

Hebrews 13:8-16

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[0 : 00] Let me read this passage for us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Do not 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.

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.

[1 : 08] Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Let's pray together.

God, we ask your blessing upon the reading and the preaching of your word this morning. God, would you guide our thoughts and our hearts to see you and to behold you afresh in your majesty and in your mercy.

God, we ask that the message of this passage from Hebrews would strike a chord within us. Lord, so that your purposes might be carried out in our hearts and our lives, in our church, and our community, God, we pray.

For your name's sake, in Jesus' name, amen. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote those words in 1937 in the work that we now call *The Cost of Discipleship*. Less than eight years later in 1945, Bonhoeffer would be executed in Flossenbürg, a Nazi concentration camp.

[2 : 19] For Bonhoeffer, the call to follow Christ faithfully meant literally following him to death. Now, it isn't that way for every Christian.

Not every follower of Christ will be called to literally lay down their physical life for him. And yet, the call of Christ to come and die is the same.

The call to leave our old life, the call to leave our old ambition, the call to leave our old ways of justifying ourselves before others and before God, to die, as it were, to these things and give all to Christ.

This call is the same for everyone who hears Christ saying, come. Bonhoeffer goes on to explain it this way, the cross is laid on every Christian.

The first Christ suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man, which is the encounter with Christ.

[3 : 26] As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death. Thus, it begins. The cross is not the terrible end of an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.

And then comes the famous line, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. Now, our passage this morning is full of references and images that at first may seem obscure or confusing, but at its heart, it is issuing to us in a fresh way Christ's call to discipleship, to go to him, to follow him, and to do so even in the face of great cost.

The central command of the passage is found in verse 13. Look there again. Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

In other words, it's a call to us to leave the comforts of the old for the reproach of the new. To leave what's safe, familiar, secure, and to go out where there's reproach, where we'll be misunderstood, possibly disliked, despised, derided, insulted, maybe even forgot.

And if we pause to think about it, isn't this where and why our discipleship so often wavers? Isn't this where so many of us falter, as it were, on this race of following Jesus?

[5 : 14] Think about it. On the one hand, we don't really want to go outside the camp, as it were. We don't want to leave the comfort of the old.

You know, in the ancient world, a city or a camp was a place of protection, of security. You could come into the walls and not have to fear the danger of thieves on the highway or of wild, ravaging beasts in the field.

You could come into the city and you could be safe. But cities were also places of identity. You weren't just safe in a city, you were also someone in the camp, in the city.

It gave you a story. It gave you a people. It gave you a network. It gave you a set of aspirations. For instance, if you lived in a Roman city in the first century, then you would be swept up into the story that Rome was telling about how they were going to bring peace and justice to the world.

The story of how Caesar was Lord and how the barbarians were being subjugated and how civilization was triumphing. So to go outside the camp, to go outside the city, was to leave behind the protection and the identity of your former life.

[6 : 33] And what Hebrews here is saying is that that's what it means, part of what it means, to give your trust to God in Christ, to leave behind the comfort of the old, the old securities, the old identities.

And for the original audience of Hebrews, this meant leaving behind the comfort, the security, the identity of Old Covenant, Old Testament Judaism. The very thing that has sustained their families for generations, the sacrifices, the altar, the priests, the temple, the city of Jerusalem itself, they were being called to step out.

Into the fulfillment of God's plan. Into the fulfillment, into what all those things were actually pointing towards. Step out. They were being called to do the unthinkable, to actually go outside the camp and realize that all those things that they had structured their life around were provisional.

They were signposts of the greater thing to come. They were called to give their full allegiance to the one who brought those signs and ceremonies to their appointed goal and end.

And of course, for us today, to leave behind the comfort of the old, those old securities, those old identities, is no easy thing. Many of us maybe are struggling with just that this morning.

[7 : 57] Maybe some security that we fear to lose. Some pattern, some habit, some relationship that we just couldn't think to live without.

Maybe some identity that we don't think we could actually lose without losing who is essentially us. But it's not just leaving the comfort of the old that causes us to waver in our following of Christ.

