

Giving Thanks: The Sacrifice of Praise

Hebrews 13:15

*“By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,
that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”*

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As we come to this Thanksgiving week 2022, we are faced with a question: *Why and how should we give thanks to God?* Those who know their Bibles are familiar with that question and the answer. But, as always, it's important to look at passages more carefully to get a better grasp on the deeper, richer meaning within them. In so doing, we can see our Lord more clearly and express our thanks to Him with greater appreciation. In this passage, we see how we can express our gratitude to God through the sacrificial work and continuing mercies of Jesus Christ. Privileged by Christ's saving grace, we need never return to inferior systems.

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines. For *it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without [outside] the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without [outside] the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without [outside] the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate [to share] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”* (Hebrews 13:8-16)

*Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus Christ, always the same
Hearts established by God's favor, we give thanks to praise His name
See our High Priest at the altar; none can come but by His blood
He who suffered as our Savior, making us His own beloved
Let us go to Him, disfavored, bearing now His deathly shame
Heavenward, we travel onward, giving thanks to praise His name*

Introduction and context

Hebrews 13:8-16 expresses essential truth about Jesus Christ who is at the center of every believer's life. It is framed by two verses about the spiritual leadership of each church. In verse 7, we see that these leaders exercise their authority as they faithfully teach and preach the Word of God. They do so, according to verse 17, as those who must give an account to God for their use of God's Word with His people. Those who hear and obey God's Word are a source of joy; those who are indifferent or who disdain the teaching of the Scriptures are a source of grief. What goal is expressed in this passage? It is that we would place faith in **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today and forever”** (v. 8). A.B. Bruce “pointed out that “yesterday” Jesus suffered and died; “today” he represents Christians as their high priest; and “forever” he lives to intercede on their behalf.”¹

As we come into the Thanksgiving season, this passage is especially helpful to us: *“By Him [Jesus Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name”* (Hebrews 13:15).

I. By Him: By Jesus Christ

A. Jesus Christ is the unchanging Son of God. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (v.8). In the study of God, we refer to Him as “immutable” meaning that He never changes, and He never will change for all eternity. It would be against His nature to be any different than He is. The same One who died for our sins and rose again, is the same One who is interceding for us at this moment – and He always will.

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B. By Him: By His saving grace and not by a religious system, 9-10

“Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.” (v.9-10).

The Book of Hebrews continually presents a contrast between the old system of God-given rules and laws and the newness of our relationship with the God-given Savior. Jewish Christians of that time were under tremendous pressure to return to the old system. They were plagued with strange teachings and the pressure to eat only certain foods. But the writer of Hebrews encouraged them to embrace the fact that **“it is a good thing that the heart be established by grace, not by meats.”** In fact, those who still followed the old system have no right to approach the altar of God where our High Priest, Jesus Christ, intercedes. Privileged by saving grace, we need never return to that old system.

C. By Him: By the obedient, shame-filled sacrifice of Himself, v. 11-12

“For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without [outside] the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without [outside] the gate.”

Those who felt rejected by their friends and loved ones could find great encouragement in Jesus Christ. Verse 11 refers to Leviticus 16:27. Now this is instructive: the old system was to be rejected, but the deeper meaning and symbolism in the old system was to be retained. (You can see this by comparing Psalm 40:6-7 and Hebrews 10:5-10). Leviticus 16 gave the Israelites instructions about how to celebrate the Day of Atonement. In verse 27, the bullock and the scapegoat were to be taken outside the camp and burned. The Israelites did this routinely when they were wandering in the wilderness: that annual sacrifice was disposed of outside of the camp. The priests who made that sacrifice on the Day of Atonement were not allowed to eat it, and neither was anyone else.

Verses 11-12 emphasize why those who abide in the old system of sacrifices **“...have no right to eat”** (v. 10). The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was shameful, and disposed of outside the camp. During the Temple period, it would have been disposed of outside the city gates; it was a shameful reproach. But Jesus Christ was willing to be our shame-filled atoning sacrifice. His death on the cross of Calvary was outside the walls of Jerusalem at the time. His death was a shameful reproach. Yet it is by the blood of Jesus Christ that He has granted us the privilege of saving grace. We need never

return to the old system. And those who still practice the old system have no right to the privileged sacrifice of Christ's atonement.

