

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 says, 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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Acts 3:19–21*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the ongoing work of Christ that builds on the Cross and culminates in the judgment and Second Coming.

Feel: Cultivate the alert watchfulness and faithfulness of those who expect to see their Master at any time.

Do: Follow Christ behind the veil of the sanctuary as He mediates on our behalf before the throne of mercy.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christ in the Sanctuary

A How does Christ's work as High Priest build on what He did at the Cross for us? How does this work culminate in judgment and the Second Coming?

B How have the earthly sanctuary activities helped to explain current last-day events in the heavenly sanctuary?

II. Feel: The King Is Coming

A What is the proper attitude that Christ's followers should have regarding the signs of the last days?

B What deceptions must be guarded against?

III. Do: Following the High Priest

A What part do Christ's followers play as their High Priest intercedes with the Father on their behalf?

B After the cleansing of the heavenly temple, what comes next in the great controversy, and what are the followers of Christ to do?

► **Summary:** After ransoming His beloved on the cross, Christ intercedes on their behalf as their heavenly High Priest. He cleanses the heavenly sanctuary and then returns to take His people to live with Him.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **The second coming of Christ is not a fairy tale but a reality. Without it, our faith in Christ is vain.**

Just for Teachers: **To motivate faith in the second coming of Christ and other related last-day events of redemptive history, have a senior class member read the following imagined narrative. Then discuss the implications of the story.**

Story to Read: “As an early teen, I became a charter member of the church at Thessalonica. When Paul came to our town, the gospel message challenged every philosophical and belief system we had ever known. Plato was out, Jesus was in. Idols were gone, the God incarnate in Jesus became our Sovereign. We received the Word heartily (*1 Thess. 1:6*). Our faith was known everywhere (*vs. 8*), even as we turned to serve a living and true God and to wait for Jesus’ imminent return to establish His kingdom (*vss. 9, 10*). But as things turned out, everything was not rosy in our church. Satan was stirring up trouble. He caused some saints to doubt and question. One of the great truths that the apostle Paul brought us is that Jesus, who came and died for our sins, is in heaven and will soon return to take us home. We lived in that awesome hope. But Satan was busy, sowing seeds of doubt. Some elderly believers were beginning to die, and members began to ask: Is the second coming of Christ real? What will happen to those who are dying, one by one, without seeing the Son from heaven? Doubt attacked faith. We all were in a state of worry. Against such doubts and worry, Paul wrote us a beautiful epistle. In the climax of the epistle, he assured us: ‘For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air’ (*1 Thess. 4:16–18*). I live and am ready to die with that hope in my heart.”

Questions to Ask:

- 1** Have you ever doubted the Second Coming? If so, why? If not, why not?
- 2** It has been almost two thousand years since Paul wrote those words. On what basis can we say that those words are still trustworthy?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: Of the many assurances Jesus gives to His disciples, **John 14:1–3 is one of the finest. Despite the grief that the shadow of the Cross brings to the disciples, Jesus does not leave them without comfort. Two reasons for His comforting assurance may be cited: first, Jesus will turn the instrument of death into a means of triumph and rise victorious over sin; second, Jesus will go to the Father and return to take the disciples home. The lesson today deals with the second part; it is important to lead the class in a faith-renewing discussion and study of this topic.**

No other founder of any philosophy or religion has left to his followers a promise as significant and meaningful as the one Jesus left. “I go” to my Father, Jesus said to His disciples, and immediately assured them, “I will come again” (*John 14:1–3*). The time between His going and returning is known as the last days. Among the last-day events, three are for our study this week: the ministry of Jesus in heaven, the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the saints.

I. Last-Day Events: The Heavenly Sanctuary (*Read Hebrews 7:22–28 with your class.*)

The Cross is the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. For the death that Jesus “died, He died to sin once for all” (*Rom. 6:10, NKJV*). There is no further sacrifice needed. Having offered Himself as the “once for all” sacrifice, Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary to perform His mediatorial ministry (*Heb. 7:22–28*). The book of Hebrews teaches that the earthly sanctuary is a model of the heavenly (*Heb. 8:5, 9:23–26*). The earthly sanctuary taught the procedures—the daily sacrifices, the priestly duties, the annual services of judgment—to be followed in dealing with sin, thus showing God’s people the seriousness of sin and the cost of salvation. All these were an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality (*Heb. 8:5*). The heavenly reality is what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 9:9–15*) “after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever” on the cross (*Heb. 10:12, NKJV*). When the ministry in heaven—including the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 9:23*) typified by the annual Day of Atonement—is over, Christ will return to the earth for “the second time” to take His children home (*vs. 28*).

