

Gods Condescension

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Date: 26 November 2009

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn back now to that chapter that we read in Hebrews chapter 13, the last chapter of Hebrews. And I want to read from verse 12 once again, but particularly focus on verse 15 and 16.

But since these verses are founded, grounded on verse 12, I think we need to read from there in order to get the context. So Jesus, verse 12, 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.

And then verse 15 and 16, which are the verses I want us to focus on particularly. 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.

[1 : 18] Verse 15 and verse 16 of that passage are two sacrifices.

There is in verse 15, first of all, the sacrifice of praise to God. That's what he says, the sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

That's the first sacrifice that we are told to make in these verses. But the second one is found in verse 16. Another sacrifice. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.

For such sacrifices are pleasing to God. These are the two sacrifices I want us to think about this evening in the context of what we're here for, which is a service of thanksgiving and acknowledgement of all that God has done for us.

But I want us to do so particularly acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did. Because those two sacrifices in verse 15 and verse 16 are founded on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which we read about in verse 12.

[2 : 31] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Now the letter to the Hebrews is all about sacrifice.

And the message of the letter is quite simply this, that Jesus' sacrifice is superior to all the ones that were made, all the offerings that were made in the Old Testament.

And that has to be said in order to encourage the people of God in the New Testament, who were continually being reminded of the big change, the great change that had taken place, that whilst beforehand as Jewish people, as Israelite people, they had been accustomed to approaching God by means of animal sacrifice, now they were approaching God by means of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the name and on the basis of his sacrifice alone.

Now you remember what a sacrifice was in the Old Testament. You simply couldn't approach God from the very beginning. We saw this on Sunday when we looked at Cain and Abel and their sacrifices, that you simply could not approach God without bringing a sacrifice with you.

And every time you approached God, you had to bring an animal in order for that animal to simply die as your substitute. The guilt of your sin was placed upon that animal, and the animal was put to death.

[3 : 50] And then it was offered on the altar. The animal was cut up, and it was offered on the altar. But there was something more to sacrifice in the Old Testament.

I don't think enough attention is given to this sometimes. We always think of sacrifice, quite rightly so, as a substitute. The animal being put to death, instead of the person bringing the animal, taking the sin of the person on himself.

But there was another sense in which sacrifice was given as well. And that was every time that the person came to God by means of the sacrifice, he was offering himself to God.

In offering the animal to God, he was actually offering his life. He was laying down his life as an offering in service to God. And that's the sense in which the word sacrifice is being used in verse 15 and verse 16.

When we're told to offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledges name, we're not being asked or required to bring a substitutionary sacrifice.

[4 : 59] We can't in any way pay for our own sin. That was the whole point of Jesus giving his life as the sacrifice for our sin. And yet, having come to faith in him, God requires us to make a sacrifice.

That is, he requires us to make an offering. We are to offer ourselves, just in the same way as the Old Testament believer, by bringing the animal to the altar, he was bringing himself and offering himself to God.

So the Lord asks and commands us tonight to bring ourselves to him and to offer, as Paul says in Romans chapter 12 and verse 1, offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God, which is your spiritual service.

And so there are two types of sacrifice, grounded upon the one, once for all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and that is the sacrifice of praise to God and the sacrifice of doing good and sharing what you have.

But I want us, for just two or three minutes, to look at that great foundational sacrifice, particularly the way in which the apostle refers to the death of Jesus in this chapter.

[6 : 12] Here's how he puts it. He says this, So Jesus also suffered outside the camp, in order, outside the gate rather, in order to sanctify the people through his blood.

And as a consequence of that, the first requirement that God puts before us is, therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

Now why am I saying this? Why don't we make this a celebration of all the good and the good things and the generosity of God that we can remember during the past year? Because of this.

I don't believe you can ever do that without recognizing what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, our coming here tonight is not just paying lip service.

we're not just thankful without knowing what we're thankful for. We are particularly recognizing and aware of the goodness of God which is demonstrated more than anything else in the person of Jesus Christ and in the death that he died at Calvary.

[7 : 27] And this is the way that the apostle puts it. He said, Jesus suffered outside the gate. Now what is he talking about and why does he particularly use those words?

