

This World is Not Our Home

Hebrews 13:7-16

A well-known hymn begins with these words:

*“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing thru,
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door;
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”*

That hymn seems especially appropriate for Christians in America in 2016! Everywhere you look there is more bad news. Tragic shootings, protests and pleas for justice accompanied by a rash jump to snap judgments, a bitter divide between races and classes that is encouraged and inspired by both the media and politicians. There is a tremendous pressure to give full-blown acceptance to the homosexual/transgender agenda, or else be ostracized as unloving, hateful. Even the NBA is getting into the mix. Then there is the rise of almost unimaginable devastation caused by Islamic terrorists both inside our country and without.

In this day and age it seems that everything has changed so fast. The “Christian America” many of us remember and enjoyed seems to be out of reach and gone. Even in a place like Iowa, the government has threatened churches to stop condemning homosexuality or else risk losing their tax-exempt status.

We look around and wonder where is a safe place to rest? Where can we be secure in our faith and in freedom? Never before has it been so easy to say “we can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”

Our text today should help us. The Hebrew Christians who first received this message faced an even more troubling predicament than we do.

They had already endured a period of struggle and affliction. Heb. 10:32-34 says,

“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, & sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession & an abiding one.”

But that time had passed, and they had not yet come to a point where they were being martyred for their faith (12:4 “have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”). They could see that day coming, perhaps, and so many of them were tempted to lay low. They had grown up in a temple-centered religion that focused on outward rituals and animal sacrifices. Now Christianity called them to forsake outward ritual and receive salvation by grace through faith. Couldn’t they do both?

Stay in the synagogues and join in the sacrificial-system yet love Jesus in their heart? Perhaps if they did that, they could avoid losing their employment or their property when persecution came again.

On top of this, they had also lost some of their former leaders. The political climate was changing, their familiar leaders were gone, and now things were never so uncertain.

Hebrews was written to these believers who were tempted to walk away from Christian faith. The author of this book (we don't know who he or she is) compares the old covenant and old Jewish religion with the better covenant and better worship we have as Christians. The book shows how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament patterns and types. It really helps to bring the Old and New testaments together.

In chapter 13, the author is closing the argument and making some last appeals. Let's read beginning in vs. 1.

Read 13:1-16

When we get to v. 13-14 don't forget to go back to 10:32-34 and add 35-39

I. Don't Ignore the Change/Challenge

A. Don't Insulate yourself from the Change/Challenge

1. By pursuing money/finding identity as a consumer who can just ignore others and focus on the wellbeing of his own family – Heb. 13:5
2. By finding fulfillment in sex or the sensuality that the world offers – Heb. 13:4
 - We don't need to find security in pleasure or in money, because Jesus has already pledged to be there for us: "He will never leave us, nor forsake us." (13:5)
 - With that promise, what can man do to us? 13:6
3. By accommodating appealing yet strange teachings

- Such as twisting Scripture to allow for the acceptance of homosexuality

B. Don't Cling to the past and wish the Change/Challenge away

1. Finding strength in foods (13:9) refers to the food laws of Judaism and possibly some gnostic peculiarities encouraging abstention from certain foods.
2. This would have been a familiar thing to the receivers of this letter – a religious system they knew well.
 - In chapters 3-4 these readers were challenged not to be like the Israelites who had longed to go back to Egypt rather than enter into the rest God had for them.
3. In a similar way, we can long for the "good old days" to such an extent that we are side-stepping the here and now.
4. In truth, the ugliness of today was present in the golden years too, just not as visible. The pristine morality of the 50's birthed the wild revelry of the 60's.
5. Christians in every age have had to battle against the world and the flesh, and the challenge we face today is just another chapter in the church's long struggle as pilgrims in a strange land.

II. Remember Those who have Led the Way

A. Your Mentors/Leaders

1. The Hebrew Christians had some mentors/leaders who had first spoken to them the Word of God.
2. Evidently they had died or left them. Their life was lived and its outcome was known, and it was something that

could be imitated. They had “spoke” not “were speaking” to them.

