

Seek the Lasting City

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Date: 03 January 2016

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- [0 : 00] Well, please turn your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 13. And this morning, our attention will be directed to verses 7 through 16.
- ! Let me begin by saying that I am increasingly aware of my great need for the Lord's help whenever I have the privilege to bring His word to His people.
- And I tend to be acutely aware of that need when I come to the first service of the year. There is this sense in my heart that God wants to always give us a foundational word as we embark upon a new year.
- And so in the weeks leading up to the end of the year, I would just really cry out to the Lord that He would give a word for our church.
- And I really believe this morning that the message that I'm bringing to you is what the Lord has laid on my heart for us individually and also for us as a local church as we embark upon this new year.
- [1 : 12] So let us pause your hearts this morning to hear God's word. Hebrews chapter 13, beginning in verse 7. I'm reading from the English Standard Version.
- Remember your leaders who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Don't be led away by diverse and strange teachings.
- For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.
- For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.
- [2 : 21] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured.
- For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.
- Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. For such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
- Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you once again for the privilege we have to gather, and in particular on the first Sunday of this new year.
- Lord, we pause in this moment to ask that you would speak to us from your word. We pray that you would help us to listen and then to obey, and to be guided by your word this morning.
- [3 : 40] Father, I acknowledge once again my great need for you, and I pray that you would grant abundant grace, that I would care for these who are gathered this morning.

Father, would you do this? In no other name than the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. I'm sure that there are many of you who would agree that one of the biggest reasons for disappointments is unreasonable expectations.

We develop expectations that overlook some of the realities that should tell us that our expectations are unreasonable, and we should not have those expectations.

Here we are on the third day of a new year, and no doubt in this room, hearts are filled with plans and desires and expectations about this new year.

And without speaking to you about your specific plans and desires and expectations, I would venture to say that many of us this morning are not mindful of a cold reality that we need to bear in mind.

[5 : 08] And here's the cold reality. The cold reality is that nothing in this world lasts forever. I think we so easily can develop plans and have expectations that do not factor in that reality, that nothing in this world lasts forever.

Although we are not even two weeks away from Christmas, out of Christmas, and I'm sure as toys are breaking and gadgets stop working, even the young children among us this morning realize that nothing lasts forever.

But again, our challenge is that we so easily forget this cold reality. I'm sure that many of us are aware that one of the most painful and sobering reminders of how temporary this world is, how temporary this life is, is death.

And yet as much as we experience the loss of possessions and the death of loved ones, we somehow still forget that this world and everything in it is passing away, and this forgetfulness often shows up in how we live, how we approach a new year.

And the forgetfulness compounds our pain when we experience loss and we experience brokenness in this life. I'm sure there are some of you who have had the experience of going to the food store and perhaps in your rush, you pick up an item that has an expiry date on it and you just didn't have the presence of mind to check it, and you only check it when you get home, and you realize that it is either near-dated or it is already expired.

[7 : 12] You just didn't have the presence of mind to check it. And really, we make more of this world than we should, and therefore we expect more from this world than we should.

In the passage that we just read in Hebrews 13, verses 7 through 16, the people to whom the writer to the Hebrews wrote faced a similar situation.

They were Jews who had come to Christ, and they began to face hostility and persecution from other Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and were hostile to Christians, and in particular, Jewish Christians who had forsaken the law of Moses.

Now, unlike the other books in the New Testament, we really aren't sure who wrote the book of Hebrews, though there are those who would speculate, but we aren't sure.

So we generally would just talk about the author or the writer to the Hebrews. But what we're able to see when we consider the contents of this letter is that the Christian Jews to whom it was written were being pressured to abandon their faith in Christ and to return back to Judaism.

[8 : 41] Some of them had suffered incredibly. Some of them had been persecuted and had their possessions taken from them, and it was taking their toll on them, and they just wanted to throw in the towel.

If you would turn back to chapter 10 of Hebrews, and we have an example of what some of these people faced and were still facing.

In verse 32, Hebrews chapter 10, starting in verse 32, the writer says to them, But recall the former days when you were enlightened.

You endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

[9 : 49] Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. The writer to the Hebrews is reminding his heroes of the hardships that they faced and the hardships they endured.

And he's saying you endured it because you realized, you understood at that time, that you had a better and an abiding possession. It was something out of this world, and it enabled you to allow your goods to be taken away.

