

The Majestic Jesus  
Hebrews for Today  
xi. Christ our Sanctuary (Heb 9:1-28)

The writer of the Hebrews depicts Jesus resplendent in majestic glory. He attempts to describe the indescribable. No visual image will suffice. This presents a creative challenge for us today. One social critic has described our contemporary world as having shifted from the Age of Exposition in which the written world prevailed to the Age of Entertainment in which image trumps words. Lines have been blurred. Confusion parades as creativity. Comprehensive descriptions of reality are regarded as suspect. Our postmodern world has come of age in which a multiplicity of 'truths' (small t) have replaced 'Truth' (capital T) reminiscent of Pontius Pilate who asked 'What is truth' and did not wait for an answer.

That notwithstanding, Hebrews is quite content to describe Jesus as God's final word. (Heb 1:1,2). Various metaphors are used – Jesus as high priest, an anchor for the soul, the guarantor of a new covenant, culminating in Jesus as our Sanctuary, the one who offers forgiveness and a clear conscience. “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God” (v14).

The result is peace with God – an objective reality dependent on the person and work of Jesus – not simply a subjective experience dependent on us. As J.I. Packer put it “If you want to know how well a person understands Christianity find out how much they make of the thought of being God's child of having God as his Father”. Just as the persons of the Trinity are one, God and his Word are one. We cannot separate Spirit and Word just as a musical rendition cannot separate a musician from her instrument. It would be like entering a workshop and saying we want less of the carpenter and more of the saw! God's Spirit and his Word are inextricably linked.

In his high priestly prayer offered to the Father in John 17, Jesus refers to the Apostles, “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world” (v6). His inspired Word was entrusted to them. Jesus then prays further “I have made you known and *will continue to make you known*” (v17). God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit continues to illumine our minds and capture our hearts. Therein lies our hope and sanctuary.

Well might we have reservations about the nature of sacrifice in the old covenant practice. Over a span of a thousand years it has been estimated that about a million animals must have been sacrificed. As one writer observed, “literally rivers of blood flowed”. Our modern sensitivities notwithstanding, we cannot ignore the cost of forgiveness viz the shedding of blood. “Just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgement, 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” (vv27,28).

God has spoken. His word is true. Therein lies our hope and sanctuary.

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