

# Hebrews 12:25-13:21 AM

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we come to the end of our series in Leviticus and Hebrews, and it's been a wonderful way for us to prepare for Easter as we've tried to search out some of the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

And we've seen something of the incredible lengths that the holy God has gone to, to draw near to his unholy people and for us to draw near to him. The trouble is, talking about God's holiness can seem so remote, removed, detached from everyday life.

And the sacrificial system in Leviticus, yes, it shows us something of the cost of sin and God's determination to draw near. What does it all mean for Monday?

Anyway, and we've seen more of Jesus as the true sacrifice for our sin and the great high priest in the book of Hebrews. We've heard his call to draw near, but there seems to be something missing, if I could say it that way.

It still seems to be a bit abstract and impractical. How does this all change us? And the burning question when we come to the book of Hebrews, the burning question for the Hebrews was this.

[ 1 : 21 ] It was written to a group of Christians who had begun very, very well. They had stood publicly for the Christian faith and they had suffered for it.

They'd been abused and humiliated. Some had been imprisoned. Some had lost properties, houses confiscated by the authorities. And they had joyfully accepted this suffering because they were looking for a heavenly city.

And now that things were a little more comfortable, they were strongly tempted to slip away from Christ and just slip back into the world. This is one of the most difficult edges of Christian suffering. Not so much physical suffering, but bearing the constant disapproval of those around us. The embarrassment that we and the awkwardness we feel about our faith in front of others.

And the recipients of this letter had come out of a Jewish background. And the Jewish faith was still highly regarded in the Roman Empire. It was a legal religion. It was untouchable.

[ 2 : 30 ] Whereas Christianity was still illegal. So the temptation to slip away from Jesus came very attractively wrapped in Judaism.

Which is why this book spends so much time on how Jesus is infinitely superior to all the obsolete practices of Judaism. But this is a very contemporary temptation, isn't it?

I don't think any one of us, I think all of us feel from time to time, the sense of, I wish I could just drop all this and simply slip back and be a normal person.

Do you struggle with that? I'm so tired of the inevitable shame of following Jesus. And those awkward moments when I know I should say something in conversation.

And I know my friends, some of my friends find it awkward to be associated with me. Wouldn't it be great to just throw it off and slip back into the stream of things? And this is where Leviticus 19 and Hebrews 13 are such a help to us.

[ 3 : 34 ] We're going to do a lot of flipping today. They show us that holiness is not a nice abstract idea out there. But something that can and should be reflected in everything we do.

In our thinking, in our attitudes, in our words and in our actions. The way God says it in Leviticus is, you shall be holy for I, the Lord, am holy.

And the way the writer to Hebrews says it is this, we must share God's holiness. We must strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

So this sermon is about this. What does it mean to share God's holiness? And I've got three points. One in Leviticus 19 and two in Hebrews 13.

And they're all moving the same direction. So let's turn back to Leviticus 19, shall we? On page 97. Nice to hear a little bit of rustling there.

[ 4 : 40 ] So what does sharing God's holiness mean? My first point from Leviticus 19 is sharing God's holiness means saying no to Egypt.

Verse 1 of Leviticus 19 starts. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy because for, here's the reason, I, the Lord, your God, am holy.

So holiness is non-negotiable. Bringing holiness to bear in every area of our lives. This is what leads to real change.

Not just our ethics, but every decision. And I think as soon as you hear that, it's a little bit surprising that God expects us to share his holiness. I mean, doesn't God's holiness mean how separate and distant and distinct he is from us?

What he means is this, that God expects us to share his holiness, that we would be distinct from the world around us in how we live. And you can see this from the chapters in Leviticus.

[ 5 : 56 ] So Leviticus 19 is part of three chapters, which are a section called the Holiness Code. And they show that being holy means being distinctive from all of those around who do not know God.

That is, we set our lifestyle not according to the cultures roundabout, but according to God and his words. So look back to chapter 18, verse 2.

Speak to the people of Israel. I'm in Leviticus 18. Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they did in the land of Egypt, where you lived.

You shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. You shall follow my rules, keep my statutes and walk in them.

I am the Lord your God. There's chapter 18. Turn over to chapter 20. The end of chapter 20. Well, near the end, verse 22. You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

[ 7 : 03 ] And you shall not walk in the customs of the nations that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. And then down in verse 26.

You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. So to be holy means to be out of step with the culture around about you, not for the sake of being different.

The Lord preserve us from that. But to live out the words of God. And here's the thing, as you read through the Old Testament, the constant desire of the Israelites as they're walking through the wilderness is to go back to Egypt.

Again and again and again. They rise up against Moses and Aaron. They say, we don't like your leadership anymore. We're going to elect new leaders. We're going to go back to Egypt. Because back in Egypt there were leeks and garlics and onions by the dozen.

Interesting diet. They never talked about the bitterness of slavery. They never talked about the wonder of God's rescue. And I read this week that even after 38 years in the desert, when they come back to the promised land, they do it again.