It's also the prospect of the reproach of the new. You know, for the original audience of Hebrews, just think of what it meant for them to maintain their confidence and confession in Christ.

At the very least, it would mean putting themselves in a place of familial disapproval and rejection as parents and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins accused them of betraying the heritage, of betraying the family, of betraying their people, of betraying even their God.

And it would also most likely have meant social reproach and exclusion. Think of how their Greco-Roman neighbors would have viewed them with suspicion.

[9 : 10] Here's this group of people that never participated in the civic cults, that never took part in the local temple sacrifices, and after all, what exactly were they doing when they got together on Sunday morning?

I heard that they're eating flesh and blood and calling each other brother and sister. What is this thing? To hold on to their confession of Christ would have meant social ridicule and suspicion.

But third, it could have possibly even meant legal vulnerability, because unlike Judaism, Christianity wasn't a protected religion by the Roman state. And we see this as Christian history progresses.

If the local authorities needed a scapegoat, there were always the Christians to blame. Now, we know from reading the headlines today that there are some places in the world right now where identifying with Christ means facing the very same threats—family, social, legal.

And we Christians should be praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ in those places that they would hold fast to their confession. And we should be praying for governments and cultures to change so that the gospel can be freely proclaimed and believed.

[10 : 25] But friends, lest we think that this is just some problem in another part of the world, is it not a problem in our own hearts as well?

Don't we fear the reproach of identifying with Christ? Don't we fear what our peers would say if they found out that we had given our full allegiance to Christ?

No intelligent person believes the Bible. Or you don't really believe that Jesus rose from the dead, do you? You're telling me that a guy 2,000 years ago went into a tomb and came back out.

Or maybe, look, if there's a God, why can't he just forgive? Why send his son to die on a cross? Don't we fear the reproach?

What would my friends and family and neighbors and co-workers and bosses and roommates really think of me if they knew I was a Christian? We don't want to be excluded. We don't want to be seen as weird and close-minded.

[11 : 33] So we hesitate in our commitment to Christ. We try to stay inside the walls of our old cities, of our old identities, of our old securities, and we're afraid to embrace Christ with the reproach that may come.

But friends, if this is the call, how do we do it? How do we heed the call of Christ? How do we leave, actually leave the comfort of the old for the reproach of the new?

It's a critical question, isn't it? You know, because some of us as followers of Christ, we're wondering why, as we look at our lives, there's no growth, there's no spiritual change, there's no joy in our walk with God.

We feel stagnant and stuck. And friends, perhaps it's because we keep retreating back to the comforts of the old. We keep finding our security and our identity inside the walls of that old city, of that old camp that we thought we left behind.

And so we need to know how. We need to know what strength there is for us to go out, to move out, and to leave that behind for the new. But, you know, it's also a critical question if you're spiritually seeking this morning, if you're here and you're exploring Christianity.

[12 : 48] Because, you know, as the claims of Christ begin to make more and more sense to you, there will come a point in your spiritual searching when you realize that what's going on is not just you seeking God, but actually God summoning you.

And there will come a decisive point when the summons is just this, to go to Him outside the camp, leaving behind the comfort of the old, whatever that may be for you, and to embrace Christ wholeheartedly, along with whatever reproach may come as a result.

And how, friend, in the world, when it gets to that point, will you make the impossible step?

Well, that's exactly what the rest of our passage is about. Up to this point, we've been considering the exhortation in verse 13, but the rest of our text actually gives us powerful reasons, powerful motivations to go to Him outside the camp.

The whole passage is constructed to propel us in that outward movement as Hebrews makes one last shot at His audience to get them to embrace Christ.

[14 : 06] Here it is. Three powerful motivations to go to Christ outside the camp. And the first is this. We can go to Him outside the camp, leaving the old comforts, bearing His reproach, because in Christ, there's actually a feast of heart-strengthening grace.

Look again at verses 8 through 10. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Don't be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it's 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. You see, one of the great spiritual theological issues that the original audience was wrestling with was whether they should take their understanding of who Jesus is and fit it under their understanding of the law of Torah or whether they should take their understanding of the law of Torah and fit it under their understanding of who Jesus is.

