

Sermon Draft for November 10, 2024

Text: Hebrews 9:15, 24–28

Sermon: “Forgiven and Forgotten”

The well-known phrase “all for one and one for all” is the motto of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis from Alexandre Dumas’s novel *The Three Musketeers*. The three musketeers joined forces to fight as one against power and corruption— “all for one.” And even though they were very different and diverse characters in many ways, their strong spirit of brotherhood led each one of them to defend and fight for the other—“one for all.”

In a much greater way, Jesus is the one who is truly “all for one and one for all”! All the sacrifices in the Old Testament find their fulfillment, their goal, their end, in his perfect and definitive **“once for all”** sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9:26). As Isaiah long foretold, Christ would indeed bear the iniquities and “the sins of many” (9:28), making **“intercession for the transgressors”** (Isaiah 53:12).

Yes, Christ's "once for all" sacrifice avails for the many, for all who look to him, who believe upon him, and who are ***"eagerly waiting"*** for his return (9:28).

One of my favorite stories is about the young nun who claimed to have had a vision of Jesus. Her bishop decided to test her truthfulness and ordered that the next time she had a vision she should ask Christ what the bishop's primary sin had been before he became a bishop.

Some months later, the nun returned and the bishop asked if she had asked Christ the question, to which she affirmed that she had. "And what did he say?" the bishop asked apprehensively.

"Christ said . . ." and the nun paused a moment . . . "He said, 'I don't remember.'"

How would you like to have a God like that? Who doesn't even remember your sins? Well, we do have such a God! He says: ***“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more”*** (Isaih 43:25).

Let's put it another way. How would you like to have a clean slate? I mean like you woke up this morning and everything—I mean absolutely everything you've done wrong in the past was completely forgotten over—done with?

It would be quite unlike the circumstance of the man who made a fool of himself at a party. The next day he felt complete remorse for his actions and begged his wife to forgive him. “I do forgive you,” she promised.

But over the next few months, whenever something came up that displeased the wife, she would bring up the party incident. “I thought you forgave me for that,” protested the husband.

“Darling, I did forgive you,” she replied. “I just don’t want you to forget that I forgave you.”

Unlike that man, we have a totally fresh start with God. Old things are passed away. All things are become new. Yes, we do have a clean slate today. For his mercies are **“new every morning”** (Lamentations 3:23).

But the trouble is, we often forget the kind of a God we have, and we doubt or misunderstand his mercy. Though we may doubt God’s forgiveness, or make it conditional, He has forgiven us totally! “Once for all!”

The writer’s point in the letter to the Hebrews is that Christ’s sacrifice is infinitely better than those of the law. He offered his own blood for us. And it was not done “again and again,” the way the high priest entered the most holy place each year. It was not done “many times,” but “once for all.” And it was done **“to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself”** (v 26).

Christ has “(done) away with sin.” Now our text doesn’t specify specific sins here. But we’ve all done them, to be sure! ***“The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”*** (Genesis 8:21).

First of all, we may have sins of doubt. Does Satan so plague you with the memory of some past sin(s) that you wonder if God has really forgiven you? Do you feel what you did was so horrible that even God can’t “forget” it?

Do you actually limit God and deny his mercy when he says to you, to repeat: ***“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”*** (Isaiah 43:25):

At times we need to say the prayer: “O God, forgive me for the sin of coming back to you and asking forgiveness for a sin you forgave—and forgot—a long time ago!” (O.P. Kretzmann)

In addition, our sins may be sins of thinking about God’s grace conditionally. We may think God says “If you will do so-and-so, then I will forgive you.”

This “if-then” heresy is perpetuated by some television evangelists whose “theology” is gripped by many people quite unthinkingly.

Scripture plainly teaches not “if-then” but “because-therefore.” We need to repent of our sin. And this is not to be a repentance like one former national leader who recently said “I didn’t do anything wrong. But I’ll never do it again.”

No, this is to be a true repentance. We are to throw ourselves totally on the mercy of Christ. And because the atonement has been completed because you have been forgiven by Christ’s death on the cross, therefore you are to live as redeemed children of God.

That’s the Good News of our text in verse 28: ***“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.”***

“Not to bear sin.” It has been done. To “bring salvation.” But this is no “cheap grace,” no “easy forgiveness.” We don’t just knowingly go on sinning, thinking that later we can lightly say “I’m sorry.”

No, this cost . . . cost the life of Christ. Christ was not offered for any sin of his own. He was wounded for our transgressions. God laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Christ will appear a second time for the salvation of those **“who are waiting for him”** (v 28), and so we live eschatologically, that is, knowing the last times are approaching. Christ calls us to “look for him” each day, and to look for him by faith—that faith first implanted in us at our Baptism. He calls us to expect his second coming, and to prepare for his return, that we may be reunited with him.

In Spain, a father and his teenage son were at odds with each other. The relationship became so strained that the son ran away from home. His father, though, began a cross-country journey in search of his rebellious son.

Finally, in Madrid, in a last, desperate attempt to find him, his father put an ad in the newspaper. “Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you . . . Your father.”

The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office 800 Pacos showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers.

Is your name Paco? Often you and I run away from God’s love. But our rebellion does not stop our Father, because it is his nature to seek and to save lost people. Here he is again in his holy Word, calling to you, saying your sins **“once for all”** have been forgiven! Jesus made us one with God! We have often been grappling with God, and then running away from home by doubting him or putting conditions on his love.

But listen to Jesus as he says to you again today, Dear “Paco,” meet me in my Word. I know the pain of your soul, for I have suffered body and soul for you. I know your desperate loneliness, for I was forsaken by my Father for you. I know you, “Paco,” for I had you in my heart when I gave up my spirit on the cross, and I am watching over you. All is forgiven. I have made atonement “once for all” for your sin, and I love you.

What a wonderful Savior we have!

Amen