Well, he's referring to a particular kind of offering in the Old Testament known as the sin offering.

Or, if you want to put it this way, he's referring to the great day of atonement.

Because what happened either on the day of atonement or in the sin offering was simply this, that the sacrifice was taken and it was divided. After the animal, of course, was put to death.

Part of the animal, and I don't need to go into it, we don't have time, part of the animal was placed on the altar of burnt offering and it was offered up to God. It was burned on the altar.

But the other part of the animal was taken all the way from the tabernacle which was situated in the middle of the camp of Israel that it was taken all the way out.

[8 : 27] And we're talking a good long distance here in front of everyone. The animal was taken, the part of the animal was taken through the camp, outside of the camp to a particularly, specially designated place where the body of the animal was burned.

Now that place was a horrific place because it was kind of like if you would like, you know, you can drive out to Mary Bank and you continue out past the loch and you get to the rubbish dump.

Well, that's not the kind of place you go to for a walk or for a nice pleasant drive. Once you get there, it becomes very apparent what kind of place it is.

But if that's true for ourselves, it was even more true for the people of Israel because this wasn't just a rubbish dump.

This was a place where the animals which had been put to death for the sin of Israel, where the parts of their body were taken and they were ceremonially burned.

[9 : 40] They were destroyed. It was a place of horror. It wasn't just an ugly place. It was a place that God designated as a place of shame and a place of disgrace.

And if you looked at that place, you would be reminded time and again of the sin that had to be paid for by the sacrifice. In fact, you weren't allowed to go to that place because it was ceremonially

unclean.

In other words, God regarded that location as being unclean. You weren't allowed to go there. Now then, here's the point. What I'm saying is this, that there were two places.

You can imagine the camp of Israel. We're talking two million people, by the way. It's not just a small camp. It's not like a campsite that we can think of. We're talking about two million people. And if you can imagine in the middle of that enclosure, in that community, there was a place of ultimate holiness that you couldn't get into because it was so holy.

And what made it more holy than anything else was the presence of God was there in the holy of holies. That was in the middle of Israel. However, on the outside of the camp of Israel, there was the opposite kind of place.

[10:54] And equally, you weren't allowed to go near there because it was so dirty and so shameful and so unclean. So God said two things. First of all, you're not allowed to go near the middle of the camp.

You're not allowed to go into the tabernacle. Only the priests could go because of its holiness. Because it signified the presence and the holiness and the power of God.

On the outside of the camp, there was another place where the bodies of the animals were burned and that was the opposite. It was a place of unholiness.

It was a place of sinfulness, if you like, because all of these animals, they bore the guilt, symbolically, of the sins of all the people of Israel. So as their bodies were burned, you were reminded of the reason why these animals had to be put to death, because of the sin of Israel. It was a shameful and it was an unclean place. Now when, and here's the point, when the apostle in this chapter wants to describe the death of the Lord, that's the place he takes us to.

[12:03] This awful place that you dare not go, that's where the Lord chose to go in order to bear the sin of his people.

If I can put it this way, let me just put it this way. When God, way back in the Old Testament, the camp of Israel, when God chose to dwell among his people, he chose to dwell in the Holy of Holies, which was in the middle, in the tent.

The tabernacle. But when the Lord Jesus Christ came to bear the sin, and remember that the Lord Jesus Christ was the same being, the same God, as dwelt in the middle of the people of Israel in the Holy of Holies, which he couldn't approach.

When that same God entered into our world, and when he took our sin upon himself, it wasn't in the Holy of Holies that he dwelt.

He went to the opposite place. The place of shame. The place of guilt. The place of horror. The place of rejection.

[13:18] The place where he said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's the glory of the cross.

The cross, of course, was literally situated outside of Jerusalem. And here, the apostle is saying that just as the animals were taken, the bodies of the animals were taken outside of the camp, so Jesus was taken outside of Jerusalem, the camp of the covenant people of God.

There is where he suffered. But he said, let us go to him. Let us therefore go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. And that's where we're to go tonight.

We're to go and be identified with this Jesus who took upon himself our guilt and our uncleanness. And it is on that basis and that basis alone that we want to give thanks to him this evening.

