

“At Home in Heaven”
Hebrews 13:15-25
November 14, 2021

INTRODUCTION:

We come today to the end of our study of the book of Hebrews. We have seen that the theme of this book is the same as the theme of the entire Bible. God has determined to reestablish his home with his fallen image-bearers. Paradise is restored through the blood of Jesus; the way back to Eden has been revealed and realized through Jesus. This theme has been developed in Hebrews through the idea that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament tabernacle. That was the place where God met with his people, and Jesus opens the door into God’s presence, to heaven itself.

If this is the theme both of Hebrews and the entire Bible, it brings up an important question. Has your heart been changed such that heaven will feel like home to you? Christianity is not just about getting people into heaven; it is concerned also with getting heaven into us. Richard Sibbes was a 17th century Puritan in the Anglican Church. At his funeral, it was said of him, “Of this blest man, let this just praise be given: heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.” Hebrews closes by mentioning three qualities of heaven that Jesus produces in us.

I. A Sacrificial Life – v. 15-16

These verses speak of two sacrifices: a sacrifice of praise to God and a sacrifice of doing good and sharing with others. Sacrifice lies at the heart of all religion, biblical or otherwise. All humans can’t help but be religious, your religion is indicated by your sacrifices. Sacrificing all for career, for the accumulation of money, or for the perfect body indicate what you worship. Sacrifices are at the heart of biblical religion too. That is easy to see in the Old Testament, where animal sacrifices were commanded and practiced in abundance. The New Testament teaches that all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus. He is the fulfillment of the Passover lamb, which was sacrificed that the angel of death might pass over Israel. He is the fulfillment of the animals sacrificed on the great Day of Atonement. Jesus is the true sacrifice, through whose blood our sins are forgiven and the wrath of God is turned away. The sacrifice of Jesus lies at the heart of biblical religion. That’s why verse 15 begins with the words, **“Through him.”** The “him” is Jesus and is a reference to his sacrifice.

Sacrifice is not just something Jesus does. We are to respond to his sacrifice by a sacrifice of our own, seen in the command of verse 15 where we

are told, **“let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.”** The nature of heaven is mutual sacrifice because the nature of God is mutual sacrifice. Just as all three members of the trinity give of themselves sacrificially to the other two members of the trinity, so we are invited into the life of God by doing the same. But notice the nature of the sacrifice asked of us here. It is called “a sacrifice of praise to God.” This is the precise wording of an Old Testament sacrifice referred to as a **“thanksgiving sacrifice”** (Lev. 7:12). It was to be offered when an Israelite received some special blessing and wanted to give thanks to God. It is speaking of a joyful event. A son or daughter is born, an abundant harvest is reaped, or a man or woman is healed of a sickness, and a sacrifice of thanksgiving is offered. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, this sacrifice of praise becomes for us not something that is offered on special occasions, but “continually.” Jesus’ sacrifice brought agony to his body and soul, while ours brings joy to our hearts.

If this is a thanksgiving sacrifice marked by joy, why is it called a sacrifice? There is something that must be sacrificed if we are to make such an offering, and it’s our pride. Our proud hearts want to take credit for the good things that come to us, and that pride must be sacrificed if we are to enter into joyful praise to God. We see this clearly in the next phrase, where we read that this sacrifice of praise is **“the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”** To acknowledge God’s name is simply to acknowledge his character and to know God. The Bible makes it clear in many places that the fruit of such a knowledge of God will be seen in our words. Jesus said, **“What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person”** (Matthew 15:18). Our words indicate what is in the heart, for good or for bad. Many have noted how people will write things on social media that they wouldn’t dare say to another person’s face. Why is that? It is because some of the restraints are removed on social media, which means that the things written there are probably a truer indication of a person’s heart than what might be said when face-to-face.