And verse 8 couldn't be more emphatic. It's not the law. It's not Torah. But Jesus Christ.

He is the eternal and unchanging one. He has not and does not and will not change. Everything else in God's plan of redemption from beginning to end revolves around Him.

[15 : 36] The sending of the Son wasn't plan B when plan A seemed to fail. It was the plan from the beginning. And that means that Jesus didn't just come along because we needed a little push to get us over the line morally and spiritually.

No. Christianity is not a message that we're basically good and that we do our part and if we've done our part, then God will come along and give us the little boost that we need.

No. No. Jesus came to rescue us by sheer grace, by unmerited favor.

He came to do what the law and what Torah could never do. And Hebrews is saying that fact is not only central, but it's unchanging.

And because Jesus and His grace never change, then any teaching that diverges from that, Hebrews says in verse 9, is diverse and strange.

[16 : 41] In other words, utterly foreign. Now, you have to see that when Hebrews says that, he's being somewhat ironic. How so?

Because think about it. What the Hebrews were being tempted, what they thought they were going back to, was the biblical Mosaic covenant. Something that God Himself had thought up, had put in place. They thought they were going back to follow the Bible.

No. But Hebrews says, no, don't you realize? If you don't see the law, first and foremost, as really being about Christ and what He's come to do for us, then your teaching is utterly foreign to what God intended.

If Christ isn't at the center, then you don't really understand the Bible. In fact, you've totally missed it. It's like you're reading an utterly foreign book. And you can put into place all sorts of regulations and rituals.

Hebrews mentions foods in verse 9. Probably referring to the Jewish food laws and fellowship meals like Passover. You know, you can put all those things in place, and they won't do you any benefit.

[17 : 46] In fact, you can eat from the very altar in the temple itself, and it won't do a thing for your heart. So what does strengthen the heart?

Grace. Grace. And how do we feast on grace? Faith. Faith in Jesus and in what He's done.

You see, friends, if you stay in the old city, you know, you can stay there. You can stay in the old city. You cannot venture forth to Him. And to stay in that place is to stay in a place where there are lots of externals.

Not just religious ones, but your religious ones, too. Lots of regulations and rituals that can make you feel good about yourself for a time. Right? In fact, you can play the game just right and have everything.

The job, the car, the spouse, the kids. You can be devoted to all the right things and all the right causes. And you can center your life on all the right principles.

[18 : 50] But in the supposed comfort and security and identity that those things give you, your heart, the very core of who you are, will grow weak.

Even if you lack nothing, materially, relationally, vocationally, if you've got it all still, the heart will starve.

And you will bite down on something to make the hunger go away. Your job, the success of your kids, your good deeds.

You will put all the weight of your soul into them. All your expectations, all your hopes, all your dreams, trying to get a morsel for your heart. But in the end, you only come away more hungry than before.

And what's worse, you'll find that you've utterly consumed whatever it is that you've tried to feed your heart upon. After all, what career could feed the depths of your heart?

[20 : 01] Won't you crush it with your expectations? What child, what humanitarian project could possibly bear the weight of a human heart? None of them.

Because, friends, you were made to feast on His grace. And if you go to Him outside the city, the table of His grace is always set for those who come in faith.

Because He doesn't change. And He's the same yesterday and today and forever. And at His table, at His altar, there's a feast that you could never empty. Where your heart will be made strong.

Where it will be revived from its weakness. Where it will come alive again. Where your eyes will be brightened as if you had just taken a good meal.

Friends, aren't you tired of feasting on things that just don't feed your soul? Go to Him outside the camp. Leave the old comforts. Yes, bear His reproach.

[21 : 10] Because with Him, there's a feast of heart-strengthening grace. That will never leave you hungry. But that's not all.

Look at verses 11 through 14. Especially verse 14. That's where we find the second motivation to go to Him outside the camp. If it weren't enough that there's an unceasing feast of grace, Hebrews hits us again with another thing.

Look at me with verse 13. We'll start there again. Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach to the endured. For here we have no lasting city. But we seek the city that is to come.

There it is. Going out to Christ, we seek a lasting city. Just as He remains the same.

