

**+ Hebrews 9:24-28 + The Cure for Fearing the Future +
+ 3rd Sunday of End Time: Last Judgment + 9 November 2014 +**

What does the future hold? That question has drawn the curiosity of people of every walk of life since the beginning of time. People have tried to answer that question in the stars, in the guts of a slaughtered animal, in the lines on the palms of their hands. Companies hire analysts to make forecasts about crops, trends, political situations, global markets, technology, and potential money-making endeavors. College sports teams pour money into recruiting in hopes of guaranteeing a winning future. Professional sports teams hire droves of statistical analysts, scouts, and coaches with hopes to take athletes with raw talent and transform them into championship teams. This time of year meteorologists get a lot of attention—good or bad—for the accuracy of their weather forecasts. Do we get 3 inches of snow or 14?

...But what about you? How do you answer that question, “What does the future hold?” How do you look at the future? Do you look ahead to the future with joy and certainty or with worry and fear? On a sunny day in Syracuse, it’s easy to say, “The future’s looking great!” Yet a change in the weather, a new stack of bills, a suddenly uncertain job situation, an unexpected health scare, well, things like that make that joy and certainty disappear with the sunshine behind the gloomy clouds of worry and fear.

Deep down inside does the future get you excited or does it make you nervous? If we’re going to be honest with ourselves, the uncertainty of the future can certainly fill each of us with fear. Perhaps it’s the fear of something or someone you depend on failing at an uncertain time in the future. Perhaps it’s the fear that all your efforts in this life at work, at home, in school, at church, in society will be in vain. Perhaps it’s not fear of the near future that bothers you, but the fear of what’s to come at the end of your life. What’s going to happen to you? Your family? Your life’s work? When will it happen? What does the future hold for me?

This particular Sunday—Last Judgment Sunday—is a day when you and I look at the future. You have to admit that with a name like that, it sounds quite a bit more terrifying than the “Saints Triumphant” theme we had last week! A Sunday like today, however, makes each of us ask ourselves that all-important question, “How do I look at the future?” My friends, should you look at the future with fear or with certainty? Let’s see what the inspired writer of Hebrews has to tell us about the future and how we look at it.

Hebrews was written for people who feared the future. The Holy Spirit had brought these people to faith in Jesus through his saving Gospel, but not everyone among their friends and family and neighbors were so happy about that. You see, as Christians, they no longer followed the old pagan ways devoted to the local gods or goddesses. It was believed that if a city or region endured problems, it was because the local deity was displeased. So the Christians became any easy target since they only followed Jesus.

Some among them who had been Jews tried to convince them to leave the Christian faith and go back to the “legal” religion of the Jewish faith. They all feared what the future held. Loss of property and jail time would eventually escalate to violence and even death. Wouldn’t God want them to stay safe and alive, even if it meant stepping back from following Jesus? The inspired writer responded with a divine “No!” Their fear would lead them away from the true God and down the path to eternal death in hell. Rather than fear the uncertain future, the Lord wanted them to follow their certain Savior—and that’s what he wants for you and me too in the face of our own fear.

As you look ahead to the future, do you ever find yourself wondering if the things you depend on will fail you? The bills come rolling in and you wonder how you’re going to pay them. The car breaks down or needs some expensive repairs and you wonder if you’ll be able to afford it. Your job situation becomes uncertain with a changing economy. Your nest egg for retirement seems like its shrinking with rising prices. The things you own or purchase wear out over time or break. Your body doesn’t respond the way you expect. Everything in this life seems so temporary. So it’s easy to think that everything that you depend on will eventually fail no matter what.

It’s an easy recipe for being pessimistic and cynical about this life, but even though the things of this life fail, there is a reason for hope. There is One who does not fail. The writer tells us, **“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.”** After Jesus died on the cross and rose on Easter morning, he ascended into heaven to rightfully take his place of authority over heaven and earth, but also importantly, to present his sacrifice on our behalf before the holy God.

You see, no matter what is going in your life, no matter what in your life has failed or is failing or is temporary or is no longer dependable, you have a Savior who is dependable and who is preparing a place for you that is

eternal. That Savior, Jesus, he's actually interceding for you. He knows how much you fear the future. So before his heavenly Father, Jesus guarantees you a heavenly future purchased with his own blood as the evidence that turns God's holy anger away from you forever.

"...But won't Jesus let me down just like the other people in my life?" It would be easy to think that since Jesus walked this earth 2,000 years ago in human flesh like yours and mine. It's easy to make our God too small—to think that he won't come through just like a loved one or a friend who failed you. It's easy to think that he's a limited, mortal being just like you and me and every other sinner on this planet. It's easy to fall back into that old fear of the future, but listen to the writer. ***"Nor did [Jesus] 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 to suffer many times since the creation of the world."***

While Jesus was fully human, he never failed like every other human. Jesus never failed to come through on everything he promised or said he would do. Jesus never failed his friends, never failed his loved ones, never failed anyone. Unlike every one of us, he was without sin. He couldn't fail us. Unlike the high priest in the Old Testament who only had access to God's presence once a year and only with the sprinkling of blood on all the temple furnishings, Jesus didn't just have access to God. He came through for each of us and gave each of us full, daily access to our God.

How could Jesus pull that off? Rather than sacrifice a goat to use the blood for access to God, Jesus sacrificed himself—his own holy, precious blood. Because of that single sacrifice, you don't have to fear failure anymore. You don't have to fear the failure of the things of this life. You don't have to fear the failure of those around you. You don't even have to fear that your efforts in this life are in vain. You don't have to fear any of that in your future because of this fact. ***"But now [Jesus] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."***

Look to the cross and see Jesus hanging there. Look to the cross and see Jesus' sacrifice once for all and how that sacrifice makes your life worthwhile. Look to the cross and see the cure for your failure, for your worry, for your dependence on the things and people of this life, for your guilt, for your sin, for your fear of the future.

"...But what about the end? The end of my life? The end of time? The reality of actually having to stand before the holy God to be judged? That still terrifies me!" Try as we might to silence that fear, it's still there. Why is that? Death and judgment were not what God had originally intended for us. Death is not natural. So it terrifies us. Don't believe me? Look at how hard we try to mask death with flowers and makeup and soft music. It's true. ***"...Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."***

That reality fills each of us with a certain amount of fear—even for the most courageous among us. Yet even for that fear of the future, Jesus has a cure. As certain as it is that we're eventually going to die and face judgment, even more certain is this—***"...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."***

Are you afraid of death? Look to the cross and see how Jesus took the curse of sin on himself by his own death. Then look past the cross and see an empty tomb where life conquered death. Look even further past that into the future and see what is most certainly coming! Jesus is coming back. Yes, to judge the living and the dead, as we are so clearly reminded today, but also ***"to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."***

For believers in Christ like you and me, there really is no need to fear the Last Day. Jesus is coming to judge, but most importantly, he's coming to bring us home, to give us an eternal future in a place that will always be holy, where there will no longer be any failures or grief over failure, where there will be no uncertainty, but only joyful confidence, where there will be no more death, but only forgiveness and love and peace unending in the presence of our Savior.

So what does the future hold for you? Does it fill you with uncertainty? Worry? Fear? Look to the cross and see the cure for your fear. See the reality of what is to come so that no matter what challenge or issue or problem or pain you face in this life, you need not worry or fear what's coming. Jesus is there by your side and will be with you for eternity. He's the cure and his precious blood guarantees that the Last Day will be a day of pure, unadulterated joy for you and all believers in him. So look to the future with hope, with confidence, with lifted heads because in Christ, we have no need to fear the future. Amen.