

Pentecost 20 / October 6, 2024

Hebrews 2:9

*“But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”*

Jesus tasted death for everyone

There is no message more important than the message of salvation in Jesus' Name. The message of salvation is that in Jesus the eternal Son of God took on human form, sharing in our humanity, fully experiencing all things as we do, so that through His sinless life and sacrificial death, He would atone for our sins and heal the brokenness of our relationship with the heavenly Father. Jesus tasted death for everyone. Because Jesus tasted death, we have access to the Father through Him. Because Jesus tasted death, we have peace with the Father. Because Jesus tasted death, we have the assurance of the Father's presence in our lives and His promise to work all things to our eternal good. Because Jesus tasted death, we have the promise that when we taste death, Jesus will lead us into the Father's presence to await the fullness of His love in our share in His resurrection to a new and eternal life.

There is no message more important than the message of salvation and so the author of Hebrews stresses the importance of continually hearing the message of salvation, saying, *“Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”* It is our nature to drift away from the things of God. Consider Israel in the presence of God at the foot of Mount Sinai and how quickly they drifted away, despite the signs they witnessed and the glory they saw. We need to constantly refresh our faith with the message of salvation in Jesus' Name. It is the power of God to eternal life to all who apply it to their lives in faith, take it to heart in daily devotion and believe. Jesus tasted death for everyone. He is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

One of the reasons the author wrote the letter we call “Hebrews” was because Jewish believers were drifting away from Jesus and returning to the rituals of the Mount Sinai Covenant, which St. Paul in Colossians, calls, *“a shadow of the things to come, whereas the substance belongs to Christ.”* The author shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the words of the prophets. He begins, saying in the past, *“God spoke to us by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.”*

The author shows that in His life and in His person, Jesus fulfilled the functions of the temple, through which God drew near to His people of old. He especially fulfilled the work of the high priest, whose job was to offer the annual sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of the whole people. Jesus fulfilled this work for time and eternity, by offering Himself as the sacrifice that truly atoned for sin, the sin of the world for all time, past, future and present. Jesus tasted death for everyone. In Him God is reconciled to every human soul. The Father calls every person to Himself through faith in Jesus' Name and baptism into His death and resurrection.

The author warns against the deceitfulness of sin, by which the world, the devil and our sinful nature seek to quench the flame of faith and lead us away from Christ. The author writes, *"Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."* He urges us to *"exhort one another every day as long as it is called 'today,'* that none of us be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. He reminds us that *"we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."* Our 'original confidence' is the faith that God gave Jesus, His eternally begotten Son, to be our Saviour from sin, death and the devil. Our 'original confidence' is that Jesus tasted death for everyone. Our 'original confidence' is that in tasting death, Jesus paid the debt of human sin and lifts its guilt from our hearts and the condemnation of eternal death from our heads. We maintain 'our original confidence' by remembering Jesus tasted death for our sins and fixing our eyes on Him as the author of our faith and founder of our salvation.

The author doesn't specify what was causing the first recipients of this letter to drift away from Jesus. We might think it was persecution, but it wasn't. The author reminds them of how they previously endured persecution with joyful hearts, as a sign of the truth of their faith. Oddly enough, one of the things that may have been causing the original recipients of this letter to begin to drift away from Jesus was that their lives in Christ weren't as glorious as they expected. The early days of their new found faith in Jesus were filled with joy and excitement, despite the opposition they received from fellow Jews who rejected Jesus. He urges them to *"recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction."* We may think that hardship can destroy faith. Sometimes it can, but many times the greatest threat to faith is the opposite of hardship; peace and ease. The original recipients of this letter didn't turn away from Christ when they suffered for their faith. They began drifting away when the trial ended. Their lives in Christ had

become dull, routine and boring. Like ancient Israel in the wilderness who became sick of the bread by which God fed them from heaven, these people had become tired of the word of salvation, by which the Holy Spirit fed them with the true bread of life, Jesus Christ.

It's easy to take people we love for granted and tune them out when they talk and become insensitive to their feelings and needs. It's easy to take Jesus for granted, become cold in faith, begin to drift away from His word and neglect the sacraments, through which He comes to us as our Saviour. It's easy for us to become cold in our worship and slack in our prayers. We live by faith. Faith isn't our doing. Faith is the gift of God given by the working of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the word. Our faith is maintained, nourished and strengthened by the Holy Spirit through the word.

Faith isn't our doing, but there are some things we need to do. We need to actively apply ourselves to the word through hearing, reading, worshipping and having fellowship with other believers. The Holy Spirit nourishes and nurtures our faith as often as we return to the word in study and devotion, in worship, confession and absolution. The Holy Spirit feeds our faith as we eat and drink the holy body and blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. In this letter the author urges us not to give up the habit of meeting together, for Christ is with us in word and sacrament and in worship; to strengthen and encourage us in faith, so that it is fulfilled in life everlasting.

Jesus tasted death for everyone. There is no message more important than the message of salvation. There is no one more important than Jesus. He is the Saviour of all people. There is nothing more important than believing in Jesus as Saviour. He is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. Faith is the means by which we personally access the benefits that Jesus secured for the whole world. Through faith we receive the blessings of forgiveness, healing in relationship with the Father, access to Him in prayer and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us both to believe and walk in the newness of life. We see Jesus by looking for Him in places He promised to be; the word, the sacraments and the fellowship of the church.

We see Jesus in the scriptures. Jesus said to the teachers of the law, "*you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that testify to me.*" We see Jesus in the water of our baptism, remembering His promise that "*whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.*" We see Jesus in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, remembering His words, "*Take and eat, this is my*

*body given for you.” We see Jesus in our gathering as believers, remembering He said, “where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them.” Jesus tasted death for everyone. He is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. God bless us always to hold Jesus in our hearts as Saviour and fix our eyes on Him as the founder of our salvation. In His Name. Amen.*