**September 1, 2019 Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16**

 ***A Sacrifice of Praise***

**Scripture:** Hebrews 12:28 - 13:1-8, 15-16 NRSV

(12:28) Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; (29) for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

 (13:1)Let mutual love continue. (2)Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (3)Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (4)Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. (5)Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." (6)So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" (7)Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (8)Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

(9)Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. (10)We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. (11)For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. (12)Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. (13)Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. (14)For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

 (15)Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. (16) Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

**Notes:**

1. Six basic ***instructions*** for those who are followers of Christ.
	1. We should ***love*** our brothers and sisters.
	2. We should not ***seclude*** ourselves from the world.
	3. Do what we can for those who are held in ***bondage***.
	4. Marriage should be honored and sexuality in marriage should be ***undefiled***.
	5. Live our lives with ***contentment***.
	6. Remember our ***leaders***.
2. Three theological statements to ***encourage*** us.
	1. “I will never leave you nor will I ***forsake*** you.”
	2. We need not fear ***anything*** that another human could do to us.
	3. Jesus Christ is the ***same*** yesterday and today and forever.
3. “…let us continually offer a sacrifice of ***praise*** to God.”
	1. We are called to confess the name of Jesus with the “***fruit*** of our lips”.
	2. “Do not neglect to do ***good*** and to ***share*** what you have”
	3. “Such sacrifices are ***pleasing*** to God.”
4. The Lord ***loves*** us with everything that makes him who he is.
	1. How do you show your ***love*** for the Lord?
	2. Strive to complete these tasks in order to ***demonstrate*** our love for the Lord.

**Transcript:**

For 25 years Janice has been my bride, my closest companion. After these 25 years one would be pretty secure that we are a solid match, that we are truly in love and that we are devoted to each other. And we are in love with each other and faithfully devoted to one another. But a question rises in my mind sometimes, insecurities bubbling to the surface, “How do I know that she loves me? And how does she know that I love her?

We humans are a fickle sort of being. We make bold claims out loud in public but in the recesses of our mind we doubt and fear. When we are alone and left only to our own thoughts we dream up all sort of scenarios, that create these doubts and fears. Am I the only one who does this? Are there any of you who have doubts and fears? I believe that we all do it, we all have them, only the truly brave people are willing to admit it. We all have doubts and fears, which cause us to do things that can create division in our relationships that can make us feel very self-centered and many times feeling all alone.

These same doubts and fears can also drive a wedge into our relationship with Jesus. We allow our fears to take over and we begin to doubt in God’s goodness. We allow our struggles to take over and create dissension towards our Lord. We allow our reactions to the events of this world, to put our trust in ourselves, to lean on our understanding alone, then we look to ourselves and fail to acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But we must remember that the events of our lives are in no way the result of God’s vengeance against us, but the result of sin in the world and the actions of our self and other sinful people. We find words of encouragement and instruction in Hebrews 13:1-8, Join me in reading this passage

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As we listen to our passage today we may get the idea that we are being preached at with a bunch of rules that we must keep in order to maintain our salvation. Hebrews 13 can read like a list of rules: do this, don’t do that, remember, but don’t forget. But this chapter includes some vital theological truths that endure the passing of time; instructions and the grounds for them that create a template for ethics we can follow. It provides a picture of how community might be able to survive until one day we finish this race and enter into God’s holy presence in eternity.

Chapter 11 talks about faith; it defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for the conviction or proof of things not seen. And then goes on to speak of the heroes of our faith; men and women who have stood against sinfulness, even when nobody else would join them or back them. So today as we look at these words, we can understand why the writer is listing these rules. These words are meant to encourage, they are meant to give us hope. These words are meant to give us direction as we live our lives; following the teachings of Christ, serving the God of all creation, and loving all of humanity even when they are lost in sin.

At the close of chapter 12, the author left his audience with the intense quote from Deuteronomy, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). He must have taken a deep breath there, or maybe even resumed his sermon series the next week, for the beginning of chapter 13 switches tone abruptly. And it is here that he issues six basic instructions for those who are followers of Christ.

