

The Altar, Table, & Sacrifice of the Cross

Hebrews 13:8-14

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 30, 2023

Good morning. Can you guys hear me, okay? I would encourage you to consider coming to *The Essential Church Movie* tonight, if you haven't thought about that, that's at six o'clock here in the sanctuary. Some of you have followed the news, but you'll recall that during the beginning of COVID, whatever you want to call it, era, Grace Community, like most of us were closed for about three months or so, and then they opened up in Los Angeles. And as time went on, incurred a lot of resistance from the government. They went all the way, I believe, to the Supreme Court; fought a lot of court battles over that. This is the ministry of John MacArthur. Our church is connected to them because I was trained at The Master's Seminary, I was ordained at the church there. And our church was planted through the means of Grace Advance, which is connected with their church, it's their kind of church planting arm, if you will. And so that whole story had a big part in our lives and hearts. And so this video is about that, and it'll be at six o'clock tonight; I believe it's two hours long or so, so we wanted to kind of start it early, so there'd be plenty of time for us to see it, and then interact and talk about if we want to. So that will be this evening, so please mark your calendar for that. If you did not sign up, that's okay. There's plenty of room. It'll just be here in the room in the sanctuary tonight.

Well, this morning, we are in the final chapter of the book of Hebrews, and we're coming close to the end of it. If you can believe it or not, we've been in it for about a year and a half. Our first sermon in the series, I looked it up it, was preached on February 6, 2022. And the last one will be sometime next month, Lord willing. I don't have an exact date, but I'm thinking it'll probably take us through to August, maybe September, but probably August, that's when it'll wrap up. Which means it's been about 50 sermons in this book. This is the second longest book we've studied as a church. The first one was the book of Ephesians. And we were in that one for 64 sermons. We began that one in 2019 and didn't finish until 2021 because we believe in expository preaching as a church. And we think it's very important to go verse by verse through the Bible, no matter how long it takes. Sometimes you go through a book, we went through Jonah, it took us a month. We go through books like these, it takes us much longer than that, especially if the theme is that of Jesus Christ, which is what our text is about today. So if you would open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, we are in Hebrews 13, we're going to start reading in verse seven. So if you want to look in verse seven of this last chapter, and it talks about Christ this way, when it says,

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 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. Therefore Jesus also, that He might

sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come.

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

And we're going to end the reading there in verse 17, but I wanted you to look at all of this text together because as you read that you can see verse seven starts off with a theme of leadership. Verse 17 does it as well because those are the bookends of the passage. If you're looking at the whole thing in its context, this is how it comes together. Leadership in the beginning; leadership talked about in the end, but in the middle of it, it's focusing on one big topic, and that's Christ.

He tells you in verse eight that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. And that leads him off on what we would call a sanctified tangent. He goes in a different direction, where he gives you several images here, like that of an altar, and the tabernacle, and the bodies of animals whose blood is brought into the holy place, in order to say Jesus took the place of all of that now. The reason he brings it up is to say Jesus completed everything they stood for. So you don't have to go back to that anymore. You can let it go.

This was said to a specific audience, if you recall, the people he's writing this to are Jews. That's why the book is called Hebrews, written to the Hebrew people, to a group of Christians who had laid aside their former allegiance to the law in order to follow Christ. But as they did that, they paid a high price. They were shunned and shamed and avoided by their community. Some of them lost their jobs over this. Others of them were isolated by their family and divorced by their husband or wife. And it left them wondering, is it worth it? Should I just turn my back on Christ now and go back to all those things I used to follow? Back to the law, back to the altar, back to the tabernacle. And the author says no, because what you have in Christ is so much greater than that.

Because the cross is the center of the Bible, it's the one thing that holds it all together. So if you have that, you have everything you need in order to be saved. Amen? Did you hear what I said? If you have the cross, you don't need anything else. You don't need the old sacrifices, you don't need the old law, you don't need the priests, you don't need the synagogue because you understand that all of that spoke very clearly of Him. They were signs pointing to Him. Some of you were on the Trans-Canada Highway this morning and on your drive in, you've passed a sign that said Chilliwack. And when you saw that

sign, you didn't get off on the side of the road and say, "Hey, kids, let's go to church." You understand that sign is not Chilliwack. In the same way, the signs were not salvation, Christ is salvation. They're pointing you to Him.