Consider This: What is the relation between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary? How does the earthly sanctuary show the seriousness of sin? How did the earthly service typify the heavenly?

II. Last-Day Events: The Second Coming (Read Matthew 24:5–7, 25:37–39 with your class.)

Christ’s promise “I will come again” (*John 14:3*) resolutely affirms a second coming as distinct from a first. Hebrews underscores this distinction clearly: “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” (*Heb. 9:28, NRSV*). Thus, the mission of the Second Coming is not to atone for sin but to gather into His eternal kingdom those who “are eagerly waiting for him.”

The Olivet discourse of our Lord (*Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21*) specifically speaks of the Second Coming in terms of a universal gathering of His disciples “from the ends of the earth” (*Mark 13:27, NIV*) into the kingdom of God. It is the harvest time (*Mark 4:29, Rev. 14:15*). His coming will be preceded by various signs, including false Christs (*Matt. 24:5*), wars and rumors of wars (*vss. 6, 7*), famines and earthquakes (*vs. 7*), and worldwide proclamation of the gospel (*vs. 14*). Just prior to His coming will be a great tribulation (*vs. 21*) and a spiritual apathy and deterioration (*Matt. 25:37–39, Luke 17:28–30*). These and other signs are given not to work out a chronological timeline as to when Jesus will come but to keep God’s people in a state of preparedness. Watchfulness and readiness are the Christian’s perpetual response to the promise of the Parousia.

Consider This: What is the mission and purpose of the Second Coming? How does it differ from the first? What are the signs of Christ’s second coming within the church and in the world? In what ways are they meant to prepare us for His soon return?

III. Last-Day Events: The Resurrection of the Saints (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 with your class.)

In the trauma of death, Christians must not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (*1 Thess. 4:13*). A Platonist may see in death a release from the pain and corruption of life and a doorway to a new life. A follower of Seneca may issue a call to self-discipline in the face of death. A Hindu may see in death the endless possibility of reincarnation. But not the Christian. To him or her, grief must be placed within the perspective of Christian hope, and that hope is anchored in the certainty that the “dead in Christ will rise first” (*vs. 16, NKJV*). There lies the Christian’s answer and comfort to the problem of death.

But when will the dead in Christ rise? Paul’s answer is clear: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven. . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (*vss. 16, 17, NKJV*). The Greek word for “meet,” *apanteesin*, is packed

with power and significance; it connotes the return of a conquering hero. The Hero of all ages, the King of kings, the Sovereign of the universe is returning, and His subjects will meet Him in the air. Jesus, the Sovereign of the cosmos, the Lord of heaven and earth, is arriving to take His own. That is our “blessed hope” (*Titus 2:13*).

Consider This: Based on the authority of Scripture, what is the biblical understanding of when the dead in Christ will rise? How does a knowledge of the Greek word for “meet,” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, enhance our appreciation of what will transpire at the Second Coming?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Today’s lesson brings out many areas of truth peculiar to Seventh-day Adventists. As you lead the lesson, make sure you emphasize these unique areas of last-day events.

Application Questions:

1 Why is our faith in vain if the Second Coming is not real?

2 What does the Second Coming mean to you personally? Can you recall an experience during which you found this doctrine a blessing to you?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Make sure that your class understands that without the second coming of Christ, the first coming has no meaning so far as final victory over evil and death is concerned. The Cross assures the decisiveness of the victory over the evil one. It was through the Cross and the Resurrection that the decisive battle was won.

Activity: Ask various class members to read aloud the following passages and share what the text means to them: Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 11:26; 15:54, 55; Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 1 Peter 1:3, 5; 4:7; 2 Peter 3:12.