

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 13, Verses 17-24
Notes From Class on June 1, 2010
Last Revised on (June 16, 2010)

Songs

Prayer

Dear Lord

Thank you for this beautiful day,

and for all of the marvelous things you have done in it.

Thank you for each one who is here tonight, having preferred to study your word,

to all of the other things which they might be doing instead, be it work, or rest, or pleasure

Please let this, your word, be our work, our rest, and our pleasure.

Let us know the joy and the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Please, O Lord, let your Spirit be amongst us now.

And let Him be in each one of us.

Refreshing us, teaching us, healing us, comforting us, making us one.

Let our minds now be open, O God, to hear only your voice.

Please form our understanding and protect us from error.

In Jesus Name we pray.

Amen.

Preliminary Matters

Please make sure you have the one-page summary of the first 12 chapters of Hebrews.

This is the same summary as we distributed last week.

Copies are on the table at the back of the room.

Also there are copies of the ESV text of Hebrews if you need one of those.

There is also coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and then let's get started.

Introduction/Review

Tonight will be the **last** lesson in our study of the New Testament book of Hebrews.

It has taken us a little over one **year**.

I have enjoyed it and learned a lot, and I hope that you have too.

Among other things we have learned that Hebrews is a document rather more like the text of a sermon than a letter, and we have generally tried to understand it that way, as a word of exhortation first read to a particular church.

We don't know who wrote it, or specifically who it was written to, but we have read it, correctly I think, as an inspired sermon preached to Christian churches in all times and places.

It may be that the original audience was a group of Jewish believers in Christ.

Probably this was the opinion of whomever attached the **title**, Hebrews, to the manuscript.

But we have rarely allowed that supposition to color our reading of the sermon.

We have tried instead to listen to the sermon speaking to **us**, and I think that has been a good way to listen.

The sermon speaks to churches where people have professed faith in Christ, but where at least some of the people there are in danger of falling away...

And that describes **our** church and, I think, **all** churches of all time.

There is **always** a danger of falling away, and this always needs to be preached against --- this danger

We are supposed to exhort one another to remain faithful

And we are supposed to help one another in every way

As we tarry in this world, anxiously awaiting the unshakable kingdom to come.

The key to it all, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is greater than everything in heaven and on earth.

The preacher spends the first couple of chapters making sure we know that Jesus is supreme!

How sad it is when we go to a church today and hear a sermon that fails to lift up Jesus

He is, as our preacher tells us, our Great High Priest, without whom there is no church, no salvation, no future, no hope, and indeed no reason to live or to care about anything else.

To fall away from Jesus is to fall away from the meaning and purpose of life.

We see examples of what such falling away looks like in our Bibles --- in the stories of the Old Testament where Israel, God's chosen people, constantly fell away from God, and suffered the consequences.

All of these stories are in the Bible for our benefit, so that we will not fall away as they did.

The preacher used many of these stories to teach us as, indeed, all preachers should use the Old Testament

As he neared the end of his sermon, in Chapter 11 especially, the preacher also drew positive examples from the Old Testament, to inspire us.

These positive examples were the great heroes of faith --- the men and women who had heard God speak, and who believed him, and who obeyed him.

None save Christ obeyed Him **perfectly**, but these others surely did behave in ways that could only be explained by their **faith**.

In particular, they **persevered**, despite trouble, and despite not having received in this lifetime much of what God had promised.

This is because, the preacher tells us, they were looking up and forward to the unshakable kingdom to come.

They did not know Christ as clearly as we do, but their spirit knew to look up and forward, and not to the things of the world in this present age.

The world we live in, here and now, is a **parable**, teaching of things to come.

The "**troubles**" we experience now are for our **benefit**, preparing us for things to come.

So whatever you do, don't give up!

This is a fair summary of the first 12 chapters of Hebrews.

And it is a fair summary of the Bible.

Whatever you do, don't give up! God is preparing a great and mighty thing. Jesus has **already** paid for it.

So be patient and wait for it to be fulfilled. And don't get distracted by the things in this world.

 Yet while we wait, there is a certain way that believers in Christ must live.

 That is pretty much the **subject** of the final chapter of Hebrews,

 which we have been studying during the past two weeks,

 and which we will finish this evening.