Verses 13-16 help us to apply what we have learned about Jesus Christ. His death was a shameful reproach, but today's ornate religious systems are full of glitz and glitter. Think about this when you see the celebrations during the upcoming holidays. Opulent celebrations, full of fancy decorations and ceremonies, are featured in the rituals of religious systems. But those who know the true nature of Jesus Christ understand that He took our disgusting reproach upon Himself. How would we apply what we learn in this passage? Now that we know why we can give thanks, how should we give thanks?

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II. "Let Us:" Practically Applying This Passage

A. Let us go to Him, bearing His reproach, vs.13-14

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without [outside] the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (vs. 13-14).

Undoubtedly, the friends and relatives of those who had come to Christ despised their newfound faith in Jesus. They shamed them with reproachful looks and words because they no longer participated in the old religious system. But the writer of Hebrews encouraged these believers: **"Let us go forth therefore unto Him ... bearing His reproach!"** Don't miss this: they were encouraged to wear the shameful death of Christ like a badge of honor! So today, we should bear Christ's shameful reproach – for it was for us that He died that awful death. He took our place, dying the shameful sinner's death that every one of us deserved. By admitting our sinfulness and repenting of it, we can embrace Jesus Christ by faith and glory in His death, burial and bodily resurrection from the dead.

We do this as strangers and pilgrims in this world. Two chapters earlier in this book, we learned what has transformed believers into strangers and pilgrims. Speaking of the patriarchs of old, he wrote, **"These all died in faith, not having received the [fulfillment of the] promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"** (Hebrews 11:13). What happened to someone in the Old Testament who by faith embraced the promises associated with the coming Messiah? They were transformed into citizens of heaven and **"confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."**

Reemphasizing that earlier teaching, Hebrews 13:14 states, **"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."** Those who trust Jesus Christ today as the Way, the Truth and the Life know that they are newly made citizens of Heaven. They don't live for this world; they are not tourists who enjoy the pagan evils. So, knowing that Jesus Christ is our royal King, let us be willing to be despised and reproached, knowing that our home is in Heaven. Now we can clearly see we see how we ought to express our gratitude to God through the sacrificial work and continuing mercies of Jesus Christ. Privileged by Christ's saving grace, we need never return to inferior systems.

B. Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, vs. 15-16

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate [to share] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (vs. 15-16).

Especially in this season, verses 15-16 read like a guidebook for Thanksgiving. Now that we understand the words, “by Him,” then let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. By that, the writer refers to **“the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”**

Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. Let’s face the fact: making preparations and taking the time to meet with other believers in our congregation is a sacrifice. You could be doing other things and pursuing other interests. But the exhortation is “let us [plural] offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.”

Each and every time we gather together, we can offer Him “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” Whether we are singing or testifying, whether we are praying or conversing, we have an opportunity to sacrifice our time in order to praise God together. In these dark days, especially when you are going through trials and turmoil, these times of praising God are times of blessed relief. In this morning’s service, as we sing, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God. In this evening’s service, we will present a new hymn of praise to God entitled, “O God Whose Name Is Holy.” Let us gather to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually – the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. This Tuesday evening, when we gather for our Thanksgiving testimony service, consider sacrificing the time to encourage other believers with “the fruit of your lips giving thanks to His name.”

And right along with this loving praise to God, let us remember our fellow man. How do we do this? By “doing good and sharing.” We should not forget this. Why? **“With such sacrifices, God is well-pleased!”** Do you desire to do that which pleases God? Well, here is the guidebook in verses 15-16. Sacrifice your time and talents to give thanks and praise God together and share your treasures with those who have need.

In this passage in Hebrews, we see how we can express our gratitude to God through the sacrificial work and continuing mercies of Jesus Christ. Privileged by Christ’s saving grace, we need never return to inferior systems. We can give thanks and praise to God and share our blessings with others.

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¹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 612–613, citing A.B. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p.375