

HEBREWS: JESUS IS BETTER

Hebrews 13 | *The Final Word: Love*

North Center | June 11, 2023

Pastor Jeremiah Knoop

Here in chapter 13, we have reached the end of this letter to the Hebrews.

Thematically, the letter really **ended** in chapter 12 with the author calling us to “*run with endurance the race that is set before us*” (12:1). This was the **climax** of the letter.

This letter was written to professing Christians in the first century who (for one reason or another) were tempted to walk away from Jesus.¹ It wasn't easy being a follower of Jesus. Being a Christian isn't like floating down a gentle river; it's like running a race. It's hard. It's always been hard. And it is absolutely imperative that we keep our eyes on Jesus (12:2).

- When you are **scared** or **lonely**, *where do you look?*
- When you're **mistreated**, *where do you look?*
- When you're **exhausted & empty**, *where do you look?*
- When you're **bored**, *where do you look?*
- When you're **tempted**, *where do you look?*
- When **life just doesn't make sense**, *where do you look?*
- When you have **questions** or **doubts** about God, *where do you look?*

The point of Hebrews is to call people to only One who has the answers to life and death,² to the only One who can satisfy the longing in your soul; to the only One who is the way, the truth, and the life.³

I had a long conversation this past week with a guy who has spent his whole life looking for meaning and purpose and fulfillment in philosophy, art, intellectualism, exercise, experiences. He's in his 50's, and he's still looking – because his eyes have not yet been opened to see Jesus.

Jesus is Better

- He is the Architect of the cosmos. He is the Story written in the stars.
- He is the Source of Life. He is Before all things, and in Him all things Hold Together.
- His Presence fills time and space. He is more glorious than angels.
- He is the Author of history. He is the Lord of science.
- He is the Giver of language. He is the Creator of art.
- He is Sovereign over government.
- He is the Focal Point of the entire Bible.
- He is the only Savior for a lost and dying world.
- He is the only Way into the presence of God the Father. He is our High Priest forever.
- He has all Authority in heaven and on earth. He has No Rivals. He has No Equals.
- There is None Before Him, and there is None After Him... and we could go on and on!

LOOK TO JESUS.

¹ E.g., Hebrews 2:1; 3:6, 14; 4:14; 6:6, 12; 10:23, 25, 39.

² John 6:68.

³ John 14:6.

Here in **chapter 13**, the author finishes this letter with **A FINAL WORD** about what it looks like **to live as a Christian** in a world that feels so lost and broken. *How do we live as a Christian* in the midst of *religious persecution*? In the midst of *relational tension* and *political corruption* and *economic uncertainty* and *sexual confusion* and *mental distractions* and *spiritual questions* and *moral failures* and *emotional anxiety* and everything else going on around us ...

- How do we navigate all of this as a joyful follower of Jesus?
- And how do we show the world around us that Jesus is better?

The answer can be boiled down into one word: *love*. *Continue to love one another*.

Let brotherly love continue.⁴
~ *Hebrews 13:1*

I think this sentence is the banner that flies over this entire chapter.

Q. What does it look like if we are treasuring Jesus above all things? If we truly believe that Jesus is better than everything else in the universe, how will we then live? How will the world know that we are truly followers of this Jesus? How will this world see that Jesus is better?

A. When we love *like* Jesus.⁵ When we love *how* He loves and *who* He loves.

LOVING LIKE JESUS

1. **Start by loving one another** || *SAINTS*

The word for love here is “*philadelphia*” (φιλαδελφία), which means “*family love*”. This word is used five times in the NT,⁶ and it’s always in the context of your church family. Jesus said that the world will know that we are His followers by watching how we love one another *as family* in Christ (**John 13:35**).

They’ll know that we are followers of Jesus by our love **BECAUSE** [we don’t love one another the way the world loves](#).

I had a **conversation** about “love” this past week **with a woman who claims to be an atheist**, and about halfway through the conversation I realized that we had very different definitions for “love”.