First, we should love our brothers and sisters. The early church practiced “fictive kinship.” In other words they treated each other like family, in the way they talked and the things they did. Elders were looked to as the parents of the group. They referred to each other as brother and sister. They truly loved each other and were not afraid to correct and rebuke. The author of Hebrews has also used this practice throughout the letter; referring to them as brothers and sisters, urging them to supportive relationships; and here he only reiterates what he has urged us before: to keep loving one another.

Second, we should not become an insular community focused only on ourselves. We should not seclude ourselves from the world and those who are lost. We should not hide from the sinfulness of the world, but they must resist it. We must live our lives as an example for all to see. And if the lost in the world can see nothing else. They must be able to at least see our love, Our love for God, for all of humanity, our love for them as individuals. That is right, we cannot forget to love the stranger as well. Who knows? we might end up entertaining an angel; an angel sent to serve humanity, just as Abraham did. But even more important we may be a vehicle that draws the lost closer to salvation.

Third, we have an intimate responsibility to those in bondage. We must remember those who are in prison and, we must be doing what we can for those who are held in bondage. Those bound to addictions and oppressive situations; situations that hold them down from realizing their true potential in God’s eyes. The author noted that they faced persecution in the past (Hebrews 10:32-34) and are currently struggling against sin, which could include external persecution. The prisons of the first-century Roman world were demoralizing places; crowded, dark rooms where prisoners were often bound and abused, these prisons required family or friends to provide goods & visits to those in chains. We are all part of the same body, so the congregation should serve those suffering just as if they were going through the same horrors ourselves. In the song Family of God, the words are written, “When one has a heartache, we all shed a tear, And rejoice in each victory of this family so dear.” As the church we are to be reaching out to those who are stuck in situations; such as abusive relationships, those who are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, as well as other forms of addiction. Even though those suffering are mostly to blame for the situation they find themselves in; we as the family of God, must be working to free them of these chains.

Fourth, the author asserts that marriage should be honored and sexuality in marriage should be undefiled. God will be the judge of those who commit adultery and fornication. That is not our role. Here’s a reminder of the gap in our time and culture these issues receive little notice. Many look the other way when faced with these situations. Interpreters are left to establish the meaning of the phrase sexually immoral person. Nevertheless, exclusive purity of the marriage relationship remains his clear instruction. And while many may just look over these types of iniquities, situations involving sexual activities with somebody other than your spouse; premarital sex, sexual activity with somebody of the same gender, watching or looking at sexually explicit videos or pictures, and even situations where an exclusive couple is just shacking up. We must lovingly let them know that what they are doing is sin; and while we may not approve of what they are doing, we must also remind them that God still loves them, and we do too.

Fifth, a place should exist in our lives with contentment, our daily lives should be filled with activities that bring us joy, and peace. We should be focusing on the relationships that we have with others, not focusing on the stuff we have, not focusing on how to hold on to our stuff, or how to get more stuff. This means a literal “anti-love of money”. We should acknowledge that what we have is sufficient. Yes we should work hard for what we receive. We should not expect our needs to be handed to us on a silver platter, but we should be satisfied with what we have, especially when our needs are met. Scholars know that ancient house churches, consisted of a few wealthy, and quite a few not-so-wealthy, here the emphasis lies in an acceptance of what God has provided for us. A lack of gratitude or a grasping for more wealth should not enter our lives.

Sixth, he urges them to remember their leaders. These could have been direct witnesses to Jesus, people who heard the gospel directly from him and then spoke it to this congregation. They may not be with them anymore, for the author tells the listeners to remember how these people’s life ended. They endured until the end, just as he is hoping the listeners will do. They are part of this great cloud of witnesses and their faith should be imitated. Just as he was sharing and remembering the heroes of the faith in previous chapters. He is calling us to remember the faithful followers of Christ who have done so much; faithful men and women who have made an impact in our lives, impacted our communities, and those who have been so instrumental in our church

We too should remember our leaders. We too should remember the men and women who worked to put this church here. We must remember who financed the efforts to begin this congregation. We must remember those who planned and sacrificed to build this building. And how could we forget the ones who were instrumental in helping to lead us to where we are today in the presence of God. Those who served as teachers and song leaders, trustees and stewards. Those who worked tirelessly so that this church would flourish and we could come to know Jesus as our Lord ad Savior. What names come to mind when you think of the leaders of our past.