For example, in the book of Genesis, it says He is the seed of the woman who would destroy sin and Satan. In the Book of Leviticus, it told us that Christ is the perfect offering would be the perfect offering for sin that the sacrifice is represented. In the book of Numbers, He's typified in the bronze serpent who is lifted up in the wilderness. In the book of Isaiah, He's described as the suffering servant. In the book of Zachariah, He's the pierced one. In the book of Psalms, He is the innocent victim who called out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" And we could go on and on. You could talk about this all day long.

But the question the author is asking here is don't you see this now? After I've been writing chapter after chapter and verse after verse and page after page, can't you tell Jesus is the one this is leading you to? Because if you can, you won't give Him up for anything. If you know He is all of this, you will be willing to do what verse 13 says and go outside the camp bearing His reproach. Friends, I want to tell you the same thing this morning. If you understand all the things the Old Testament said about Christ, you'll be willing to go outside the camp. You won't give up anything for that. Even when they attack you.

Listen, people attack Christians today, and they often do it this way. They often tell you, religious people will tell you, in order to be saved, you don't just need Jesus; you need Jesus and something. Have you ever heard that before? Key word there is "and." To go to heaven, to be spiritual, to be a real Christian, you need Jesus plus this or that. Jesus plus religion, Jesus plus ceremonies, Jesus plus work, Jesus plus the mass, Jesus plus the Pope, Jesus plus priests. Jesus plus a bunch of rules that say, "don't go to the movies. Don't drink alcohol. Don't wear jewelry. Don't play cards. Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't." The fact is that's not true in order to be saved. You know what you need? You need Jesus plus nothing. Amen? And the key word there is nothing. The Gospel says salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. As the hymn writer said, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling." Because I don't need anything else but Christ to go to heaven. So I don't have to put such an emphasis on that anymore.

Listen, friends, my neighbor has a dog that does not watch movies, and I will tell you that dog is not a Christian. And they have a cat that doesn't drink alcohol or wear jewelry and that cat is worse. There is something wrong with that cat. It gets into our flower bed, messes up our yard, it takes more than that to be a child of God. This is a very important passage we have today, even though I'll have to admit it's hard to read because who doesn't struggle with legalism. And which one of us does not have the heart of a Pharisee in us. We all want to add something to the cross, so we can take credit. And we can say, "I did it." But you can't do that. That's like driving a stake in the heart of the gospel. You trust in Christ

alone. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at three things that illustrate the cross in this passage.

So if you're taking notes, this is our outline this morning, but in Hebrews 13, we're going to focus on verses 8 through 14, we're going to look at three things that illustrate the cross from the Old Testament. And the first one is the altar. The first thing that illustrates the cross from the Old Testament in this text is the altar, which refers to the place where the sacrifices were made. That didn't happen anywhere in Israel, they didn't just kill the offerings on the ground, they did it on an altar made out of brass and wood. It was made out of wood to hold the weight of it. It was made out of brass to keep it from melting when the fire was lit.

And as you come to this text, I'm going to show you that the meaning doesn't leap out at you at first glance. It takes a lot of digging to understand what this is talking about because if you look in your Bible verse eight says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." And that's straightforward. That's a text you can understand at first glance. That means Jesus is eternal. Jesus is infinite. Jesus is ageless because He has the same nature God does. Whereas your leaders are going to die in verse seven, and your pastors are going to fade away, and your elders won't be there with you for all time; Christ will. But then if you go onto the next passage here, it's harder to follow because it says in verse nine, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings. For it's good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods through which those who are so occupied were not benefited." Now, that verse makes you wonder, well, what does that mean? Why is the author talking about food in relation to Christ? And the answer is because the varied and strange teachings here are referring to strange teachings about the food laws that the Jews were so caught up in, which said that in order to be saved, you needed Christ plus something. Jesus plus dietary restrictions, Jesus plus rules, which said, "Eat this, don't eat this; touch this, don't touch that."

They're called kosher laws; the Jews still have them today. If you go to Israel right now, and you try to go into McDonald's and get a cheeseburger, they'll say no because you can't eat milk and meat in the same meal. That's against the kosher laws. My wife wanted to take an ice cream cone into a store that was selling fish; she had eat outside with the Gentiles. That's the kind of thing this is describing. And in order to deal with that the author writes this next section, which says, you don't need the food laws because Christ is enough.

