

Hebrews 13:7-25 // Making it All the Way to the End

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[0 : 00] So Hebrews chapter 13 from verse 7. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the most holy place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gates to make the people holy through his own blood.

Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

[1 : 38] And pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

Now 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 forever and ever. Amen. Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my words of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.

I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

Grace be with you all. Thank you, Joe, for reading. And let me add my welcome. It's brilliant to see you all. And if you're visiting here with us, it's a real joy and encouragement to have you here with us.

[2 : 45] And we hope that you can stay on for a little bit afterwards so that we can get to know you a little bit like that after the service. But let's bow our heads and pray as we come to God's words.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have spoken to us through your Son. And that by your Holy Spirit, you continue to speak through your Word.

So please, Lord God, give us ears to hear your voice. Help us to understand what you are saying to us. Strengthen our faith and shape our lives in obedience to Christ.

For we ask in his name. Amen. Well, the first time that I went up the Anachigach Ridge in Glencoe, I didn't have a clue what I was letting myself in for.

When my friends invited me along, I assumed that we were just going up another mountain. Little did I suspect. Well, it started with a steep ascent.

[3 : 54] But when we reached the top, it slowly dawned on me that the climb had only been the beginning. A head lay along, traverse across the narrowest ridge in mainland Britain, scrambling over rocky pinnacles, picking our way along.

A knife edge with steep drops on either side. The point wasn't reaching the first summit. The point was making it all the way across.

And eventually, after a long day on the ridge, there was the final descent down the gully to the Clacig Inn and a well-deserved pints of cast-conditioned ale at the end.

Well, as I've been reflecting on Hebrews this week, it struck me that this letter is a little bit like that ridge. We've climbed some remarkable heights together.

We've stood on the soaring peaks and seen Jesus, the eternal Son of God, enthroned on high.

We've navigated difficult terrain. We've encountered serious warnings.

[4 : 57] We've looked down on some perilous drops. And now, 13 chapters and 25 sermons later, the end of the ridge is in sight. We're almost back at the Clacig Inn.

And as we look back on the ground that we've covered, we've been called again and again to consider Jesus. Jesus is better.

Better than the prophets. Better than the angels. Better than Moses. We've seen him as the great high priest who lives forever to intercede for his people. We've seen the better sacrifice of his once-for-all death, the better covenant, the better city that is to come.

Again and again, the message of Hebrews has been, consider Jesus. He is better. But why? Why has the author spent 13 chapters showing us the glory of Christ?

Why? Why all these warnings and exhortations? Because the goal of Hebrews isn't simply that we admire Jesus.

[6 : 04] The goal is that we keep following Jesus, that we make it, friends, to the end. The original readers were wavering.

They were facing pressure from without pressure, from within temptations. Some were beginning to wonder whether following Jesus was worth it.

After all, it would have been easier to drift back, easier to fit in, easier to choose comfort over costly discipleship. So the author writes this letter.

He shows us the glory of Christ. He shows us the danger of turning away. He shows us the reward that awaits us for those who endure. All so that we will keep going.

In fact, he tells us exactly what he's doing in verse 22. Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation.

[7 : 00] That's what Hebrews is. A word of exhortation. A sermon designed to help weary Christians like us keep going until they reach the finish line.

And now we've arrived at the final section of that sermon letter. We've almost reached the end of the ridge. The final descent is in sight. So what does the author want ringing in our ears as we press on?

What does he most want ringing in our ears? What do we need if we're going to make it all the way to the end? Three things. Firstly, we're to follow faithful leaders.

Secondly, we're to feed on grace and bear Christ's reproach. And thirdly, we're to trust God to get us home. We're on the service sheet if you find that helpful.

So firstly then, follow faithful leaders. Now leadership has come under great scrutiny in recent years. In politics, in business and sadly in the church.

[8 : 04] And rightly so. Abuses have been exposed. Scandals have come to light. And many people have been deeply hurt.

