

A Heart Established by Grace

HVFC

May 24, 2026

Jesus is Better Series

Hebrews 13:9-16

Good morning.

What a week. Maybe what a month.

I want to thank everyone for the warm anniversary wishes, 23 years ago today, I trapped a very young and unsuspecting gorgeous woman into saying yes and taking a \$100 wedding ring in exchange for well all of this. And while I definitely received the better part of that deal, she has been faithfully at my side, giving me 5 wonderful kids, raising them and educating them, making them and myself into the best we can be. God gave me the spouse of my dreams even though I didn't deserve her, so I am not really sure what she did to end up with me, but I can say with no regret or shame I married up several classes. And she does all this and so much more, and she is more beautiful today than the day she walked down the aisle all those years ago.

And in other news, there was this other wedding this past week of some minor note...

Bowen and MJ wanted me to express their overwhelming gratitude to you for making their wedding a magical memory for them. They are in Hawaii, lounging on sandy beaches, Bowen enjoying the time to write, while MJ is getting extra workouts in with all the extra time on her hands.

I actually have no idea what they are doing, well...

I digress...

With a few more sermons to go in Hebrews, last week we looked at the scriptures where the author is beginning to bring this book to a close.

And we focused on verse 8 that says Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And as believers we have the ability to know God through Jesus by looking to those who have come before and walked faithfully before God and man, speaking the word of God, running their race of faith to the very last breath of life. That same Jesus who led and sustained them, is the same Jesus that leads and sustains us today. The writer then encourages us to hold true to Jesus when strange and varying doctrines begin to show in the form of secret knowledge, and codes and changes from what is written and known of Jesus from the past and the present. God is not like man that he should change, he remains constant.

This is where we are going to pick up today, completing verse 9 of Hebrews 13. We are to have a heart that is established through grace which comes from Jesus, not occupied by mindless traditions.

If you have your bibles open, turn with me to Hebrews 13:9.

Hebrews 13:9

Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

NKJV

Let's Pray.

This morning I really have just two points I would like to make.

Here is what they are.

We can live this life having our hearts established in the Grace, or Gospel.

Or we seek to tangle our lives up with traditions and ceremonial knowledge, trying to earn enough worth to receive an eternal reward.

And this is where I will start this morning.

The writer gives a few examples of what has occupied the heart of man until Jesus.

Hebrews 13:10-14

10 We have an altar from which the priests in the Tabernacle have no right to eat.

11 Under the old system, the high priest brought the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin, and the bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp. 12 So also Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make his people holy by means of his own blood. 13 So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore. 14 For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.

NLT

I pulled out two tangible things mankind will always be tempted to set their hearts on.

An Altar. Verse 10

A Temple. Verse 11

Let's look at the altar.

Verse 10 clearly says we have an altar.

What is an altar?

An altar is simply a place of sacrifice.

It provided a way for sinful man to approach God.

At the altar sacrifice took place. We come to the altar to surrender.

Blood is spilled so that atonement can take place.

However, the best thing that the altar represents for us is substitution.

Even in the OT, the altar was meant for sheep and goats, not for you and I.

It was a place for us to come burdened and guilty, and leave free from the shame and guilt.

The alter where God ordained that sin was to be dealt with.

The writer says we have an altar, which is Jesus.

He says this because those reading this letter wanted to go back to the tangible, real altar that Judaism offered.

We have the same tendencies as they did.

While we believe Jesus is our altar, we often need to add something tangible to it.

What are some of those tangible spiritual systems we like to experience along with Jesus?

A tangible spiritual system is something we can control, see, measure, organize, and emotionally experience.

It might sound something like this.

Wow I really like that worship team today, I had goosebumps, all the songs made me feel good inside. It just touched me deep down inside and made me all emotional.

With all of that I was able to really worship today, man the spirit was really moving.

To experience all of this we follow personalities, or seek platforms, or create traditions and programs that ultimately push Jesus to the back, and begin to seek the tangible expression more than the presence of Jesus.

The focus becomes the tangible experience, and when that is not perfect, we walk away disappointed because Jesus must not have showed up, I didn't have one goosebump, never felt excited enough to shout amen, I didn't like one song we sang, and I just couldn't get into the vibe of worship.

If you have said that, it is because your focus was on the tangible experience not the person of Jesus. If you come to the altar focused on Jesus, you can worship him no matter the songs, programs, or speakers that are there, because Jesus is there and is greater than all those tangible add-ons.

We also do this with the temple/church.

Hebrews 13:11

Under the old system, the high priest brought the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin, and the bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp.

NLT

If the altar is where God ordained that sin was to be dealt with, the Holy Place or temple deals with God's presence and fellowship with us.

We like the idea that God is in a place for a couple reasons.

One, it gives us a place to go, it gives purpose to seek out where God is.

Two, and probably the more important to us, it allows us to not be in God's presence.

There are plenty of songs about partying on Friday and Saturday, and repenting in church on Sunday.

