

Jesus is Greater **Hebrews 13**

1. Life in the world

- Romans 12:2; John 17:15-19; 2 Corinthians 6:17;
Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41; 1 Thessalonians 4:3

* open house to strangers

* open heart to the oppressed

* open eyes to danger

2. Life in the church

- James 3:1-2; Hebrews 13:18; Romans 12:1

* the structure of leadership

* simplicity of belief

* sacrifice of praise

3. Life in the center

- Hebrews 13:20-21

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Hebrews: Jesus is Greater **Chapter Thirteen¹**

In some ways, the original readers of the book of Hebrews were faced with the question, “Would you rather stay faithful to Christ under persecution, or abandon Christ for an easy life?” So throughout the book of Hebrews the writer has been giving all the reasons why Christ is greater than their persecutions and old religious systems.

We’ve learned that Jesus Christ has done for us all that we need by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. He is the greatest High Priest and is greater than the Old Testament with all of its rituals and laws. In fact, he is the fulfillment of them. Because of that, we can be saved from the guilt of sin and we can be God’s children. We also can live a holy life, by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in us, and live in peace and rest no matter what we go through!

This last chapter wraps up the entire book with a quick sketch of how a Spirit-filled Christian will behave. So why don’t you take your notes out of your worship folder and write down what you can learn from this for your life, because we are being given a last look at what that kind of life looks like as it’s lived out day by day.

In fact, it’s pretty crowded in chapter 13, because there’s a whole lot of practical information. When I think about what the writer has crammed into this last chapter, I’m reminded of a limerick that goes like this (you know what limericks are, right?):

There was a young poet in Japan,
Whose poetry no one could scan.
When told it was so,
He replied, “Yes, I know,
But I try to get as many words in the last line as I possibly can.”

That’s kind of what is happening here – the writer is trying to get as many thoughts into this last chapter as he can, because God cares about *your* life: the quality and character of your life, and how it is lived, and he wants you to have the best life possible.

¹ Sources: Kevin L. Anderson, *Hebrews: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2013). Ray Stedman, *How to Live What You Believe: A Life Related Study in Hebrews* (Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1974). John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hebrews* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008). Gareth L. Cockerill, *Hebrews: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998). Philip H Hacking, *Opening up Hebrews*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006)

To get a better grip on what we will be talking about, we're going to start out by reading this chapter. You can open your Bibles or Bible apps if you haven't. But we are going to read it a little differently this morning. Since this is the last chapter, we're going to read it responsively. That means that I will read a section (the slides that say "Pastor") and you will read a section in unison (the slides that say "Church"). Then at the end, there are a couple that say "all." Hebrews chapter 13: *(Please stand)*

Pastor:

¹Keep on loving each other as brothers. ²Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Church:

⁴Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Pastor: ⁶So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

⁷Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Church: ⁹Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. ¹⁰We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

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

Pastor: ¹³Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. ¹⁵Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.

Church: ¹⁶And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. ¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Pastor: ¹⁸Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

All: ²⁰May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Pastor: ²²Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter. ²³I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. ²⁴Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

All: ²⁵Grace be with you all.

Thanks for standing – please be seated. Every believer lives in relationship with two worlds, two groups of people, two spheres. This chapter deals with how to live your life in each of them, starting with...

1. Life in the *World*

The first six verses of this chapter deal with the Christian's relationship with the world. This passage repeats the same thoughts that we find in what Romans 12:2 says:

“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2, nlt)

For every Christian, *that* is our calling: we are not to be like the world around us, but to be different. We live differently because our lives have been transformed by the love of God. We don't remove ourselves from the world around us; we allow God to transform us as we live in the midst of the world around us. That's why Jesus prayed this way for us:

“I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.” (John 17:15-19, nlt)

In other words, Jesus prayed that we would live holy or Christ-like lives *while we are in this world*. Why would Jesus pray this if it wasn't possible to do so? He indicated in his prayer that because of his death and resurrection, we now have the power to live a Christ like life in this world. So, Christian, while you are in this world, you can be, in Jesus' own words and prayer, truly holy! That is what God will do for you and in you as you submit to him!