And here's why, because verse 10 says we have an altar. And you can stop there. You don't have to go further into the text because the term would have said enough to the Jews. Everyone knew what an altar was in the first century; they'd seen them. Because in the Old Testament, the altar was the first thing you encountered when you came to worship God. It was the first piece of furniture you found whenever you went to meet Him in the tabernacle. Before you came to the tabernacle, or even the main part of the temple, you had to pass by this object. It was seven and a half feet wide, four feet tall or so. It was where the offerings were made. It was where the priests took the life of a sheep and goat and presented it to

God. Because when you sinned under the Old Covenant, you couldn't just say "I'm sorry." And when you failed God, you couldn't just act like it was no big deal. It was a very big deal. Something had to die, blood had to be spilled, a price had to be paid. And the altar is where that took place. And the priests would have several steps to follow when they would use the altar. When someone brought a sacrifice to him, he would take the worshiper's hand, and put it on the head of the animal to say, "This is my fault this is happening. I'm the one to blame. I'm the one who sinned." And then he would cut the animal's throat. And he would collect the blood in a bowl. And he would go to the altar where he would sprinkle the blood before skinning the body and cutting it up and placing it back on the altar to burn. He would actually do the killing in one place on a different side, so the bodies of the animals wouldn't pile up and make a big mess. Which means he was kind of going back and forth like this, it looks like a worker bee just going around all the time, working, working, working, which made the whole thing just a brutal affair. Some people call the priests professional butchers because of this; they spent their whole day just slaughtering animals.

Because of this, if you want to write this verse down in Exodus 29:43, the Lord says, "there" pointing to the altar. "There, I will meet with the children of Israel." I won't do it there first, pointing to the tabernacle. I won't do it there, pointing to the holy place. I won't do it there, pointing to the Ark of the Covenant. I will do it in the place of slaughter. So if you want to worship Me, you go to the altar. And if you want to meet with God, you bring a sacrifice. And if you want to praise Him, do not come empty handed. Don't just show up. It would be catastrophic for you to do that. You'd better bring something to die.

And the author of Hebrews here in this verse brings all that together all that image to mind to say that all of that was a foretaste of the cross. It served as a foreshadowing of what would happen when Jesus died. Friends, do you know what the cross was? It was an altar. Do you understand what it was all about? It was about making a sacrifice for sin. The reason we don't have an altar up here right now is because Jesus died that way. He created an offering to God. He provided atonement for you. He gave you redemption full and free. Like Israel, you cannot approach God on your own. And you can't walk into His presence, empty handed, and saying it's no big deal. It's a very big deal. Something has to die for you. Blood has to be spilled for you. A price has to be paid for you. And that's what Jesus Christ did. He gave up his life so God could say "Here," pointing to the cross. Here is where I will meet with my people now. I won't do it there, pointing to your works. I won't do it there, pointing to your religion. I won't do it there, pointing to a bunch of rules you made up which said don't go to the movies and don't drink alcohol and don't wear jewelry. It will only happen at the cross.

So you keep your eyes fixed on that; don't let them get distracted by anything else. This was the problem that Jews had right here. They're getting distracted by something else. Verse nine says they're buying into the lie which said to be right with God, you had to watch what you eat, avoid certain foods, maintain the kosher laws, and have the rabbi walk through all your kitchen in a sense and say you can

eat this, you can't eat that, throw this one out. The author says here that's wrong. That's not how you come to God now. This is. You do it through Calvary.

Friends, I don't know if you've ever thought about this before, but a heavy emphasis on the law never helps you as a Christian. It always hurts you because it distracts you from the most important thing. It puts your focus here when your focus needs to be there. It makes you dwell on food and diet and movies and jewelry when you need to be thinking about Jesus Christ instead. This is why you have to resist legalism of any shape in the church, any form or fashion. Anytime it rears its ugly head, you need to kill it. Anytime the deadly snake comes among us, you have to throw it out the window. Because if you don't, it's not long before it'll corrupt the entire doctrine of Christ among us. Legalism, it mingles faith and works. And it says in a sense that you go to heaven like a man in a rowboat with two oars. On the one oar there's the words that say "grace," whereby you trust in God to do it all and you hope and Him to save you; and it's all about his mercy, and love and kindness. And then the other oar has the word "works" on it, where it's all about you, and your hope is in your efforts and your sweat. Which is a cute illustration, but the problem is that's completely backwards. You're not going into heaven in a rowboat. You get there by the grace of God. And that means there's only one oar in the ship, and God is the one rowing it, not you. You have to see it that way. That's salvation.

So whenever you come to make a decision in your life with something like food or movies, your first question is not does this decision honour that person's list that he just made up for me to follow? Your first question is does it honour Christ? Christ is my Lord, not that guy. Christ died to save me, not that man. Christ is my author; He is my way to God. Not brother so and so, not my denomination, not the church I came from, not my parents, Christ.

