

Hebrews 13:7-17: What Jesus Says Makes No Sense...but It's True, What Satan Says Makes Complete Sense...but It's a Lie

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I. Introduction

Life's circumstances often make us believe the worst. This leads us to fear and then do things that actually make things worse. What if there was an alternative way of looking at our circumstances? What if our initial negative, hopeless reaction was wrong? What if our initial take on the situation was based on a lie that we're unable to see because there's someone blinding us? No matter how blinding the situation, Jesus has the truth that will open your eyes and set you free.

II. Hebrews 13:7-17: Jesus Is Calling You to Live In His Kingdom Instead of a Kingdom of Lies

The circumstances of this audience tell them not to go back to Jesus. If they want to avoid persecution, they need to return to Judaism; that's where it's safe. But God has told them that there's actually grave danger in returning to the Temple and Jerusalem. God has given them an unshakable Kingdom ruled by an unshakable King and that King will enable them to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear," that King will never leave them nor forsake them. Will they believe the King or His enemy whose weapon is lies which lead to fear?

13:7-9, not only must they show brotherly love to their brethren and strangers, honor their marriages and sexual life, refuse to let money become their idol, be content with what they have because the Lord will never abandon them, they must also remember their previous church elders who ruled over them and taught them God's Word. They must consider their faithfulness to God and how they lived their lives and copy them. Those who teach God's Word are not just supposed to teach from the pulpit; their lives are supposed to teach the flock how to live and serve God.

Those former leaders may be gone but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." He enabled the heroes and saints of the past to live victoriously despite trials and persecution; He can do the same for this audience today. That's why they must not allow any teaching that does not conform to what Christ taught them to carry them away. Their hearts must not be established by keeping a bunch of food laws, which don't even profit those who keep them (Colossians 2:20-23). Instead, their foundation must be Christ's grace; they must be led by His Spirit and live in His unshakable Kingdom (4:16; 6:4; 12:28).

13:10-13, it would be a grave mistake to return to the Temple in Jerusalem for two reasons: that Temple and city is not going to continue; it will be destroyed, and more importantly Jesus has given them a privilege that no high priest ever had: they get to partake of the ultimate Atonement sacrifice—Jesus. The author explains all this by giving them a new understanding of the Day of Atonement sacrifice. When the high priest offered the Day of Atonement sacrifice to cover the people's sins, he brought the blood into the sanctuary, but the body and the rest of the animal's remains were not eaten, instead they were taken outside the camp of Israel and burned (Leviticus 16:27). This, he explains, is what's happened to Jesus.

That is, Jesus also, that He might sanctify us with His own blood, suffered outside Jerusalem's city gate, which was a sign of defilement and shame (Deuteronomy 21:23). But instead of separating ourselves from Jesus's shame, the author calls his audience (and us) to go to Jesus outside the camp and bear His reproach. The colossal irony is that if we go to Jesus, it doesn't defile us; it cleanses and sanctifies us (9:14; 10:14)! And thereby, we get to partake of something that no priest, including the high priest, ever partook of. Often the priests ate the animal sacrifices (Leviticus 6:24-30), but not the Day of Atonement sacrifice. We on the other hand, "have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." We get to partake of the ultimate Atonement sacrifice: Jesus Christ, that is, we get to live with and be guided by Israel's Messiah in His unshakable Kingdom (2:18; 4:16; 7:25).

Why should this audience (and we) go to Jesus outside the camp and city gate? Because "we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." The author uses "camp" and "gate" as metaphors for Judaism (especially the Levitical Temple and system) and the city of Jerusalem. They will not continue; they will be (and were) destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. But the heavenly Jerusalem, that's the city we seek (11:16; 12:22). Our citizenship is in Jesus' Kingdom and one day, His capital city will be established forever (Revelation 21:1-4).

Jesus our High Priest has made us priests and servants of the heavenly tabernacle with a duty to offer sacrifices to God (10:19-25). But our sacrifices are not made of blood; Jesus made sure of that (10:10). Instead, the sacrifices God wants from us is worship, "the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name," doing good deeds (which mirrors showing brotherly love to the brethren, 13:1), and sharing (which mirrors showing hospitality to strangers and those imprisoned, 13:2-3). With these sacrifices God is well pleased.

13:17, lastly, as citizens of the Kingdom, we must obey and be submissive to the church elders who rule over us. Because they are responsible before the Lord for our spiritual wellbeing: they will one day have to give an account to the Lord for their stewardship (James 3:1). But they also give an account to the Lord now of the conduct of their sheep. And if they make the elders' job difficult by disobeying, then that report will not be done with joy but grief and that will not be profitable for them.

Whose voice do you believe Satan's or Jesus'? This audience has a choice: heed Jesus' call to live in His unshakable Kingdom or heed Satan's lie that it's better to return to Judaism and the Temple sacrifices. If they listen to Satan, they'll experience a fate worse than death when the Romans come to town (10:26-31). That's our choice today, live in the Kingdom Christ has given us (Colossians 1:13) or live in Satan's kingdom of lies (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:3)...a man struggles with Satan's lies about money, but the King opens his eyes.

III. Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. 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. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.