And it may be that for some of us in this room, we know from personal experience in our own personal histories, those kind of wounds.

So when Hebrews calls us to trust and follow leaders, we don't hear those words in a vacuum. We hear them in a world where trust has often been broken.

Which means we need to pay careful attention to the kind of leaders that Hebrews is talking about. Because the author is not commending every leader.

He's commending faithful leaders. Now notice how this section, verses 7 to 19, is bracketed by references to leaders.

[9 : 11] So let's look at the first bracket, verse 7. These seem to be former leaders. Most likely those who have died and gone to be with the Lord.

Everything's in the past tense. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Notice what we're to remember. First, their Bible teaching. They spoke the word of God to you.

These were leaders who faithfully taught scriptures and pointed people to Christ.

So hold fast to their message. But not only their teaching, also their lives. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

The church needs godly leaders like that. People whose doctrine and lives match. Who teach God's word and seek to live by it.

[10:20] Who walk the walk, not just talk the talk. And when we read these verses, it should bring to mind leaders that God has used in your own life. Those who've led faithful lives.

Those who've taught the Bible faithfully to you. I think of my dad personally. He's also a minister. I think of his faith, his integrity, his prayers, the consistency of his Christian life over many years. He's got his flaws like we all do. But the manner of his life, the manner in which he lived his life, he lives his life, gives credibility to what he professes.

And one of the things that I'm most grateful for is that he shepherded his own flock at home in my family growing up in much the same way that he shepherded the congregations that he was called to serve.

With a servant heart. And I am profoundly grateful for his example. And I suspect that many of us could name people like that who've influenced us in our own lives.

[11:32] We heard from Josh just a minute ago about Mitya. You might think of former ministers or small group leaders or scripture union camp leaders, parents, grandparents, people who've helped us to see what following Jesus looks like.

Remember them. Imitate their faith. I was once at a conference and I heard Kevin DeYoung, a minister reflecting on pastoral ministry.

He said, one of the things that frightens him most is the thought of making a shipwreck of his faith. Not because people expect him to be perfect.

They don't. You shouldn't expect your pastors to be perfect. But we should expect integrity. He said that when he's tempted to compromise, the thought often comes into his mind, Kevin, you're a pastor.

Don't look that way. Don't do that thing. You're a pastor. Because people are entitled to expect that the man preaching the gospel believes the gospel and seeks to live out his life according to the gospel.

[12:52] And I think that that's exactly the kind of leader that Hebrews has in mind here. Not perfection, but integrity. Not charisma, but a life that points people to Christ.

A life that says, follow me as I follow Christ. Follow me insofar as I follow Christ. Because faithful, godly leaders are one of God's ordinary means of grace, ordinary means of preserving his people. Which is why verse 8 follows immediately afterwards. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Leaders come and go.

Some retire. Some leaders that we love and respect and admire move on. Some die. Even the best of leaders eventually leave this stage.

And it's just possible if we're not careful that we can become so dependent on a particular leader that it's hard to imagine how life can go on without them.

[14:04] But verse 8 reminds us why we can. Because Jesus remains the same. And because he remains the same, his people can keep going even when faithful leaders move on.

The leaders were never the destination. They were always the signposts pointing beyond themselves to the unchanging Christ. Remember them.

Thank God for them. Imitate their faith but trust ultimately. Trust only in Christ for your salvation. That's the first bracket. Now let's look at the second.

Verse 17. These are your current church leaders. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

Do this so that their work will be a joy and not a burden. For that would be of no benefit to you.

[15:14] Now my guess is that for many of us this is a verse that will be harder to swallow because we live in a culture that instinctively distrusts authority and recoils at the idea of submission.

Sometimes for understandable reasons. We've all seen authority abused. But once again, remember the kind of leaders that Hebrews is describing.

Faithful Bible teachers. Faithful followers of Jesus. The author says, have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority.

Why? Because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. That's shepherding language. Church leaders are under shepherds of Jesus Christ.