 Please turn with me now to the beginning of Chapter 13 and follow along with me as I review.

 As we Christians await the coming of the kingdom, **first** and **foremost**, we are to **love** one another. **(13:1)**

 Our love is not to be reserved only for Christians whom we **know** and who are **near** at hand.

 Neither must our love be reserved only for **Christians**.

 We are **also** to love **strangers**, those who are in **prison**, and those who are **mistreated**. **(13:2-3)**

 If we could have only one guide as to how we as Christians are to live, as we await his coming kingdom, that one guide would be **LOVE**, love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, near and far, and love for our neighbors in all the world, whether or not Christian.

Sexual love, however, is to be reserved **only** for the husband-wife relationship and it is to be godly within that relationship. **(13:4)**

Money is **not** to be an object of love **at all**. **(13:5)**

 Instead the preacher tells them to "keep their life **free** from the love of **money**."

 We have spent enough time, in the past two weeks, speaking about this point, so there is no reason to belabor this point again tonight.

 The preacher in Hebrews is not preoccupied with money and what it represents, he simply says to keep your life free from the love of it.

 And so we **should**. And so we **will**, if we truly if we love God and man.

 Jesus put it succinctly, you **cannot** love both God and money. You **must** pick one.

 Clearly we must pick **God**, and say confidently with the psalmist, "The **LORD** is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" **(13:6)**

 Here again is a major and consistent theme of the whole Bible: just **trust** in God.

 But we may sometimes wonder what that **means**.... "just trust God"...

 How do we **do** that? What does it **look** like?

 An important hint is given in Verse 7

(Verse 7)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Here he has in mind those who had **originally** brought the gospel to the congregation he is addressing.

 He asks the congregation to **remember** those people.

 And to **imitate** them.

 The same advice comes through to **us**

(Verse 8)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The outworking of faith in those who went **before**, and who **first** spoke the word of God to us, is the same outworking which should be seen in **us**, and in those who will come **after** us,

 because Jesus **never** changes...his **gospel** never changes...his **Spirit** never changes...

 Of course **none** of the heroes of faith **before** or **after** Jesus have been perfect, because their faith, like ours has always been mixed with much sin.

 Christ Himself is the **perfect** example, which all the rest **typify** to some extent but not perfectly.

 It is simply not possible to **progress** beyond Jesus.

 This being the case, there is no reason for Christians to **innovate!**

 Nor can there be any benefit for Jews or others, then or now, to stop short of Jesus and dwell on rituals and practices and ceremonies which the coming of Christ has made **obsolete**.

 Verse 9 reads...

(Verse 9)

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.

Any teaching that goes away from the unchanging Jesus Christ and his gospel of grace, is a strange teaching and such strange teachings are many and diverse.

There can be only one truth, but infinitely many divergences from it

We know from history that early Christians were often ridiculed, both by Jews and gentiles, for not having a proper religion, or any religion at all, because of their lack of sacrifices and rituals and ceremonies.

At various points in history, and still perhaps, Roman Catholics and other "high" churches have said much the same thing about protestant Christians, whose forms of worship they considered too simple.

Where is the incense? Where are the bells? Where are the robes? Where are the candles?
Etc.

This is the sort of issue to which the preacher may be responding in Verses 10-16

This is important and there were a lot of questions about this last week after class, so I want to go back through this again a bit carefully this week.

Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 10-16

Will someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 10-16, in Japanese please.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English (ESV).

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

11 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.

12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Thank you.

Again, I think the background here is the charge that the gospel is **impoverished** or **deficient** somehow for **lack** of animal sacrifices, lack of an altar to sacrifice them on, lack of a temple to put the altar in, and lack of other ceremonial and ritualistic accouterments that almost every other religion had and has.

The preacher's defense is to explain, the **better** sacrifices that we Christians **do** have.

Verse 10 reads...

(Verse 10)

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

Here "those who serve the tent" would especially include non-Christian Jews, represented by their levitical priesthood, who serve in the tabernacle under the Old Covenant,

But I think the preacher has also in mind all men in every religion that maintains a **priesthood** and an **alter**...rather than serving Christ alone.

"we" is almost certainly "we **Christians**."

