

2. Believing Together

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[0 : 00] God our Father, we believe that you have called us here, each one of us, for whatever reason we've come, whether it is habit, whether it is an impulse, or whether it was, or whether simply we just happen to be passing.

We know that everything that you do in our lives is planned by you, and so you have called us for those moments to hear your word. You have called us aside from the good things and the bad things, from the busyness of our lives, from the frustrations, from the joys, and from the sorrows, from the good things and the bad things.

You have called us for a meeting with you. And we thank you that when we read your word, when we listen to your word, that Jesus Christ himself, Jesus who is the same yesterday and today and forever, that he speaks to us through its pages.

And although we've drawn aside for these moments from the world around us, we're not forgetting that world, we know that the world is a hurting place. We know the world is a lonely and frightening place for many people.

And even for people whose lives seem to be going smoothly and going well, there are always problems and difficulties. And so we need you. And the people around us need you.

[1 : 25] And we praise you that in the gospel, you have given to us everything we need. You have not stayed away across leagues and leagues of space.

You have come to us. You have come to us in your son, Jesus Christ, one with you who became one of us and is one of us still. And you have given to us your word that points fully and faithfully to him.

And it's to that word we now turn. It's to that word we want to listen. And so we pray that your Holy Spirit, who caused this book to come together, not just as black marks on pages bound together under one cover, but as the living word for us today.

We ask now for his help as we open your word, as we read it, as we listen to it together. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now last week we began a new series in Hebrews chapter 13.

I've called this series The Gospel Changes Everything. And not only does the gospel change individuals, the gospel changes communities.

[2 : 39] And that's why the various titles of the various weeks have the word together in them. Last week we looked at brotherly love. We looked at living together and loving together.

And today we are going to look at believing together. And I'm going to read verses 1 to 16. It's on page 1009 of the Bibles, if you have them there.

We're going to be looking particularly at verses 7 to 16, but I'm going to read verses 1 to 16. The author has told us that Jesus is God's final word to humanity.

That what he did on the cross by dying for us and by rising again is the final work which is needed to bring us to God. Then he goes on in chapter 13, verse 1 to say, Let brotherly love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body.

[3 : 52] Let marriage be held in honor among all. And let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.

For he has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 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.

[5 : 02] 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 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. This is the word of God. May he bless it to our hearts and to our minds.

Believing together. What is it that we believe, or rather, who is it that we believe in? And the author tells us in verse 8, Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

At an earlier stage in my life, I lived in Durham, and I ministered in a number of churches in England at various times. And some churches I went to, I've never actually seen this in Scotland, although it may be in some places.

[6 : 18] And some churches, on the lectern, on the pulpit desk, there was an inscription which only the preacher could see. And these words were the words from John chapter 12, Sir, we would like to see Jesus.

The words were, Sir, we would like to see Jesus. Reminding the preacher that he wasn't there to sell himself, he wasn't there to give some kind of ideas of his own, he was there for one purpose only, and that was to point people to Jesus Christ, God's last word, who did God's final work in the world.

And that could be written over the letter of the Hebrews, as a kind of title. Sir, we would like to see Jesus. And this verse 8 really crystallizes it. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.

Now, as we looked last week at living together, what is it we believe? What is the gospel that changes everything? And the point is, the gospel isn't really about Christ.

The gospel is Christ. Christ is calling us to himself and to a relationship with him. Whoever we've been, whoever we are, whatever we've done, there is one invitation that comes to us all.

[7 : 43] Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever. The same yesterday, because what he did at Calvary was valid even before it happened.

The people in the Old Testament days were saved by faith. They didn't know who Jesus was, obviously, because he hadn't yet come into the world. Do you read the great 11th chapter?

By faith, Noah, by faith, Enoch. All those people were saved by Christ, even though he hadn't come. He is the same today. When our author is writing, the people to whom he's writing, probably scattered around the city of Rome, are tempted to turn back and go after something else, perhaps go back to their Jewish roots.

He says he is the same today. His work is valid today. And it's valid in our today as well. And he is the same forever. That doesn't just mean our lives in this world.

That means in the city, which is to come, in verse 14. So, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. So let's look at it in context.

[8 : 54] There are just two things I want to say. First of all, I want to speak about the leaders who spoke about him. That's the first thing. And then secondly, the realities which point to him.

So first of all, the leaders who spoke about him. Verse 7. Remember your leaders. Now, these leaders are only significant because they pointed to the leader, Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

And what made them leaders? What was their authority? They weren't given that authority primarily by a body of people. They were given that authority by the word of God.

Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Now, that's clearly the past leaders. The leaders perhaps who have gone, perhaps have died, or perhaps are no longer active.

Next week, we are going to look at verse 17. The present leaders whom the author tells them to obey. They spoke the word of God. They taught the word of God, which pointed to Jesus Christ, the word of God.

[10 : 02] When we call Jesus the word of God, we are meaning an awful lot of things, but whatever else we mean, we are saying that Jesus is what God is saying to us.

