

Hebrews 13:10-14 "We Are Looking For The City That Is To Come."

Hebrews 13:10-14 ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come.

Much of what we've seen in this letter has had to do with showing the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, the Old Covenant and the New, the laws and traditions and the person who fulfilled the law, Jesus Christ.

Many of these Jewish Christians, who are being addressed in this letter, were tempted to go back to the old ways, either for convenience because of persecution, or out of a misunderstanding of how the Messiah wanted them to break completely with Judaism.

Because of their mixed allegiance to what they knew over the years in Judaism, and their acceptance of the Messiah Jesus, they had a tendency to walk both sides of the fence. And as a result it opened them up to all sorts of strange teachings concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul addressed the Galatian church and the teachings of some Jews who were still trying to meld the law and grace.

GAL 1:6-7 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ."

It is this confusion which the enemy will use to keep Christians from ever really becoming effective in the Kingdom of God. They're like the waves being tossed here and there, never having a firm footing in the word of God as they float from one experience to another, or one conflicting doctrine to another.

Many of them become frustrated in their walk and conclude it's not worth the effort to follow the Lord where He leads because it's much easier to walk according to their own way and hopefully somewhere along the way they'll finally get it and mature in their faith.

It is simply not the case that one will become mature in their faith apart from God's way of building up His people. We see this when Paul told the Ephesian church what Christ has designed for our growth.

EPH 4:11-14 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."

What Paul is saying is that reaching the unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God comes as a result when each individual in the Body of Christ is willing to submit to Christ and His word without being sidetracked to follow the clever devices of men.

It's being committed to the work as we put our hands to the plow and not look back, as some of these Jewish believers were prone to do as their confusion between the past and their present faith was opening them up to all sorts of false teachings and misconceptions about Christ and His salvation.

And this is the reason our writer says in HEB 13:9 "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."

What is the value of being called by the Spirit and given life in Christ and then walking according to the principles of this world? Paul addresses the dangers of the teachings of the world and trying to unite them to the truth of God's word.

COL 2:6-8 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

The problem with the readers of this letter to the Hebrews is that some of them were doing just that and being carried away by strange teachings which were out of accord with the word of God.

But what's interesting about Hebrews 13:9 is that our writer connects strange teachings with the practices of Judaism which included "ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."

Evidently, some Jews, like those in Galatia, were trying to force others to continue in the law as they added it to the Gospel. And our writer says they are of no value. The sacrificial system has been abrogated, it has been taken out of the way and now these shadows have been replaced by the person who cast them as they pointed to Christ who has come in the flesh.

And so, this is where we left off last week as we saw how our writer shows that the grace of God is what enables us to grow in Christ, not by following the teachings which are fleshly and are more concerned about what you put in your mouth, rather than the truth of Christ and His word which you put in your heart by His grace.

The same question Paul asked the Galatians could be asked of these Hebrew Christians and of us as well.

GAL 3:2-3 "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

As we saw last week even Christians today are tempted to attain this goal through the human effort of making up their own rules and regulations to attain holiness. We've been set free from the bondage of the law. Let us encourage each other with God's word and lift each other up with the grace that's been extended to us in Christ.

And so, as we come to our text this morning may God's word speak to all our hearts and may we walk in that grace He has given us.

HEB 13:10 "We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat."

Now this seems like a very strange thing to say. What is this altar which we have? And why do those who minister at the tabernacle not have a right to eat at our altar?

It would be very easy to get off track here and start creating all sorts of strange teachings at this point; the very thing we've been warned against. Don't lose sight of the context of this passage and the context of this entire letter. Our writer has been contrasting Judaism and the law, with true faith in Christ.

Roman Catholicism has suggested that here would be a proof text for the altar they utilize in the mass. And what are altars for? For sacrificing. And if we have this type of altar then obviously the bloodless sacrifice of Christ, every time the mass is offered, is being suggested. Those who do not belong to the Roman Church then have no right to eat at this altar.

But is our writer talking about a physical altar? Of course not! And yet he contrasts this concept of an altar with a physical tabernacle in verse 10 as he compares the spiritual to the physical. The physical in verse 10 is the tabernacle which was used in Israel under the old covenant.

This tabernacle under the Old Covenant was the place God ordained whereby men would be able to approach Him with the express purpose of finding forgiveness through faith as they brought the sacrifice of an animal.

The animal itself did not remove sin. We're clearly told this in earlier in this letter.

HEB 10:3-7 "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am - it is written about me in the scroll - I have come to do your will, O God.'"

And so, those who use the tabernacle which housed the holy of holies where the High Priest would go into once each year, as a means of seeking atonement, have essentially rejected Christ who is the fulfillment of what those sacrifices revealed about His sacrifice for us. In rejecting Christ, by embracing their law, as it

revolved around the tabernacle, they have disqualified themselves from partaking in our altar.

That's what verse 10 is saying. The question remains however, what is our altar that they cannot partake of it? Well, we know it's not a Christian altar upon which a Priest officiates the mass before God. But some have suggested that the altar is the cross of Christ upon which He was slain.

