the great significance that Hebrews gives to Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as part of the entire plan of salvation. Nothing in the verses indicates that the sanctuary in heaven, much less Christ’s ministry there, should be seen as metaphorical or symbolic. In fact, verse 5 makes it clear that the earthly sanctuary—a real structure with real priests and real sacrifices—was only a “shadow” of the reality of what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary.

The Heavenly Sanctuary: Part 2

The earthly sanctuary service revealed three phases of salvation: substitutionary sacrifice, priestly mediation, and judgment. The Bible teaches that all three phases of salvation are embodied in the ministry of Christ on behalf of sinners.

Read Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:24, 25; and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How does Christ’s death on the cross satisfy the substitutionary aspect of salvation?

What do these texts say about both Christ and mediation on behalf of sinners? *1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:25.*

Just as animal sacrifices pointed to the death of Christ, the priestly ministry foreshadowed the true ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In particular, the continual, or daily, ministry of priests in the Holy Place symbolized the access that the sinner has to God through Christ’s ministry as Intercessor and Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 4:14–16*).

Study Hebrews 9:23. How does the cleansing of things in the heavens relate to the priestly work in the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement?

With the earthly sanctuary services in the background, Hebrews 9:23 points clearly to a cleansing ministry of Christ in heaven. This is a text that has baffled scholars for centuries, because it clearly teaches that something in heaven has been defiled and needs to be purified. For Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of the two phases of Christ’s heavenly work in our behalf, this cleansing is the antitype—that corresponds to the yearly cleansing of the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

Think about atonement—what it means, how it is accomplished, and who alone can make atonement for us. Why, then, should the news that we are living in the “Day of Atonement” be something positive and hopeful?

The Second Coming of Christ

Study Acts 3:19–21. How does the blotting out of sins that is mentioned here relate to the cleansing of the sanctuary that we studied yesterday?

While Peter may not have known the “times or seasons” (*Acts 1:7*), his reference to Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:14–21 points to his appreciation of the fulfillment of prophecy in his time. In his prophetic frame of mind, it seems evident that “Peter, speaking by inspiration, and thus beyond his own finite understanding, is referring, tersely, to two great events of earth’s last days—(1) the mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit and (2) the final blotting out of the sins of the righteous—which are tied to a third climactic event, the second advent of Christ.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 160.

The early church was certain of both the second coming of Christ and the promise of a new heaven and earth (*2 Pet. 3:13*). Christ’s first coming provided a theological rationale for the second. As far as we are concerned, without the Second Coming, the First Coming would have been futile. The process of dealing with the sin problem, a process that He began with His sacrifice on the cross, reaches its consummation when, after the “cleansing of the sanctuary,” He appears the “second time . . . for salvation” (*Heb. 9:26–28, NKJV*). In fact, without the Second Coming, and the resurrection it brings, what would the promise of salvation mean to us? (*See 1 Thess. 4:16–18.*) Nothing!

The second coming of Christ will mark the conclusion of the great controversy as far as the destiny of mortals is concerned. Satan, knowing that the end of the controversy is in sight, seeks through deception to lead as many astray as possible. We are told that, “as the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ draws near, satanic agencies are moved from beneath. Satan will not only appear as a human being, but he will personate Jesus Christ, and the world that has rejected the truth will receive him as the Lord of lords and King of kings.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 14, 1896. Against this deception we have been warned that Christ’s coming will be a literal, personal, and visible event that will impact the entire world, ending it as we know it—a place of sin, suffering, misery, disappointment, and death.

Look at our world. How well have we, as humans, done in making it a better place? While we must try to improve the lot of those less fortunate than we are, and of those who are suffering and in need—why must we *always* keep before us that which is the only solution?

Awaiting the Advent

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. What is the message here, and why is it so relevant to us today, living when we do? How can we take these words and apply them in the practical moments of day-to-day living?

So much exists in those verses, but one point should stand out so clearly, and that is the hope that those Christians awaiting the return of Christ should have. Certainly, we need to be watchful and sober so that the day doesn't overtake us like a thief in the night. But we should also be full of faith and love and hope; because whether we "wake or sleep" (that is, whether we die before He returns or are alive when He returns), we have the promise of eternal life with Him.

In this day and age, when we see signs all around us, we must be careful of the way in which we interpret them and of how we understand their significance. Too often we can get caught up in events that cause all kinds of excitement and drama and anticipation, only to have them fade into nothing. These kinds of things, once finished, can leave members disgruntled, disappointed, and even full of doubt. We need to be vigilant, but we also need to be cautious, wise, and humble as we seek to read and discern the signs of the times (*see Matt. 16:1–4*).

What is the purpose of the "signs of the times," according to John 13:19, 14:29?

The predictions about the end times were not given to satisfy the curiosity of believers but to encourage them to keep watching (*Matt. 24:32–44*). As we await the Second Advent, we need to keep our eyes open, and we need to know what the Word of God teaches about last-day events; this is especially important because there are so many false views within Christendom itself regarding the signs of the times.

