

Citizens and Residents

Hebrews 13:8-16

- Today we are concluding our study of the book of Hebrews that we have been doing throughout the duration of this year.
- And the writer in his concluding statements is encouraging his readers to make sure they keep the main thing the main thing.
- ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the***

gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the City that is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” -Hebrews 13:8-16 (ESV)

- After the tragedy of 9/11 my dad went active duty in the army, and his first duty station that caused us to move was to Mannheim, Germany.
- And we were a big family, there were 7 of us total and there weren't many housing options on the military base for us to live comfortably in, so we eventually found a house out on the German economy.

- So for 3 years, I spent my 7th through 9th grade years living in this other country that I was not a citizen of.
- My family and I were residents of Germany, but we were still citizens of the United States.
- And at no point did we ever feel the need to try to become German citizens because we knew that our time there was limited and we knew where our homeland really was.
- This is how the writer of Hebrews describes Christians
- If you remember in chapter 11, when he is talking about the great heroes of the faith, he says:
 - ***“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” -Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)***
- And in the original language he is literally describing them as ***Strangers and Exiles:***

“those who comes from a foreign country into a city or land to reside there by the side of the natives”

- The technical term we would use today would be resident aliens.
- And that is exactly what we believers are in this life: We are nothing more than resident aliens while we are on this earth.
- **WE ARE RESIDENTS OF EARTH**
 - Not Citizens
 - We are residents of Earth, but we are Citizens of Heaven.
 - It is a very important distinction for us to make.
 - God wants us to have a clear understanding of what our identity in Christ entails, who we are, and where we belong.
 - Because as James says, this life is but a vapor. This world is not our home.

- And the writer of Hebrews tells us that the believers before us recognized that truth, and says: ***“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.”***
-Hebrews 11:16 (ESV)
- And the writer wants us to be very clear on this truth, like he says in verse 14 of chapter 13, ***“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”*** ***-Hebrews 13:14 (ESV)***
- It’s very important for us to know where our citizenship truly lies.
- Because nothing here is going to last.
 - That’s why Jesus was letting His disciples know before He went to the cross that He was going through all of that to prepare a place for them. He said in My Father’s house there are many rooms, and He went through the cross to make Room for you and for me!
- Paul said to the Philippians, ***“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”***- ***Philippians 3:20 (ESV)***
- He said to the Corinthians, ***“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*** ***-2 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV)***
- It’s very important to know where your true citizenship is, because it will effect how you live.
- I know even within living in a foreign country, I would still carry myself with a sense of pride because I was American.
- Other Americans would as well, and that would create some positive, and some negative stigma’s with those in the country that we were residing in.
- Some would be like, “Oh you’re American! That’s so cool! Do you know Tom Cruise??”

Sunday, October 13, 2024

- Sometimes you'd like to play along, like, "Ole Tommy Boy?? Yea, I know Tom, he was practically my uncle growing up..."
- But others would find out that you're American and just mutter something in German under their breath. Refuse to speak English to you, even though you know they know how to speak English. They hate you, just because you're American.
- Now why would they be that way? Well they were either taught to hate Americans, or they had a bad experience with Americans.
- I know that whenever my dad was a missionary in Northern Ireland, he went and visited with one couple who was a little older, and the husband didn't want anything to do with my dad because during WWII he had had a negative encounter with British American soldiers.
- However, his wife loved Americans because an American Soldier gave her her first ever chocolate bar
- And because of the positive experience that she had, she forced her husband to give my dad a chance. My dad was able to give him another perspective on Americans, and he was able to share the Gospel with him, which led to him getting saved, becoming a part of the church my dad started and that couple would be grandparent figures to me and my siblings during our childhood while we lived there.
- So for us as Christians, there are going to be some people that hate us simply because they were taught to.
- There are going to be some that hate us because they have had a bad experience with other Christians.
- And there is nothing that we can do about that.
- We can't control the experience that everyone has with other self-proclaimed Christians.

- But we can control the experience that they have with us.
- Many Christians buy into the notion that we are to be anti-earth because we are citizens of heaven, but that's not the case at all.
- As Tim Keller puts it: We are not to be consumers of the place that we live, but we are to be committed to it's full flourishing.
- I think a really good example to learn from is what God was telling the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah as they were being taken captive by the Babylonian Empire.
- And this was a part of God's punishment on the people for forsaking Him. But he tells them that He knows the plans that He has for them, to give them a hope and a future. And the time will come when they seek Him and find Him when they seek Him with all of their heart and He will bring them out of captivity...but He also tells them that its not going to be immediate.
- And even though they were living in a godless-foreign land that is not their own, this is how

God tells them to live within that place they were going to be residing for the next 70 years:

- ***“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”***
-Jeremiah 29:4-7 (ESV)
- In a similar manner, we are living in a foreign land where we are strangers and exiles awaiting our trip Home to Heaven
- But what do we do in the meantime? Create homes, settle down, work jobs, have kids,

have grandkids, allow the number of Godly families in our community to increase

- PRAY for our city, for our state, for our country. Want it to prosper and do everything we can to be a part of it's prospering.
 - That's why the writer says, in verse 16, while we are still residents of this earth: ***“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” -Hebrews 13:16 (ESV)***
- Because, not only are we residents on earth:
- **WE ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF HEAVEN**
- And we are called to represent Heaven well.
 - That term “Do good” literally means: “to act in a way that benefits others”
 - We as Christians are called to live a life that benefits the people around us, whether they believe what we believe, whether they like us or they hate us

- We are to live in such a way where the community is better off because there are Christians present
 - We are to be the most generous people in the community
 - We are to be the most peaceful people in the community
 - We are to be the most joyful people in the community
 - We are to be the most secure people in the community
 - We are to be the most un-offendable people in the community
- Because we are confident that this place is where I am now, but it is not where I will be forever...so I want to do everything I can to make this community a better place and represent my Homeland well
- *Because I KNOW that the only way a community on earth will flourish is if it is under the influence of Heaven.*

Sunday, October 13, 2024

- And that is the assignment that we have been given from God. To be the influence of Heaven in the community that He has placed us in
- And don't worry about how you will be received, worry about how you can be faithful
- Because we are called to love a world that will never fully love us back.
- Peter says very famously in his epistle, ***“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.” -1 Peter 3:15-17 (ESV)***
- When we share our faith, it is to be done with gentleness and respect
- When we live out our faith, it is to be done with gentleness and respect
- When we share the convictions that we have it is to be done with gentleness and respect
- We are to handle ourselves and represent heaven well, keeping our conscience clear, for **WHEN WE ARE SLANDERED**
 - He doesn't say “If we are slandered” he says **WHEN** we are slandered.
 - Which is to say it is a biblical guarantee that you will, at one point or another, be slandered, because of your faith in Jesus.
- And he tells us to make sure that we have a defense ready. The word literally meaning, a reasoned statement or argument.
 - We are told to be prepared with a clear statement of why we believe what we believe

- And when we deliver that statement, it is to be done so with gentleness and respect toward another human being that was made in the image of God, and the God is not willing that they perish but come into repentance.
- And also, we understand the biblical truth that the Gospel sounds like foolishness to those who don't believe...so it shouldn't take us by surprise whenever we are reviled as foolish and unintellectual because we choose to live by faith.
- We are called to have a defense, but not to be defensive.
- Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, and those people who do not believe what we believe, who do not see things the way we do, and who do not have the Holy Spirit that we have...we understand that those people are not our enemy.
- Our fight is not with them, it is with the dark spiritual influences that continue to cloud their mind and judgement
 - So we just continue to represent heaven well, because greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world
- And Peter says we are to handle ourselves with such gentleness and respect, continue to do good...and we live our lives in such a way that the people who revile and slander us look like idiots whenever they do so
 - His words not mine.
- We are to do good for the community, share what we have in the community, regardless of how we are accepted, and by doing so we will represent Heaven in a way that cannot be ignored.
- In the early 300's AD while Emperor Julian was in power in the Roman Empire, he was one that hated Christians and was trying to revive paganism in the midst of the explosive growth of Christianity, and in a letter that he wrote to a

Sunday, October 13, 2024

pagan priest he stated: ***“Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of these Christians as their charity to strangers, the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor but for ours as well.” -Emperor Julian***

- They couldn't be ignored
- *It was a blessing this past week, on Thursday we took a team up to **Old Fort, NC** a small town in the mountains with a population of less than 1000 that had been pretty devastated by the storm*
- *And it was so cool that one of my old friends from college is a rep for Adidas in Ohio, and she saw that we were involved in helping with some hurricane relief in any way that we could and she asked me if she could send us some shoes from their warehouse to give to those in need.*
- *And they sent us over 100 pairs of shoes that we got to go up and give out and it was such a sweet time blessing that community in that way*

- *But we set up outside of a small family owned bakery that is temporarily closed while they try to get back up and running again and the owner came out and talked with us for a little bit*
- *And she was telling us just how blessed their town has been since the storm and the 1000's of people that had come in to help with relief immediately after the storm*
- *And she was telling us how the overwhelming majority of the help had been from Christians and churches*
- *And when FEMA finally showed up and was meeting with the Mayor of the town and they saw all of the relief groups that were already there, and they asked who are all of these groups, what organization are they with*
 - *And the Mayor said, “You know who those people are? Those are local churches.”*
- There is nothing like it, whenever the body of Christ lives on mission for the Kingdom of God and represents Heaven well