"We Christians" do **not** literally have an "alter"

This is a figure of speech (metonymy) where the word "**alter**" stands for that which is **sacrificed** on it.

Like when we say that a man "keeps a good **table**," meaning that he serves good **food**.

Christians do recognize a **sacrifice**, a single eternal sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who gave himself once for all

He is the **antitype** of the animal sacrifices which the Jews offered year after year on the Day of Atonement.

The ceremonies which the Jew's carried out on the Day of Atonement are referred to in the following verse.

Verse 11 reads...

(Verse 11)

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.

As you can read in greater detail in Leviticus 16, the bodies of the **bull** and the **goat** which are sacrificed to atone for the sins of the **priests** and the **people** are taken outside of the camp and burned.

This was repeated **annually** because animal sacrifices cannot effectively and permanently remove sin,

Consequently this annual ceremony served as a **sign** and **symbol** of the one who would later come to effectively and permanently remove all sin.

It is this connection that the preacher has in mind in Verse 12 which reads...

Verse 12 reads

(Verse 12)

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Can you see how, in both cases, the priests made a **sacrifice**....first the animals and later Jesus

In both cases a **death**, represented by the blood, was an atoning sacrifice....the animals imperfectly and so repeated each year....Jesus perfectly and so performed only once

And when the **perfect** came, the imperfect was permanently **replaced**.

There is now no **reason** to return to return to the tent, ever again.

Jesus has **finished** that work, and he is **outside** the tent.

Because that is where the priests disposed of him...much the same as they had done year after year with the bodies of the animals which they sacrificed.

(Verse 13)

Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

Do you understand?

There is **nothing** left inside the temple that is of any value.

And no **possibility** of any meaningful animal sacrifice or temple ceremony.

Jerusalem **itself** is of no account, he means to say, and will be pulled down.

And we should not try to drag Jesus back into some earthly temple in some earthly Jerusalem and add animal sacrifices and other ceremonies back to our worship of Christ.

Verse 14 reads...

(Verse 14)

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

The earthly **sacrifices**, the earthly **alter**, the earthly **temple**, the earthly **city**, were all just figures of the heavenly reality that we stand to inherit.

Creation was and is a **parable**: an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, for those with eyes to see

The **heavenly** kingdom has come, and is coming, and will finally come in Christ.

Animal sacrifices are a thing totally of the past,

And **temple** worship is a thing totally of the past.

but not **all** sacrifices are finished.

Verse 15 reads

(Verse 15)

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Here "**him**" is Jesus, the perfect eternal sacrifice, and our "great high priest"

Through **Jesus** we can offer up a sacrifice of **praise** to God continually

Here organized praise and worship in **church** is **not** in view, or at least not exclusively,

Because we cannot be, or at least we should not be, in church **continually**.

The "fruit of the lips" that acknowledges his name is something we are supposed to do **everywhere**.

And such **verbal** praise to God through Christ is **not** the **only** sacrifice we can offer.

We read in Verse 16

(Verse 16)

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

When we **share** what we have, we are offering a **sacrifice** that is **pleasing** to God.

Does anyone have any comments or questions before we read on?

Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 17-19

OK then, would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verse 17-19, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now would someone please read those same verses in English (ESV).

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Thanks.

Earlier he urged them to remember and to imitate those who had **first** told them the gospel.

Clearly these were not priestly figures, of the sort he is consistently preaching against.

Rather they were spiritual leaders, and leaders by **example**.

Imitators of and exemplars of Christ, who is himself, still and forever, "**outside the camp**"

Jesus' Kingdom is **not** of this world

Yet he is still a **King** and a **shepherd**,

And we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

And he does appoint leaders and shepherds over us.

Here we are reminded of this and of how we should treat such leaders.

Verse 17 reads...

(Verse 17)

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Those whom we **acknowledge** to be our leaders, are to be **obeyed**,

which is to say that we must **follow** them.

and **not** grudgingly but **submissively**

We are to go willingly where they lead us.

Q. Why? Why should we willingly follow these people?

A. Because they are keeping watch on our souls....as those who will have to give an account.

Jesus prayed to his father saying, I have not lost any of those you have given to me.

Similarly our leaders will need to give an accounting to God.