It enabled you to endure suffering yourself or to stand with others. But varied by it all, they were on the verge, many of them, of giving up and going back to Judaism.

And so the writer to the Hebrews says to them, Don't do it. There is a reward that awaits you as you endure to the end. So in light of these pressures that these Jewish believers were facing, the writer to the Hebrews, as he concludes his letter, the section that we just read, he encourages them to continue to follow Christ.

And in the text that we read this morning, the heart of it seems to be in verse 14, this encouragement that he gives to them.

[11 : 16] In verse 14, where he refers to two cities, one that is here and now, and one that is to come. And he makes the point that the city that is here and now is passing away.

It's not lasting. But the one that is to come is. And so the writer makes the case to them that to turn aside from Christ and to return back to Judaism is to be forsaking the lasting city that is to come and to be pursuing this city that is not lasting, this city that is perishing, as it were.

So in light of these two realities about these two cities, the writer to the Hebrews tells these struggling, forgetful Christians, don't pursue the perishing city that is here and now.

Seek the lasting one that is to come. That's what he says to them as he concludes this letter. Don't pursue the perishing city that is here and now.

Seek the one that is to come. The one that is lasting. In short, what he says to them is, seek the lasting city. But friends, this morning, this is not just a message for these forgetful, struggling Christians.

[12 : 46] This is a message for us as well. It is a message for us this morning, we who can be so forgetful and forget the true nature of this world and we can be pursuing it in a way that we ought not to be and not pursuing the city that lasts.

So this is a message, not just for those struggling Christians at another time and in another place, but it is a message for us this morning to be reminded that we need to be seeking the city that lasts.

Well, for the remainder of our time this morning, what I want to do is I want to focus primarily on verse 14 in this text and the two statements found in it and the two cities referenced in it.

In verse 14, the writer is telling a story about two cities, one that is perishing and one that is lasting. And so naturally, I have two simple points this morning that I want us to consider and they are number one, the perishing city and number two, the lasting city.

Let's consider the first one, the perishing city. This is the city that is here and now that the writer refers to in verse 14 and he describes it as not lasting.

[14 : 14] His exact words about this city are, for here we have no lasting city. Here we have no lasting city.

And friends, on this third day of 2016, and mindful of all that's in our hearts, let us allow those words to rest on our souls and let's hear them this morning.

Here we have no lasting city. The writer was reminding the Jewish believers of this truth because some, as we have seen, were considering abandoning the faith.

Now to help us to appreciate the case that he makes in verse 14 to urge them to not do that, to urge them to not go after this perishing city but to pursue the lasting city, I want us to consider how he builds his argument beginning in verse 7.

What clearly is in view is that these Jewish believers have drifted or they are on the verge of drifting and forgetting the precious salvation that they have.

[15 : 36] And the reason is they just weren't seeing clearly. So in their obvious despair, the writer in verse 7 calls them, first of all, to remember their leaders who spoke the word of God to them.

He calls them to consider the outcome of their leaders' way of life and to imitate their faith. Now what is clear from these words is that these leaders had evidently passed on.

Perhaps they had died. They certainly didn't seem to be in that location because he speaks about them in past tense. And then also later as he concludes in verse 17, he calls them to obey their leaders who are watching over their souls.

So they seem to have a different group of present leaders who were caring for them. Even as he ends it, he talks about them greeting, giving greetings to their leaders.

But here now he calls them to reflect upon these leaders who spoke the word of God to them and he calls them to consider the outcome of these leaders' lives and to imitate their faith.

[16 : 47] He is encouraging them to be inspired by the examples of these individuals who brought them to the faith. And then in verse 8, he reminds them of another truth.

He says to them that Jesus Christ doesn't change. That Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That Jesus, the one whom the leaders, their former leaders, served and preached to them, that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And he's therefore worthy of their worship. He seems to be saying to them, the same Jesus who was faithful to those who preached the word of God to you will be faithful to you.

You need to consider their lives. You need to remember them, consider their lives, and imitate their faith and imitate their example.

And then in verse 9, he commands them to not be led away from the faith by entertaining diverse and strange teachings.

[18 : 00] And he seems to be referring to some Jewish ceremonial laws by his reference to foods. And he gives them two reasons to not do that.

First, he says, it's good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace. A clear reference to the gospel of grace as opposed to strange, unsound doctrine and legalism.