I mention all of this because I know some of you do come from legalistic backgrounds, at least you've told me that. And you know what it's like to live your life under a superficial system of rules. It's just exhausting, isn't it? It wears you out because you never know if you've done enough. There's always one more rule to keep, one more law to follow, one more command. There are people that on their deathbed will call for a priest to come in and sprinkle holy water on him because they don't think they've done enough. If that's you, let me remind you what Spurgeon said to his church in the 1800's. Because it was being infiltrated by legalism at one point, some Roman Catholics were kind of in there among the people. And he said, "There are false teachers among us who are telling you, you need to trust in Christ along with the sacraments, and you need to trust in Jesus along with the Mass. I will tell you to trust in Christ alone. Because when you die, and you face the great and terrible day before the Lord, you're going to need something to carry you into His arms. And the cross is the only thing that can do it. Sacraments will not carry you because they're not strong enough. And the Mass can't get you to God because it can't hold the weight. The Pope can't do it, what's he going to do? He's just a man. Put your faith in Jesus and Jesus Christ alone."

I mean, that right there is enough to end the sermon on, isn't it? I mean, we're about to do the Lord's Table, and there's nothing more fitting to talk about than this. But there's more to talk about in this passage. I mean, I've just looked at the first part of the one of the first verses here, let's look at another thing that illustrates the cross from the Old Testament in here, and that is the table of the altar. So we've looked at the altar itself, but the second thing that illustrates the cross in this passage from the Old Testament is the table of the altar, which refers to the table that the priests would eat from after the sacrifices were made. When the animals were presented at the altar back then, most of the meat was burnt up, but some of it was not. And the remainder was often given to the priest as their source of food, which is what verse 10 goes on to talk about.

Now, before I read this to you, I do want to point out as you come to this next section, this unusual language, it doesn't stop. This is an obscure text from beginning to end in a sense, which is why you got to buckle down a little bit and put in some effort to understand what it's saying. In fact, when I told you that this refers to the cross, that's not a decision I came to lightly. I put some effort into this. Commentators have determined the term altar, and all these things in here could have different meanings. For example, some have said it could refer to a real altar that was located at the temple in the first century. So it's not figurative, it's a physical altar. But the problem there is that that goes against the whole message of the book of Hebrews. Nowhere does the author tell you to go to a real altar to forgive your sin, so this is not talking about that. Others have said, this is a heavenly altar. Because Revelation 6:9 talks about the martyrs who are around the altar of God, crying out, "How long Oh, God before you avenge our blood?" But that's an imposition as well. There's nothing in the text that justifies that idea. Others have said this table and altar refers to the mass where the priests would bring down the body and blood of the Lord to do Transubstantiation there, but that's heretical, and has no place in a Protestant church. In reality, these verses are speaking metaphorically and describing a figurative altar and table that tie in with the cross. And this is what you see in verse 10, when it says this, it says, "We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat."

Now, let me explain what he's saying here. The phrase, "those who served the tabernacle," it's a reference to the priests who served in the tabernacle under the Old Covenant. Because the Lord tells us that after making a sacrifice at the altar, the priests were allowed to eat from some of the meat that was presented there. The Jews had five major offerings they could bring. And in the first one, the burnt offering, everything was burnt up, all the meat of the animal was consumed in the fire. But in all the other four, the sin offering, guilt offering, peace offering, and grain offering, the priests were required to present the sacrifice, and then keep a portion of it for himself as means of payment. He would go through all the procedure I just told you about where he would cut the animal's throat and let the blood drain into a bowl and go back to the altar whereby, he sprinkled the blood and skinned the animal and cut it up. Except this time, when he cut it up, he would take his knife and do this. And he would put some of it off to the side so he could eat later. Not just anybody could do that. Only the priests could do that. The worshipper, in the peace offering, if I remember correctly, the worshipper was allowed to eat a little bit. But in all the other ones, only the leaders could do that.

So when the author refers to this in verse 10, what he's saying is this in Christ, you have something better than that. And in Him, you have a source of meat that not even the priests can touch because of the cross. When Jesus died for you, He gave you one sacrifice that satisfied your soul completely. And when He went to die at Calvary, He provided one offering and one offering only, that would quench your appetite forever. So you don't have to keep going back to the table to eat. You can take one bite of Him, and you'll never be hungry again. Amen? This is an "Amening" sermon, by the way.