How do we strike the right balance in living in anticipation of the Second Coming while refraining from seeing every headline as a sign of the end?

Death and Resurrection

In the New Testament, one of the events connected with the second coming of Christ is the resurrection of those who died believing in Him. In fact, as far as most believers are concerned, that is the most important part of the Second Coming, because most of Christ's followers will be dead when He returns.

What do the following texts teach us about the resurrection of the dead at the time of Christ's return?

1 Thess. 4:13–16 _____

1 Cor. 15:13–25 _____

Rom. 8:11 _____

Phil. 3:20, 21 _____

The Bible teaches that in the resurrection, the “body” is restored to life. In other words, biblical resurrection is a bodily resurrection. This truth becomes even more clear when we keep in mind the fact that after Christ's resurrection, His tomb was empty. The dead body no longer remained in the grave. So, in the certainty of His resurrection, we have the certainty of ours.

If resurrection amounts to the breaking of the power of death, how does that explain why one can attain to it only by being “in Christ”?
2 Tim. 1:8–10.

The key to immortality is not greater scientific research. The power of death has already been broken through Christ's own death and resurrection (*Rom. 6:9*); based on that accomplishment, He is able to bestow immortality upon those who identify with His death and resurrection through baptism (*Rom. 6:23*). Also, the Bible makes it clear that the gift of immortality is not given to believers at death but when Jesus comes the second time, at the “last trumpet” (*1 Cor. 15:51–54*).

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.” (*John 11:25, NASB*). How can you learn to better grasp the hope that is contained in these words? Where would you be without them?

Further Study: “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, ‘whither the forerunner is for us entered.’ Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 786, 787.

Discussion Questions:

- ① John Calvin called Christ’s work of intercession the “continual application of His death for our salvation,” and it is said that “the existence of a heavenly sanctuary was standard theology among Puritan divines.” It’s not hard to see why Christ’s work of intercession should be seen as such an important teaching. After all, look at how much of the Old Testament centered around the sanctuary and the temple. Look at how much the New Testament does, as well! What should this tell us about the importance of this doctrine?
- ② Dwell more on Hebrews 9:23, a text that for centuries has baffled biblical scholars who can’t understand how something in heaven itself could actually need cleansing. As Seventh-day Adventists, we still have a lot to learn about what this text means. How does our understanding, for instance, of Daniel 8:14 help to clarify this important concept?
- ③ The resurrection of Christ is utterly essential to the Christian faith. Without it we have nothing. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. Look at how Paul is seeking to persuade his readers of the evidence for Christ’s resurrection. Notice especially verse 6. What is he saying here? Why is he emphasizing the fact that many of the people to whom Christ appeared are still alive? It’s almost as if he’s saying, “Don’t take my word for it. Ask some of these hundreds who saw Him themselves.” These are not the words you would expect from someone who wasn’t sure of what he was teaching. What other evidence from the Bible can help to reaffirm our certainty of Christ’s resurrection?

Free Indeed!

Esther* slipped across the North Korean border into China. But she still wasn't free. She knew that if she was caught, she would be sent back to North Korea and imprisoned or even killed. While in China, she met a Seventh-day Adventist woman who befriended her. The woman offered Esther a place to stay and introduced her to Jesus.

One day Esther was stopped by security police. Without a Chinese passport, Esther was arrested and sent to a North Korean prison. "God, why are You allowing this to happen?" she pleaded.

The prison was surrounded by high walls, and thick bars covered every opening. Prisoners were guarded constantly when they were allowed out of their cells; there seemed no way of escape.

One cold, rainy day Esther shivered as she waited in line to use the bathroom. The guard was called elsewhere, leaving the prisoners unguarded. Suddenly Esther felt an unseen hand push her toward the prison wall, where she found sacks of cement piled like a stairway. She climbed over the wall and ran to the nearby village. She hid in a small building, shivering from the cold.

She heard voices and watched as a search party moved from house to house looking for her. "Jesus, help me," she pleaded. The guards skipped the building where she was hiding and eventually turned back toward the prison without finding her.

The rain turned to snow, but Esther couldn't stay any longer. She trudged out of the village through the deepening snow. "God, show me the way," she prayed. Immediately a light illuminated her path, and she followed it. The path led out of North Korea and back into China.

For two months Esther walked, crossing a desert and cutting her way through barbed wire fences. She found shelter with sympathetic farmers. At last she crossed out of China. She found soldiers who took her to the embassy of South Korea, where she was given asylum.

Esther eventually arrived in South Korea, where she met Sister Park, an elderly Seventh-day Adventist woman who has made it her ministry to help refugees from North Korea find a new life in South Korea. Sister Park is their Dorcas, cooking for them if they are sick, providing food and clothes and shelter for them until they can care for themselves. But most important, Sister Park leads these people to Jesus.

"God led me to freedom," Esther says. "Today, thanks to His love and His people who helped me, I'm free indeed!"

Our mission offerings help people such as Esther find freedom and faith in Jesus.

*Not her real name.