If one of us is lost, they will answer to God for it.

So we should not make their work harder for them; they are, after all, working for us, for our benefit.

To make their life difficult, is simply counter-productive

Needless to say, hopefully, the obedience we owe to our leaders applies only to those who truly **are** our leaders,

Q. How will we know them?

A. For one thing they will be accepted as leaders by the **congregation**: we cannot each sort of pick our own leaders.

A. But they must also be **qualified** to lead --- meaning that their behavior and speech is Christ-like and in accordance with the principles of His kingdom.

A. We follow our leaders because **they** faithfully represent **Christ** to us, and lead us faithfully in his Name.

Should their behavior, including their teaching, deviate from that standard, they can **not** be our leaders.

This does not, of course, mean that our leaders must actually be Christ, who alone is perfect.

Rather it means that they must be the sort of people who enable and encourage us and our brothers and sisters to become more Christ-like.

To frustrate the efforts of such leaders, is to damage the church, dishonor Christ, and harm ourselves.

The preacher clearly is, himself, a leader of sorts over the congregation to which he is preaching.

Yet he asks them to pray for him.

Verse 18 reads...

(Verse 18)

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

By this we are taught that Christian leaders are not to assume a condescending "priestly" posture of conferring blessings only but, rather, are disposed to earnestly seek the prayers of those whom they lead.

This points to the "royal priesthood" of all believers who have continual access to Christ himself, and who do not require any mediator between themselves and him.

Likewise the preacher feels it seemly and appropriate and beneficial to tell them that his conscience is clear.

He does **not** claim to act honorable in all things, which would be untrue and sinful

But he does dare to claim that it is his desire to act honorably in all things.

He would not expect them to pray for him or to follow him if his desire were otherwise.

Neither, I think, would he admonish them to follow leaders who did not covet the prayers of their people and express a desire to be honorable in all things.

Hypocrisy is the great dis-qualifier for Christian leadership.

Just as a longing for fellowship is a great qualifier.

It has always seemed to me, that the main thing a good shepherd needs, is to love **sheep**

which will usually evidence itself as a desire to be **with** the sheep, so as to **protect** them.

We see this in **Jesus**,

we see it in **Paul** and the other **Apostles** and **leaders** of the New and Old Testaments

We see it in the **preacher** of this sermon,

Verse 19 reads...

(Verse 19)

I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

His motivation is to be **reunited** with the people he is preaching to

It is, I think, the voice of a shepherd longing to be with his sheep.

He covets their prayers in this regard

Maybe he is in prison someplace or otherwise detained.

Or me may be referring to some division within the church that prevents him from rejoining them

We just don't know the circumstances, but that he desires to be with them, is clear.

And this feeling moves him to invoke a final blessing, which we shall read next.

Before we read on, does anyone have any comments or questions?

Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 20-21

OK, then. Will someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 20 and 21, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English (ESV)

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,

21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Thank you.

The preacher has just finished asking the people to pray for him.

Now he invokes God's blessing on the people.

Verse 20 reads

(Verse 20)

**Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,**

God has many names, here he is called the God of peace,

which suggests that maybe the situation of the people is not as peaceful as it might be, whether from external persecution, friction within the church, or some combination of these.

Whatever the problems may be, God, who is the God of peace, is able to address them.

Proof that God is the god of peace, and that he is able and willing to redeem his people is found in Christ, whom God brought back from the dead, to be our King, and the great shepherd of the sheep

and Jesus' blood is called the blood of the eternal covenant

This covenant in the blood of Jesus is sometimes called, even by Jesus, the New Covenant because in human history it came last.

This New Covenant is also that final covenant, because nothing can ever again happen in human history to surpass it.

But this New and Final Covenant is also rightly called the eternal covenant, because it was in the mind of God before ever the world was created,

it was only the revelation of this covenant to man which waited

and all of human history that preceded the resurrection of Christ was preparation for it, and all that follows is reflection of it.

It is by the blood of this eternal covenant that God's people of all times and places are saved.

In Verse 21, the preacher continues...*by the blood of the eternal covenant God will*

(Verse 21)

equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

It is true that we must **persevere**.

That has been the central message of this whole sermon.

But thank God this is not something that WE need to do in our own strength, which would be impossible.