[ 8 : 22 ] So what does it mean to share God's holiness? In chapter 19. What does it mean in chapter 19? Well, we read it. It means it shows in the way we treat our parents.

In the way we deal with generosity with our planting in the fields. And not stealing from others. And telling the truth. And not oppressing the vulnerable. And not touching the occult. It's all of life.

And at the heart of holiness, in Leviticus 19, is verse 18. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Isn't that great? That's what holiness is.

It's not being weird and otherworldly and super spiritual and disengaged. It's treating your neighbour as you wish you would be treated. And if you look back in chapter 18, you can go over this sometime.

There are a long list of instructions from God about sexual behaviour. Because one of the key ways that we demonstrate our love for each other is in our sexual purity and who we sleep with.

[ 9 : 23 ] Of course, our culture roundabout finds this bizarre, what we believe. It says, you sleep with anyone you want. It mixes up love and sex. Just go out and get what you need.

But we don't draw our standards from Egypt, nor from Vancouver, nor from Canaan. So this is my first point. Leviticus 19 teaches that sharing God's holiness means saying no to Egypt.

Point two. Let's turn over to Hebrews 13. More rustling, please. So Hebrews 13, 1 to 6.

Sharing God's holiness doesn't just mean saying no to Egypt. It means saying yes to the people of God. Now you can see right off from verse 1 in Hebrews 13 that it reflects the same practical concerns of sharing God's holiness and how it affects our attitudes and our actions in the daily circumstances of our lives.

So verse 1, keep on loving each other. Keep on loving the stranger with hospitality. And you might think, tick, okay. But it's not simple and it's not easy.

[10:40] Because one of the most common things you hear today is, I love Jesus but I hate the church. There are often very good reasons for that. It can be hard to get on with brothers and sisters.

It's hard to love them, let alone like them. So many Christians are difficult and strident and argumentative. And to keep on loving one another is not simple and it's not an easy thing to do. And there is the very real temptation of being ashamed of other believers and looking down on them. When there are so many nice believers like me, why bother with the difficult ones, right? And this temptation comes in all sorts of forms. When I was a young minister, a certain bishop took me into his confidence and he began mocking an older Christian brother who believed what I believed.

And there was something in what the bishop said. And I remember thinking, if I continue to love my brother, I'm going to have to tell the bishop I stand with him.

[11:51] And I did. But I know for the Hebrews, this would have been incredibly difficult. Look at verse 2. Care for those who are in prison. I mean, prison.

Prison in the Roman Empire was awful. Didn't get any food. And if you visited people in prison and cared for them, you would soon come under suspicion and the same suspicion that they were in for and particularly if they are in prison for their faith.

Verses 4 and 5, just like Leviticus revealed that we share God's holiness, means we take our sexual ethics from the word of God and we take our view of money, not from the culture round about us. Because the cross of Jesus has enough grace and space to forgive us all, to cleanse us who are sexually impure, to strengthen us who are sexually tempted, and to give us riches beyond finance and property and money, all the money world can give.

Still, it's not a comfortable thing in our culture to say we desire to honour marriage above all, or that God will judge the sexually immoral, or to keep our lives free from the love of money.

[13:05] I mean, sex and money, they're two of the three primary idols in our culture. And if you don't worship at their altars, you will experience powerful disapproval and rejection of some.

Now, here's my question. That's fine, David. But why is this here? What is it that holds this together? What's really going on?

What's really going on, and the reason this is here, is that sharing God's holiness means saying yes to the people of God. Loving one another and hospitality and compassion on those in need, sexual purity and generosity are not a random list of things to do that the writer just throws in at the last moment.

It's a reflection that our hearts are given to the welfare of the people of God. And it is the antidote to the temptation to be ashamed of the people of God and then to slip back into the world.

Because if we don't give our hearts to our brothers and sisters, you will give your heart to the world and you will slip back. That's why the example of Moses that he gave two chapters ago is so important.

[14:15] If you just... It's on the same page as Hebrews 13, chapter 11, verses 24 to 27. You remember Moses brought up in the court of Pharaoh and he had a decision to make as a young man, either to identify as an Egyptian and have all the wealth and power and position, or to identify with the people of God who were, frankly, not that attractive.

And it would mean abuse and shame and rejection. So look back, chapter 11, verse 24. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Why? He considered the reproaches of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking for his reward.

See? Sharing the holiness of God for Moses meant deliberately choosing to identify with God's people, the despised, the mistreated slaves in the kingdom.

It meant turning his back on all that fame and wealth and pleasure and luxury, living with an army of people to serve him for the rest of his life, and to serve a people who were bitter and complaining, famously complaining, but who belonged to the holy God.

[15:49] So sharing God's holiness means saying no to Egypt. It means saying yes to the people of God and committing ourselves to their welfare in the terms of Hebrews 13, verses 1 to 6.

I wonder if you'll do that. And the third point is this, and this is Hebrews, back to Hebrews 13, verses 7 to 17. Sharing God's holiness means saying yes to Jesus.