Sometimes Christians begin to get this mindset that we are supposed to circle the wagons and minimize our contact and associations with the world around us and the people in it. I don't know, maybe we think we might get “sin” on us. So we only

go to church functions, all our friends are people from church, we only go to Christian concerts and we send our kids to Christian schools. I'm not saying any of those things are wrong – they can be very good things! But if we selectively cut ourselves off from the very people that God calls us to love and live differently in front of, there's a problem. The job of the church is *not* to cocoon ourselves from the world; to keep people sheltered in the church from the womb to the tomb. There will be plenty of time to hang out with only God's people when we get to heaven. Until then, it is the job of the church to send us out into the world!

Okay but wait a minute: doesn't the Bible tell us to...

“Come out from them and be separate,” says the Lord. “Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:17, niv)?

Yes it does say that, and it's quoting a couple of Old Testament passages (Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34, 41). But when it says “separate,” it does not mean as in physical or relational isolation. It means to be separate or different in *character*. To be holy, or sanctified, is to be like Jesus Christ *in the world*; not to be removed from the world that God loves so much. How will people know there is a difference God can make in their lives and in this world if they don't see it in you and me?

In fact, not only are we to go into the world, but we are to bring the world into our home. We are to have an...

- **open house to strangers**

Who knows; you might be showing kindness to an angel and not even realize it. When I was a pastor in our previous church, it was in a small town in southeastern Idaho. Anyone I saw in town either knew who I was or was related to someone in the church. I learned very quickly to simply be nice to everyone, because you never knew! The author here takes it a step further and says that some of those we treat with love and honor, even if they are strangers, could actually be angels that are checking in on us.

Let me ask you a pointed question, Christian: when was the last time you entertained an unchurched person in your home? Welcome folks outside of church into your home, love them, show them hospitality, and honor them.

But beyond that, we are to have an...

- **open heart to the oppressed**

Verse 3 talks about visiting those in prison and caring for the broken hearted and suffering. Historically we know that the early church was so very good at doing this. In fact, there was something of an epidemic in the prisons. So many Christians were visiting prisoners, that the prisoners were becoming Christians too. And then no matter how hard the jailers tried, they couldn't hurt the prisoners anymore. They would torture the new Christian prisoners, but the prisoners just kept loving the prison guards! So the emperor actually made it a law that anybody who brings food or clothing to a prisoner would suffer the same penalty. *That* is love in action! We

need to always concern ourselves with those who are oppressed and poor and lonely.

I have a friend who is a pastor, and he was going to Germany for a couple of years to work with the church there, but he had to learn the language. I asked him how he was doing with the German language, and he said he was doing great with most of the language – all except for the verbs. For whatever reason, the verbs in German were harder to figure out. We both laughed about that, because we realized that’s like many of us Christians: we know the language – but we struggle with the action words! This passage says we better know how to do the actions, too.

Then we are warned to have...

- **open eyes to danger**

Specifically, we are warned about two of the big sins; sexual sins and the sin of materialism. Lust for sex and love for money – both very dangerous sins that we must be on our guard against. Both of them are particularly important for us today, because in our capitalistic and consumeristic society, these two are epidemic in the US. Remember last week we learned about the selfishness of sin.

We live in a world where sexual sin is rampant. The majority of the men in this room struggle regularly with pornography. The percentage of women using internet pornography sites is increasing rapidly to the point where there’s little difference between men and women’s use of it. We are bombarded with it. That is why 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says:

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified (made perfect or holy); that you should avoid sexual immorality”. (1 Thessalonians 4:3, niv)

I remember when Magic Johnson, hall of fame basketball player for the LA Lakers broke the news that he had AIDS. Some of us who are older remember that (some of you don’t know who Magic Johnson is!) This was in 1991 when AIDS was a new epidemic. He vowed to use his tragedy to promote AIDS awareness, and he really did do a good job of that. But don’t you think it would have been better if he would have also admitted that he acquired it from one of his many affairs from cheating on his wife? Wouldn’t it have been great if, besides awareness, he would have taught people that living a healthy moral life is the best prevention?