- Because you know as well as I, that so often we churches can get caught up in diverse and strange teachings, and we have tendency to create denominational rivalries and divisions over secondary doctrines and theologies
- But we also have a tendency, whenever things get real, to throw all of that pettiness aside, and unite together under the Name of Jesus to help those who cannot help themselves
- And that is a movement of God and a representation of Heaven that cannot be ignored
- And we do not do those things for a pat on the back or to push an agenda...there is just an innate wiring within us from the Holy Spirit to just bear burdens, to try and meet needs, to do everything we can to love and care for those who cannot or will not love and care for us back in the same way
- Because that is exactly what Jesus has done for us.
- The Letter to Diognetus is one of the earliest Christian Apologetic writings that we have. It was written in either the 2nd or 3rd century, and we're not exactly sure who the author or recipient was
- But because the recipient is addressed as "His Excellency" its obvious that it was written to a person of notoriety
- And the author is explaining what the Christian movement is all about and why it is so important. And at one point in the letter the writer describes Christians in this way:
"Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of

whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

- ***And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives.***
- ***They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. They are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; A blessing is their answer to***

abuse, they repay insult with honor. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

- ***To speak in general terms, we may say that the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body.” -The Letter to Diognetus***
- You see this is what being in the world, but not of the world is actually supposed to look like.
- So often we say a saying like that and we take it to mean that we are supposed to just shield ourselves from the world, and condemn the world from the outside looking in!
 - But we as Christians are not to just hunker down in our segregated communities and just wait it out until we die and get to heaven
 - Because our job as Christians is not to get to Heaven, our job is to bring Heaven here.
 - And we do that by representing a Risen Savior well.

- Peter again, in his epistle he says, ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” -1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV)***

• and because you are God’s people...

- ***“To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like***

sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” -1 Peter 2:21-15 (ESV)

- We need to realize where the power of all of this really comes from.

- We are residents of earth that are representatives of Heaven because:

- **WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED BY JESUS**

- *We desperately have to understand that this type of radical heavenly representation will not come from trying harder...but it will be a byproduct of praising more.*

- The writer of Hebrews, at the beginning of this passage is once again reminding his readers, that they don’t need to get caught up in all of those strange diverse teachings

- Like he’s been trying to drill into their minds this entire book...They don’t need to buy into the lie that they need to keep up with the legalistic Jewish system to stay in a right standing with God

- He says yes, there was a time when the sacrifices had to be presented to God for the covering of your sin and a right standing with God
- And those priests would have to take and burn the sacrifice outside of the gate
- But all that was doing was pointing toward the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, who was crucified outside of the gate for us
- So there is now a brand new sacrificial system for us to carry out and he says in verse 15: ***“Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” -Hebrews 13:15-16 (ESV)***
- Notice that the continual praise of God and acknowledgment of His Name, come before the doing good and sharing.
- Why is that important? Because we have to be reminded why we do good and share, and where the power to represent Heaven actually comes from.
- Because remember, Jesus said, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
 - We cannot bear a burden, if we are not yoked to Christ
- If you’re not sure what mean by yoked, a yoke was a farming tool where a farmer, when plowing his fields, would use this big wooden collar like tool that would connect to the plow that would be put around the necks of two Oxen that would carry the plow forward.
 - And what they would do, is have one seasoned veteran strong Ox on one side of the yoke, and would have a younger up and coming but weaker ox on the other side.
 - That way the two would pull the plow forward together, the stronger one would set

Sunday, October 13, 2024

the tone for the younger one and the younger one would become stronger the longer they did this together, while not putting too much pressure on the younger one that it would get injured or broken

- Now we are the weaker vessel. And we are told to bear the burdens of others and so fulfill the law of Christ.
 - However, if we are not yoked to the stronger Jesus, those burden we try to bear will break us...and we will be no help to anyone at all
 - So we are to stay yoked to Christ by continually praising Him
 - We are to continually acknowledge, or give thanks, to His name
 - Continually being reminded of what He did for us on the cross, the promise of Heaven that we have been given...and the more that we praise the more spiritually able we are to do good and share
- *The more we continually praise the God who Redeemed us the more we will continually represent Heaven well on the earth we currently reside in.*
 - And we have to keep it in that order, because if we try to just do good and share without it being rooted in our Praise, all we're going to be doing is trying to build a spiritual resume
 - We will be just as guilty as those who would base their relationship with God based on the certain foods that they ate
 - And we will drown ourselves because what we'll find is that there is never enough good that we can do and never enough that we can share
 - The needs always supersede our means!
 - I'm telling you, if we try to bear the burdens of hurricane relief without being yoked to Jesus, the burdens will break us

Sunday, October 13, 2024

- Because you, me, our church cannot be the savior for any area...and we'll never be able to do enough
 - The needs supersede our means, but the needs can never supersede Him
 - He's the Savior, He's the Provider, He's God
 - We just Praise Him that He allows us to be a small part of what He is doing in this season that our state is in.
 - And even in our every day lives, doing good things and being generous is not what is going to make your standing with God
 - You are accepted by God based on the work Jesus did for you on the cross, not by any good deed that you can do on your own
 - So the more that you praise God and thank Him for the redemption that He has offered you, the more you will appreciate how much He has saved you from, and the natural response of your praise will be to do the good things that He has called you to do.
- So let's spend some time, just praising Him together and allow this to be the starting point of our praise for the week, that will empower us to represent Him well in our every day lives.