- When an atheist says that we need to love one another, what they mean is that we should do whatever it takes to make others feel good about themselves – because love is primarily about feelings. If you love somebody, you won’t do anything to **offend** them. You will let them **believe** whatever they want. You will let them **live** however they want. You won’t ever talk about **sin** (*because that won’t make them feel good about themselves*). You won’t tell them that they need a **Savior** or call them to **repentance**. Our culture teaches that to truly love someone is to affirm them in every way - because love is all about making people feel good about themselves.
- But when the NT talks about loving one another (φιλαδελφία), we get a very different picture. In the NT, love is **not** primarily focused on people’s *feelings*, but on their *soul*. It’s the kind of affection that we have toward one another that wants what is best for someone **regardless** of how it makes them feel.⁷ It’s the kind of affection we have for someone that makes us care more about their heart (their soul, their eternity) than about their feelings.

⁴ Η φιλαδελφία μενέτω

⁵ John 13:35.

⁶ Rom 12:9–10; 1 Thes 4:9; Heb13:1; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 Pet 1:7.

⁷ Mark 10:21–22; Luke 6:27; 2 Cor 12:15.

Our culture says, “If you love me, you will endorse my beliefs. You will approve of my decisions. You will applaud my self-identity. And if you say anything against my lifestyle, you are a hater.”⁸

But that is absolutely upside-down and backwards.

😊 I have a son who consistently walks out of his room wearing his underwear inside-out and backwards. I’ll consistently say, “Daniel... (I mean, Asher) you’ve got your underwear on inside-out and backwards!” He can wear them like that, but that’s not how they were designed to be worn.

When our culture talks about love, they’ve got it upside-down, inside-out, and backwards. When the Bible talks about loving one another (φιλαδελφία), it’s always a picture of somebody pouring out their life for the sake of your soul.

“Loving one another” is not about tolerance or acceptance or back-scratching or chemistry...

- It’s about **God**.⁹ And **people** who were made in the image of God, for the glory of God.¹⁰
- It’s about *laying our life down* for the sake of another person’s **eternal soul**.¹¹
- It’s about *enduring* anything and everything for the sake of their **eternal good**.¹²
- It’s about *guarding* one another from **sin**.¹³ *Exhorting* one another to live **holy** lives.¹⁴
- It’s about *calling one another* deeper and deeper into the **joy** of God.¹⁵
- It’s about *helping* one another **cling** to the truths of God’s Word.¹⁶

When we read, “let brotherly love continue”, this is what it means.

2. Love people who are outside of our church family || STRANGERS

Do not forget to entertain strangers,¹⁷
for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.
~ Hebrews 13:2

This idea of “entertaining” or “showing hospitality” to strangers (τῆς φιλοξενίας) shows up twice in the NT,¹⁸ and both times it comes right after our love for one another. **First**, we show love for each other *within our church family*, **and then** we are called to use whatever resources God has given us to love people who are *outside of our family*. When you open up your life (your home, your table, your time, your energy, your heart...) to people, you are helping them see that **Jesus is better** than your comfort. **Jesus is better** than your privacy. **Jesus is better** than your space. **Jesus is better** than your family traditions. **Jesus is better** than your plans.

- Like the couple who gave up their anniversary plans so I had a place to stay when I was stranded on the side of the road. 😊

One of the most powerful ways that the gospel of Jesus spreads across this planet is by Christians investing their lives into people outside of their immediate circle.¹⁹ And who knows if you won’t even have an experience like Abraham & Lot who, as they were showing hospitality to strangers, were actually showing hospitality to angels (**Gen 18–19**)!

⁸ Matt 5:11, 44; 24:14; John 1:5; 3:19; 5:42; 12:25; 15:18.

⁹ John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 12:9–10; 1 John 4:7–10.

¹⁰ Gen 1:26–27; Isa 43:7.

¹¹ John 13:1; 15:13; 2 Cor 12:15.

¹² 1 Cor 13:4–7.

¹³ Rom 12:9–10; 1 Cor 13:6; 1 Thes 5:14–22; 1 Tim 1:3–11; Jude 23.

¹⁴ 1 Thes 5:14–22

¹⁵ Psa 16:11; 1 Tim 1:11

¹⁶ Rom 12:9–10; 1 Thes 5:21–22.

¹⁷ τῆς φιλοξενίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε (ESV: “Do not forget to **show hospitality to strangers**”). See also **Heb 13:16**.

¹⁸ Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2.

¹⁹ Some **great books** on hospitality include those by Tony Merida, Rosaria Butterfield, Willis & Dustin...