Besides sexual immorality is the issue of love of money. Money is not evil; money is simply a tool that allows us to barter and trade and provide goods and make a living and help others. The sin is the *love* of money. You might say that you don’t struggle with this; if you actually *had* money maybe you would! You can’t sin with what you don’t have, right? But the *lack* of money can cause you to be obsessed about it too, which leads to lusting for money. Again, this is true especially in our culture – materialism is always a struggle for us. This is a large part of the reason that God commands us to give a tenth of our income to the church, and to be generous in giving offerings and giving to others. It’s not because God needs our money, but because *we* need to give it. If you can’t give it away, you don’t have hold of it; it has hold of you. Holiness means trusting God to provide what you need, so you don’t

have to strive to possess it. Contentment is not having what you want; it's wanting what you have.

I remember a few years ago Shelly and I were at Vintiques at the fairgrounds here in town, looking at all the amazing restored old cars. We ran into Gary Riddle (you know Gary and Ena; they are in our church family). Making small talk, I asked Gary if he wished he had one of these cars. I'll never forget what he said: "It would be nice, but not really. Everything you own ends up owning a piece of you. You have to insure it, clean it, protect it, worry about it...I don't need one more thing owning me." Wow there was great wisdom in that. By the way, its no surprise that Gary is a very generous guy; he gives of himself and his time in so many ways.

Well next then, the writer turns to the issues of the believer's relationship to the church...

2. Life in the Church

Sometimes Christians have a harder time living a holy life *inside* the church than they do outside the church. You know that old limerick: "Oh to live above with those we love; won't that be glory?! But to live below with those we know, that's another story!"

This passage is talking about the way we treat each other. This is something that Christians don't have a very good reputation for. The world is watching the church, looking for a reason to discredit us, and we are all too quick to oblige when it comes to the way we treat each other. But if we could live what this passage is talking about, in fact what the whole Bible is talking about, the world would not be able to accuse us; they'd have to make up lies about us (just like they did to Jesus).

This passage in particular talks about three important aspects of a holy life in the body of Christ, or in our relationships to one another. The first is regarding...

- **the structure of leadership**

The church functions differently than a business or any other organization. We are an organism, not an organization. Even so, we still need to organize and structure ourselves so that we can work together to accomplish our mission. These verses talk about respecting and learning from the examples of the heroes of faith from the past (remember chapter 11), but it also refers to the leaders in the present. The follower of Jesus is to submit graciously to spiritual leadership. In our case, that would be the pastors. But this is not a blind submission; it is submission borne out of proof and trust. It is not like some kind of cultish following. As pastors, it is our responsibility to live out our faith in front of you, and to show that you can trust us. This is a two way street; those in church must submit to the pastor, but the pastor must also submit to others. For example, when it comes to my ministry, I am accountable to the Leadership Team – our church board that you elect. I answer to them. I am also accountable to our District Superintendent, and beyond that I am accountable to the leaders of our denomination; our General Superintendents. I am

accountable to Jim Cunningham, who is the lay-chairman of our board. In my personal life, I have a group of guys here at the church that I am accountable to. I have two friends in other states who hold me accountable. I am accountable to my wife and boys. I believe that when the Bible asks you as a church to support us as pastors, we have to do all we can to make sure we are “supportable.” Not that we are perfect, or anywhere close, but we are to be an example. Besides, the Bible says:

“My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers, because we know that we teachers will be judged more strictly. We all make mistakes often, but those who don’t make mistakes with their words have reached full maturity. Like a bridled horse, they can control themselves entirely.” (James 3:1-2, ceb)

If your pastor – me or the staff – are not in submission to the Biblical mandates of our leadership and the higher standard, we must give an account to the Lord. We take very seriously our role of leading you spiritually, so understand that for the body of Christ to work right, we need you to follow our lead as we serve you. But we must give an answer to the Lord daily about how we have led you. And we need your help with that, which is why verse 18 says, “pray for us.” We must be confident that our consciences are clear as we lead you, and that we are living honorably as an example for you.

Next is...

- ***simplicity of belief***

This faith we have is not complicated; God in Christ has already done everything you need. He has done all the hard work. You just have to accept him, love him, and follow instructions from His word. Walk in relationship with him, and watch how you’ll grow. That’s a big part of our job as pastors; it is to help you grow in your faith and relationships. Don’t make it complicated.