Just as His table is never emptied. So His city to come will always endure. Will forever last. And that's not the case with the cities of this world, is it?

[22 : 14] With our identities and our securities. It seems almost too obvious to even point out that the things of this life don't last. And yet, how often do we live our lives as if they do?

Rome. Rome. Rome. Rome. The center of the political universe in the first century. Rome. Eventually began to call itself what?

The eternal city. And yet, by the fifth century, Rome itself would fall to the so-called barbarians. The very barbarians that they prided themselves on conquering.

Friends, don't you see the comforts that we fear to lose by leaving your old city, by going outside the camp? Will they ever really last? Take the best case scenario. Even if our finances stay intact to the end of our days.

Even if our family and our friends stay in touch. Even if our reputations are esteemed to the very last. Eventually, we've all got to face the grave.

[23 : 21] And what comfort wouldn't you trade to no real comfort on that day? But even at the everyday level, isn't it true?

The things that we cling so tightly to, how fleeting they are. That friend whose approval you just couldn't imagine living without. In a year or two, who knows where they'll be in your life?

A different college, a different city perhaps. Or that great new cause, or that exciting intellectual movement that makes Christianity seem so unfashionable.

In a few short years, it'll be just that. A fashion that came and went. Like flannel shirts in the 90s.

I had flannel shirts in the 90s. I don't wear any of them anymore. And of course, none of this is to say that relationships or the life of the mind are unimportant.

[24 : 21] But friends, it's just to say that perspective is often something that we sorely lack. None of these comforts we fear to lose. And friends, none of the reproaches that we fear to gain will really ultimately last.

But the city to come. Where God dwells in the midst of His people. Where all creation is set free from its bondage to disease and death and decay.

That city that is coming. Where the things that have been done for His glory in every city of the world come streaming in and find the rightful place. That city.

That will last. And in Christ, by His grace, we are granted a place in that city. Where all things are made new.

And where the works don't crumble. And where the glory doesn't fade. And whose citizens never again fear sorrow and sickness and sin and death. Friends, so go to Him outside the camp.

[25 : 22] Leave the fleeting comfort of the old for that glorious reproach of the new. Because we're going out not just to a feast of grace, but to a city to come that will endure forever.

And as we come to the last two verses of our text, we see something important.

That seeking the city to come. That feasting on grace in our hearts. These things have a surprising effect. You know, rather than sort of going outside of the camp.

And that making Christians withdrawn and useless to the world as it now stands. Which is what some of us fear. It does just the opposite.

It creates a people who are joyful and generous no matter where they live. No matter what actual city they find themselves in.

[26 : 24] They actually create a counter movement that brings good to those around them. They become a distinct people for the life of the world.

And this is our third point. It's right here. How can we go out to Him? Because as we leave the comforts of the old for the reproach of the new through Christ, we actually offer sacrifices that are pleasing to God and that bring good to those who are around us.

Look at verses 15 and 16. 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.

Now, look. One of the things that made Christians very, very odd in the first century was the fact that they didn't offer any animal sacrifices as a regular part of their religion. It's hard for us to appreciate how strange that would have been.

But everyone else was offering sacrifices of some sort. Jews, pagans, Romans, Greeks, male, female, slave free, everybody. And yet here were Christians saying, running totally against the stream of everyone else, that because of what Jesus had done, they didn't need to offer those sorts of sacrifices anymore.

[27 : 42] They had the true and better sacrifice, the once for all death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for them. And these two verses then answer a sort of implicit question.

Well, if that's the case, what sort of sacrifices do we offer? Now that Jesus has completely done what every animal sacrifice ever hoped to do but never really could do, what now?

And the writer of Hebrews says in his own incredibly artistic way that here are the sacrifices that you offer.

Here are the new sacrifices, if you will. And the first is continual, joyful praise of God through Jesus.

And the second is continual, practical doing of good to others. Sounds a lot like the greatest commandment, doesn't it?

[28 : 49] When Jesus was approached by an expert in the law and asked what the greatest commandment was, do you remember what he said? He said, well, the first is this, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

Love of God, love of neighbor, joyful, continual delight in God, and practical, generous good towards our neighbors.