And the second reason he gives to them is he says to them, listen, the very people who are devoting themselves to those strange and diverse teachings have not benefited from it. So why should you pursue those things?

They have not benefited. It's not likely that you are going to benefit. And then in verses 10 through 13, the writer goes on to contrast the Old Testament sacrificial system that these Jewish believers were being enticed to return to with Christ's sacrifice.

And he shows how the sacrifice of Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Now, at this time it seems pretty clear that even though Christ had died and he had been resurrected and he had ascended into heaven some 35 or so years prior to the time of the writing of this letter, it seems though that they were continuing the animal sacrifice in the temple, that it continued to go on.

[19 : 35] That's the language in this section, it's the language in other parts of this letter as well. And in verse 10, there seems to be this clear reference to that where he says, we have an altar from which those who serve, present tense, those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

and what he's saying is he's saying that if you are partaking of that Old Testament sacrificial system, if you're still offering the blood of bulls and goats, he's really saying Christ is of no value to you, you have no right, you have no basis to come to the altar of Christ's sacrifice symbolically, what he has provided through his sacrifice, you aren't able to eat off both of those tables.

He says, when you do that, you forfeit your right to the altar that those who have come to Christ have a right to eat from.

And then, he, in verse 11, goes on to talk about the bodies of animals whose blood is brought into the holy places.

And here he's referencing the day of atonement, the day when the sins of Israel would be atoned for and they would use animals and transfer the sins of the nation on those animals and those animals would be their substitute and the animals would be killed.

[21 : 06] The blood would be poured into the holy places, sprinkled into the holy places and the bodies of those sacrifices would be burned outside of the city.

And here, he goes on and he says in, he says in verse 11, sorry, in verse 12, he says, so Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

So he's contrasting the Old Testament sacrificial practice on the day of atonement with Jesus and essentially saying that Jesus fulfilled it.

So Jesus did and he says it was sacrificed outside of the gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.

So he's reminding them of this fulfillment that has now taken place through Jesus Christ and therefore he points to them now the implications of that.

[22 : 16] So here you have Jesus who is hung on a Roman cross. This is the innocent suffering for the guilty. He has no sin of his own and therefore he's bearing the sin of sinners so that God may make them righteous and there he hung naked and cursed because of our sins.

But clearly these people to whom he's writing are not getting all of that in this moment. They're not computing that. They're not valuing that. They're more enticed to return back to the shadow of all of that to the four shadows of all of that.

And the writer to the Hebrews is reminding them that no Christ is Christ is better than that. Christ has already sacrificed Christ on your behalf.

But they were being alert to the comforts of what they had come out of. Getting rid of the rejection, getting rid of the persecution by simply going back and participating in what they left.

Now it is against that backdrop that the writer to the Hebrews writes these words that we find in verse 14. and he reminds his audience that the world in which they are is not lasting.

[23 : 48] He says it's perishing. That's the tale of this first city that they are minded to go back to. It is a perishing city and it will not last.

And these Hebrew Christians did not want to go to Christ and identify with him and with the reproach that that would bring.

They did not want to pay the price of identifying with him. And so what the writer says to them in verse 13 is therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach that he endured.

Now this can be true for us as well this morning. I think we can like those Jewish Christians make too much of this world make so much of this world overvalue this world and all of its expiring offerings and we can be tempted to cling to it and not cling to Christ.

We too can be tempted to shy away from openly identifying with Christ because we don't want to bear the reproach that so often comes with identifying with him.

[25 : 02] People mock us and sometimes people persecute us. Many of our students are going to be returning to school in the morning and some of you have trusted in Christ.

You have professed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and as Savior and therefore you're called to identify with him. You're called to do what the writer to the Hebrew says.

You're called to go to him and you're called to identify with him and you're called to endure the reproach that he endured. And I want to say to you this morning as you prepare to do that that you might not worry if your friends tease you and they most likely will.

When you do normal things like giving God thanks for food that he has given to you. When you perhaps may choose to associate with a group of fellow students who might meet in an SCM a student Christian movement or some other kind of meeting just to pray together and there would be those who would ridicule you and laugh at you when you do those things.

When you do those things and you endure the scoffing and the mocking what you are doing is you're doing what the writer to the Hebrews is saying you are enduring that reproach.

