

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 13, Verses 7-16
Notes From Class on May 25, 2010
Last Revised on (May 31, 2010)

Songs

Prayer

Dear Lord

Please be among us now as we study your word together.

Please prepare our hearts and our minds to receive your word.

Please open our ears to hear your word and help us to understand properly all that you are saying to us.

At the same time, Lord, please make us deaf to the strange and diverse voices that would also try to speak to us.

We ask your protection for all who are here assembled and your blessing upon each of us.

We want yours to be the only words that we hear.

Please help us to hear them, and to do them.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen

Review *(Hand out written summary of the first 12 chapters)*

I am handing out a one-page summary of the first 12 chapters of the New Testament book of Hebrews.

Please take a moment to look at it.

If we had to summarize these first 12 chapters even more briefly, in a single sentence, perhaps our one sentence summary would go something like this:

Because a place has been prepared for us in the unshakable and eternal kingdom which is certainly to come, we Christians should hold fast to our faith now, right up until the end, no matter how difficult that may sometimes be.

Hebrews is a message of **hope** and **encouragement** and a call to **perseverance** in troubled times.

Good things are **coming**, very good things, so don't give up. Stay the course. Don't get distracted.

But as we await the final coming of the kingdom, there is a certain way we should be **living**.

This is what the author moves to in Chapter 13, which is the concluding chapter of Hebrews.

Last week we looked at the first **six** verses of chapter 13,

Please turn there and follow along with me as we review last week's discussion.

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

I think it is important to notice that the preacher did **not** begin by addressing their religious practices, or ceremonies, or doctrines...or anything else.

He begins with **love**, and love for the **brethren** first of all. (Which necessarily presupposes love of God.)

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

Neither must our love be reserved only for those whom we suppose to be **Christians**.

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

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

And **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**."

Which means keeping themselves free from the love of the **things** in this world that money can buy.

In the same breath, he tells them to "be **content** with what they **have**."

Which is the same as telling them **not** to desire things which they don't have. (10th Commandment)

Of course if they desire **nothing** beyond what they have, then **money** will not benefit them at all, except as an instrument of their love for others.

But, the question naturally arises, and I daresay Satan insinuates it, "What about **tomorrow**?"

And the preacher is **ready** for this question:

We are not **supposed** to worry about tomorrow.

Because God has said "I will **never** leave you nor forsake you."

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

This ends our review of the first six verses of Chapter 13

But before we move on, I feel the need to dwell a bit on verses 5 and 6.

What the inspired preacher says about **money** is all true, isn't it?

We should all love money **less** than we do, shouldn't we?

But figuring out how exactly to apply this lesson, is **hard**.

Pastor Dennis was preaching about this last weekend.

In Mark 10:21 Jesus told the rich young man to sell **everything** he had and **give** to the poor and, **then**, to come and follow Jesus.

Q. What **should** the rich young man have done? (Take a vote)

A. He should have sold **everything** he had and given it to the poor and, then, gone and followed Jesus.

Because **Jesus** himself was speaking and he was being very **clear** about what the rich young man **should** do, there was only one right thing for the rich young man **to** do, and that is to obey **Jesus**.

Likewise if **we** hear Jesus saying the same thing to **us**, then there is only one right thing for **us** to do: obey Jesus!

But **do** we, or **should** we, all hear Jesus saying that to us?

That is truly a hard question.

And this is not a problem **only** for those who are relatively rich.

There are many very **poor** people who are **desperately** anxious to become very rich and who are willing to do almost **anything** to make that happen.

They do not love money any **less** than rich men and may, indeed, love it **more**!

Spoken to these ambitious poor, Jesus' words would not be a call to abandon **accumulated** wealth, but to abandon the **accumulation** of wealth.

So we come down to the question of whether or not Jesus is commanding all men and women to abandon personal **wealth** and the **pursuit** of personal wealth.

This past week someone sent me, by email, a part of a sermon which John Wesley gave on this subject.

Basically what Wesley said was this: we should (1) work hard to earn as much money as we can without dishonoring God, (2) be as frugal as we possibly can be, to avoid wasting that which we have earned, so that (3) we can be as generous as possible in sharing our earnings with others.

That all seems like good advice to me, but it basically does not solve the problem, or does it?!

Does Jesus **really** want us all to be so free in sharing what we have earned that our personal bank accounts are always near zero?

It seems very likely to me that he **does!**

And this **troubles** me!

Let's move on.

Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 7-9

Will someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verses 7-9, in Japanese please.

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

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.

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

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.

Thank you.

We have been puzzling over what the love of **people** (on the one hand) and the **absence** of love of money (on the other hand) might look like in the life a believer...even ourselves.