God promises to **equip** us with everything good,

so that we are **able** to do his will

God himself, through Jesus, works **in** us that which is pleasing in his sight and brings glory to himself.

Questions?

Well the sermon, is finished, and the benediction is ended, there remain just a few concluding remarks.

Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 22-25

Will someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 22-25, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English (ESV).

22 I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

23 You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

24 Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

25 Grace be with all of you.

Thank you.

Verse 22 reads...

(Verse 22)

I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

The brief writing to which he refers in Verse 22, probably refers to the sermon we have been reading and which we know as the New Testament book of Hebrews.

As a sermon --- a written exhortation --- it is fairly short. It can be read out loud in less than an hour.

Addressed to a church with significant issues, it might be considered brief.

Even compared to more standard **letters**, it is shorter than Romans and 1 Corinthians.

He appears to be asking them to pay attention to it and to take it to heart in the right way,

He appears to be saying that in its **brevity** there is something to recommend it.

Or perhaps he is alluding to all that he did **not** say about their situation, but might have said!

As an additional impetus to their hearing and conformance with his brief exhortation, he adds news about **Timothy**, which most presume is the same Timothy who accompanied Paul on his journeys and who would, therefore, probably have been a strong leadership figure, of the sort they have been encouraged to obey.

Verse 23 reads...

(Verse 23)

You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Probably Timothy has been released ... from jail ... at least this is what the grammar most probably suggests.

There is no clear Biblical record of Timothy having been imprisoned, but it seems very likely that he might have been, say, following the death of Paul.

If this is the scenario, then Timothy would be coming to see them, with the preacher of this sermon, and some of the authority of Paul and the other apostles would attach to them, maybe.

This may just be news, but it does seem to reinforce his previous appeal that they "bear with" his brief exhortation.

Likewise the following verse, tends to reinforce unity and discipline. It reads...

(Verse 24)

Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

That the author is coming to them, coming soon, and coming with Timothy should hopefully encourage them and put them on their best behavior.

That their leaders are being specially greeted, reinforces the point he has already made about the importance of obedience and submission.

That ALL of their leaders are being greeted, militates against factionalism,

as does the fact that ALL the saints are being greeted in the same breath.

The preacher clearly wants to see the church unified from top to bottom.

And he want this unity to extend beyond them, to the larger Church Universal.

Those who come from Italy also send their greetings to the leaders and saints here being addressed.

It is finally hard to know what this says about whether the church here being preached to is comprised of Italians or the opposite, or whether they are outside of Italy or within.

The thing is, it finally doesn't matter.

Because this is a word spoken to all.

Verse 25 reads...

(Verse 25)

Grace be with all of you.

What a great way to end this communication: Grace be with you all.

Grace, as you know, means unmerited favor.

God's goodness poured out undeserved, on everyone: All the leaders, All the saints, including those who come from Italy, and those first addressed by this sermon, and all Christians, including you and me.

Grace IS with all of us, who are in Christ.

In pronouncing this blessing, the preacher is simply proclaiming that which is eternally true and, therefore, that which must certainly come to pass.

So I think I am also allowed to end this, our one-year study, of the New Testament Book of Hebrews by saying...

Grace be with all of YOU.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord

We have been so blessed by your word, spoken to us.

So blessed by the Bible, which records your speech to us for all time.

So blessed by Jesus, who is your ultimate word spoken to man and angels.

May his name, the name of Jesus, be glorified forever.

He is our King, our Shepherd, our Savior, our Teacher, our Friend, our Everything

Please help us to follow him better and love him more.

Please help us also to be more obedient and submissive to other leaders who are over us, for Jesus sake.

At the same time, please make us careful and discerning to submit only to leaders who truly serve Christ.

Please help us to hang together, brothers and sisters in Christ, and to help one another persevere.

Please help us to share what we have, knowing that such sacrifices are pleasing to You, O God.

Please help us to love everyone, but to keep our sexual love pure and only within relationships between husband and wife

Please help us earnestly to desire to act honorably in all things.

As we eagerly await the consummation of your unshakable, eternal kingdom.

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Please O Lord let not one person here fall away from you,.

Put by your grace, O God, please preserve every soul until the end.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