If that interpretation sounds a little strange, I want to remind you, it's not strange when you consider the fact that Jesus often made the same comparison by connecting Himself to food. Listen to some of these verses. He said in John 6:35, the Lord Jesus said this, He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." Now, that's not talking about physical hunger. And it's not talking about fleshly thirst. It's talking about spiritual hunger, the hunger of the soul. Jesus is the only one that can satisfy that. Just like bread is the only thing that can satisfy the needs of the body, Christ is the only thing that can satisfy the needs of the soul. So if you want to have your soul's needs met, this is what you do, you believe in Jesus. Don't get a bunch of self-help books. You don't have to see a psychiatrist. You can go to Christ. If you want to find someone to fill the gaping hole in your heart, this is how you respond, you trust in the Gospel.

In the same passage Jesus told us in John 6:51 that "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." And that makes you stop and think for a moment because how strong is the bread? Listen, this is how strong it is. One bite and you live forever. One taste and you go to heaven, that's powerful bread. And you don't have to taste it twice. You don't have to eat it over and over again like the priests did, or like the Catholics do when they bring Christ down at the Mass. You do it one time with a sincere heart full of faith. When you die, you will go into the presence of God.

Jesus wasn't done yet because in the same discourse, He says in John 6:53, that "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves, for he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Because this is what He leads to now. If you partake of Christ, He will raise you up. And if you put your faith in Him, when judgment day comes, and we stand before the throne, and the books are open, and God looks at everything you did, He will bring your body back from the dead to be with Him.

And the principle that's kind of behind all of this is that none of this will do you any good if you don't come to the table now. And none of this talk about Christ being your bread and Christ being your drink, and Him being the table will help you if you don't reach a decision to eat the bread yourself. You can't just hold the bread; you have to eat the bread. You can't just leave it in your hand; you have to put it in your mouth, swallow it so that it goes down into your innermost being and transforms your life.

This is one of the greatest problems facing the church in North America right now, and that is that so many people are lost because they come to church, and they show up on Sunday, and they sit in our pews, and they listen to our sermons, and they hear our songs, but they have never ever, ever, ever eaten the bread of life. They've never trusted in Christ. They've held him in their hands. They've listened about Him. They've never partaken. It's just a superficial thing. CBC News website did an article several years ago, which said that the number of churches are dwindling so rapidly in Canada that they believe about a third of them will sell their buildings in the next decade. It's not hard to see why. I always questions some of those statistics by the way, that's a lot. But having said that, it's not hard to see why that the drift is happening. It's because so many of the people in the churches aren't saved. They're not born again. So as time goes on, they do what lost people do and they just leave because they lose interest.

And the saddest thing is it doesn't have to be that way because they have the gospel laid out for them. They have the truth put in their hands, but they say no to it. Will you put your faith in Christ today? "No." Will you make a decision for him now? "No." Will you come to the altar? "No." Will you come to the table? "No." Will you eat the bread that has come down from heaven? "No, no, no, no, no." They say no to all of it. So what is left for God to do but send them to hell. They're rejecting the greatest thing there is in the universe. And they're throwing it in His face. And so this text reminds you this morning, you don't want to do that. You have to take the Lord Jesus Christ more seriously than this. The bread is being offered to you; you have to eat it. And the way of salvation is being presented; you need to believe. It's not enough that your parents believe, you need to believe. It is not enough if the person sitting next to you is saved, you need to be saved.

By the way, if you want to see how fortunate you are to have this, verse 10, if you look back in your Bible says this, it says that the priests did not have a right to eat from this table. They didn't have the privilege. They got to eat at *a* table, not *this* table. Which may not mean much to you because we don't have priests anymore in the church, but to a Jew, there was no one closer to God than the priest was. And there was no one higher up in the whole scheme of the system than these guys. They were the best of the best, the cream of the crop because they thought the priests were up here, you're down here. And now the author says not anymore. If you eat the bread of Christ, you're closer to God than the priests are. That was a revolutionary thing. That was turning the whole world upside down.

Which brings you to another illustration here; we're just going through this list as we're looking at these. We'll give you a third one, and that is the sacrifices. Something we talked about before, but we're going to say more here, but a third thing that illustrates the cross from the Old Testament in this passage is the sacrifices, which refers to the animals that were killed on the altar. But not just any animal, some specific ones, the ones that were taken outside the camp and burned. If you look in verse 11, it says this. It says, "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."

Now that's a veiled expression, but it becomes easier to understand when you tie this into the Day of Atonement. When it mentions the time when the high priests went into the holy place, there's only one time of year he did that. And that was at the feast of Yom Kippur. Where the high priests had to sacrifice a bull, in the way that I just showed you by cutting the blood and cutting the throat and draining the blood, whereby he would enter into the holy place and sprinkle it on the Ark of the Covenant. Then he would come out again and take two goats to symbolize the sins of the people, he would cast lots for them. And the lot the goat fell on would be allowed to live; it was called the scape goat. The goat that the lot did not fall on would die, at which time he would take its blood sprinkle it on the Ark of the Covenant, and after that it was over. The Day of Atonement was essentially finished.