We want to keep that at the top of our thought of God. the greatest reason, of course, why we give thanks to God as well as our well-being and our health and strength and all of the things that God gives us.

[14:27] We are looking particularly, focusing particularly on the condescension of God. And surely that has to be at the forefront of our minds. And that is what I would argue this evening makes us truly and really thankful.

I would say to you tonight that unless you know this Jesus for yourself, that you are not truly thankful. You might be outraged at that. You might feel, of course I'm thankful.

I'm thankful for every moment that I breathe. For every moment that I live. And for the air that I breathe and for everything. But what I'm saying is that tonight if you truly recognize that the Lord has given you these things, you will listen to him and you will come to him in faith and that you will discover what he really has to give in the person of Jesus Christ.

See, I hear a lot of people saying, oh I'm thankful. I'm thankful every day I live. And what they really mean is that's enough. I'm not going to go any further than that. That's enough.

That should be enough. Surely, that's what God wants. Of course, I'm not saying that God doesn't command us to be thankful. But God commands us to listen to him and to come to Jesus because we need to come to him.

[15 : 40] And the reason why a person would say he's thankful and not come to Jesus is because he thinks he can be thankful by himself through his own strength. And he thinks that God should be satisfied with that.

But as soon as he comes to Jesus, he's admitting his own failures and his sinfulness. And that's a different thing altogether, isn't it? It takes real faith to confess our own bankruptcy and our own need to be saved from sin.

Now, as the basics of what Jesus did outside the camp in that place of shame that we know as Calvary, the place where the Son of God himself became the sacrifice for our sin, we come to him outside the camp being identified with him.

And this is what God asks us and commands us to do as a base, as the result and the consequence of what we have in him. Verse 15 then, the first of those sacrifices is that we are to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of our lips and that acknowledge his name.

Now, the verse tells us that this is a continuous sacrifice. Do you notice that?

[17 : 03] It tells us that it is not just a gesture, you see, for us, thankfulness is a gesture. It's a one-off. Somebody gives you a gift and you say thank you.

You mean it. You're sincere about it. But it doesn't take long before that thankfulness and that gesture is forgotten about. And that's very often the way we think of thankfulness. You might even think that tonight is a gesture.

One-off a year. Of course, you might even be here tonight because you think, well, that's the least I can do to acknowledge what God has done for me. I'll go and I'll... But that's not what this verse tells us to do. It tells us that our thankfulness, our gratitude has to be continuous.

You know, there's a sense in which we have created as singular events what should be taking place all the time in our Christian lives.

Isn't that the case? The world focuses on the birth of Jesus only one day of the year. Isn't that tragedy? For the Christian, it's every day of the year. For the Christian, I hope that we're aware of what God did in coming into the world as a baby at Bethlehem every single day.

[18 : 11] The world focuses on the death and the resurrection of Jesus at Easter Day. But for the Christian, every day is Easter Day, isn't it? Every day should be the day of the resurrection and the day when his focus...

Is there ever a day when we don't think of what Jesus did for us? Is there ever a day? I hope not. God. And so it continues. And it's the same is true for Thanksgiving Day.

Isn't it a tragedy that the eyes of the world and the attention of the world is only on thankfulness one day of the year? Surely every day should be a day in which we are even more aware of what God has done for us.

Every day, we should never, ever lose sight of it. It should be continuous. That's what the apostle says. Through him, let us continue. The only way that we can have that continuous sense of gratitude to what the Lord has done is through him.

And what he means by that, of course, is with the new life, the resurrected, transformed life that Jesus, the new birth that Jesus has promised to give us and in which we are if we're following him.

[19 : 20] Only then, with eyes that are open, can we focus on God and the Lord Jesus Christ as we ought to. That's the offering that the Lord is commanding for us.

Do you notice then also that the thankfulness that God is requiring of us is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. What does that mean?

Well, again, perhaps the word acknowledgement is not particularly strong. We say, I acknowledge. If somebody sends you a letter, you might send them a wee letter back saying, I acknowledge. And it's a gesture.

One more, it's a gesture. But that's not what the word means at all. The first thing it means is that we focus our attention and our thoughts and our concentration positively on God.

And that we, as Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It means that God takes the central place as we focus our eyes and our gratitude and our faith upon him.

