

## Hebrews 9:24-28

I think that most of you probably think you have a pretty good understanding of what is meant by a **mirage** - I know **I** did. However, as I was doing some research for this sermon, I found out that I didn't **really** know as much about **mirages** as I **thought** I did. I always thought that a mirage was a figment of someone's imagination - something which a person **thought** they saw, perhaps out of wishful thinking, perhaps out of desperation, perhaps out of the manufacturing of a deluded and sun-scorched mind. However, **this** is what I actually **found**. A mirage is defined as: An **optical illusion** in which the image of a **distant** object, as a ship or an oasis, is made to appear nearby, floating in air, inverted, etc. It is caused by the refraction of light rays from the object through layers of air having different densities, as the result of unequal temperature distributions. In other words, when a person sees a **mirage**, they see something which is **real** - it is just that their **view** of it has been **distorted**.

Sometimes our **minds**, or our **senses** play **tricks** on us so that it becomes very **difficult** to tell what is **real** - and what is **not** real. People who are very adept at sleight of hand, are often capable of **deceiving** others, making them **think** that they are seeing **one** thing, when actually all they are **seeing** is just a **diversion**. If you've ever had the opportunity to watch a really good illusionist, you know how **easily** your mind and senses can be **confused** by an **illusion**.

At **other** times an equal amount of confusion can be caused simply by a good **copy**. Since I'm not really a connoisseur of fine art, I would have a pretty hard time telling you if a Rembrandt or Picasso hanging in an art gallery was an **original**, or just a **reproduction**. I also remember an old TV commercial for audio cassettes in which people were blindfolded. They were told to listen very carefully, and then decide whether the music they were hearing was **live**, or **Memorex**. The assumption was that any **copy** which was made on Memorex tape was so **accurate**, that you wouldn't be able to tell it from the **original**. What is **real** and what is **not**? Sometimes it's not so easy to tell!

That's the **dilemma** which occurred for the people who lived during the Old Testament times. They had been brought up to think that the rites and rituals which they went through in their **worship** were extremely **important**. However, when **Jesus** came, He taught them that many of the things which they had **thought** were important and **real**, actually were nothing more than **symbols**, or **shadows** of things to **come**. Three different areas where that applies are found in our text for

today - the **sanctuary** - the **sacrifices** - and the final **judgment** - **Are They Shadows, Or Are They Reality?**

Our text begins, “*Christ did not enter a **man-made** sanctuary that was only a **copy** of the **true one**; He entered **heaven itself**, now to appear for us in God’s presence.*” The **temple** and everything **connected** with it, was the heart and soul of Jewish worship. It was there that they presented their **free-will** offerings - it was there that they raised their voices in **song** as they sang the **Psalms** and **other** music - it was there that they offered their **prayers** - and it was there that the **priests** performed **their** duties, including the offering of the morning and evening **sacrifices**. The Jews felt that by coming to this special place and going through the motions which God had prescribed for them, they would be considered **worthy** in God’s eyes. But in **reality**, they were only chasing **shadows**. The writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us that the **temple** was only a **shadow** pointing to what was to **come**. It was only a **copy** of the **real** sanctuary - namely **heaven**.

All too often you and I become guilty of chasing the **same** shadows. We aren’t living in **reality** if we think that **our** works or **our** actions will merit **anything** from God. In terms of **merit** God says, “*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all **our** righteous acts are like filthy rags.*” Sometimes we feel as if our mere **attendance** at church or Sunday School will make us **right** with God. But here again, we’re being **deceived** - we’re chasing a **shadow**. It isn’t **being in** church that’s important - it’s the connection that we have with God’s **Word** and **Sacraments** which is **found** here - **that’s** what’s important. If I’m not taking the blessings of God’s **forgiveness** and **mercy** home with me and **using** them in my daily life, then I’m simply going through the **motions**, and chasing **shadows**. The Bible says, “*It is impossible for the blood of **bulls and goats** to take away sins.*” And it is just as impossible for **our** actions to do any **better**.

That’s where **reality** sets in - the reality of **Jesus** - for our text continues, “*Nor did (Christ) 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 had to suffer **many times** since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared **once for all** at the end of the ages to **do away** with **sin** by the sacrifice of **Himself**.*” One of the most important **problems** we face, is the problem of **sin** in the world. Sin has been having its horrible, crippling effect on God’s creation ever since Adam and Eve **doubted God**, and ate of the fruit which He had forbidden. Sin **separates** us from **happiness** both now and eternally, because sin **separates** us from **God**. Sin has become thoroughly **entrenched** in the

people of this world, and the end result is that people have become **slaves** to the will of the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh. So the important question which needs to be asked is, how can we get **out** of this terrible situation? How can sin be **removed** from our lives? The Jews thought that the daily sacrifice of **animals** would do the trick. But that was **impossible**. People today think that the sacrifice of their personal **time, talents, and treasure** will win God's favor. But, that's impossible **too**. Down through the ages **many** solutions have been proposed by men - and **all** of them are totally ineffective. In fact, there is only **one** solution which actually **works** to remove sin from our lives. Through the **perfect life** of the God-man Jesus Christ, righteousness was **earned** for all people. And through the one-time **sacrifice** of that perfect life on the **cross**, that righteousness was **given** to all people - **His** life was exchanged for **our** lives - His **perfection** for our **sinfulness**. When we try to compare the feeble sacrifices made by **men**, with this all-sufficient Sacrifice made by **God**, there is really **no comparison**. All we can do is sit back and **marvel** at the **love** which God has shown to us, through this great **exchange**.

It is in the **final** thought of our text where we find the **theme** for this Sunday - the **Last Judgment**. We read, *"Just as man is destined to **die** once, and after that to face **judgment**, 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."* Prior to Jesus' ascension into heaven, He had told His disciples, *"In a **little while** you will see Me **no more**, and then after a **little while** you will see Me."* From a strictly **human** perspective, we have been waiting a lot **longer** than just *"a little while."* Since it has been some 2,000 years since Jesus spoke those words, and He **still** has not returned for the second time, many have raised **questions** about the Last Judgment. **Is It A Shadow, Or Is It Reality?** Is there going to **be** a Last Judgment at all, or are we just chasing **shadows** again? Actually, **Peter** answered that question very effectively in the Bible when he wrote, *"Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a **day** is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a **day**. The Lord is **not slow** in keeping His promise, as **some** understand slowness. He is **patient** with you, not wanting **anyone** to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance."* The Last Judgment is a **reality** all right, but the Lord is **holding off** on completing His promise to **judge** the world - because He wants to give those who **don't** believe in Him and who **aren't** waiting for Him, the opportunity to **repent** of their sins, to **turn** to the Savior, and to **avoid** eternal damnation. Now is not the time to **give up** or to **doubt** the promise of the Lord. Now is the time to **spread** His promise as

widely as we are able.

My dear friends, so much of what we **think** is important in this life, the things which **we** have earned by the labor of our hands - things we can **see**, and **hear**, and **touch**, and **smell** - are really nothing more than a **shadow**. They will be here for the length of our existence on this globe, and then they will **vanish** forever. However, the gifts earned by the blood of our **Savior** - things which we **can't** see, or hear, or touch, or smell - like the **forgiveness of sins**, **peace** with God, and **eternal life** in heaven - **these** things are **realities**. May we not be **confused** by the **mirages** of this sin-infested world, and may we continue to **treasure** the **realities** of the **perfect** world to come. Amen.