

# Living Out Our Citizenship

## Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

### INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday morning, before anyone else is in the building, I sit in the quiet of my office and rehearse my sermon for the day.

- As I do, I jot additional notes in the margins and highlight key thoughts I don't want to overlook or under-emphasize.
- I spend time praying about the impact of the message, both on me as I deliver it and on you (the congregation) as you hear it.
- It is an important moment of preparation for me.
- As long as everything flows smoothly during that time, I can relax and be ready to fully engage with you when you walk through the doors later that morning.

But every once in a while, things don't go smoothly.

- Case in point: A couple of weeks ago, I was panicking! A entire page of my sermon was missing! Where could it be?
- It had to have been there at some point, because there were Power Point slides.
- But there it was ... page 1, page 2, page 4. No page three.
- Fortunately, it was a short-lived crisis, for I discovered that I had accidentally three-hole punched the wrong side of the paper, and page 3 was waiting patiently for me on the other side of page 4.
- But for a while that missing page had me rattled.

Have you ever borrowed a book from the library and discovered pages were missing?

- I remember one children's book in that condition. Some previous borrower had returned it a couple of pages lighter than it had been borrowed.

Such a thing evidently happens frequently enough that there are several novels about missing pages.

- There is one by Alyson Richman that sounds interesting to me. I've put it on my reading list.
- There is another one about pages stolen from an archive in Israel. That one is supposed to be true.
- I also discovered there is an investigative podcast by that name.

I am always curious when something is missing. I want to find out why.

As you may know the Scripture readings for a particular Sunday are assigned by what we know as "The Revised Common Lectionary." These readings are set up on a three-year cycle so that the major themes of the Scriptures are covered. That means any one of you can know three years in advance what the readings will be on a given Sunday. If that interests you, we have printed copies of the lectionary in the narthex and you can also find it in the front of your LBW.

From time to time in those assigned readings, a few verses get skipped, like in today's reading from Hebrews 13. We read 1-8 and 15-16. We did not read verses 9-14. Those verses were missing.

- Most of the time it is no big deal. The skipped verses may contain lists of names that no one can pronounce.
  - Like when the reading is in 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Nehemiah. On that day we skip these verses:

Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. (Nehemiah 8:5, 7)

- Other times the editors of the lectionary determined that the missing pages don't really add to the story (or the theme) of the text.
- Such is the case today. And frankly I think they are incorrect. Verses 9-14 do add something for our worship. They offer an important background to the key truth and the concluding verses in this text.
- So I don't want you to miss them. I am going to read those missing verses to you, and as I do, listen for the key theme conveyed in them:

The last verse before the missing ones says this:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

And here are the missing verses:

<sup>9</sup> Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. <sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. <sup>14</sup> For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Hebrews 13:9-10)

What was the theme? Sacrifices. Which leads us into the concluding two verses of the lectionary text...

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. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

And somehow these sacrifices are connected to Jesus. There is a link between:

He is the same yesterday, today and forever.  
and  
Therefore through Him let us sacrifice.

So our COMMON SINCE truth today is verse 8:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

And our faithful response is to offer Him two sacrifices:

### #1: SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

Look at verse 15:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a **sacrifice** of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. (Hebrews 13:15)

Let me ask you this: “How is praise a sacrifice?”

Back before Jesus, sacrifices were obvious. Those missing verses I read a few moments ago reminded us of that. A sacrifice was...

The act of slaughtering an animal as an offering to God...

It was a sacrifice because it cost me something. It was my lamb, my bull, my possession.

- When I sacrificed it, I had it no more. It was gone.
- My personal inventory was lower.
- So the understanding – even today – is that ...

Sacrifice always has a cost.

So if praise is a sacrifice, what does praise cost me?

Praise is a yielding of my circumstances to God. It is a “letting go” of the thing I’m trying to control.

- In other words, when I offer praise to God I give up the right to complain or be discouraged about my circumstances.
- Gerald Mullins wrote:

Praise is the power that changes your circumstances and lifts your burdens.  
Praise is the shout of victory before the actual victory. (Gerald Mullins)

Another writer, Dr. Louis Evans, puts it like this. Listen cautiously. This one might hurt.

When discouragement tethers our feet to the stakes, when fatigue numbs our spirit, when relentless circumstance hounds us moment by moment and day by day, the mature disciple discovers that praise both produces and releases energy. If only we could understand this, we would not wallow in the mire of self-pity and whine our way through the dark valleys, whimpering pathetically like spoiled children. (Dr. Louis Evans)

There is a song I used to sing many years ago. It was popularized by a group called "The Jeremiah People." Here are the lyrics, as I remember them:

When you're up against a struggle that shatters all your dreams  
And your hopes have been cruelly crushed by Satan's manifested schemes  
And you feel the urge within you to submit to earthly fear  
Don't let the faith you're standing in seem to disappear  
Praise the Lord. God can work through those who praise Him  
Praise the Lord. For our God inhabits praise.  
Praise the Lord, and those chains that seem to bind you  
Will serve only to remind you that they drop powerless behind you  
When you praise Him.

What does praise cost you? It costs you the spirit of defeat and despair. It costs your right to feel miserable and depressed about the unfair treatment you've received. It costs you every well-earned ounce of self pity.

Here is the truth of Scripture:

Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, I can praise Him in every circumstance, for I know He has already won the victory.

## **#2: SACRIFICE OF SERVING**

Look at verse 16:

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

One of the things the early Christians "lost" (if you will) when they started to follow Jesus was the Old Testament sacrificial system. They had grown up with it. It was second nature to them.

- They had been taught that "this is what you do."

Now, they knew that the death of Jesus on the cross was the last sacrifice that God required.

- And they knew that because of His death, they were not longer under obligation to offer sacrifices.
- A big part of how they worshipped and how they understood God was gone.
- Forgive them if it felt like something was missing!

So the writer of Hebrews reminds them here of

a teaching they should have remembered all along. Way back in the days of Samuel, God spoke through the prophet to say:

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice ... (1 Samuel 15:22)

And through the Psalmist:

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is...a broken and contrite heart ... (Psalm 51:16-17)

One of the early Christian writers commented:

Compassion shown to men by men is a bloodless sacrifice and is holy unto God.

After all, Jesus Himself said:

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. (Matthew 25:40)

Here is the truth of Scripture:

Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, the gift of service to one of His children in need is a holy act of sacrifice.

## **APPLICATION**

Sometimes as Christians we think we are no longer tied to a sacrificial system. But that's not true.

- It is true that we are not obligated to a system that sacrifices animals.
- But we still have a system of sacrifices: Sacrifice of Praise and Sacrifice of Service.

Let us offer them freely.

Amen.