**Sermon Text**: Hebrews 9:24-28

**Occasion**: 25th Sunday after Pentecost, 10 Nov 2024

**Resurrection not Reincarnation**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

***27****And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,****28****so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.* (Heb 9)

I would like to begin with a story as we delve into this passage from Hebrews—the passage which tells us that Christ came once to forgive sins and comes once again to save us in the resurrection. The story comes from a pastor I once met. He went to visit a relative of one of his church’s members. This lady he saw had not gone to church for years but was considering coming regularly, having already attended a few times. Now, being apart from Christ’s teachings for quite some time, she picked up some unbiblical beliefs. One of them was reincarnation. In the first visit between her and the pastor, she went on about all her experiences in past lives. Somewhat flabbergasted, but not wishing to overtly cause offense, the pastor said after each description of a presumed past life, “That’s interesting, but the Bible says it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment.”—quoting our reading from Hebrews. The woman was not terribly impressed at the time but she was not about to kick him out or stop coming to church. The pastor was being nice and cordial in the situation. Eventually, the woman delved deeper into the Word of God, regularly attended worship, and has since discarded any notion of reincarnation or notion that she has had a previous life. She is now a committed disciple of Christ.

“Why, Pastor, are you telling us this story?”[[1]](#footnote-1) Well, let me explain this to you with a question: do you feel like you can properly present the hope of Christ to someone who believes in reincarnation, not the resurrection? If not, then I think it is good that we address the subject of reincarnation in at least one sermon in your lifetime. I also believe it is important to understand why we do not believe in reincarnation, since it goes against our core beliefs in Christ. As the author of Hebrews says: it is appointed for man to die once, like Christ died once to forgive our sins that he may bring us into paradise at his second coming. Were reincarnation true, then there would be no such thing as the resurrection of the dead nor the entrance into paradise. Reincarnation denies the Christian Gospel, which is why we should address this at least once to give our minds rest in the peace of Christ, as well as think of how to share the Gospel to many people in this world.

Belief in reincarnation is pretty popular. It is the default understanding of what happens to the soul upon death in most Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Reincarnation also appears in many pagan and New Age religions, which means maybe half the religious individuals in the world believe in reincarnation of some form or another. It is so popular that about 22% of Christians in the United States believe in reincarnation despite what the Bible teaches.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is not good because, as I said, it compromises on the Gospel.

The Gospel is that Christ has gone to the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. We have done wrong in this world and we need to be reconciled to our God. Therefore, God Himself came down in human flesh to reconcile our human flesh back to God. By bearing our sins unto the cross, our sin was crucified that we may receive the perfection of God (2 Cor 5:21). We are saved from sin. Thanks be to God, but the Gospel does not end there. Christ burst forth from the tomb on Easter morning. He did not remain in death but in the fullness of everlasting life and in union with our heavenly Father. He rose from the dead to show us that we too have risen from death to new life in him.

Christ died once and he will never die again. Death has no dominion over him just like death has no power over us who are united to Christ (Rom 6:9-11). It is appointed for a man to die once and after that comes judgment. Christ died but was without sin (Heb 4:15), and therefore he comes again not to be judged but to judge. What this means for us is that, once we die—should we die before Christ comes again—then we will only die once and then face judgment in the resurrection. We will come before the judge on the throne—Christ himself—where we will give an account for every last sin we have done. Every last curse word we used to speak hate. Every last lustful glance. Every last grudge, sleight, and time we neglected to help those in need. Christ will pass through these sins one by one and, one by one, declare each and every sin forgiven in him. It is appointed for us to die once in Christ, and after that comes the eternal paradise with our merciful Lord.

But this is not what reincarnation offers. We see in the Gospel of Christ, both problems of sin and death are forgiven. This is not the case in reincarnation. The problem of death remaining in reincarnation is easy enough to see. Without death, reincarnation would not work for reincarnation is the process of continuously dying again and again for you to inhabit body after body. But what about sin?

