

Hebrews 9:24-28 – Christ appears for us in the 'real tabernacle' of heaven

His first appearance was to sacrifice Himself for the sins of many and He will come again to gather others

24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

"Sanctuary... a copy of the true one" – under the old covenant the rule was for a sanctuary on earth that represented God's transcendent 'otherness', with the holy place that people other than the high priest could not enter. Now Christ enters into the very presence of God in heaven.

25 Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.

"Blood not his own" – the difference between a priest sacrificing animals, and Jesus offering Himself.

26 Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of

the world. But He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

"Many times... once for all" – the animal sacrifice had to be made again and again on the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16:29-34. Christ's far superior sacrifice was final, for all time.

"Since the creation of the world" – or since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3, Hebrews 4:3, there has been the need for a complete and lasting, rather than provisional, remedy.

27-28 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

"He will appear a second time" – but not to deal with sin, because that has already been accomplished.

"Those who are waiting for Him" – believers are to live in expectation of Christ's return at any time, remaining faithful and ready however long the wait.

IN PRACTICE The writer of Hebrews (possibly Apollos and almost certainly not Paul) addresses Jewish-background believers. This gives them a sharply-drawn comparison between the rituals of temple and synagogue (as it was then) and the worship in heaven with Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the adoration of the heavenly throng. One is an earthly imitation, of sorts, and the other is the real thing. Is what we do a pale imitation, or the real thing, albeit scaled down and humanised to make it accessible for us? We can go through the familiar routines – liturgy or not, every church tradition has them – or we can be intentional about inviting the presence of God, asking the Holy Spirit to presence Himself, giving Him permission to upset our carefully prepared order of service. Perhaps little steps at first, but we notice the difference. But there's a sense of God's close presence. We know 'the real thing' when we experience it. And Christ has performed the perfect ritual, once and for all, so that we can be free to encounter the Lord and experience a little bit of heaven as we gather and submit to Him.

QUESTION *Honest answer... would you rather know the exact order of worship, or know that you have met with the Lord in a way special and personal to you?*

PRAYER Father God, I receive Your love afresh and thank You that You know me inside out. You know the ways I am an open book to You, and also where I cling to some life position for my identity. Help me to renounce all that is false, proud or self-sufficient – and offensive to You. I pray this in and through Jesus. Amen.

The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, November 11, 2018, with commentary

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **Sunday, November 11**, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **God hates falsehood, but honours authenticity and trust**

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 – Ruth shows her need of a kinsman redeemer

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 – Jonah obeys the Lord and preaches repentance to Nineveh

Mark 12:38-44 – Jesus condemns the falsehood of the scribes

Hebrews 9:24-28 – Christ enters the 'real tabernacle' of heaven to appear for us

Also: Psalm 127. 'Remembrance' readings may differ.

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 – Ruth shows her need of a kinsman redeemer

Boaz marries a young Moabite widow and their son is an ancestor of King David

1-2 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.

"Find a home" – literally, resting place, or permanent home. As a close relative, Boaz might act as a kinsman-redeemer for Ruth and Naomi.

Winnowing...threshing floor" – separating the chaff from the grain. It was usual for the landowner and men to sleep nearby and prevent theft of the grain.

3-4 Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

"Uncover his feet" – folding back his long tunic so that he wakes with cold feet, so she can speak privately with him, is not a lapse of moral integrity. Ruth's action, dressed as a bride, rather than a

widow, amounts to a request for marriage. Tamar's story, Genesis 38:13-30, is another example of appealing to the guardian-redeemer law.

5 "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered.

"Whatever you say" – Ruth was a Moabite, unfamiliar with Jewish law and custom.

4:13-15 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

"Gave birth to a son" – the story concludes with the ten generations from Perez, the son of Judah (Jacob's son) to David, grandson of Obed. Ruth and Boaz were ancestors of Israel's greatest king (and Joseph, husband of Mary, mother of Jesus).

16-17 Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women

living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

"Obed... father of Jesse" – Ruth and Boaz were ancestors of Israel's greatest king (and Joseph, husband of Mary, mother of Jesus).

The conclusion, Ruth 4:13-17, balances the introduction, Ruth 1:1-5, Ruth 4:13-17. Both focus on Naomi, her former emptiness and reliance on the Lord, now reversed by His provision for her. Both passages are similar in being compressed and having the same number of words in Hebrew.