[20 : 21] That's not just some kind of passing gesture. I acknowledge him. For too many people, that's about as much thought as they give to the Lord. The fact is this tonight, that far from being a momentary, singular acknowledgement, thankfulness is something which is a driving force in the life of the Christian.

It is far more important than the attention that we give it, even as true and genuine believers in Jesus Christ. And I would like us this evening to try and return to that sense of gratitude in faith to what God has done for us.

What do I mean by that? Well, let me ask you this question. When sin came into the world, where did it all begin? What is the root cause of sin? Where you take all the, you take all the atrocities of the world and every evidence that there is of man's inhumanity to man and the kind of paganism and the kind of selfishness and the kind of awfulness that goes on in the world.

And you might think of the world in which we live and these are the terms in which you think of wrongdoing. But where did it all begin? Where did the start of the process begin? Well, the Bible tells us.

If you go to Romans in chapter 1 and verse 18, there is this, this solemn list and this solemn description of the way in which we went so badly wrong.

[21 : 52] Here is how it begins. And I would, I would recommend if you've never, or if you've seldom read this passage, then read it once again because it's a, it's a condemning indictment on the human race.

Verse 21, for although the human race knew God, every human being knows God, they know that there is a God. Deep down in our consciousness, we know that there is a God.

We'll do anything to blot out that consciousness, but it's still there. Although they knew, listen to what he says, although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or, listen, give thanks to him. That's how important and how basic and fundamental giving thanks is. In other words, the start of the process of sin in the human race began with our failure to give thanks to God.

That's how important it is. For too many of us, thanks, giving thanks is just, it's just a, a courtesy. God says to us, it's basic to your human makeup.

[22 : 56] That's the way I made you and the evidence that you have departed and rebelled from me is this, that you have failed to do what I have programmed you to do, which is to give thanks and honor to my name.

That's how basic it is. But if we move on to what I said before that it's the driving force, the motivating power within the Christian. How do I know that?

Am I not overstating the case? No, I'm not. Here, let me just give you some evidences. Philippians chapter 4 and verse 4. He says, Rejoice in the Lord always.

And I will say again, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Then he says this, Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Now what is the apostle telling us here? He's telling us, he's reminding us of something that is a challenge to every one of us. Situations in our lives in which we become anxious. There isn't a single person here tonight that doesn't know something of what being anxious is.

[24 : 11] Now I'm not talking about being concerned. The apostle's not telling us that it's wrong to be concerned. Of course we're all rightly concerned about several things. But there's a difference between what the apostle is telling us do not be anxious.

Being anxious is the downward spiral to despair where we only think of the problem and where our eyes have turned away from the Lord.

It's a bit like Peter when he went to Jesus when he stepped onto the water. At first he stood on the water, he walked to Jesus, then he looked around him, saw the wind and the waves and he panicked. He took his eyes off Jesus.

All he saw at that moment in time were the waves. And how high the waves were and how fierce the waves were and he began to sink. Well that's a picture of you and I when we become anxious and when we start on that downward spiral and we only see the darkness of our circumstances and fail to see that God is in control and if we're followers of Jesus he's right there.

He's behind us, he's before us, he's in front of us, he's in us, he's leading and guiding us every step of the way. Now here's what the apostle says, here's the antidote to anxiety. He's saying, do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness.

[25 : 35] In other words, thankfulness is God's remedy amongst other things, amongst the prayer and supplication to that anxiety which we so naturally fall into.

it's the driving force of trust and faith and confidence in the Lord in every single situation. What does he mean by that?

He means that even in the midst of the darkest of experiences we should stop and we should think of all that the Lord has been to us, all that the Lord has done for us, all that the Lord has promised us, the Lord's love towards his people in the Lord Jesus Christ, his covenanted love demonstrated in the death of Jesus Christ and the Lord's willingness to give us all things and it's seen, it is recognized only in one place and that's the cross.

Paul says, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how shall he not freely with him give us all things?

That's what Paul means when he says, do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Colossians chapter 4, here we have when God's people they feel that they can't go on any longer, they're giving up, they're allowing temptation to come in as we all do.