Church leaders are sheep before their shepherds. We're fallible. There needs to be room for forgiveness and grace and mercy there.

[16:20] Responsibility is to watch over the souls of those members as a shepherd watches over the lives of their precious sheep.

To guard God's people from dangers. From wolfish false teachers and from our own sheep-like tendency to drift. And do you know that's a tremendous responsibility?

Because one day they must give an account. Not to the congregation at the ABM, but to the great shepherd himself, to the Lord Jesus Christ, for the precious people won by his blood and trusted to their care.

That's a sobering responsibility. But notice something important. This verse isn't primarily addressed to leaders.

It's addressed to the whole church, to all of you. The command isn't lead faithfully, though that certainly is implied. The command is have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority.

[17:37] That jars against all our natural instincts. We don't naturally like being corrected. We don't naturally like being challenged. We don't normally like being told we're wrong.

I'll decide for myself. Thank you very much. I'll do it my own way, if you please. Our instinct is often to defend or to go on the attack.

But Hebrews says that one of the ways that God preserves his people is through faithful spiritual oversight. So just imagine for a minute that your church leader comes to you with a word of correction.

Brother, I'm concerned about this in your life. Sister, I'm worried that you're in danger of drifting if you go on like this.

what happens in your heart in that moment? What happens in your heart? Do you become teachable or do you immediately become defensive?

[18:42] What happens in your heart? That's the question that this verse presses on. And then comes the really searching part. Do this so that their work will be a joy not a burden.

That's striking, isn't it? It means every one of us contributes something to the life of the church in this respect. We can make leadership a joy or we can make leadership a burden.

By the words we speak, by the tone we use, the emails we send, the way we respond when we disagree. Now this is not a blank check for church authority.

Hebrews is not calling us to blind obedience to abusive or self-serving pastors. Faithful leaders need accountability.

Difficult conversations sometimes need to happen. Genuine concerns sometimes need to be raised. But there is a world of difference between raising a genuine concern and nurturing a culture of suspicion.

[19:56] A world of difference between asking a difficult question and undermining trust. A world of difference between accountability and cynicism.

The enemy loves to attack faithful churches. The enemy hates St Silas. Hates where the word of God is preached faithfully.

Hates the fact that people are coming to the Lord, returning to the Lord in faith. Hates the fact that the church was planted in the East End of Glasgow. Hates the fact that godly members of this church were sent out with a mission to take the gospel to the East End.

The enemy hates the church. And one of his favorite tactics is to undermine faithful leaders.

To undermine confidence in faithful leadership. To sow suspicion, to spread gossip, to create division. Because if he can wound the shepherds, he can scatter the sheep.

[20:59] And Hebrews says, don't unwittingly become part of that ploy. Instead, strengthen the hands of faithful leaders.

Leading a church is already a weighty responsibility. Pray for your leaders. Your leaders covet your prayers.

Support them. Help them shepherd with joy. Because faithful leaders are one of God's ordinary gifts for getting his people safely home.

That means every interaction matters. Every message, every comment, every communication is moving in one of two directions. Towards joy or towards groaning.

Now, they also isn't saying that church members should never bring difficulties to their leaders.

Please don't hear me saying that. If you're struggling, if you're doubting, if you're grieving, if you're battling a particular sin, please don't think, I mustn't burden my leaders.

[22 : 10] Helping people through these things is part of the job. The burden that Hebrews is talking about is something completely different. It's the burden created by a critical spirit, a cynical spirit, a divisive spirit, the kind of attitude that tears down rather than builds up.

And Hebrews says, think carefully about which direction you're helping to create. Is it towards joy or is it towards groaning? Now secondly, if we're going to make it to the end, we need faithful leaders, but we also need something else.

We need to keep feeding on the grace of Jesus. And verse 9 reminds us that the Hebrews were in danger of drifting, drifting from the gospel that they'd received.