This however also misses the point of this entire letter. This altar spoken of in verse 10 can't be the wooden cross of Christ because then the cross takes precedence, not Christ. I believe Jesus answers this question for us Himself.

MAT 23:19-20 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 Therefore, he who swears, swears both by the altar and everything on it."

Jesus was showing how the altar sanctifies the sacrifice and makes it acceptable before God.

And this is exactly why Jesus could say in JOH 17:19 "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

<The altar sanctifies and Jesus is that altar who sanctifies Himself before the Father, making it an acceptable sacrifice for the penalty of our sins. A sacrifice which is a soothing aroma going up to the Father.

And so when our writer says in HEB 13:10 "We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat", he is using a metaphor to describe that we have Jesus who has sanctified us and those who would embrace the shadow instead of the substance, by rejecting Jesus, have no right to eat with us and partake of the grace of God if they insist on rejecting the heavenly altar who is Christ.

Does this mean they can never partake of the heavenly altar, who is Jesus? Of course not. But they must lay aside the shadows that pointed to Christ and accept Him alone for their salvation.

A.W. Pink makes an interesting observation about the language used here in verse 10. He states: "The special aspect in which our text sets forth Christ as the altar of His people, is to present Him as the One who furnishes them with that spiritual [food] which is needed for nourishment and sustenance in their worship and service.....

..... In other words, the Holy Spirit here explains and declares the fulfillment of those words of Christ in JOH 6:55-58 "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.""

One of the reasons our writer may have used this type of language to describe Christ is that those believing Jews may have felt that the central part of their religion, which was the tabernacle, was now taken away. They knew the importance of this, and their unbelieving brethren may have pressured them into going back to the central pillar of their former religion.

Our writer of Hebrews reminds them that they gave up nothing. They still have an altar, it's just infinitely better than the one which was covered in the blood of goats and bulls and lambs. Our altar is Christ Himself whose blood was shed once for all that we might have life eternal. He is our real spiritual food which never perishes and gives life forever.

We also see this in the Old Covenant when the Priests offered up the blood to God on the altar, but then were allowed to eat a portion of the sacrifice. Our true food unto life eternal comes from Him who is called the Bread of life. We are called upon by Him to eat of Him, or in other words to take Him fully to ourselves to where He inhabits our entire being as we receive Him by faith and abide in Him by faith. And so, He not only gives life eternal, but daily nourishes us as well.

He goes on to say in HEB 13:11-12 "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood."

This also sounds a little strange. To get a better appreciation of what our writer is saying it's helpful to better understand the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement in Israel. In verse 11 we read, "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp."

Dr. Donald Guthrie makes the point that "the central idea is of the presentation of *the blood* to God and the destruction of the bodies of the victims outside the camp, a procedure followed on the Day of Atonement."

This is taken from LEV 16:15 "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it."

But regarding the carcass of the animal we read in LEV 16:27 "The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal (dung) are to be burned up."

The connection to the bodies of the sacrifices being taken outside the camp and burned and Jesus Christ is an interesting one. Its parallel is not exact since Jesus was not burned outside the camp, but its implication is clear in that the penalty for sin is separation from God.

The animal was separated from his blood, which of course brought death, but then he was separated from the camp of Israel, the place where God dwelt with His people. To be outside the camp was a place reserved for those who were unclean.

Pink points out that it is "the place where the leper was compelled to dwell (Lev.13:46), it was the place where criminals were condemned and slain (Lev.24:14), it was the place where the defiled were put (Num.5:3), it was the place where filth was deposited (Deut.23:12-14).

This is the place our Savior chose to die for you and me as one scorned and rejected of God, and yet who was without guilt. He was numbered with the transgressors (Isa.53:12). He was made a curse for us (Gal.3:13).

And yet He was not One who was abandoned by the Father. His sacrifice was pleasing to the Father which, as the sacrifice whose inward parts were burned on the altar on the Day of Atonement, was a sweet savor unto the Lord, intimating, as Pink puts it, "that God still beheld that in His Son with whom He was well pleased, even while He was bearing the sins of His people."

Another interesting point about the sacrifice whose carcass was carried outside the camp and burned is found in in LEV 4:12

"all the rest of the bull - he must take outside the camp to a place *ceremonially clean*, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap."

Pink again points out that despite the bullock being taken outside the camp, it was "still holy unto the Lord, and not a polluted thing."

Jesus, was always holy and pure and undefiled despite the fact that He humbled Himself to die in our place for the penalty we deserved. His humbling was seen clearly in that He was convicted as a common criminal who received death as a punishment. This is why He was crucified outside the gates to the city. He was identified with our sin, though sinless.

He was willing not to exalt Himself in this world and was willing to obey the Father, even unto death, because His kingdom was not of this world. Either is ours. Our writer wants us to identify with Christ humbling Himself and obeying the Father's will. Notice what our next verse says.

HEB 13:13 "Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore."

