

## A living Sacrifice

Hebrews 13:13-16

Exodus 33:5-11

Hosea 6:1-6

Responsive Psalm 136:1-9

Turn with me to Hebrews Chapter 13 this morning, Last week we left off at verse 13, and today we will be picking up at verse 14 but I want to start this morning by reading from verse 10 to verse 16.

So in a bit of recap, we are called to go outside the camp to be with our Lord and Savior. We are called to leave behind everything that this world sees as success, or comfort and follow our savior being considered rejected by society for his sake. As James wrote, "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation." For those who with Christ are outside the camp, there is a glory and exaltation beyond what this world can offer, for it is only there in the presence of the Messiah that we may find life everlasting. For all that the world can offer, even in its highest glory will rot and fade. Continuing in James he says, "but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."

That is the best that awaits those who remain within the safety, and comfort of the camp, But we who are Christians are called to bear his reproach, as he said because they hated him, they will also hate us. Yet the glories of Christ far exceed the scorn of this world. The reality is that this faith is a radical faith, it is a life changing faith, it is a faith that if you stand on, will likely result in the loss of friends, or even family for the calling of God, and the life of the Christian is at odds with the world. Remember it is Christ who said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Let that sink in for a minute...I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. The enmity between the seed of Adam, and the seed of Abraham has come full circle. Christ did not come to bring peace, but to crush the head of the serpent.

Continuing on, he says, "For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter in law against her mother in law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household." This is a different focus than the world is it not...in which it is said that your family is everything. But Christ says, I have come to cause problems in your family, there will be divisions, and you will be hated for my name sake, that even your family will turn against you, even your enemies will be those of your own household...and he goes on and says "For He who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of ME, and he who loves son or daughter more than ME is not worthy of Me. This is a radical thing, but none the less true. It is the reality that the Author of Hebrews has been hammering home, there is nothing greater than God, there is nothing worthy of our love and worship more than God, and anything which takes preeminence in our hearts and minds over him is an idol, a false god. Even to the point of our families, the thing in which we are tied to the most in this world, outside of God is also a temporary thing, for families split, they break apart, and in the end all die.

The one thing that this world holds sacred, even it is as Solomon said, meaningless and fades away. Now don't get me wrong, I am not saying that family is meaningless, what I am saying is that if family, or friends, or anything for that matter is elevated to an importance in your life that exceeds the importance of God, it is actually a hindrance, and a stumbling block and has become sin. Yes, that is right, the love and respect that you have for your parents, or for your children, can be sinful if it exceeds the love that you have for your savior...for he who loves his father or mother, or son or daughter more than is not worthy of Christ.

Being at odds with our unbelieving family when it comes to things of Christ, not only will happen, it is necessary, for we are called to bear his reproach, to go outside the camp, and sometimes that may mean leaving the influence or being at odds with an unbelieving family member. But be of good courage, for even in this God blesses, for he says in Matthew 10:39 “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” Finding a life in Christ will cause much of your old life to be lost, for Christ is only found outside the camp among all that is counted as unclean and refuse yet, here is the great controversy, his glory outshines all others, and in going outside the camp, in losing that life for the sake of Christ, you will find a life in which the treasures and glories far exceed that which you left behind. For Christ has gone outside the camp so that he may sanctify the things which are unclean by the shedding of his own blood.

Therefore, since we are with Christ, outside the camp, as verse 14 says, “We have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” Much like Moses and the Israelite's in the wilderness, we are sojourners, we are travelers who are going through this life, awaiting the next. We who are Christ's are rejected by men, our home is not of this world, but we await for the one to come, not with some vague optimism, but rather this city we await is real, and true.. we do not await the arrival of this home with uncertainty, but rather with confidence of faith, which is the faith as the Author here said in chapter 11. “a conviction of things not yet seen.” All those he listed in chapter 11, that great cloud of witnesses awaiting the coming city, we are numbered among them. All of us who join Christ crucified, outside the gate are not separating ourselves from reality, but rather are aligned with a reality which alone is the only reality that is ultimate and eternal, leaving behind all that fades, rusts, and dies, to be one with the everlasting. To that city whose builder and maker is God, a better homeland, an eternal homeland.

This idea of meeting God outside the camp is not a new one, nor is it strictly a new testament idea, but was done by Moses, as we read this morning in the book of Exodus. Moses took a tent, pitched it far away from the camp so that it was separate, and called it the tent of meeting, which served as a temporary sanctuary in which the pillar of cloud would descend upon when God would talk to Moses. Moses, by this action basically showed the fact that the peoples sin, in worshiping the golden calf and separated them from God and defiled the holy ground of the camp. The result now was, that it was now necessary for anyone who sought the Lord to go outside the camp. Again flipping the normal situation where outside the camp is considered unclean...God had made that which was considered clean to be unclean, and that which was considered unclean to be clean. Just as he has done with each and everyone one of us who are of this faith.

This is again just another way of showing the end of the old ways, the end of the law, and covenant and an establishment of the new. As Leo the Great preached, “When Christ offered himself to the Father a new and true sacrifice of reconciliation, he was crucified not in the temple, whose worship was now at an end, and not within the confines of the city, which for its sin was doomed to be destroyed, but outside the camp, so that, on the cessation of the old symbolic sacrifices, a new Victim might be placed on a new altar, and the cross of Christ might be the altar not of the temple, but of the world.