The opposite is also true, which is what this verse is talking about. A good heart of faith will produce good words. I was reminded this week of a story I read years ago about Corrie ten Boom. She lived in Germany between the two World Wars, and her father was a poor shopkeeper. He was a devout Christian, and one day he led the family in prayer for God to send them a customer to buy an expensive watch so they would have the money to pay their bills. Just such a customer came and picked out a quite expensive watch. As he was getting ready to pay for it, he casually mentioned that he had just purchased a defective watch from another merchant. Corrie’s father asked to see the defective watch and pointed out that only a minor repair was needed. He assured his would-be customer that he had purchased an excellent watch from the other merchant, though doing so caused him to lose the sale. When she heard the story, Corrie asked her father, “Papa, why did you do that? Aren’t you worried about the bills you have due?” Her father answered, “There is blessed and unblessed money.” He explained that God would not be honored if

he allowed another man's reputation to be wrongly sullied, especially since he knew that other merchant to be a brother in Christ. He assured his daughter that God would provide, and just a few days later a man came and bought the most expensive watch they had, the sale of which not only paid their bills, but also paid for two years of Corrie's education. That's the fruit of lips that acknowledge God. Such lips are both honest and filled with praise to God.

The next verse speaks of another sacrifice, that of doing good and sharing what you have. Such sacrifices require a generous spirit concerning both our time and our money. Our sin nature leads us to think of both our time and our money as ours to spend on ourselves. But if our hearts have been transformed by the sacrifice of Christ, we come to view these as gifts from God to be used for others. It will lead us to ask a different question. Instead of asking, "How do I want to spend my time and money to be most fulfilled?" we will ask, "What resources has God given me to be able to bring good to others?"

The self-giving, sacrificial heart spoken of in these two verses is essential for living with God. It is the dominant value of heaven because such love is a dominant quality of God. God is self-giving love, seen within the members of the trinity. As a result, God's home is marked by such love and sacrifice. Christianity is not just about getting your ticket punched to heaven. It is also about getting us ready for heaven. A heart that hasn't begun to value and practice such self-giving sacrifice will be as out of place in heaven as a fish out of water.

II. A Submissive Life – v. 17

If we would be at home in heaven, our hearts must learn submission. To say that differently, we must learn that always getting what we want is the worst thing possible for us. God often leads us through being challenged by those in authority over us to do differently than we would naturally do. He says it like this in verse 17. **"Obey your leaders and submit to them."** He's clearly speaking here about church leaders, because he says that **"they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."**

When he commands obedience and submission to church leaders, he doesn't mean that church leaders have authority to run people's lives. What is in view is obedience and submission to them as they speak the word of God. It is in their office as ministers of God's word that submission and obedience is to be given. These ministers will have to give an account to God of their faithfulness to God's word, which is perhaps one reason that they lose sleep at night. To "keep watch" means to stay awake when others are sleeping in order to guard and protect the sheep. Who wouldn't lose sleep at the frightening warning here that ministers of the gospel will have to give an account to God for their ministry?

In a healthy congregation, church members want to help their pastors. This verse goes on to tell them how that can be done. **“Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”** In other words, you can help your pastors have joy by submitting to the ministry of the word through them. The failure to do that results in their groaning. It is discouraging to a pastor when church members don’t believe and submit to his faithful teaching. It is discouraging if church members only value in a sermon such things as entertainment, humor or eloquence. I remember reading years ago a sermon from the fourth century preacher, John Chrysostom. His name means “golden-mouthed” because he was noted for his eloquence. He was making the point in his sermon that applause is inappropriate. But he made it so eloquently that his congregation began applauding. So he took another run at it and made the same point, but with even greater eloquence, resulting in yet another round of applause. This happened about three times until he finally gave up. His congregation was valuing entertainment more than submission to God’s word through the ordained leadership of the church.

The submission that is a struggle for us now, due to the continuing presence of a sin nature within us, will be our great joy in heaven. We will still submit. The Bible says that every knee will bow to the authority of King Jesus. But it will be the very thing we most want to do and will be the source of great joy to our heart.

III. A Praying Life – v. 18-21

An honest assessment of our lives in light of the first two points prepares us for this third and climactic point. When it comes to sacrifices for others and submission to others, we all recognize that there is still work to be done in all our hearts. That’s where this third point comes in. We look to God for his help, and that is expressed in prayer. The author asks for prayer for himself. He is one of those leaders who will have to give an account to God. And he prays for his readers with this closing benediction. A benediction means “a good word,” and what better word could there be than a prayer like this.