If you want to listen to God, if you want to know what God is like, then you have to listen to Jesus. You have to look at Jesus, who is the revelation of God.

Once in the past, he made a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is enough to forgive all of our sins. And today, he is the great high priest in heaven, who helps us to keep going when our sins threaten to drag us down, when our own faults and our own weaknesses threaten to get in the way.

They spoke the truth. They gave good teaching. That's why in verse 9 he says, do not be led away by strange teaching. And not only did they speak the truth, they lived the truth.

Back again in verse 7, consider the outcome of their way of life. Look at the kind of people they were. You knew these people, he is saying. You listened to them. You saw the way they lived, and the way they lived proved that what they were saying was true and sincere.

[11 : 19] And imitate their faith. Be like them. Don't imitate them, notice. Imitate their faith. That's the important thing. Imitate their devotion to Jesus, their love for him, their commitment to spreading the gospel.

And don't be led away by strange teachings. Now the New Testament always telling us a lot about strange teachings. And they really fall into two types. There's what you might call the gospel minus.

The teaching that takes away from the gospel. The teaching that tells us that Jesus was simply a good man. There's no gospel in that, is there? If we think Jesus is simply a good man, and we have to imitate him, then we're going to get very depressed, aren't we?

Because we can't possibly make it. Or else, we're going to get very conceited because we think we're doing rather well. It's the gospel minus, the way of liberalism. Or else there's the gospel plus, adding all kinds of things to the gospel that aren't part of the gospel.

It's the way of fanaticism and legalism, where people make up all kinds of regulations and say, you've got to do these kinds of things unless you're not going to be a true Christian.

[12 : 31] Our author says, the gospel is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus who died to forgive our sins. Jesus who rose again.

And Jesus who is now in heaven. So that's the first thing, the leaders who spoke about him. But secondly, the realities that point to him.

And that's really verses 10 to 16. Interestingly, in the first century, the Roman writers often called the early Christians atheists. But they didn't seem to have anything a religion needed.

They didn't have a sacred building. They didn't have priests. They didn't have altars. They didn't have sacrifices. So obviously, they couldn't be anything other than atheists.

Interesting, in the 17th century, when Charles I sent Archbishop Laud into Scotland to try and impose the particular type of religion he wanted, Archbishop Laud said, the benighted people had no religion at all that I could see, which grieved me much.

[13 : 39] Well, that was Laud's view because there was no ornate buildings. There was no obvious sacrificial work going on. Now, you see what our author is doing.

Our author is saying, now look, you're calling us atheists. You say, we don't have any of these things, but we do have all these things. Look at verse 10. We have an altar. So, you're saying, we don't have an altar, but we do have an altar.

Now, he's not really talking about communion here. Because the word, the communion table in the Bible, in the New Testament, is never called an altar. Indeed, it's about the end of the second century, more than a hundred years after the New Testament period, that we first find the communion table called an altar.

And the reason it's not called an altar, especially in Hebrews, is because an altar suggests somewhere that we go and offer a sacrifice to God. Our author is saying something different.

Our author is saying, God himself provided the sacrifice. Indeed, God himself and his son became the sacrifice. The sacrifice he offered, the phrase that Hebrews uses, is once for all.

[14 : 52] It can never be repeated, and nothing can be added to it. We don't offer the sacrifice. We benefit from the sacrifice that's been offered. So, the altar is Christ himself.

Christ himself, who is both the sacrifice on the altar, and the priest who offers that sacrifice. He is one with God, but he is also one of us.

He is truly one of us. He knows what it is like to be human. The author says earlier on, and think about this, reflect on this, when you go away from here, we do not have a high priest, who cannot be moved by our weaknesses.

For he was tempted in every way, just as we are. Think of that, in every way. Think of all the temptations of humans, sexual, financial, all the other temptations.

He knows what it is like. But, without sin. He never sinned. He never succumbed to that temptation. And because of that, he is able to help those, who are tempted.

[15 : 59] He has not only gone ahead into heaven, he is alongside to help. So, we have an altar. And secondly, he says, we have a priest. We, verse 11, the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy places, by the high priest, are burned outside the camp.

The background, is that great day, in Israel's calendar, the day of atonement. It's almost a kind of spring cleaning, if you like, when all the sins of the year, were gathered up, and brought, into the holy place, by the high priest.

Blessing, these are all the sins. And then, the rituals, of that day of atonement, and go to sacrifice, another one sent out, into the desert.

They sent out into the desert, carrying the sins of the people, away, outside, the sacred, the sacred place. And notice what verse 12 says, Jesus suffered, outside the gate.

Jesus suffered, outside the sacred enclosure, in the far country. So, there is no need, any longer, for holy places, on earth. Because, Jesus died, outside the holy place.

[17 : 12] And by dying, outside the holy place, he's opened that place, for everyone. If you read, the book of Leviticus, in the Old Testament, where all these sacrifices, are described, it's like a manual, of radioactive, radioactive material.

Everywhere you go, there are forbidding signs. Don't enter. This is dangerous. Do not touch. Do not go, beyond this point. Everywhere.