[26 : 24] You're going to him you're identifying with him and you are enduring that reproach. There's some of our students this morning who have not trusted in Christ and some of them are conscious that one of the reasons they would not do that is because of the ridicule and because of what friends would think and the fact that they may fall out of the approval of some friends that they would not be seen as cool to do that.

And though you may not think of it in this direct way what you are really doing is you're saying I don't want to go to him because I don't want to bear that reproach that is associated with him.

So in a sense what you're doing is you're holding on to this world and its enticements and its offerings and it is perishing. It's not lasting.

He says here we have no continuing city. And see that may look a little different for many of us. There are some of us who are holding on if you want to think of it this way.

We all have these little cities that we just think are valuable that will last and that we get comfort from and that we think are worth investing our time in.

[27 : 46] But we can collapse them all into the one big city of this world and it's all passing away. He says there is no continuing city here.

But this is not just true for students in primary school and junior high school and high school. It's also true, especially true for our college students. Some of you in a matter of days are going to be on campuses where you would be ostracized, where you would be ridiculed and laughed to scorn.

if you hold to biblical teaching, if you uphold what scripture says about life, about things like marriage.

And added to that, there would be professors who would join the line of mockers and scoffers. And you have to consciously, those of you who have trusted Christ, you have to consciously decide to go to him and to be willing to bear the reproach that comes with identifying with him.

And when we choose not to do that, if you choose not to do that, likewise, you're holding on to that city that's not lasting, you're holding on to that city that is perishing. And beyond our college students, it applies to the rest of us.

[29 : 16] as we journey into this new year, I want to remind us of what scripture says about this world and all that it offers.

Nothing in it will last. Nothing in it will last. So let us be willing this year to go to Jesus, to go to the one who promises something better than what we have, something more enduring than we have.

And let us willingly, those of us who have trusted Christ, bear his reproach. Well, that's the tale of the first city. It's a city that is enticing, but it's not lasting, and it leads to hell, it leads to death.

death. But Paul references a second city, and this second city is the lasting city, and this is my second and final point.

Here Paul refers to this lasting city with this statement. He says, but we seek the city that is to come. We seek the city that is to come.

[30 : 34] So this lasting city that we seek is not here yet. It is a city that is very much unlike the city of this world in which we now live, where nothing lasts.

As a matter of fact, what happens in this city that we now live in is, as we experience the breakup of relationships and the death of loved ones, and the breaking down of life all around us, it makes us long for that other city, the city that will endure, the city that will last.

In the last book of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, the Lord gives the apostle John a vision of the lasting city that is to come. And here's how John describes this city in Revelation 21, 1-4.

John says, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

[32 : 01] He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God, and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

that's the lasting city that we've been called to seek. Now, I think you would agree with me that it does make sense when we listen to these two cities, this one that's not lasting, that's perishing and vanishing away, and this other one that is to come that is lasting, and that promises a relief from every single effect of the fall that we now know.

I think you'd agree with me that when we think about that, naturally we'd all say, hey, we should pursue the lasting city. We shouldn't pursue the perishing city.

It makes no sense to pursue the perishing city. And so the question is, if that is true, and I believe you'd agree that it makes sense to pursue the lasting city, why don't we?

Why don't we broadly speaking, as a whole, the whole of humanity, why don't we, broadly speaking, seek this lasting city?

[33 : 34] Again, nobody wants to polish brass on a sinking ship. Nobody wants to waste their efforts in an endeavor that is going downhill. So why is it that we so easily and naturally hold on to the city that is perishing and that is vanishing away.

Last night I watched ZNS News and they did a story on Sandals Emerald Bay and they interviewed some guests and talked about how they brought in the new year.

So you saw all the food and all the drinks and the fireworks and the reporter would go around randomly to various ones and ask them what were their hopes and plans for the new year.

And it's pretty obvious that many of them had too much to drink and it was also obvious not just from their facial expressions but from the things that they said.

and he asked this one man what were his hopes and expectations for the new year and he just paused and looked away from the camera a little bit and then he said to be a better partier.