The benediction begins with a reminder of the one to whom it is directed. It is **“the God of peace.”** He is the one able to bring the peace our hearts long for. He brings us peace with himself and with others. We know he is able to do it because he is the one who **“brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.”** He is able to bring life to our dead hearts as well. Jesus is named as **“the great shepherd of the sheep.”** He’s not just any shepherd, but the *great* shepherd. This metaphor communicates Jesus’ great commitment and condescension. Shepherds were committed to their sheep. They couldn’t say, “I need a day off; I think I’ll leave the sheep to themselves today.” Shepherds couldn’t take a day off, and Jesus never does either. It’s also a metaphor of condescension. It was

the youngest son who was given the job of shepherding, because no one else wanted to do it. Jesus condescends to care for our needs.

At the very center of this benediction, at the end of verse 20, is a phrase that lies at the very heart of our salvation. All the good gifts from God that come to us are grounded in **“the blood of the eternal covenant.”** Remember that a covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. Who are the two parties in view here? Since it’s called an “eternal covenant,” it must be God the Father and God the Son. In eternity past, before the creation of the world, and as the Scriptures teach elsewhere, the Father and Son entered into an agreement with one another to bring about the salvation of humanity. That’s why in the book of Revelation Jesus is referred to as **“the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world”** (13:8). Both the Father and the Son obligated themselves through this covenant agreement. The Son’s obligation was to shed his blood as an atoning sacrifice. The Father’s obligation was to accept the blood sacrifice of the Son as full payment for sin. The basis of our salvation is simply that neither of these parties could ever fail to keep these obligations. The assurance of our forgiveness and of our adoption as God’s sons and daughters is not anything within us, but a commitment by God himself that cannot be broken.

This covenant is eternal not just because it reaches back to eternity past, but also because it reaches into eternity future. It secures for us our eternal home, and it is ultimately what fits us for heaven. The quote I began with concerning Richard Sibbes at his funeral is a reality for us all because of the blood of the eternal covenant. Heaven must begin to be in us before we are in heaven. But none of us can act in a heavenly manner of ourselves. But by the blood of this eternal covenant, God will **“equip you with everything good that you may do his will.”** We are not passive in this process, because it is our duty to “do his will.” But the equipping for this lies with God and not us. He is the one who supplies us with “everything good” for the accomplishment of his will. That means that right now, God has given you what you need. We can do good works only because God is **“working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.”** This is done “through Jesus,” and it is for his glory.

CONCLUSION:

We are all in different places in our lives right now. Some are in hard places and others in happy places. No matter what place you might be in, I want to invite you to apply this passage to your own heart by asking you what part of the doing of God’s will that this text speaks of is God calling you to now. Believe that God has given you everything good for the accomplishment of his purpose in you right now.

Small Group Discussion Questions
Hebrews 13:15-25

1. As you think back over this entire book of Hebrews, what are some of your favorite passages?
2. Why do you think the author refers to our praises of God as a “sacrifice”? He could have told us to offer up a “word” of praise or a “song” of praise. Why a “sacrifice” of praise?
3. These praises to God are described as “the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” If our words indicate our hearts (which the Bible affirms is the case), what do the following verbal sins indicate about a person’s heart?
 - Boasting
 - Gossip
 - Critical words
 - Complaining words, either on social media or in person
 - Honest words
 - Encouraging and Affirming words
 - Words of praise
4. The second sacrifice we are told to offer is that of doing good and sharing what you have. Can you think of time when you were the beneficiary of such a sacrifice?
5. The obedience and submission to leaders spoken of in verse 17 has in view receiving God’s word from ordained ministers of the gospel. What have you found helpful in receiving God’s word from preachers? What have you found challenging?
6. The author believed in prayer. Have you seen answers to prayer in your life recently? Can you share that with the group?
7. What is one thing from the benediction of verses 20-21 that encourages you?