3. Love those who have been mistreated for the sake of the gospel || *SHACKLED*

Remember the **prisoners** as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the body also.

~ *Hebrews 13:3*

He's saying, "You know what it's like to be mistreated. So don't forget to show love to your Christian brothers and sisters who are being persecuted, imprisoned, maligned, or mistreated for the sake of the gospel."²⁰

It's so easy for persecuted Christians to be "*out of sight, out of mind*" when it comes to the global church. We aren't suffering (at the moment), and so forget that we have brothers & sisters who are. But God's Word says that we should care about them "*as if we were chained with them.*" We get a picture of this as the local church was praying for Peter while he was in prison (**Acts 12**).

Two helpful resources for "remembering the prisoners"

- The Voice of the Martyrs (*stories to encourage you, specific ways to pray and support*)
- Operation World (*what Christians are facing in different countries & how to pray*)

4. Love the spouse that God has given you || *SPOUSE*

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled;

But fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Let your conduct be without covetousness;

Be content with such things as you have.

For He Himself has said, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*"

So we may boldly say: "*The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*"

~ *Hebrews 13:4–6*

One of the ways we show the world that Jesus is better is by loving the person God put you with.

We live in a culture that struggles with contentment – especially *sexual* contentment. We have this idea that life is better on the other side of the fence. **We're like cows** that keep thinking that we would be happier if the farmer would just take down the fences so we could graze wherever and whenever we want. And since the farmer isn't taking down the fence, we keep looking for ways to break through...

What is **fornication**? It's the act of an unmarried person having a sexual relationship w/ someone. What is **adultery**? It's the act of a married person having a sexual relationship w/ someone other than their spouse.

Q. What leads a person to engage in sexual sin?

A. They aren't content with the life that God has given them.

If you are **single**, why should you be content with your singleness (in this moment)?

If you are **married**, why should you be content with your spouse?

Because you have God! He has promised never to leave you!

²⁰ It seems clear that the author has imprisoned *Christians* in mind since (1) he emphasizes that they are mistreated in their imprisonment (13:3) and since (2) he refers to Timothy's imprisonment at the end of the chapter (13:23).

He is with you in your **singleness** – even when it’s lonely.
He is with you in your **marriage** – even when it’s hard.

And He is infinitely better than anything you will ever find on the other side of the sexual fence. When you honor marriage and the marriage bed, you are showing the world that **Jesus is better** than the sexual freedom they are promoting. When they break down the fence, but you stay in your field, it’s a testimony to them that what you have is better than what they are offering. And what is it that you have. You have God! God in your marriage. God in your singleness. God in your loneliness. God in your brokenness. You have God, and He is enough.

5. **Love your church leaders** || *SHEPHERDS*

Remember those who **rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you,**
whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

~ *Hebrews 13:7*

Obey those who **rule over you, and be submissive,**
for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.
Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

~ *Hebrews 13:17*

The job of a spiritual leader is weighty beyond all comparison.
One day, we will stand before Almighty God and give an account for your soul:

- *Did we love you well? Did we preach the Word of God faithfully?*
- *Did we serve you with joy and humility? Did we open our homes and hearts to you?*
- *Did we exhort you to turn away from sin and follow Jesus? Did we live holy lives?*²¹
- *Did we pray for you? Did we prioritize your needs above our own?*
- *Did we protect you from the wolves of an anti-Christian culture?*
- *Did we lay down our lives for you as the Great Shepherd did for His sheep?*

It is a weightier thing to be **an elder** in a church of 100 people (or a **Sunday School teacher** with one child in your class) than to be the President of the United States.²²

If you are in a position of leadership in which you are called to speak the word of God over people, the Bible summons you to see the eternal weight of your calling.

- *As a spiritual leader, you are called to help others see that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life – and that He’s better than everything else they could ever go chasing after.*
- *The rest of us* (as members of the local church) are called to **love our shepherds** by:
 - Following their faith, paying attention to the way they live
 - Obeying the words they speak over us (*insofar as they are speaking God’s word*)
 - Submitting to their authority over us (*insofar as it accords with the Word of God*)
 - Making it a joy for them to lead us.²³

When the world sees a local church whose elders are faithfully leading from the Word of God and whose members are joyfully following... it’s a picture of the beauty of Jesus (**Col 1:18**).

