

Hebrews 10:11-25 Hearts and Minds
November 14, 2021

The idea of the Return of Christ marks the end of the liturgical year that begins with Advent, which means a new year begins in a few weeks. There are several scriptures that speak to it; Mark 13, Daniel 12, 1 Thessalonians, the Apocalypse of John. It is related to the Old Testament idea of The Day of the Lord. There is a line dedicated to it in the early Christian confessional statements, such as the Apostle's creed,

“He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

It has been common down the centuries for some believers, usually a minority, to believe, as Jesus and Paul apparently did, that this return would happen *in their lifetime*. Even today, there are some who believe it is imminent. Of course, they have all been wrong so far. Given that it has been 2,000 years, what does the doctrine mean for us today? With regard to this doctrine, how should we live our lives?

There have been two applications; one says there is no point in trying to correct injustice or make the world a better place, or give too much effort to personal improvement, because after all, there is not enough time for meaningful change. The believer is not held to be responsible for the way things are in the world. Being “ready,” means taking care only of one's

immediate spiritual needs, not much more than a conversion experience.

The other is precisely the opposite, that the reason we are still *in* this life is to work for personal growth as well as positive change. Being ready means to be continually working with others of goodwill to create and nurture better this-world realities, and higher character. That in fact, the meaning of the doctrine is meant to inspire moral and ethical action.

Bear with me while I change gears for a few minutes. There is a line in the text read for us this day, that speaks to this question. It involves a quotation from the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah. The line is, “‘This is the covenant I will make with them after that time,’ says the Lord, ‘I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them in their minds.’”

There was a phrase used by Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War that later became well-worn in the context of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It regards the winning of hearts and minds. The general idea is that military success requires the intellectual understanding and emotional investment of the people. In other words, deeply held convictions overcome military might. There has been quite a debate about what it all means.

I do not know if these texts are the most ancient reference to, “hearts and minds,” in human history, but we certainly hear it bantered about quite a bit. I *am* certain that its recent popularity *is* due to the

appearance of these words both in Jeremiah and in the New testament Letter to the Hebrews.

Maybe it is best if we do not use military language to describe the struggle of the spiritual life. “Hearts and minds,” has meaning for the life of faith. It means that we are driven by convictions that run more than skin deep.

I think of an example from my youth that applies. When I was in the 9th grade I ran on a very good freshman cross country team that had on it at least eleven good runners. After that year five of them no longer ran, and another would give up running before high school was through. I felt disappointed with each defector, but somehow I knew that their heart was not in it, and running is one of those things in life a person has to really want to do, or it won't work out.

In addition to music and athletics, which are two of the great learning activities of youth, almost any human endeavor in life fails unless those pursuing them are dedicated to the task, willing to make sacrifices and work diligently. One must believe, have some determination that runs a little more than skin deep.

We are told that personal salvation involves a change of both ones's heart and mind, often called repentance. Deeply held convictions by large collections of people define the nature of the community they make together. There is much in the Bible about the inward substance of authentic faith.

But let us not read only the words about hearts and minds. The inner life is a canvas for the activity of God, it is *God's law* has been written there. The Return of Christ as a part of the Theology of the Church refers to the conviction, deeply held, that there is a grand reconciliation, a happy ending to the life of the world which is foreshadowed in the faithful living out of earthly life.

The result is not that we are somehow morally perfect but that believers allow the grace of God to crack the shell around the heart and break the stubbornness in the mind. The result is being willing to do a better good in the face of more daunting obstacles.

The result is an unwavering faith in the triumph of good over evil, love over hate, and light over darkness, hope over despair. Life is less about tasks and duties and more about dedication to the good, the gracious, and the merciful.

We can hear an allusion to this conviction in the final words of the text we have heard today, that we might “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

[Back](#)

[Home](#)