This is reminiscent of what we saw in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews when our writer placed before us men and women of faith who followed the Lord under every circumstance. When talking about Moses we read this:

HEB 11:25-27 "He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."

Jesus tells us in LUK 9:23-24 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

What Jesus and the writer of Hebrews is saying is that to follow Christ is to die to self and its will. The will of the Father for His Son was to die for you and me. Jesus regarded the will of the Father as a delight because it brought glory to the Father and accomplished His will.

This is how we need to view our lives as well. We need to consider God's will instead of our own and delight in doing that which pleases the Father. We need to be willing to go outside the camp as we follow Christ by faith and humble ourselves before Him knowing that our citizenship is in heaven, not in this world.

To bear the reproach or disgrace of Christ is to bear His life without compromise. It is to walk in His way which is contrary to the world. It is to be last that we might be first. It is to be humbled that we might be lifted up. It is everything which the world deems weak and useless.

But then we shouldn't be surprised at this since, to the natural man, the things of God are foolishness to him. For the Jew being addressed in this letter, it was a choice they had to make. They could either, stay in the camp of Israel and continue with the law and its ways which led to death, or they could follow Christ outside the camp as they turned away from the old covenant and find life.

For you and me, the camp is the world and its established ways which speak against Christ. There is a reproach among men who belong to Christ by faith. But in the end those who stay in the camp, where they find their comfort zone without Christ, will realize that that camp will be destroyed and they with it as they reject the only one who can lead them out.

This is why our writer wants us to continually keep God's perspective concerning this world.

HEB 13:14 "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

There is nothing enduring about this present world. It's a great place to visit, but we certainly don't want to put down roots.

But what about the enduring city that is to come? Our writer clearly implies that though we don't have an enduring city in this present world he makes it clear that there is an enduring city that is to come. What is this enduring city?

Well, we need only go back to what our writer has already revealed. In fact, early on in this letter there is a reference to the world that is to come.

^{NAU} **Hebrews 2:5** For He did not subject to angels *the world to come*, concerning which we are speaking.

What world is being referenced? It is the world that is intrinsically tied to our gift from God, His salvation to all who believe which is found in the immediate context of Hebrews 2.

Hebrews 2:3 ³ how will we escape if we neglect *so great a salvation*? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

Later, when talking about the faith of Abraham, our writer gives us a clear picture as to what Abraham hoped for as it related to the promises given to him about the Messiah to come and it's found not only in the person of the promise, Jesus Christ, but also the place at which this promise will be worked out as our Savior brings us into His kingdom.

^{NAU} **Hebrews 11:10** for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

In reference to the seed of Abraham we see that those men and women of faith also acknowledged the transitory nature of their sojourning as they too understood that this present world was not their home, but a permanent home they longed for was seen with eyes of faith.

Hebrews 11:13, 16 ¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

This city that God is preparing for them is the same city that Abraham and the saints of old longed for in the world to come.

This is the same "world to come" that is addressed in the 12th chapter as well.

^{NAU} **Hebrews 12:22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

The heavenly Jerusalem is where our risen Lord resides awaiting that time where He will bring with Him all the saints as He returns to set up His eternal Kingdom on that final day when destroys, in

judgment, the world and all who rebel against Him. It is this Day of Judgment that Peter addresses in his second letter.

2 Peter 3:10-13 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But *according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

This is the promise Abraham longed for and the promise Peter and Paul also longed for. It is the promise of entering into the eternal heaven with our Lord Jesus in our resurrected bodies on a resurrected earth and universe where Christ will dwell with us forever.

Revelation 21:1-5 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

This is the promise that our writer of Hebrews addresses when he discusses the world to come that Abraham longed for and it should be the same world you and I long for as well as we will one day be transformed from these perishable bodies to those which are imperishable.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54 ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put

on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.

And all of this is made possible through our Lord and Savior defeating death through His resurrection as we will be raised up by our Lord on the last day as we too will have defeated death through Him.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 ²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. ²¹ For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, ²⁴ then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

We are a people who have been set apart for God for a very special purpose to live in His resurrection life. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to set our own purposes ahead of God's. He desires to use us to represent Him as Ambassadors, to go forth into battle as soldiers of Christ, to extend to the world the love of Christ which He has shed abroad in our hearts.

This is our purpose; to glorify Him as those who do not belong to this world. Paul put it well.

EPH 2:19-22 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Remember who you've come to. You've come to the living God who's given you life eternal in Christ.

HEB 12:22-24 "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous

men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

May we see ourselves as God sees us and may we walk as the type of people who follow Christ outside the camp and not go back under any circumstance.

Let me close with an exhortation from the apostle Peter.

1PE 2:9-12 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

Paul sums it up well.

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Let's walk in the good works God has prepared for us to do as we walk by faith desiring to do His will not ours. Whether it's your time, your talents, your gifts or your money. Do all so as to bring glory to Him that His Kingdom may go forth as we take the Gospel and the truth of His word to a dying world.