We have seen that this is a very **hard** problem.

But, here may be a hint....a clue... that we can work with.

Verse 7 reads...

(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.

to remember and imitate their faith in Christ specifically.

And as we have been learning throughout this sermon, faith is manifest in deeds.

So by remembering these people, their spiritual forbearers, they will have a useful guide to imitate in governing their own actions.

Q. Why? Why would imitating those who first preached the gospel to us be a useful standard?

A. The answer is suggested by Verse 8 which reads...

(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...

"yesterday" certainly looks back to the time of those who had evangelized the church now being preached to, and whom the church is now being asked to remember and to imitate

I think that "yesterday" probably also looks all the way back...to the faithful of all previous times, such as those listed in Chapter 11, referred to previously as the great "cloud of witnesses"

All godly people who have gone before show us, in some degree, what faith looks like

The standard does not really change with time, because the object of the faith is unchanging, Jesus Christ

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 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!

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

Here it appears that the preacher is addressing a particular family of divergences, a particular problem in that time and place, something having to do with food.

He and those to whom he is preaching are probably still living in a Jewish milieu in which there were many ritual purity laws concerning food.

So it is possible that this is simply a problem with Jewish converts to Christianity backsliding into certain now obsolete rituals of Judaism.

But many of the other religions and cultures present in that time and place had food laws and sacrifices and rituals of their own.

So we cannot be certain precisely which food laws and rituals he is warning them against here,

and it doesn't really matter to us.

What matters is that he is defending the unchanging **gospel** (which obviously has benefited all who are devoted to it) against some food related distraction (which obviously has **not** benefited those devoted to it).

Bottom line: he is saying you don't need to "**enhance**" the gospel and start adding rituals and other stuff that was not part of the gospel of grace you **first** received.

Jesus Christ is the **same**, yesterday, today, and always!

Not only is innovation **harmful** to you, but it will be harmful to those who **follow** you! those who may one day need to consider the outcome of **your** life and take it as a guide for themselves.

Now 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 what follows.

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, an altar to sacrifice them on, and other ceremonial and ritualistic accouterments

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

"Those who serve the tent" are probably non-Christian Jews, represented by their levitical priesthood, and perhaps including all men in every religion that maintains a **priesthood** and an **alter**...rather than serving Christ.

"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.

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,

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

But praise to God through Christ is not the **only** sacrifice we can offer.

Or perhaps it would be better to say that our praise to God through Jesus is not **limited** to the "fruit of our **lips**"

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.

We can also offer **ourselves** as a "living sacrifice" by doing what is **good** and **sharing** what we have.

This sort of brings us back to the love of money question that we were struggling with last week and again at the start of this week's lesson.

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

For so long as we have any money left in the bank at all, we have offerings left to give

Closing Prayer

O Lord,

Your ways are above our ways.

You dwell in unapproachable light and holiness.

Perfect in power, and wisdom, and all that is good.

You are a consuming fire.

We thank you for condescending to create us, to sustain us, to forgive us, and to prepare a place for us in eternity with you, in your unshakable, eternal, kingdom.

Lord God please help us to understand more and more, better and better, what this all means.

Please show us the heavenly reality behind these earthly parables.

But no matter what mysteries you may ever choose to reveal to us, let us never lose sight of the cross.

Where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ suffered reproach and rejection by those he came to save

He allowed them to dispose of him **outside the city**, outside the temple, far from altar and the rituals and sacrifices, and priests, and religion

Jesus who sacrificed himself, giving quite literally all that he had, not only his life, but his dignity, so that we might have life, and life abundant

With this example before our eyes, O God, as we tarry briefly in this world, let us not hold anything back.

Not our money, not our time, not our obedience, not our praise, not our dignity....

Let **US** go outside the city to be with Jesus where he is, and to share his reproach, and to minister to those who are poor, and in prison, and suffering, and alone.... to the widows... to the orphans ... to the unclean

Please help us O Lord to learn how to give it all to you, because that which is worldly in us will not let go

Your standard, Lord, set for us in Jesus is so high, that we are afraid

Afraid of what it will cost us to follow Jesus

Afraid that we will fail to follow

We are nothing, and less than nothing,

Weak and foolish and sinful.

Please help us.

In Jesus Name we ask it.

And in Jesus Name, and for Jesus sake, we believe that you will certainly hear our prayers and answer them,

that you will lift us up, and forgive our sins, and fill us with your spirit, and make us into great men and women of God,

not because there is any goodness in us at all that we can claim for ourselves,

but because you are unfailingly gracious,

Please help us to put our trust in you.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