But if you look in verse 11, it says not quite because what this is alluding to is the fact that there was still the issue of the bodies left behind. Once he killed those animals, there was still a problem of the carcasses of the bull and the goat lying in the courtyard because the priests had to figure out what to do with them. According to the law, you couldn't leave them there, the bodies would defile the camp. So in order to prevent that, he would take them outside the camp and burn them, which made everything outside the camp defiled by way of comparison.

Outside the camp was a land that was cursed in the eyes of God; it was a place of reproach. To go outside the camp became synonymous with entering a world of ultimate rejection and disgrace and shame in Israel. That's where the worst of the worst were. That's where the baddest of the bad was. Outside the camp is where the trash was taken. Outside the camp is where the refuse was dumped. Outside the camp is where the sewer was found, along with the latrine. And it's where the criminal stayed, and the executions happened and the stonings occurred, you're gonna stone somebody, take them outside the camp. You're gonna kill an adulterer, or kill someone who broke the Sabbath, kill someone who dishonored their parents, outside the camp. That's where the lepers lived. If you had an infectious skin disease, you stayed outside the camp. And if you ever came close to the border of the camp, you had to cry out, "Unclean, unclean," and then go back out again. That's where you belong. All that is found in this expression here.

Which is what verse 12 refers to, when it says, "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate." And that phrase, "outside the gate," it's synonymous with outside the camp, there's two things are described in the same place. Because Jesus was crucified outside the camp. He was killed in a place of ultimate reproach. Listen, friends, the idea of this whole thing is that Jesus went outside the camp, so you could come back in. And He was rejected, so you could be accepted. And He was condemned so you could be forgiven. What the writer is telling you here is that you Jesus was not crucified in a nice place. That would send the wrong message. And He was not put to death in a crystal cathedral or a perfume shop; that would give you the idea that sin is cute and cuddly and nice. It's not. It's something that's so evil in the eyes of God, it has to be dealt with in the worst way imaginable.

One pastor said it like this. He said, “Sin is not a pretty thing, and so God did not give you a pretty boy Saviour to deal with it.” On the contrary, He gave you a man of sorrows, who was acquainted with grief and suffering. And that's how sin was dealt with. Your sin is like a stench in the nostrils of God. It's like an open sewer to Him that makes him cry, “Unclean, unclean.” Go where the lepers are, that's where you belong. Go where the criminals live; that's how I see you. Go with the adulterers, go with the Sabbath breakers, go with the murderers. You are that wicked in my eyes.

And so in order to rescue you from the consequences of that, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Verse 12 says He did this so that He might sanctify you. That means He did this to set you apart from sin. You were unsanctified; Jesus died to sanctify you. You were in sin; Christ died to bring you out. It says through His blood. Do you know what makes you clean today? It's the blood of Jesus. Do you know what separates you from sin this morning? It's the blood of Jesus. Do you know what brings you in the camp after you're out of it? Same thing that the hymn writer says. “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Listen, if I sound serious this morning, it's because this is serious stuff. It's a very earnest passage. In fact, to show you how serious this is, verse 13, says, “so let us” and that's the call to action here. This is where the author wants to take the message of Christ and Him crucified and drive it home to your hearts. Here's what he says, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. He went outside the camp: you go there. He went to the place of absolute reproach and disgrace and rejection to save you; you have to do the same if you follow him. He took up a cross; you take up a cross. You have to be willing to give up everything for His name. Whatever it takes. Whether it be breaking off some relationships, whether it be giving up the culture, dying to self, throwing away your love affair with sin, leaving false religion behind, letting go of the legalism. You do it so you can be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how extreme the conditions are.

In the context here, that would mean these Jews would have to leave the dead works of the law behind, get over the food laws, and suffer the consequences of it. So that when the rabbi came in and said you had to eat this or eat that or you can't be saved, they'll say, “No, I'm already saved.” For you, it might mean something else. It might mean you have to be willing to lose your job over this because you refuse to use certain pronouns at work and call a man a woman or a woman a man. It might mean you have to lose your family because some of you do have legalistic families. Whatever it is, if it comes between you and Christ, it has to go.