[34 : 56] And the guy said to him so have ten girls because he had some around him so have ten girls he said no fifty and I thought what what empty words but it was a it was a good it was a good snapshot it was a good visual of people holding on to what is perishing those individuals at Emerald Bay were so representative of so many around the world who are living life in the perishing city of the here and now so why is it that we don't forsake the perishing city that is here and now and pursue the lasting city that is to come

I think there are two basic reasons and that's because you have two kinds of people in the world in a very strict sense the two kinds of people in the world those who are in Christ and those who are outside of Christ those who have been rescued and those who need to be rescued those who are perishing and those who by God's grace have been brought to the shore of rescue and the first group the reason that they hold on to the perishing city and the reason that they feel that the perishing city is better than that lasting city is they're blind they're blind and if God does not in mercy open their eyes they will never see and they will always believe that this perishing world is valuable and they would invest in it and they would stake their lives on it and they would see it worthy of giving themselves to and then the case of those of us who are saved though the

Lord will ensure that we make it to that lasting city though the Lord by his grace will preserve us and bring us to that lasting city I think we would all admit that we do have these moments of lapses in memory we sometimes forget that this world is indeed passing away and we have this better promise of a world to come but in moments of living life and busyness and life in this fallen world we we tend to forget and we sometimes ourselves find ourselves seeking to hold on to this world in which nothing lasts so the writer to the Hebrew says to us though we have to seek the lasting city and how do we do that what enables us to be able to seek this lasting city to grit our teeth and resolve make a bunch of resolutions this year about all the different things we're going to do read our

Bibles and pray and do wonderful things like being in God's house like we are this morning to be disciplined ourselves and just resolve to do these things is that the way we seek the lasting city that is to come well I think if we do that we find ourselves flat on our faces sooner or later but the writer to the Hebrews tells us how we are to pursue the lasting city in verses 15 and 16 I want you to focus just on two words in verse 15 first he goes and he says through him through him see this is how we are to pursue and seek this lasting city we are to do it through him we are to do it through

Jesus through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name do not neglect to do good and to share with and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God what the writer to the Hebrews is saying to us is that through Jesus we are to live this life this ongoing way of offering sacrifice to God the fruit of our lips confessing his name acknowledging his name and lives that are committed to doing good to sharing with others sharing with them of our possessions he says God is pleased with those as well but we can only do it through him we can only have the presence of mind to seek the lasting city through

[40 : 33] Jesus Christ and this must be our task to daily ask the Lord to remind us through Jesus to live this way that our lives would be lives of praise to God both in what we say and also in how we live and how we love and extend ourselves to other people I think this morning these two words are perhaps the most important words that we need to remember this morning as we commit to seeking this lasting city pursuing this lasting city to remember that it's only going to be through Jesus Christ and the grace that he provides that would enable us to do this enable us to see the world for what it's worth to see this passing world for what it's worth and then to see the value of that world to come for what it's worth because without his sight without the sight that

God gives us without divine sight we will make much of this world and we would make little of the world to come only by God's grace are we able to really see true value in both of these worlds for what they really are and that we would be able to forsake this one because we recognize that it always over promises and always under delivers and nothing lasts in it and the one to come but though it looks like it's undesirable on its face it's worth every single bit of our affection and our pursuit but only through the Lord are we able to see this that's the second city that's the tale of the second city it is a better city because it is lasting we're not the first ones this morning who are called to seek this lasting city there are others who have gone before as our father in the faith

Abraham he was called to seek this lasting city look at what it says in Hebrews 11 if you would turn there with me Hebrews 11 and starting in verse 8 here's what it says it says by faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance he went out not knowing where he was going by faith he went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land living in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God by faith Sarah herself received power to conceive age since she considered him faithful who had promised therefore from one man and him as good as dead were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore these all died in faith not having received the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth for people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland if they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out they would have had opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one therefore

God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city we join this faithful company of saints who have gone before us who in the midst of a world that allured them as it allures us enticed them as it entices us they continue to seek that city that had foundations whose maker and builder was God now what does this mean for us does this mean that we are not to work and save and go to school and study and engage in the normal things of life no it doesn't mean that at all we need to do those things and we need to be diligent in those things but as we do those things let us not put our hope on those things or anything else in this world instead what we need to do is we need to set our hope on the

Lord Jesus Christ and we need to look to him daily to help us to live faithfully in this world saying it for what it truly is not lasting and then saying the world to come for what it is that it is lasting as we enter 2016 brothers and sisters I encourage us to let us make the confession that those who have gone before us made when they said we are strangers and we are exiles on this earth we are seeking a homeland and if we do we will not make much of this world we will not hang hopes and dreams and promises on this world that is passing away but instead we will look to the world that is to come to come come to