

INTRODUCTION

I believe every word of the Bible is true. A businesswoman was on a crowded flight. After the plane took off she pulled out her Bible and began to read. The man next to her saw her reading the Bible and said, "You don't really believe the Bible, do you?" She said, "As a matter of fact, I do believe it—every word."

"It's just a bunch of fairy tales, like that guy that got swallowed by a whale. What's his name?" She said, "His name was Jonah, and I believe he was swallowed by a whale and survived to tell about it."

"Can you tell me HOW a man can be swallowed by a whale and live to tell about it?" She replied, "I don't know HOW, but I suppose that when I get to heaven, I can ask him."

The man said, "Well, what if Jonah's not in heaven?" Without missing a beat, she said, "Then you can ask him!"

In this section of Hebrews the writer is pointing out that the Old Covenant is now obsolete because Jesus came to deliver the New Covenant. How many of you remember the first VCRs? They launched a video revolution, because instead of having to watch a television program live, you could record it and watch it later. Well, you could do that if you had a pocketful of cash. The first VCRs were huge boxes that cost over \$1,000. And you pretty much had to have a degree from MIT to figure out how to program them. At one time there were millions of VCRs in America flashing 12:00. But the prices and size eventually shrank. And most Americans compiled a huge stack of bulky videocassettes with stuff on it that you thought was worth preserving at the moment! And how many hours did you spend at the movie rental trying to pick out tapes with signs everywhere that said, "Be kind. Please rewind." Kids today have no idea what that means.

But now we have newer technology. We have DVRs that record shows on a hard drive. And some folks are only streaming videos these days. The new technology made the VCR obsolete.

When Jesus came, He made the Old Covenant obsolete. We're all familiar with the story of Jesus coming to planet earth two thousand years ago. But in this passage today, we read about not one, not two, but of three appearances of Jesus. See if you can pick them out as we read this passage. To get a running start, glance up to verse 22 that reminds us "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Hebrews 9:23-28. "It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things [the earthly tabernacle] to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves [are purified] with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 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. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin

by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

The two New Testament books with the greatest amount of theological truth are Romans and Hebrews. Romans is all about who we are in relationship to God, and Hebrews is all about who Jesus is in relation to us.

In the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus is expressed in terms of past, present and future. In the first chapter of Revelation, we read, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is [present], and who was [past], and who is to come [future], the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

God is not limited by time, so from His perspective, there's no sense of past, present, and future. At the burning bush, Moses said, "What's your name?" God said, "Tell the Israelites that I AM has sent you." In Hebrew that means, "I have always been; I am being; and I will always be." God isn't limited by past, present, and future. But we live in a linear time-line: minutes, hours, days, and years. So, God has revealed Himself to us in a framework we can understand: past, present, and future. In this message I want to touch on the theological truth of the three appearances of Jesus, and then we'll end with the practical application of this truth.

1. Jesus came to remove the penalty of sin.

"He has appeared once...to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:26) We are sinners who need a Savior. Jesus became the first time to die on a cross to take away our sin. All the Old Testament law did was remind people they couldn't keep it.

Think of it this way. Humanity is like a man who has fallen down into a well. When he cries out for help, another man looks down and says, "What do you want?" The man in the well says, "I want to get out!" The guy looking down into the well thinks for a moment, then takes a piece of paper and a pen. He writes something down and drops the paper into the well. The man in the well picks it up and it says, "Ten Rules on How to Stay out of Wells." That's like the Ten Commandments. It was a set of rules to tell us to keep out of wells after we had already fallen in!

But here's the problem for most people: They don't know they have fallen in a well and need help. He thinks he was made to live in wells, and he can't understand why he is unhappy and searching for something. The Law only reveals our problem, but it doesn't give a solution.

That's why Jesus came. In Luke 19:10 Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Paul wrote to Timothy, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15)

Before you can ever be saved, you must admit you are lost. Jesus came to take our place in the well and boost us out of the well. He saves us and then He instructs us on how to stay out of wells. That was His first appearance; to take away sin.