Salvation is the whole person given to the whole Christ for the whole of redemption. The gospel is gift and it's free. It's by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone, but it's not cheap. In order to receive it, you have to repent and make Jesus the Lord of your life. Listen, you can come to the altar, and you can eat the bread this morning, but in order to do that, you have to bear the reproach. That's what it says. That's how the text comes together. You can't have one without the other. You can't look at the altar and

say, “I want that, but I don't want the reproach.” You can't look at the bread and say, “I want to receive that too. I want my soul to be filled, but I don't want to go outside the camp to get that. That's too much.” Well, then you don't get the bread. This is an all or nothing thing. It will cost you everything to get it.

You know, if you were to go to Jerusalem today, and ask them to show you where Jesus died, they would take you to a place called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. You can look it up online and see pictures of it, but it was built in the fourth century by Constantine's mother Helena, on the spot where she was told the crucifixion occurred. She became a Christian, started asking around, that spot's where they took her. It's a three-story church, has an Ethiopian monastery on top, very interesting place. But what's most interesting thing about it is that today, it's inside the walls of Jerusalem. In the first century, it was not. Those walls have changed throughout history. And in the first century, it was located outside the city in a place called Golgotha, the place of the skull. Some believe that name came from the fact that it was an old rock quarry where the Jews would dig rocks out of the side of the hill, leaving big gaping holes that look like the eyes of a skull. That's where they crucified people. That's where they killed them. Crucifixion is gross. It's a disgusting thing to watch. And so you would not do it in the middle of town. You would do it out in a place where they would dump the garbage.

And what Hebrews is telling you here is that if you want to be a Christian, you have to go there. You have to leave your place of comfort, and leave your place of ease, leave the place where everybody likes you, and go to a place where they dump the garbage, or be willing to. At this point in this text, I think if you're being honest with this, some of you would be saying that sounds a little too much. I think if you're really being real before the Lord and transparent with Him, you might want to say, “That's extreme. Leave my place of comfort, lose my job, Pastor Jeremy, why would I want to do that? I like my job. Why would I want to give all this up for Christ? I've got it pretty good right now.”

Well, that leads us to the last point in this passage, and this is not actually an illustration. It's just where the passage concludes. But let me give you one more point to consider, and that is the reward of the cross. In this passage, we've seen the cross described as an altar where the author reminds you that there is where God will meet with you now. We've also seen it described as a table where you take one bite of the bread and you live forever, one taste and you go to heaven for all eternity. We've seen it described as the sacrifices that were taken outside the camp and burned to show you that's what Christ did, and if you want what He offers, you go there too. But now it brings you to this to the important question of what does God do for those who follow Jesus this way? I mean, Jesus is basically telling you here to hand your life over to Him to be willing to be executed. Why do you want to do that? Here's why. Verse 14 says if you do this, He will reward you by bringing you to heaven.

If you look in verse 14, it says it this way. It says, “For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come.” Now let me break that down for you. When it says, “For here.” That means here in this world, here in this place at this time momentarily, what do we have? We do not have a lasting city. Do I need to even explain that to you?

The word “city” comes from the word *polis* from which we get politics. It’s the place where people live. And in the place where you live right now, everything is so fleeting, and that this world is falling apart right now. It gets crazier by the minute. Nothing stays the same, town doesn't stay the same, people don't stay the same, government doesn't say the same, morals, values, principles. Marriage does not say the same in everyone's eyes. But on the other hand, the verse says, “We are seeking the city which is to come.” The word “city” is repeated twice there comparing two places. One is this place; the other one is that place. One is this culture, this society, this wicked world; the other one is referring to a world that is not like that. It’s different. Instead of changing, it stays the same. Instead of being sinful, it's holy. Instead of being crazy, it's settled because this is being used in relation to heaven. That's where you're going if you give your life to Jesus Christ. That's what will happen to you if you put your soul in His hands. He will bring you into paradise.

In fact, when it says that we're seeking this place, that doesn't mean we're seeking it like this, sweating and striving and trying to get there by works. It means we're seeking it like this, with our eyes wide open with a laser focus, and 2020 vision because we know this world is not our home. That world is. You guys have heard the expression, “He is so heavenly minded, he is of no earthly good.” Yeah, that's a bunch of baloney. You cannot be of any earthly good unless you are heavenly minded. You need to be thinking about heaven from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed. The word “seeking” here, it's in the continuous tense. You should always be looking for this when you're at work, at home, at school.