²¹ Heb 13:18.

²² Matt 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2.

²³ **Illustration:** the Lowry’s joy as they talked about their pastor – and not about all the ways their pastor is serving them, but all the ways they are serving their pastor (because they genuinely love him). They go out of their way to make it a joy for their pastor to lead them. I’ve also known pastors (Puffer’s) who have had the exact opposite experience – where the congregation went out of their way to make the pastor know that they don’t want him there. And I’ve known many churches that just aren’t invested enough in the local church to really care one way or another.

6. Love Jesus || SAVIOR

Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

Therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

~ *Hebrews 13:12–13*

If you love Jesus (*in this life, in this world, in this culture*), what happens?²⁴

If you are faithfully following Him & obeying His Word, where will that lead you *in society*?

It leads you **outside the camp** – because that’s where Jesus was.

When you love the way Jesus loves, you will be hated the way Jesus was hated (John 15:18).

- You’ll be called a **hater**.
- You’ll be called **arrogant** for believing the Bible. You’ll be called **childish**.
- You’ll be called a **homophobe** because you believe the Bible’s teaching on marriage.
- You’ll be called a **misogynist** because you believe that men and women are not identical.
- You’ll be called a **bigot** because you believe that people are sinners by nature.
- And then you’ll be called **lots of other names** because you don’t affirm the hell-bound trajectory of the culture you.

Jesus came to bring the life and light of God into a dark and dying world – because “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), and they nailed Him to a cross for it.

So then why are we so surprised when the world treats us the same way?

Look, if your aim is for this world to **accept** you, you walked through the wrong door! 😊

If your aim is to be **welcomed** and **embraced** by the culture around you, you aren’t following Jesus. When you follow Jesus, it inevitably leads you “outside the camp”. But... that’s where Jesus is, and so there’s nowhere else you would rather be.

Minneapolis isn’t our forever home anyway. “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb 13:14).

Sure, I’m an outsider in this culture. I feel it more and more all the time. But... that’s just fine by me because I have found that Jesus is better than anything this world could ever give me anyway! Sure, they might call you crazy, but they called Jesus the same thing.

- If you tell people that you can’t go to **the game** with them because you don’t want to skip the **Sunday Gathering**, they look at you like you’re crazy!
- When you schedule your summer **vacation** plans around your **church** calendar, people think you’re crazy!²⁵
- If you walk out of the movie **theater** halfway through the movie because you know that it’s not bringing glory and honor to Jesus, your friends will look at you like you’re crazy!
- When you go on a mission trip over **Spring Break** instead of going to the beach, your friends will look at you like you’re crazy!

²⁴ Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Again, in 1 John we read that “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:1–3). To love Jesus is to obey Him. To follow Him.

²⁵ **Illustration:** There was a family from Nebraska vacationing in Minneapolis last week. They wanted to spend some time with us, and so we were talking about all the things there is to do in the Twin Cities, and they wanted to ministry together. On vacation! So we spent Saturday evening serving at FMSC. And then they showed up for our church Gathering on Sunday morning. On vacation! That’s crazy.

- When you open your home to **orphans, elderly, strangers**...people think you're crazy!
- When you **homeschool** your kids, people think you're weird.
- When you don't let your children have **social media accounts** because of how Satan uses it as his playground, people think you're weird.
- When you get up earlier for work than you need to so that you can spend time **reading your Bible**, people think that's weird.

But that's okay because they thought the same thing about Jesus.
You'll get put outside the camp, but's okay because Jesus is outside the camp.

In a culture that rejects Jesus, nothing scares me more than being seen as *normal*.²⁶

When you follow Jesus in loving people the way He loves, it will look strange to the world.
You will find yourself *outside the camp*. So what do we do? We keep loving anyway.

- *Loving one another*
- *Loving the stranger*
- *Loving those who are mistreated for the sake of the gospel*
- *Loving our spouse*
- *Loving our shepherds & our sheep*
- *Loving our Savior*

Because this is how people will see that **Jesus is better**.

²⁶ I'm way more "at home" being called a bigot or a hater or childish or arrogant or a homophobe or a racist or a misogynist or crazy than I am with being accepted.