2. Jesus appears now before the Father on our behalf.

"He entered heaven itself, NOW to appear for us in God's presence." (Hebrews 9:24) We read in Hebrews 7 that Jesus is our High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.

When we place our faith in Christ, Jesus removes the penalty for our sin: death and hell. But we still have a problem with occasional sins we stumble into. When we become Christians, we don't suddenly become sinless—but we have a new desire to sin less.

According to the first chapter of Job, we have an adversary who is also an accuser. In Job 1:11, the devil accuses Job of being a good man simply because God has blessed Him. Satan said, "You've bribed Job. But if you bring pain into his life, he will surely curse you to your face." Of course, Satan was wrong. But it is his nature to accuse.

In Revelation 12 the Bible describes Satan as the accuser of the brothers (and sisters) who accuses them before God day and night. But thankfully, for all of the brothers and sisters, we have Someone who speaks up for us. The Bible says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1)

Here's why we need an advocate before the Father. I was saved when I was nine years old. At the moment I placed my faith in Jesus Christ, every sin I ever committed or will ever commit was forgiven by the blood of Jesus. I wish I could report to you that I have never committed a sin since then, but I would be lying if I said that. In fact, I've committed so many sins that I'm sure the devil or his demons have said, "God, do you see that David Dykes? He can't be one of yours! Look at him! He has committed all these sins!" That's when the Lord Jesus appears for me and says, "Father, He is one of mine. He gave his life to me when he was a child. He has confessed me before others, and I confess that He is saved and cleansed by the blood."

And the devil will accuse you, too. When you stumble and fall he will sidle up to you and whisper, "You're no good. You're no good. You're no good, baby you're no good." And you should say, "You're right. I'm no good; but I have been forgiven by the blood of the Lamb. And I have an Advocate in heaven—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He gives me assurance that I am His."

3. Jesus will return as the conquering King!

The Bible says, "He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:28)

The third appearance of Jesus is actually what we call the Second Coming. Jesus is here now in the person of His Holy Spirit, He dwells in us. He inhabits His Body, the church. But one day, He will literally return to planet earth. In Acts 1, we are told Jesus remained with the disciples for forty days after the resurrection. Then He took them to the top of the Mount of Olives and ascended back into heaven. As He slowly disappeared from their sight, there were two angels standing there. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

Jesus came the first time to bear our sin—and He did that when He died on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." When He comes the second time, He won't be coming as the gentle Jesus, meek and mild; He will return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He came the first time as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world; He will return as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah! When He came the first time, He was judged, tortured and killed by evil men. When He comes again, He will come as the Judge! When He came the first time He tasted death; when He comes the second time He will have the keys to death and Hades.

Are you ready for the return of Jesus? I don't know when it's going to happen. Nobody knows. As I've said before, I'm not on the scheduling committee; I'm on the welcoming committee. The apostles all believed Jesus would return during their lifetime. If His coming was thought to be near back then, how much closer it must be today!

John wrote to the Believers, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28)

If Jesus returned today, would you face Him with confidence or with shame? The Last recorded words of Jesus from Revelation 22 are, "Yes, I am coming soon!" And the last prayer of the Bible is, when John exclaims, "Amen! Come Lord Jesus!"

If you are a follower of Jesus, you will meet the Lord in one of two ways. First, if you die before the return of the Lord, you'll meet Him in heaven a fraction of a nanosecond after you die. The Bible says that death is to be "away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8) Second, if you are part of the generation of Believers who are alive when Jesus returns, you'll be caught up to meet Him in the sky in a fraction of a nanosecond.

So there you have the correct theology of the three appearances of Jesus. He appeared first to take away sin. He appears now in Heaven as our Advocate before the Father. He will appear in the future when He returns as the Conquering King.

That's the theology, but what about us? What about the you-ology and me-ology? What does this all mean for us? That leads to a personal question: Am I prepared for my final appointment? This passage says, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27 NKJV)

When the Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once" it is speaking of the absolute certainty of death. We live in a day of uncertainties. Someone said the only two certain things are death and taxes. But there are many folks who have figured out how to avoid paying taxes, but nobody except Jesus figured out how to cheat death. It's the only true certainty.