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 – Jonah obeys and preaches repentance to Nineveh

On overcoming his fears and misgivings and obeying the Lord, he sees Ninevites respond and God's judgment averted

1-2 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

"The message I give you" – a prophet is to proclaim a message from God, not necessarily a foretelling one.

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

"Jonah obeyed" – this time, unlike his first call to Nineveh, Jonah 1:3, and still reluctantly, Jonah 4:1-5.

"Great city" – it was a sizeable place, about three

miles across, but not a journey of days, except that it took Jonah time to preach his message, street corner by street corner.

4-5 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

"Nineveh... overthrown" – Jonah's message did not include an "unless" clause even though he knew God wanted their repentance rather than their destruction, Jonah 3:10, 4:2.

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened.

IN PRACTICE The Book of Ruth begins and ends with the Lord's provision – He "had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them", "the Lord enabled [Ruth] to conceive" and the Bethlehem women agreed with Naomi, "The Lord... has not left you without a guardian-redeemer". It was a big issue of trust for them; for Ruth, trusting God who she hardly knew, doing the right thing when it also seemed a wrong thing and for them both, being real about their situation and their need of God's intervention in providing an unwed and land-owning relative keen to marry Ruth and continue the family line... which reached forward to King David. Jonah's version of being real before God and trusting Him in a difficult call needed some time to mature, but eventually he found himself preaching to the streets of this notorious pagan capital of the Assyrian empire, for the people to turn from their wickedness to the living God – and in a remarkable way, they did. God blessed the two women in their plight and their need, and He blessed run-away Jonah back to obedience, who then saw an extraordinary revival unfold.

QUESTION *Worshipping as one of a congregation that is led from the front, we can all wear a mask but we need to get real with the Lord about how we are. What other ways of gathering help us to do this?*

Mark 12:38-44 – Jesus condemns the falsehood of the scribes

The teachers of the law lived by show and exploited others; the powerless widow is seen to honour God in her giving

38-40 As He taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

"Teachers of the law" – also called 'scribes', were notorious for breaking the law they sought to impose by failing to love God and have His love for people. Jesus names six examples of their self-promoting desire for recognition: wearing long festive garments inappropriate for everyday wear; expecting people to rise and greet them; assuming the right to the prominent places in synagogues, and at banquets; making 'grandstanding' prayers; and preying on vulnerable widows.

"Devour widows' houses" – teachers of the law relied on the generosity of patrons; widows were vulnerable to exploitation which eventually left them homeless. Defrauding someone else's mother, Mark 7:11-13, was a denial of loving God or people, with a lack of mercy making the Scribes' lengthy prayers empty.

For further study – God's concern for widows, Deut. 14:29; Ps. 68:5; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:6;

Jer. 49:11; and condemnation of those who abuse them, Isa. 1:23, Ezek. 22:7, Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5.

41-42 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

"The temple treasury" – trumpet-like receptacles, in the Court of Women, accessible to men and women. Women were barred from going further.

"Small...coins" – 'two lepta, which is a quadrans' – a Roman measure, because Mark wrote his gospel for the church in Rome. It was equivalent to a sixty-fourth of a basic day's pay.

43-44 Calling His disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

**She... put in everything" – the widow did exactly what Jesus had told the influential young man, Mark 10:21, and His disciples, Mark 8:34-37, Mark 10:28-29, to do.*

For further study – God's concern for widows, Deut. 14:29; Ps. 68:5; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:6; Jer. 49:11; and condemnation of those who abuse them, Isa. 1:23, Ezek. 22:7, Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5.

IN PRACTICE There are times and situations where distinctive uniforms are helpful – we immediately think of peacekeeping and emergency services – and job titles are helpful for recognising people's roles, from the Queen and Prime Minister to the customer service person. The point in this passage is about those who are in a position to represent God to others failing to demonstrate His mercy, but rather assuming an entitlement to position and distinction and the right to bully others – which Jesus denounces as warranting severe punishment. The lesson here is that God may hear quite short and simple prayers from regular people who have no pretension and nothing to prove, but give themselves to God in authenticity and reliance on Him.

QUESTION *Do you have a title or a position that you rather like? What will it cost you to let it go?*