In Christ, the debt of your sin is paid by your Lord’s blood but, in the cycle of reincarnation, you pay for everything you have ever done in suffering until you have worked off all your evil deeds. Christians and those who believe in reincarnation are somewhat agreed on the fact that you face judgment for your sins. Christianity believes in hell and reincarnation believes in suffering in and in between your near infinite lives.[[3]](#footnote-3) Even if you have done well in your life, reincarnation still sadly places you back in this world which is affected by sin. There is still evil. There is still pain and there is still loss. Even Christ who lived perfectly in the world was still subjected to torture and death. There is no guarantee for anyone to receive perfection in this world through their own merits. You will be subjected to suffering and death in this world. And for people who believe in reincarnation, you are endlessly cycling through lives where there is some good but also pain.

Some versions of reincarnation do believe in a solution to the reincarnation cycle.[[4]](#footnote-4) This is where you meditate and with your hard work and extreme effort, you escape the cycle and cease to exist as an individual. Your existence rejoins the background of the universe, ceasing to be you. That is known as nirvana. Contrast this with the message of Christ. Christ promises salvation by grace through faith where he raises you from death into eternal life in paradise. Reincarnation promises that you will have no life anymore nor paradise but stop thinking, feeling, or being anymore. That is why those religions tell you to empty your mind in meditation—to try becoming absolutely void of anything. Comparing Christ with reincarnation, Christ’s resurrection unto love and joy eternal sounds greater than never to experience love or joy again.

But you might say I paint a rather bleak picture for those who believe in reincarnation. You are correct. I doubt someone who believes in reincarnation would be quite as pessimistic about it. However, I would say the person in that belief is trying to make the best out of the situation they believe themselves to be in. For example, quite a few of you have said to me that, when someone you love died, you cannot imagine what it would be like for an atheist in a similar situation. You who have hope in the resurrection of Christ know how much comfort he can give you. Our Lord promises those who have died in him will return to you in the resurrection. Yet, for an atheist, they have no hope to see anyone again whom they have ever lost. It is terribly sad, but they make due by trying to ignore death with celebrations of life and focusing on worldly pleasures to help them cope. They try not to live out the bleakness of their unbelief, much like those who believe in reincarnation will try to hold onto the hope that, despite suffering in every life they think they will have, they can somehow meet someone they have loved or that they will somehow escape the cycle of reincarnation.

But let’s offer them a greater hope than that. Let us proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ. Let us proclaim that he died and rose again which promises life everlasting to all who believe. Instead of leaving these people to think they have to pay for their sins again and again, seeking to one day pay off an infinite debt, let us share the love of Christ. Let us tell them that Christ has already paid the debt for their sins. They do not need to face judgment when their judge has paid the price on their behalf. Christ has sacrificed himself once for all. When you come before the judge at the end of your life, you will find Jesus smiling at you for he has forgiven your sins and finds you not guilty. He will welcome you into paradise in resurrected bodies where death has no place.

“But Pastor, to someone who believes in reincarnation, is this all we really need to know?” I’m glad you asked. Yes, yes, it is. You do not need to know every detail about every belief system in order to profess the good news of Christ. What you do need to know is that Christ has died once for the forgiveness of your sins and the sins of all people. There is nothing that remains except for him to come again to save you and all the faithful from judgment. To someone seeking salvation in another life, simply tell them that Christ has already saved them in the life they live now. Like the story of the pastor I told you about, you don’t need to go into details. Tell the person the basics. Christ has died once, there is no need for you to die repeatedly in reincarnation until he comes. His sacrifice covered all your sins for your entire life. Christ died once for all: for all people, for all sins, for all time. And whoever believes in him shall never truly die (John 11:26). Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1. “And why aren’t we talking about Remembrance Day?” Because none of the scripture readings for today really address Remembrance Day and I led a Remembrance Day prayer service yesterday. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [web.archive.org/web/20111210074029/http://pewforum.org/Other-Beliefs-and-Practices/Many-Americans-Mix-](https://web.archive.org/web/20111210074029/http:/pewforum.org/Other-Beliefs-and-Practices/Many-Americans-Mix-Multiple-Faiths.aspx)

   [Multiple-Faiths.aspx](https://web.archive.org/web/20111210074029/http:/pewforum.org/Other-Beliefs-and-Practices/Many-Americans-Mix-Multiple-Faiths.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is known as karma where your actions determine your experiences in future lives. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The reincarnation cycle known as samsara. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)