And none of us knows when we will die. People are living longer and longer these days. But when you consider ninety years in the span of eternity it is but a blink of an eye. In James, we are asked, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:14) Have you ever walked out on a crisp, cold morning and noticed your breath created a little vapor cloud? It was there for a second, and then it vanished. That's our lifespan in light of eternity.

But death doesn't end it all. This verse says just as certain as death, there is judgment. When most people hear that word, they immediately think of the final judgment described in Revelation 20. John wrote, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence...and I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne...the dead were judged according to what they had done...the lake of fire is the second death...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:11-15)

The most prominent painting in the Sistine Chapel is The Last Judgment by Michelangelo. It is a huge painting that covers the entire front wall. In it, Jesus can be seen with His hand raised as if He is issuing orders. In the bottom of the picture, he painted people who were crying out in anguish from being sentenced to eternity separated from God.

Here's the bad news. If you live your entire life rejecting God's free gift of eternal life you will be standing before God for this final judgment.

But here's the good news. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you won't be at this judgment. The Bible says in Romans 8:1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." But as Christians we will face a different kind of judgment. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, but this isn't going to be a judgment of condemnation. It will be a judgment of reward and rejoicing. How do you answer these personal questions: Are you ready for your final appointment? Are you ready to die? Are you ready for the judgment day?

But there's not only a personal question. There is also a personal affirmation. You are ready to die if you place your faith in Jesus. He spoke these words to Martha who was mourning the death of her brother. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (John 11:25)

Because of the three appearances of Jesus, we don't have to fear death. We can face it with confidence. When the Apostle Paul was in prison, he knew he could be executed any day. As he contemplated his death He made this affirmation. "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) If you know Jesus will you make that affirmation with me? To live is Christ; and to die is gain!

So death for a Christian isn't loss; it's gain. What will we gain? We will gain the literal presence of Jesus. Now we see Jesus as through a fogged up mirror but then we will see Him face to face. We'll gain the freedom from pain, worry, stress, and fear. We can't lose. It's like saying, "Heads I win; tails I win!"

CONCLUSION

One of the most inspiring autobiographies I read as a teenager was the Story of Eddie Rickenbacker. Rickenbacker first became famous as a race car driver and set the world speed record of 134 mph in 1910. When World War I broke out, he became a fighter pilot. He was called the Ace of Aces for shooting down 24 German planes and received the Medal of Honor. Later he became the President of Eastern Airlines.

In 1941 he was a passenger on an Eastern Airlines DC-3 when it crashed outside Atlanta, Georgia. Most of the passengers were killed and he was terribly injured. He was pinned under the wreckage all through the night. As rescuers arrived, he directed them to others before he allowed them to remove him. He had serious wounds including a crushed hip, a dented skull, a crushed elbow, and a broken knee. He had many internal injuries. While in the hospital, he suffered a massive hemorrhage and almost died. In fact, some newspapers reported his death with front page headlines.

But he didn't die. He was a committed Christian with a strong faith. As he lingered between life and death he had an experience that changed his life and deepened his faith.

In his autobiography he described the sensation of being near death. He wrote, "I began to die. I felt the presence of death and I knew that I was going. You may have heard that dying is unpleasant, but don't you believe it. Dying is the sweetest, tenderest, most wonderful sensation I have ever had. Death comes disguised as a sympathetic friend. All was serene and calm. How wonderful it would be to simply float out of the world. It is easy to die. You have to fight to live." (*Rickenbacker an Autobiography*, Prentice Hall)

Rickenbacker was a fighter. He survived after spending five months in the hospital. He would slump and walk with a limp for the rest of his life. He later said, "God saved me to serve Him." And God gave him another 32 years of life. But after that experience, Eddie Rickenbacker said he was never afraid to die. And because of Jesus, you don't have to fear death either.

Jesus came to take away your sin. He is appearing before the Father right now. And He will return in glory someday. Are you prepared for your final appointment? If you place your faith in Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Lord and Savior you can say like Paul, "To live is Christ and to die is gain!" Or you can say like John, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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