There were people around saying if you obey certain food laws, if you start going back to the temple, then you can please God more. But the author isn't having any of it. Verse 9, don't be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace. Now here's the thing about strange teachings. Strange teachings rarely announce themselves as strange teachings.

[23 : 30] They usually arrive dressed up as something deeper, something new, a sort of spiritual upgrade, a better way. something that promises to take you beyond ordinary Christianity, something that takes you beyond simply trusting in Christ for your salvation.

And that's not just a first century problem. There are countless voices vying for our attention today. Podcasts, YouTube channels, influencers, you name it.

The question is, who is discipling you? How do you discern between what's good and what's a little bit dodgy?

And one of my mentors told me that as a young minister in the 1980s, whenever some new movement or strange teaching came along, he'd often ask himself, what would my old minister make of it?

Not because this guy was infallible, but because he trusted the instincts of a faithful Bible teacher deeply grounded in scripture. That's really the author's point.

[24 : 35] Don't be carried away. Measure every new teaching against the faithful gospel that you've already received from faithful gospel teachers.

Because there's only one thing that can truly strengthen the human heart. Grace. Not religious performance. Not trying harder, not doing more.

Grace. grace. The undeserved kindness of God shown to us in and through Jesus. The grace that gives us confidence to approach God. The grace that picks us up when we fall.

The grace that assures us that Christ has done absolutely everything necessary to make us right before God. God. I heard a saying while preparing the sermon.

You know the phrase, an apple a day keeps the doctor away. Well, this one went, grace each day keeps us from falling away. Super cheesy, I know, but memorable.

[25 : 39] Grace each day keeps us from falling away. Stick it on your fridge. If you want to make it to the end, seriously, don't move beyond grace.

Nothing else but grace can heal a guilty conscience. Nothing else can transform you from inside out. Nothing else can sustain you for the long journey of faith, but the grace of Jesus can.

And then the author explains why. Look at verses 10 to 12. We have an altar from which those who minister at a tabernacle have no right to eat.

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

These verses can seem a little bit complicated. at first, but the basic point is straightforward. On the day of atonement, the sacrifice was taken outside the camp, and that sacrifice was always pointing forward to Jesus, who suffered outside the walls of Jerusalem.

[26 : 55] He is the true sacrifice to which the day of atonement sacrifice always pointed. So here's the point. Those who continue trusting in the old system miss the reality it was always pointing to.

But we have something better. We have Christ himself. And as Christians, we feed on everything that his atoning sacrifice has won for us.

Forgiveness, cleansing, access to the Father. And as we remember what Christ has accomplished, our hearts are strengthened by grace.

that's what strengthens the heart. Not religious ritual, not spiritual performance. Christ crucified for sinners. That's the fuel we need day by day for endurance.

That's what keeps us moving along the ridge. But then the argument takes a surprising turn because the same sacrifice that gives us access to God also teaches us something else.

[28 : 00] So look again at verses 12 to 13. And so Jesus suffered also outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

So do you see what this is saying? Jesus wasn't only the sacrifice. He was also the rejected one. despised, excluded, treated as an outsider.

And so now the author says if we identify with Christ, it shouldn't be surprising when we share something of his rejection.

Let's notice carefully what he says. He doesn't simply say go outside the camp. He says go to him outside the camp. The point isn't suffering for suffering's sake.

The point is Jesus. And the question is where will we stand? Will we stand with Jesus? Even when that brings disapproval, even when it costs us something, even when it's socially awkward, will we stand with Jesus?

[29 : 19] Jesus. The world says stay inside the camp and you'll be accepted. Jesus is saying come to me outside the camp.

That's the issue facing these Hebrew Christians. And it's often the issue facing us day by day as well because we naturally want both.

We want acceptance by God and we want acceptance with the world around us. But often we're forced to choose, aren't we?

Will you stay with Jesus? or will you adapt your faith in order to fit in? That's why verse 14 is so important.