[27 : 06] Paul says this, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it, guess what? with thankfulness once again when we feel the weight of temptation when we feel our own vulnerability and our own sinfulness and how easy it is for us to slip and slide into wrongdoing either in our minds and our hearts with our mouths with our bodies whatever it is, he says, look, this is the antidote and I'm not saying it's easy, he says, he says, continue steadfastly in prayer, whatever you do don't stop praying, that's exactly what you do do, isn't it?

It's what I do when we start falling into temptation we think the Lord is not going to hear us because we've started slipping we think, I can't go to God, no, says Paul, continue, keep on, keep on doing it, being watchful, on the lookout all the time, but look, he says, with thanksgiving, once again, stop and remember what God has been doing in your life and that he who has begun a good work in you will continue it and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Now, have I begun, I hope, to prove, I hope, that the power of thanksgiving, the place of thanksgiving, the enormously important way in which God has placed this grace within us to recognize what God has done and in that recognition that we can be strengthened and encouraged. You know, every gift, every grace that God has given to us, everything has given, is for our good, is for our strengthening and our encouragement and to help us along the way. He wouldn't have given it otherwise.

God is concerned for our every need. Well, I could go on, but the time is going, I'm going to finish by this by talking about the second sacrifice in verse 16, we're to go, we're to look beyond ourselves in verse 16, do not neglect to do good.

[29 : 11] Now, verse 15, if it describes our vertical relationship with God and the sacrifice of praise that continually has to be offered up every day, continuously, on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done, never losing sight of our relationship to God, we have to look out at the same time.

God expects us to be outward-looking Christians and in the first place to do good, to do good. Do not neglect to do good. What does doing good mean?

Well, you might say, well, I'm doing good by coming here tonight. That's not what he means. I'm not suggesting that it's not good to be here tonight. Of course, it's good to praise the Lord and to remember what he's done for us, but that's not what he means by doing good.

See, some people equate doing good with going to meetings. Going to meetings are important, but God expects a whole lot more from us than that. God expects us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Doing good means being the light of the world in a dark world in the midst of what Paul calls a crooked and a perverse generation because he needs us to be there.

[30 : 23] We are his witnesses. We are living epistles. We are the voice piece of God. We are the ones in whom people who do not know God can see the reality, I hope, of the Christian faith at work.

That's what it means to do good. Doing good is living a life of obedience and faith and humility. Living the life that Jesus lived when he was on the earth and imitating him and living as he lived in the company of other people.

Who knows what God will do through us. Let your light so shine said Jesus so that men may see your good works and give glory and praise to their Father who is in heaven.

But he also expects us to be mindful of other people. The one who gave us in such abundance expects us to be mindful of the needs of others.

He says, do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Now here is where a Christian, his heart has been changed like Zacchaeus.

[31 : 36] Zacchaeus up until the time he met Jesus, he was the most selfish individual. Wanted to make as much money as he could. Gathered a whole fortune to himself. As soon as he met with the Lord Jesus, his whole attitude to his possessions changed.

As far as he was concerned, all he wanted to do was to live for Jesus. And if that meant giving away everything that he had, so be it. Because he felt he was so changed, his life was so changed, no longer was he focused on himself, but he was focused on the one who changed him and who liberated him.

And that included his pocket, his means, his lifestyle. And that's why it's important to remind ourselves at a time like this. That's why it's appropriate to remind ourselves of our duty to give.

To give of ourselves, but to give of our abundance to the needs of others. To share, he says, what you have.

Because sharing is not just an act of charity for the Christian. Sharing is not just something kind, but it's actually an act of service to God when it's done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 48] And that's why we need to be active in supporting mission groups, charity groups, welfare groups, wherever the poor are fed and whenever their misery is relieved and wherever there is need in the world, we want to be there.

We want to have a hand in helping them and supporting them in whatever way we can. the apostle tells us this.

He said, if you having this world's goods and see your brother in need, you shut up your compassion against him, how can the love of Christ be in you?

And what that means is tonight is if we only live for ourselves and want to spend what we have on ourselves, like so many people do in this world, in a selfish and a self-centered world, if that's what describes us tonight, then we need to think again and we need to discover afresh what Christ has done for us and how the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ has been in that he was rich and yet became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich.

Let's pray. Thank you.