As I look back I remember a few who made such an impact on my life: Rev. and Mrs. Marshall Brown and Rev. and Mrs. Alan Smith, Pappy and Mrs. Seese; Claude and Granny McCreary, Home and Famie Brown, Lui and Lavada Hammers, Ernest and Helen Allison. And I could go on and on; some sitting here in our presence today. And when you think of these persons, do you think they would be satisfied in what we are doing today? Would they be proud of what they did and what we sustained? Would they say look at my church and all they are doing in the community?

After these instructions we find three theological statements to encourage us. First he warns of greed and dissatisfaction and then he reminds them, “I will never leave you nor will I forsake you.” There is no need to worry about material goods if you have the presence and protection of God. The statement echoes Deuteronomy 31, where Moses promises the people and Joshua who are poised to enter the land of Canaan; that God will protect them. On a broader level, then, this quote is not just about finances, but about promise of God to sustain. Since they are following Jesus, a new Joshua, to a heavenly land of promise, they need this assurance from God as much as the Israelites did.

The second theological statement is their response. For the first time in the letter the audience is given a voice. Since the Lord helps us, we need not fear anything that another human could do to us. If they were fearing future persecution, especially more seizure of their property, knowing that God would provide for them and help them would allow them to withstand anything, even as their forerunners had done (11:35b–39). Thinking about persecution in the future and in the past; the author offers his next theological statement regarding Jesus. A comment about the earlier generation of leaders and their lifelong faithfulness. If they showed consistency in their lives, Jesus’ consistency is even greater. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

This rich statement could stand on its own. It could simply be a comfort that even though good leaders of the past have died, their leader Jesus will remain forever. On a deeper level, this statement adds further support for this author’s view of Jesus. He is the Son of God, and that does not only indicate that he is Israel’s Messianic King, but that he is truly divine. If he exists in the same way from eternity past to eternity future, such a statement can only be said about God.

The writer instructs us, “…let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God.” We are called to confess the name of Jesus with the “fruit of our lips”. We do this as we sing songs that bring glory to the Lord. We do this as we share the story and truth of Jesus to those we encounter. We do this as we testify to Gods goodness in our lives, testimonies of his goodness, of his mercy given to us, of what we have seen with our own eyes in our own lives, of what the Lord has delivered us from.

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.” We find opportunities on a daily basis to do this. Opportunities to help out and do good for a neighbor, for a friend, and a stranger. Opportunities for us to share what God has given to us, and bless those without, opportunities to help those in need, opportunities to help those who are hurting. We only need to look closely and listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit, and why should we do this? Because, “Such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” The Lord loves to see us giving out of our love for Him and His creation, He loves to see us giving out of our love for our brothers and sisters. The Lord loves each of us so much, but especially loves a joyful and generous giver.

Have you ever wondered if the Lord truly loves you? Over the past couple of months I have been hearing news of contemporary Christian songwriters and singers who are leaving the faith in search for some other form of enlightenment. They have strayed away from what drew them to the Lord in the beginning. They have allowed influences of modern culture distort their beliefs. They have doubts about God’s love and are struggling with what is true and what is imagined

I have had my share of fears, doubts, and confusion, but I have come to a few realizations. The Lord loves us with everything that makes him who he is. The love of the Lord remains with us from Adam and Eve through to today. The love of God, has stopped Him from destroying creation many times in history. The love of God, moved Jesus to come to this world and die for our sin. The love of God, draws us to him so we can know him, believe in him and be saved. The sickness, pain, and suffering in this world is a result of sinfulness in mankind and many times we must live with the results of this sinfulness. But the Lord supplies what we need; that is how he shows his love for us.

How do you show your love for the Lord? The answer to this question is found in the six instructions found in our passage today. Love your brothers and sisters. Do not isolate yourself from the world and those who are lost. Do what you can for those who are held in bondage to sin, addiction, and other vices. Avoid sexual immorality and keep marriage undefiled. Be content with what we have, and do not be consumed with desires for more; and finally remember your leaders

We must each strive to complete these tasks in order to demonstrate our love for the Lord. We must offer a sacrifice of praise to God. The fruit of our lips should be shouting out the wonderful things the Lord has done. How he has established his church and led each of us into this relationship with him. We must not neglect doing good and sharing what we have, for this is what shows the Lord our love for Him.