Christ who invites us to join him outside the camp, is the one who first left the camp, he left heaven which is the true and abiding camp, the everlasting city to which after his work was done on earth he returned in triumph. He came to us, to our unholy ground so that he may remove that which defiled his people and for the renewal of a entirely new creation, so that in the eternity of his glorious kingdom, all will be of one camp, all will be of one city. A city of God, where there is neither Jew nor Great, neither slave nor free...but all will be one in the blood of Christ.

And it is that city for which we seek, it is that homeland we await. And since this is the city we await, and it is God who has opened its gates to us so that we may enter, as verse 15 says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. “ Since Jesus is this one, the one who came and died to pay the penalty for our sins, he is our one and only Mediator, and it is only through him that we have access to God. We may approach God directly, because of Christ, we no longer have need for priests to mediate on our behalf for God has made us to be a priestly people. Therefore we bring to God the sacrifices of our praise, not the corpse of some animal, but rather the sacrifice is our very lives.

This offering up of praise is not merely just singing or praising God in prayer, but it is shown forth in our lives. With our lives we are to show forth God's praise, As the Apostle Paul said, our spiritual worship so to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This sacrifice affects our being entirely, when we are Christs, we have become new creatures to live unto Christ as living sacrifices. Unlike the sacrifices of old, which were offered up periodically, and for certain purposes and occasions, our life being a sacrifice to God is offered up continually, at all times, and in all circumstances.

Our gratitude is the driving force for our life in Christ, for we as Christians must tell of God's mercy and grace, our lives, our speech, our conduct is a reflection of our savior, thereby a witness to his glory. As verse 15 puts it, the sacrifice of praise to God, is by the fruit of our lips which acknowledge his name. Unlike the thank offerings of the levitical priesthood, there is no offering up of foods, there is no outward ceremonial ritual, but rather this sacrifice of praise breaks forth spontaneously from our lips, from our inner self which has been redeemed. Such a praise can not be stopped, can not be halted, or thwarted, for it comes from inside. Where a physical, ritualistic practices maybe banned, may be restricted, being a living sacrifice unto God, who is praised by our very conduct, and our witness, which is a reflection of him can not be stopped, nor silenced.

This sacrifice of praise, comes from, and flows out of a loving faith, for as we read this morning in Hosea Chapter 6, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Or as the Psalmist said, “He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me.” Again we see that what God desires of his children, is not some form of law keeping, or ritualistic practices, it is not a dutiful following of some moral list of rights and wrongs, but rather it is what flows out of the heart. What flows outward from the heart is not only the sacrifice of praise to our Lord and savior, but likewise also the proof, and means of a continued sanctification. So many want to make out the Christian life as one of duty, of law keeping, and have created various lists, or requirements of what it means to be a Christian, what one must do to be a Christian.

Yet, there is no biblical precedence for such conduct, such a ministry is one that is outward focused, that is...a ministry that focuses on controlling the outward workings and conduct of a believer. But everywhere in scripture tells us the opposite, that it is from the heart, it is a ministry focused on the inward, and because of the inward man, flows out good works. As Micah 6 says, “ With what shall I come to the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? No, for God has shown you oh man, what is good. And what is it the Lord requires? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Again all of these things are a living sacrifice of praise, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. As we all well know, all the commandments of God are summed up in 2 things, to Love the lord our God with all of our being, and to love our neighbors as our self. Verses 15, and 16 here in hebrews is a reflection of that. Verse 15, is the loving of God through our being a living sacrifice of praise to him, and verse 16 says, “but do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Or as Paul put it in his letter to the Romans, “ Let love be without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the lord. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, steadfast in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another, do not set your mind on high things, but rather associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil, have regard for good things in the sight of all men, if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

And the beauty of this all, is that it is God working in us to will and to do. All of this flows out of a heart broken, and healed by our loving Lord. An understanding of our own unworthiness, yet despite our hatred and rebellion, God loved us first, and by his own hand made us to be a holy, and just people. Therefore our conduct, our lives, our living sacrifice is nothing more then acting upon the reality of the changes that God has done in our lives. Even in this our God is merciful, for he demands our love and loyalty, yet he has given us the means to do so. He commands us to love him, and to love others, and he gives us the ability to do so. We are called to imitate Christ, whose love and compassion upon fallen man was the motive, not only for the good things that he had done in his ministry, such as the the miracles of healing, but also for his redeeming sacrifice of himself. Christ's sacrifice was himself, and we are even in this to follow him, to give of ourselves for the sake of Christ, and others. As John said, Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

In closing this morning, I will read what Augustine wrote, he said, “That which in common speech is called sacrifice is only the symbol of the true sacrifice. Now mercy is the true sacrifice, and therefore it is said, “such sacrifices are pleasing to God” All the divine ordinances, therefore, which we read concerning the sacrifices in the service of the tabernacle, or the temple, we are to relate to the love of God and our neighbors. For on these two commandments as it is written, hangs the whole law. “

And there it is, present yourself as a living sacrifice, loving, serving one another, praising and glorifying God through your speech, and through your conduct for such is the service of God's children, A people in whom God's love shines outward into a dark world as a beacon of hope, we should be known as, and defined as a people of love for in doing so, through Christ we fulfill the whole law.