For here we do not have an enduring city but we're looking for the city that is to come. The language should sound familiar if you've been following along in this series. It's chapter 11 all over again.

[30 : 25] Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder was God. And that's where we're headed to. The reason we can endure rejection and suffering now is because this world isn't our final home.

So keep your eyes fixed on the destination. Which world are you living for? This one or the next? Those who endure are those who long for the city that is to come.

So what does it look like to go to Jesus outside the camp? The answer comes in verses 15 and 16. Through Jesus, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, a fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

Notice what he doesn't say. He's not telling them to hide their faith. He doesn't tell them to retreat into a kind of private spirituality. Instead, he calls them to public allegiance to Jesus, openly professing his name, living visible Christian lives.

That's where the reproach comes from. Think about it. They weren't suffering because of what they privately believed. They were suffering because they publicly belonged to Jesus.

[31 : 53] They identified with Christ's people. They gathered with Christ's people. They spoke openly about him and that brought opposition. Same thing happens today. When you tell someone you're a Christian, when you open your Bible on the train or in a cafe, when you invite a friend along to Christianity Explored, when you choose not to hide your allegiance to Christ, that's when you discover what it means to identify with Christ outside the camp and stand with him.

Of course, these are not sacrifices that earn God's favor. They are sacrifices of praise offered in response to the grace we have already received, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

Far easier to remain private, far easier to remain below the radar. That isn't the path to endurance. The path to endurance is feeding on grace, standing with Christ and openly identifying with him.

So brothers and sisters, if we are going to make it to the end, keep feeding on the grace of Jesus, keep standing with Jesus outside the camp, keep your eyes fixed on the city that is to come, because the grace that saves us is also the grace that strengthens us to endure.

Finally, then, and thirdly, we've reached the end of this word of exhortation, come to the end of the ridge, the clacking inn, so to speak, and what do we find at the end?

[33 : 39] not a pint of cast-conditioned ale, but a prayer, and I think that's pretty fitting, isn't it? After all the warnings, after all the calls to persevere and endure, the letter ends with a prayer.

Now, may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, 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 forever and ever.

Amen. And notice before he asks God for anything. He reminds us who God is, the God of peace. Now, that's pretty striking, isn't it? Because after 13 chapters containing some of the most serious warnings in all of Scripture, you might expect Hebrews to end by describing God as the God of judgment.

Instead, it finishes by speaking about the God of peace. Because the God who warns us is not against us.

[35 : 01] He's for us. He loves us. And he intends to bring us safely home. And then he reminds us who Jesus is.

He is the one whom God brought back from the dead. Yes, he shed his blood to establish the eternal covenant. Yes, he died to deal with our sins, but he is no longer dead.

He lives. He reigns. And he is, verse 20, the great shepherd of the sheep. The leaders of the church may watch over the flock, but Jesus is the great shepherd.

The one who laid down his life for the sheep. the one who even now watches over his people.

Lift your eyes to him. And then briefly, what does the author pray for? He prays that God would equip us with everything good for doing his will.

[36 : 08] In other words, that God would supply everything necessary for a life of faithful endurance. notice the confidence behind that prayer.

The God who raised Jesus from the dead has all the power necessary to answer it. The resurrection is proof that there's no shortage of power on God's side.

When we entrust ourselves to Jesus, we're not left to our own devices. God himself is at work by the Spirit in his people, working in us what is pleasing to him, equipping us to keep going.

And that is such an encouragement because perhaps at times throughout Hebrews, we've wondered, can I really do this? Can I really make it to the end?

The answer Hebrews gives is no, not by yourself, but by the grace of God. We may feel weary from the climb, but the shepherd is committed to getting his people all the way home.

[37 : 23] And in the end, the final confidence of Hebrews is not that we will keep ourselves, it's that the great shepherd will keep his people.

And so as we finish this remarkable letter, let's make this prayer our own. Let me pray the very words with which Hebrews ends.

Now 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 forever and ever.

Amen.