3. These mentors illustrate the way of faith. The Word of God, the Gospel message strengthened them (as opposed to the empty foods of vs. 9). And they had an enduring faith that can be imitated.
4. We too may have dear ones, parents or former pastors/teachers/leaders who have passed on or are no longer near us.
 - We may be facing new challenges and wish we could have their help to get through this.
 - We can imitate their faith and know what they would do.

B. Jesus Christ

1. Human mentors/leaders may change. Some are gone, others perhaps have even let us down.
2. But Jesus Christ never lets us down. He is the same yesterday (in days of old), and is the same today (in challenges that seem overwhelming), and is the same forever (he will be there and never leave us – and he will bring us home).
 - Jesus has endured affliction and temptation –
Heb. 4:14-16: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
3. Jesus has grace to strengthen/fuel our faith – vs. 9.
 - Rather than new strange doctrines, the unchanging Christ and his grace is what we need.

III. Consider the Reproach of Christ

A. An Altar-Sacrifice of Our Own

1. Jesus’ crucifixion was a fulfillment of the type of the Day of Atonement
 - A young bull was sacrificed to atone for the priests
 - A goat was sacrificed to atone for the people
 - The blood was brought into the very holy of holies and sprinkled before God to make the atonement
 - The bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp.
 - Jesus’ death secured the atonement “once for all” and he was crucified outside the camp/city.
2. “‘To eat from the altar’ is a figurative expression for participating in the sacrifice.” (Peter O’Brien, Pillar NT Commentary, p. 522).
 - Unlikely that communion is in view.
3. Christ’s sacrifice is better than any of the tangible, visible sacrifices still being performed in the Temple. And it sanctified Christ’s people.

B. The Camp of Comfort

1. Jesus’ sacrifice has upended the Temple system.
2. He stays outside the camp/Jerusalem/Temple.
 - Outside would be unholy/profane.
 - But Jesus has undone the Temple code system.
 - Animal sacrifices are unholy compared to what Christ has done – and without him are utterly empty.
 - After the Israelites had sinned with the golden calf – Moses set up a tent of meeting outside the camp.
Exod. 33:7 “Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the

tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.”

- Now, just as then, Israel has forsaken God by not receiving the message of Messiah. And so God has abandoned them and is to be found outside the camp – where Jesus suffered and where he lives.
- To stay in the camp, to stay in the Jerusalem-centered worship system of tangible sacrifices and OT rituals, is to forsake Christ for comfort. It is to hide and find security in the rituals of worship and not the heart of true worship.

C. Choosing the Reproach of Christ

1. We are called to go to Jesus outside the camp.
 - Earlier in Hebrews, we were encouraged to go to Jesus at the throne of Grace, or go find our rest in him,
 - but now we are called to go out and suffer with him.
2. Moses is our example. He chose the reproach of Christ:

11:24-26 “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

IV. Pursue the Heavenly City

A. No Lasting City Here

1. Why would we want to choose the reproach of Christ?
2. Reproach and disgrace, a “bad name” – this is not to be taken lightly.

3. The reason we gladly go forth to share Christ’s reproach is that His approval is worth far more than the world’s.

4. HERE WE HAVE NO LASTING CITY.

- There is so much in these words!
- Our true identity is more than “American”
- Our citizenship is in Heaven.
- We can cry for America, we can fight for her. We can work for her good.

Jer. 29:7 “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

- But we shouldn’t be surprised if the city around us starts to shake and tremble. Because we don’t have a lasting city here.
- Believers have shaken the dust off their sandals in countless cities and countries.
- Persecution dogged the church since the book of Acts and ever since.
- Baptists particularly endured much struggles and persecutions all over Europe and even in America.
- Bible-believing Christians in China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and in many other places have faced brutal persecution for decades. They don’t have a lasting city.
- Our American sense of justice cries out that this is not fair – but we look to Scripture and see that this is expected:

1 Pet. 4:12 “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

2 Tim. 3:12 “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

Acts 14:22 “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”
1 Thess. 3:3 “That no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.”
John 16:33 “...In the world you will have tribulation...”
Luke 21:16b-17 “Some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