If you want to compare this to another passage that we've looked at before, if you look up in your Bibles that Hebrews 12:22, it says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God.” Do you see the word “city” there? It's talking about the same place. And it says you're not coming to the city; you have come to the city. You're not trying to get to heaven by your works and deeds and efforts; you've already made it because of the cross. And even more than that, the passage goes on to say the angels are there. Don't you want to see the angels? I do. It says myriads of angels, billions of angels, trillions more than you can count. It says the general assembly and church of the firstborn will be found there because you will meet people who believe the gospel just like you do from the past 2,000 years of history in heaven. Paul will be there. The apostle Peter will be there. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John will be there. Heroes from church history, George Whitfield, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards. Verse 23 says the spirits of the righteous made perfect will be in heaven. That's talking about Old Testament saints. In Heaven you're not the only ones there. The people of Israel will be there who trusted in Him.

And verse 24 says Jesus will be there. Because when you die and go to heaven, not only will you meet the angels, and the saints who have gone before, you'll meet Him. And when you look at His face, and you see the nail pierced hands, and you find where they put the spear in His side, when He went outside the camp bearing your reproach, you will weep tears of joy, knowing the only reason you're in this place is because of Him. When you get to heaven, the only thing you will know, the only thing that allowed

you to enter that place was the cross. Nothing else. It isn't because of work; it's because of His work. It's not because of your efforts; it's because of His efforts.

So in answer to the question, is it worth it to follow Christ? Yes, it is. It most certainly is because He gives you all of this. So again, the point that the writer is making in bringing all this up in Hebrews is if you have this, he's asking the question, why would you want anything else? And if you're going to heaven because of the cross, why would you go back to the law? What's the point? Why would you want Jesus plus something? Jesus plus religion? Jesus plus works? Jesus plus rituals? You shouldn't. The cross is enough.

Friends, let me ask you this morning, do you believe that? Do you think the cross is enough for you? There's a reason why I'm not walking around this pulpit in front of you this morning, taking out a knife and slitting the throat of a lamb, and sprinkling the blood, and being a professional butcher in front of you. And there's a reason why I'm not going down the aisle with a censor full of incense and waving it back and forth, as I would proceed out the Court of the Gentiles and into the Holy Place and behind some veil, while you stand around and listen to me mumble something incoherently. And say, "That is so deep." That's not deep anymore. Now that's worthless. That was deep in the Old Covenant. That was important back then. Now, it's nothing. Food laws are nothing. Making up rules about movies and alcohol and jewelry and cards and dancing so you can be saved is nothing. It's okay to do some of that kind of discernment stuff in order to grow in sanctification. We all have to put up our boundaries. But to do it to get to heaven is useless. Here's why. Because if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, you're already saved. And if you've put your faith in Him, your sins are already paid for. So if you want an altar, you have an altar. And if you need a table, He is the table. And if you need a sacrifice, He is the sacrifice. Why would you look for anything else? You can come to Christ alone.

Next week, we're going to look at the next passage in Hebrews where it says that through Him, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. Because when you look at all this stuff, in verses eight through 14, and then in the whole of Hebrews, really, there's only one way to respond, and that is to worship. When you think about what Christ has done for you, you have to sing about it. And that's what we'll look at the next time we're together. So please come back and join us for that. It should be really good.

But for now, let's come to the Lord in a word of prayer, and ask Him to prepare our hearts to come to the Lord's table. And remember what He has done for us on the cross.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we are so overjoyed as we consider what our Savior has accomplished for us. It's hard for us to remember that sometimes living in a Gentile world not having all these symbols and pictures and figures in front of us that the Jews had. So we have to go back and think about that. But Lord, as we do, it must make us say, "Hallelujah, what a Saviour." Thank You for dying for us. Thank You for pouring out Your blood, thank You for going outside the camp. Because none of us could save

ourselves without it. If the Jews couldn't do it in 1,000 years of efforts and works, there's no way we could do it here sitting in Canada. So Lord, thank You for that.

And as we often do, when we consider these things, Lord, I pray for any who are here this morning who have never trusted in Christ. There may be some among us right now, who are still looking at all these works to be saved. They're very serious about religion. They're very earnest about You, but they're doing it in the wrong direction. All the effort doesn't do you any good if you're going the wrong way. So Lord, I pray that they would be convicted to set those things aside, and come to the one and only sufficient Savior, who loved us and died.

And Father, as we come to the table this morning, there's probably no more fitting way to wrap this up than to partake of the body and blood of our Lord in this picture. Father, You want us to remember these things. Well, we're going to remember them today that Christ may be glorified, and He may be all in all. As we do this, would You set our minds on things above and on that city that is to come? And we pray this in Jesus' name? Amen.