These are the sacrifices that flow from the lives of those who embrace Christ. Going outside the camp, leaving the old comforts, bearing his reproach.

On the surface, don't you think that that would make people just sad and mean, having lost so much, having to bear so much? But no. Because at the cross, we find grace.

And a city that lasts. And a sacrifice that's sufficient for us. That meets our deepest needs for all who believe. Because that's what we find there.

[29 : 55] It's a life of joy and generosity. And friends, isn't that exactly what our city needs?

This city. The one where if you walk two blocks that way, you're in a dorm. And if you walk two blocks that way, you're in the grad school ghetto. And if you walk two blocks that way, you're in an ethnic Italian neighborhood.

And then if you keep going a few more blocks, you're in a Spanish-speaking neighborhood. And if you go three blocks that way, you're in an African-American neighborhood. What does this city in all of its incredible diversity actually need?

It needs a group of people who are so enthralled by the gospel of Jesus Christ that they've left their old comforts to embrace him. And have become a people who bring joy to despair and who bring generosity to need wherever they go.

But friends, only if we leave our old camp. Only if we let those old identities and securities behind and take hold of Christ in faith. Will we be that kind of people? You know, in other words, spiritually speaking, you'll only be able to love the city if you leave the city.

[31 : 13] And I don't mean moving to the suburbs of the country. What I mean is only if you make Christ the full-fledged center of your life will you be able to then love the city the way it needs to be loved.

After all, think about it. You can only pull someone out of the water if you've got a firm grip on the shore. However, if you're floating downstream with them, you're no help.

If we're still captive to the same fears and worries and comforts as our loved ones around us, we won't actually be able to provide for them something new.

Joy. Generosity. These are the sacrifices that please God and bring good. And this is what the gospel rightly grasped always produces.

For when we go out of the camp, when we leave our old comforts, our old identities, our old securities, we're going out to Him. We're not going out to an idea.

[32 : 23] We're not going out to a principle. We're not going out to a system. But we're going out to Him. To the one who Himself went outside the city.

For the good of the city. For the good of us. Look again at verses 11 and 12. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought to the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore, let us go to Him. On the Day of Atonement, once a year, the priest used to make a sacrifice.

And after sprinkling the blood, instead of eating it, the rest of it, in the temple, like all the other sacrifices, God told them to take it outside the city and burn it to ash. And Hebrews is saying, don't you see in that image a picture of the true and better sacrifice?

Those sacrifices were offered once a year. But when Jesus Christ was crucified and consumed outside the gate, it wasn't just once a year.

[33 : 38] It was once for all. You see, He went out of the city gate bearing our reproach. Being mocked and insulted and excluded and rejected.

Having His very identity thrown back in His face. If you're the Son of God, if you are the Christ, come down off the cross. Where's your Father now?

Having His security stripped away as He was hung up between two criminals. Being made fundamentally unclean outside the city, outside the camp.

So that you and I could be made clean. So that He could sanctify us. That He would be consumed and rejected so that we could know His favor forever.

Friends, don't you see that any reproach that we now bear with Him is nothing compared to the favor that we receive because He suffered for us? And when you see how He won the Father's favor for us at such cost going outside the gate, when you see that, then the sacrifices of joy and generosity continually flow.

[35 : 08] Joy because no matter who reproaches you, you know that you're loved in the eyes of God. Generosity because you no longer need the things of this world to give you comfort and happiness.

You can give them away. In chapter 11, Hebrews told us that Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than all the treasure of Egypt, for He was looking forward to the reward.

And so it is. Friends, go to Him outside the camp. Let nothing hinder you. Yes, when Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.

But as another 20th century martyr said, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. A feast of grace, a city that lasts, sacrifices that actually please God and bring good.

So friends, for the good of our city and for the good of your own soul, go to Him outside the camp. Let's pray.

[36 : 19] Oh, Lord Jesus, we confess that we need Your grace to do what this passage is calling us to do. Lord, to step out of our old comforts and to wholeheartedly embrace You.

God, make that so. In us by Your Spirit. And God, make us a people who will bring life and good to our city because we have found a city to come.

Lord, we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.