B. There is a City to Come

1. The City to Come is spoken of throughout Hebrews:
 - Heaven (12:23)
 - The Promised Eternal Inheritance (9:15)
 - Place of God’s Rest (4:10-11)
 - A Kingdom that Cannot be Shaken (12:28)
 - A Homeland (11:14)
 - The City that has Foundations whose designer and builder is God (11:10)
 - Better Country, a Heavenly Country (11:14)
 - A City prepared by God (11:16)
 - Mount Zion (12:22)
 - Heavenly Jerusalem (12:22)
2. This City is anticipated in the Old Testament
 - There is evidence that Eden was a Garden-temple that was intended to be expanded and enlarged into a city-temple (like we find in Rev. 21-22)
 - Jerusalem was the city where God dwelt and placed his name.

Ps. 48:1 “Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God!”

Ps. 87:1-3 “On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah.”

- Of course, earthly Jerusalem never lived up to the ideal God intended. She was judged and exiled
- but the prophets foretold a restoration of that city and a time when “all the nations shall flow to it... For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Is. 2:2-3)
- And this restoration is connected with the ultimate restoration of the world –

Isaiah 65:17-19a “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people...”

3. This City is glimpsed in Revelation
 - The Bride of Christ is the New Jerusalem
 - The City is described as foursquare, and it is coated with gold – indicating it is the embodiment of the “holy of holies” – the dwelling place of God
4. This City is contrasted with the city of man
 - Augustine wrote of “the city of God” and the “city of man”
 - Revelation contrasts the Heavenly Jerusalem, with the City of Babylon. Both are pictured as women, one pure and the other a harlot. One city gets rich on trade with the world, whereas the other allows the nations to walk by her light which is the glory of God.

- Believers are called to come out of Babylon (18:4), but are called to enter the New Jerusalem (22:14).

C. Follow the Patriarch's Example

1. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob illustrate how to pursue the Heavenly City – Read Heb. 11:10, 13-16.
2. Live here as **strangers, pilgrims and exiles**
 - They lived in tents and sojourned
 - Refused to purchase anything more than a burial plot
 - Israel was also considered pilgrims/sojourners
Lev. 25:23 23 "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me."
 - So are we, the Church
1 Pet. 2:11 "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."
3. Don't turn back (they didn't)
4. Don't yearn/trust in a promised land / perfect existence on earth – but ultimately look for a Heavenly Country as the true source of your joy.
 - "Desire" – a spiritual longing
 - Their faith was exemplified in living as heavenly citizens even though it didn't appear that they were. They lived in light of realities they couldn't see.
 - This is why God is not ashamed to be their God.
 - And just like the Church, OT believers can expect a "prepared home" (John 14) or a "prepared city."

V. Live as Ambassadors Here

A. Focus on Pleasing Christ & Living for Others

1. We have spiritual sacrifices to give: Our lives (Rom. 12:2) and our thanksgiving/prayers/worship – 13:15.

2. We can also aim to be a blessing to others, giving sacrificially and choosing not to define ourselves by what we have (and keep) but by what we give and share.

Closing:

If you are feeling like a man or woman with no country, you are not alone. The Saints of old shared your forlorn desire to escape this earth and find their true homeland. We should follow them and find our chief identity not in country or political party, but in Christ.

Like the Patriarchs, we can still be a blessing to those around us. We don't have to be so "heavenly minded we are of no earthly use." But we will look at both political parties and see problems. We won't really fit anywhere. And that's okay.

We may differ with each other in how we decide to vote – this year especially. But we will all aim to distance ourselves from the worldly pursuit of godless pleasure, and of finding our identity in consuming/accumulating wealth.

Instead we will seek to be ambassadors in this land. We are citizens of the Heavenly Country. We were made for something bigger and better. This will cause us to not hesitate to stand up for Christ. We will choose to endure suffering for the sake of His name. We will gladly bear a reproach. And we will help one another when the penalties for being faithful get bigger.

Heb. 10:32-36 is a great place to end. This may soon become our reality here in America. May we live out this reality and be mindful of our secure home in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

READ: Heb. 10:32-36