During the week we can live like we want, living rebellious and even morally questionable lifestyles, until we park in the parking lot at church and prepare to go in and meet with the Lord.

It becomes easy to separate our life from our faith when God is at the church and we are out living life.

We begin to idolize and place our confidence in buildings, programs, systems.

They become our identity just as the temple was for the Jewish people.

I will be honest, when we began to talk about putting siding on the “Log Church”, I was preparing for a fight.

So often we associate a tangible place and systems with the presence of God and they become more important than God. We tend to get it backwards.

Here is how Jesus described it.

Matthew 23:16-21

16 “Blind guides! What sorrow awaits you! For you say that it means nothing to swear ‘by God’s Temple,’ but that it is binding to swear ‘by the gold in the Temple.’

17 Blind fools! Which is more important—the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? 18 And you say that to swear ‘by the altar’ is not binding, but to swear ‘by the gifts on the altar’ is binding. 19 How blind! For which is more important—the gift on the altar or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 When you swear ‘by the altar,’ you are swearing by it and by everything on it. 21 And when you swear ‘by the Temple,’ you are swearing by it and by God, who lives in it.

NLT

God commanded them to go to the temple and bring sacrifices to the altar, but they disregarded what God had set up to meet with them for what they deemed important.

We are guilty of doing the same when we seek to add to Jesus the tangible things our hearts seek.

For them it was not longer about the altar or the temple, but it was about the quality and cost of the gift on the altar, it wasn't about the temple, it was about the gold of the temple. It was about what they could take for themselves because they partook of what was given to the temple and to the altar. It was about control.

It is the same thing for us, we seek to control things.

That is why we complain about the worship. It is an attempt to control it.

Let me be clear, worship in this church is not meant for you.

Some seek to control the sermons. I received a letter this week. It opened with a nicety, then began to tell me Jesus isn't God and I should renew and refresh myself with scripture and printed out several pages of scripture references. Yet they never signed their name, there was no return address.

Upon noticing that I folded the pages had them shredded.

When we set our hearts on tangible things like traditions, church programs, buildings, celebrity pastors, and emotional experiences to feel God's presence, we want control like the priest in Jesus's time, not God's presence.

The writer tells us of a better option than the tangible temptations we want to establish our hearts in.

Hebrews 13:9

It is good that the heart be established by grace...

The writer has mentioned this before at the end of chapter 12.

The grace he is speaking of is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

An established heart has been rooted deeply in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is not constantly tossed around by circumstances, emotional experiences, trends, or the latest vibe.

We establish our hearts by grace when we give control to Jesus.

He becomes our focus. And when he is our focus, our natural reaction will be worship. True worship of who He is, experiencing his grace and mercy, and living it out in our daily lives.

When our hearts are established by grace we understand that Jesus is in me and I am in Him. The Holy Spirit is filling me with his presence and I am the temple of God.

Where ever you find yourself; God is right there with you.

David said this.

Ps 139:7

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Or where can I flee from Your presence?

NKJV

This is the difference between a heart established by grace and a heart established by tangible traditions.

The altar temporarily covered sin, grace transforms the heart

The altar focused on external sacrifice; grace produces inward transformation.

The temple created distance, grace an indwelling of the spirit. Christ in me the hope of glory.

Tangible systems are controllable, grace requires surrender.

Religion says perform; grace invites us to abide.

Traditions create spectators, grace creates worshippers.

I don't know about you but I want to be a worshipper.

Grace establishes the heart before worship flows from your life.

Worship isn't words, tears, goosebumps, music or emotional experiences.

Worship comes from a heart that is submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

When we submit to His Lordship, this becomes the direction and attitude of our lives, not my will but yours be done.

This is important because Jesus told the disciples in Matt 15.

What comes out of your mouth is a reflection of your heart.

In closing this morning.

We have two options for our heart to be established by.

The first is the tangible, the controllable, the option that is self-serving and places me in the drivers seat.

With this option we inform God of how we will worship, which sacrifices we will bring, the programs we want and how we want them done, as we build the perfect system of worship that centers around me.

It is my preferences, my choice, my worship, take it or leave it.

The second option is a heart established by grace.

This option doesn't really give us any control, tends to be very narrow minded, and puts Jesus before all my wants and desires.

With this option we get to follow Jesus, say what He says, go where he sends us, do what he tells us to do.

This option requires me to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus.

And when I do that I gain access to God, to a relationship with my heavenly father who promises to be with me, never leave me, take every rough season and difficult thing and work it into my story for the good of His Kingdom.

It won't be easy, but he will give you his burden which is lite and take your burden.

He will be your healer, your provider, your comforter, give you wisdom, make you into a new creation, prepare a place for you with Him in eternity, collect every tear, hear every prayer and call for help. He will rebuke the devourer and fight our battles. He will give us the Holy Spirit and every spiritual blessing and welcome us into Heaven when we die.

This is why it is important for us to understand that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Jesus was God's plan from the beginning.