I used to think this passage, 7 to 17, was about how congregations should treat their leaders. It certainly begins and ends with references to leaders.

In verse 7, it looks back to the leaders who've died. It ties leadership in the congregation to the speaking of God's word, and it says imitate their faith. And then in verse 17, one of my favourite commands in the New Testament, the congregation to submit to and obey their leaders and to do it in an enthusiastic and willing way so that leaders will be able to lead with joy and not with groaning. And we could spend a very profitable hour or two working through the practical implications of how to do that. It's not what the passage is about. That's just one application of the deep principle we find at the heart of the passage in verses 12 to 14.

[17:14] So if you turn over to 12 to 14, let me read them for you. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to make holy the people of God, the people through his own blood.

Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach that he endured, for here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

So where does the power come from to not slip back into the world? How can we deal with the disapproval and the rejection of others? The answer is we have to go out to Jesus outside the camp.

And I think the picture of the camp here is the place of safety and security and shelter of comfort and cosiness and consolation and approval. But to share the holiness of God means to say yes to Jesus and going out to him and bearing his reproach, the reproach that he endured.

Because you remember, Jesus was utterly and completely and violently rejected and humiliated by Israel. And the sign of their rejection was the fact that he was crucified outside the gate, the place where they just totally wanted to eradicate him and exterminate him.

[18:49] Which means the idea of going back to Judaism is nuts. It's turning you back on Jesus. And notice the reference to holiness in verse 12.

Jesus suffered on the cross to make us holy by giving his blood outside the camp. It is the cross of Jesus that is our source of true acceptance and approval.

And only by clinging to the cross and repeatedly going to the cross do we have the kind of love and the kind of acceptance that we need to be able to face the rejection and the lack of approval of those around us.

And more, to turn those, as Jesus did, to those who are crucifying and to love them. I mean, think about it from Jesus' point of view.

As Jesus looks at us, there's so much he's got to be ashamed of. Our impurity, our ignorance, our arrogance. You don't turn to this.

[19:48] But in chapter 2, when the writer speaks about his suffering and his cross, we find that Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

By facing the shame and disapproval of the world, he's opened a way so that he can be proud of us. In chapter 11, we read that God is not ashamed to be called our God because we're trusting him and looking for a city that is permanent.

We're not looking to Vancouver to supply all our needs but to the heavenly city. And then at the beginning of chapter 12, you might just turn back to that for a moment, we're taken inside the mind and heart of Jesus while he's on the cross.

In verse 1-2, we read this. Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely. And let's run with endurance the race that's set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.

And he's now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. He experienced the mocking and the shame and the humiliation and degradation to its absolute full and we read here that he despised, he looked shame in the face and he said, it's real, I'm experiencing it but I disregard it.

[ 21 : 16 ] I'm not going to allow my actions to be controlled by it. I'm not going to fear it because the joy that is set before me, the joy is that I'm going to bring many of my brothers and sisters to glory.

So when our families and our friends distance themselves from us because of our faith in subtle ways and not so subtle ways, we fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ and the city he has built for us and when we're abused and mocked and marginalised and gaslighted, we remember that Jesus was crucified outside the place of comfort and security and we go to him there and they're the same reproach that he endured and it is the same reproach because we're being mocked for the name of Jesus.

And that is why it means holiness, sharing the holiness of God, not only means saying no to Egypt and saying yes to the people of God, it means saying yes at the deepest level to Jesus himself because that is the heart of holiness.

It's willing to leave the place of safety and comfort and to take the risk of naming Jesus and bearing his reproach and such sacrifices, brothers and sisters, are pleasing to God.

So as we finish, here are two things to take away. I don't like that phrase, takeaways, but I hope you take the whole thing away, but you know what I mean. The first is this, in preparation for Easter, it'd be very good to pray and meditate on what this means for you.

[ 22 : 51 ] What does it mean for you to say no to Egypt? What does it mean for you to commit yourself and say yes to the people of God and yes to Jesus outside the gate? I mean, you can't go to Jesus outside the gate and just ignore your brothers and sisters around you.

Satan's so happy with private Christians who don't acknowledge the name of Jesus or are ashamed to be identified with other Christian believers. So it'd be very good to pray through this and then decide what it would mean for me to go to Jesus outside the camp now, today, this year.

That's the first thing. And the second thing, and I just want to finish this series by saying, do you see the beauty of God's holiness? It's his holiness that drove him to make a way to be near us and for us to be near him.

And through the book of Hebrews, the call comes back again and again and again for us to draw near, draw near, draw near by the blood of Jesus for strength and for grace and for help.

And part of the beauty of his holiness is Jesus calls us from outside the camp to come to him away from the place of natural comfort and approval and acceptance and find the place of true comfort and true approval and true acceptance.

[ 24 : 16 ] Because in the end, here we have no lasting city. This world can offer us nothing that lasts. It's only a camp. But for those who go out to Jesus Christ and his cross, we find in him everything we need, the love of God, the acceptance of God and the gift of the eternal city.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.