Keep out. Keep out. Keep out. When Jesus died, the great, heavy curtain, of the temple, was torn in two. Not from bottom, to top, specifically from top, to bottom.

God himself, removes the no entry signs, and the great, high priest, blazes the way, into heaven, by his own blood. That's why, everyone, however, guilty they may have been, however guilty, maybe now, can benefit from that.

The old hymn says, the vilest offender, who truly believes, that moment from Jesus, a pardon receives. So you see, it's not just old, mumbo-jumbo, about rituals.

[18 : 22] It's God himself, has come into the world, in the person of Jesus, offered himself, as the sacrifice, and he's done this, says, to sanctify the people, to make them holy, through his blood.

So we have an altar, we have a priest, and then he says, we have a city. Verse 14, here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city, that is to come.

Now back in chapter 11, where the author tells us, that Abraham left the city, the city of our, splendid, glorious, magnificent city, of the ancient world, full of splendid buildings, full of wonderful architecture, a place of great excitement, a kind of buzzing, vibrant place.

He left that, he struck out into the desert, because he was looking, for another city. Not an unreal city, not a fantasy city, but a real city. And it's a real city, because God himself, made it.

And our author says, there's two things here. First of all, negative. Let us go to him, outside the camp. Now outside the camp, that refers to the ancient, people of Israel, as they journeyed, through the desert, as they camped, and in the middle of the camp, was the tabernacle, or the tent, as it's called here, where they worshipped God, where they met with God, where the sacrifices, were offered, and where the high priest, went in, or the great high priest, went into the holy place.

[19 : 55] The author is saying, if we want to travel that city, we've got to leave that behind. We've got to leave behind, the world's religion, with its ritualism, and with its idolatry.

We've got to leave behind, all these seen things. And why have we got to do that? Because Jesus claims the world, for himself. It's not simply, you're not, many years ago, I had the privilege, of visiting Israel.

It's a wonderful experience. Some of you may have been there. If you ever get the opportunity, then do go, because it's tremendous, to visit the places, where Jesus himself walked, and the places where, all those wonderful things happened.

But that can easily, become superstitious. You don't have to go to Israel, to find Jesus. You don't have to go, to the site of Calvary. Indeed, it's disputed anyway, what the actual site of Calvary is.

You can find him, here and now. Because he died, outside of the city walls. He didn't die, in the city of Jerusalem. He died, outside the city walls.

[21 : 00] So that anywhere, in this world, you can find him. Anywhere in this world, he is ready, and open, to welcome those, who will come to him. That's why, the early missionary hymn, said things like, Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun, does his successive journeys run.

And the missionaries, went to all the world, singing songs, such as the whole wide world, for Jesus. And that's still true. Jesus reigns. One day, that will be obvious.

Jesus doesn't just reign, inside services like this. Jesus reigns outside there, in the building site, in the offices, in the hustle and bustle, of the city. Jesus is Lord there, and he can be met there.

So, when the author says, we have a city, we turn our back, on the city of the world, but it's also positive. The city, the city's builder, and maker, is God.

See, Hebrews doesn't talk about, the natural, and the supernatural world. The Bible never talks that way. The Bible talks about, the seen world, and the unseen world.

[22 : 11] And the point is, they're both real. We can, we can look around us, we know the seen world, the buildings, the people, everything that we touch, and smell, and taste, and rub shoulders with, day by day.

But the world, that we cannot see, is just as real. Indeed, it's even more real, because the world, we cannot see, will outlast the world, that we can see. And one day, there will be a new heaven, and a new earth.

And in chapter 12, the previous chapter, he's called this city, Zion, the city that cannot be shaken. Zion, glorious things, of your spoken Zion, city of our God.

So what is the gospel, that changes everything? What do we believe? We believe ultimately, not in, not in rules, and regulations. This is not about religion.

Religion is full of words, like should, and ought. Religion says, I do good, therefore God accepts me. The gospel says, God accepts me, therefore I do good.

[23 : 14] we're not offering religion. What the author is saying, is there is a gospel, and that gospel, is embodied in Jesus Christ. The same Jesus, who created the heavens, and the earth.

The same Jesus, who led his people, through the wilderness. Same Jesus, who came to die at Calvary, and who arose again, and who will come, on the last day, to judge the living, and the dead.

And if we believe that, that will change, everything. It will change everything, in your personal life, not just in this world, but in the world to come.

Let's pray. Father, we praise you, for the gospel. We praise you, for the relationship, of the gospel.

The gospel, that takes sinners, like us, takes us, from the, takes us, from the homelessness, the alienation, the forsakenness, of our lives. And brings us, into the Father's house, as his children, and as his heirs.

[24 : 18] Bless us now, Lord. And may we rejoice, in that truth. In Jesus name. Amen. And now, we're going to sing the song, on the back of our sheet, which is based, on the, on this passage, O Christ, the same, through all our stories, pages.

Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, and today, and forever. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[28 : 15] Amen. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you and all whom you love now and always. Amen.