Third is the...

- ***sacrifice of praise***

We are to always offer praise to our God. This life that is described is a life of continual gratitude and praise to God.

In our previous church, we had come to a point where we needed to have the building appraised in order to get a loan for some new land, and the appraiser was a Christian friend of mine. He told me the story of a time that he met a child while doing an appraisal on someone’s house. He overheard the four year old ask his older sister who the man was and what he was doing. The sister said “he’s appraiser – that means he goes to church every Sunday.” Well, we are to be “appraisers” too. And not just in church – our lives must be lived in such a way that they bring glory to God – all the time. That’s why Romans 12:1 says we should offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (there’s that holiness again) – this is our spiritual act of worship (look it up!).

If you can live a holy life in these two key areas – the world and the church, then you have learned to live...

3. Life in the *center*

You have a source of life from which your life springs that will never run out or run down. You will be able to live a holy life no matter what circumstances you face. God's Spirit is an unending source of power and life.

One of the great achievements of technology for the navy is the nuclear submarine. These great ships can cross the oceans of the world without ever coming to the surface. The secret is in the nuclear reactor that powers the ship. That reactor never needs refueling and is constantly giving off energy. The same is true for the Christian – verses 20 and 21 reveal the nuclear reactor of every Christian. Living life from that center will allow you to be at peace, even in the midst of real suffering. The closest modern equivalent to this kind of peace would be mental health. Aren't we all seeking that? In Christ we are connected to the God of mental health, the God who intends life to be lived on a peaceful level. But we are talking about a peace that goes even deeper than mental health – a peace that, when you are dependent upon God, means you can be completely at rest. God is in control! That is why Jesus said that He would give us His peace – not the kind of peace the world gives. So He said don't let your hearts be troubled, and don't be afraid. And again Jesus said, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. Jesus is our Great shepherd – it's His job to care for us, protect us, feed us, and keep us safe. He was sacrificed on the cross – the perfect sacrifice for us. But it didn't end there; He also rose from the dead. He died for us, and he rose from the dead for us. The power of resurrected life is what is now available to us when we give our lives to Him. And the prayer in this passage is that by the power of this resurrected life in you, God will equip you with everything good for doing God's will in this world. If you have the King James Bible, you will see that it says, "May God . . . *make you perfect* in every good work to do His will" – which is a more accurate translation. The point is what this entire book has been hinting at and urging you to decide about – taking hold of this perfect life that God has for you. The word perfect that is used here is a word that means "to mend broken bones." Literally it means "repairing what is broken" or "restoring what is lost." God has always wanted to restore you to a perfect life – where you can do His will, and the prayer in His word here is that God would perfect you to do His will – to accomplish in this life all He hopes and dreams of for you. This is saying that you can perform the full, unhindered will of God from a pure heart by the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Again, why would God say this to us if He didn't mean it; if we are just supposed to keep being frustrated until someday we get to Heaven and it's all magically taken care of? You really can have a perfect life here and now – free of guilt and sinful actions, free to fully live in and for God and to grow in amazing ways. When you accept this relationship with God through what Christ has done for you, you will find that God is always present, always at work, always in your life helping you grow and grow in him and his life for you.

There is an amazing story that comes from a nation of native Americans who had a unique way of training their young men. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then, he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods. By himself. All night long.

Every time a twig snapped, he probably visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined a wolf leaping out of the darkness. Every time the wind blew, he wondered what more sinister sound it was covering up. No doubt it was a terrifying night.

After what probably seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers and trees, and the outline of a path. Then, to his shock and amazement, he saw the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy's father. His father had been there all night long.

What a picture of the message of Hebrews. We don't have to struggle, be frightened, fail, or run away. Religious ritual and superstitions can't do this for us. Temple sacrifices can't do this for us. All kinds of religious history and theology can't do this for us. We have the very presence of God himself, through Christ and the Spirit who is in us. What comfort, what peace, what promise that gives us. Grace be with you all.

(pray, then stand) Hebrews 13:20-21...

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.