

INTRODUCTION

A couple received an email from their daughter at college that read: "Dear Mom and Dad, Thought I'd drop you a note to let you know what's been happening. We had a fire at the dorm the other night and it was destroyed—but don't worry, because I moved in with a nice guy I've been seeing named George. He quit high school after the 11th grade to get married—but don't worry because he's divorced now. I think I may be expecting a child—but don't worry, because George says we might get married." The parents were reeling with shock when they scrolled down a little farther and read: "Don't worry—everything I've written is false. There was no fire and there's no George, but I did get a C- in French and I flunked Calculus. I just wanted you to put everything in its proper perspective."

We have finally come to the end of Hebrews and I want to put it in its proper perspective. Hebrews is often called the Epistle to the Hebrews, but it really isn't a letter so much as it is a long sermon, or a theological essay about the superiority of Jesus over the Old Testament system. This was not written to one church in one city but to all the Hebrew believers scattered around the Roman Empire.

When this was written, the massive Temple was still standing in Jerusalem. It was later destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Jewish priests were still killing bulls, rams, goats, and lambs at the Temple every single day. This document was written to Hebrew believers who had turned their backs on their Jewish religious traditions. Many of them had been ostracized and persecuted by their family and friends. These Hebrews had decided that a Jewish Rabbi named Jesus had come as the Jewish Messiah and there was no longer any need to sacrifice animals on the brazen altar that stood outside the Temple in Jerusalem.

As the writer ends the essay, he reminds them of a better altar and a better sacrifice they can make.

Hebrews 13:10-25 (CSB). We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing his disgrace. For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come.

Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices. Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything. And I urge you all the more to pray that I may be restored to you very soon.

Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus—the great Shepherd of the sheep—through the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to receive this message of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Be aware that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon enough, he will be with me when I see you. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who are from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with you all.

We often use the terms, "Praise and Worship" together. But they aren't the same thing. Worship is the larger umbrella of expressing our adoration to God. We can do that in many ways. Underneath the larger context of worship, there are the acts of singing praises, reading praise, praising God with an instrument, praying, making an offering, and serving God—just to mention a few. In the context of this passage I will be talking about worship that involves offering a sacrifice of praise to God.

There isn't a Temple standing in Jerusalem today, but the writer of Hebrews tells us there is still a sacrifice we can make that will please God—and it is the sacrifice of praise. Hebrews 13:15 is one of the most important verses on worship in the Bible. So let's break it down. Here are seven things about worship we need to know.

1. The Altar of Worship: Through Him

The readers were familiar with the altars that were part of the Temple in Jerusalem. When God gave Moses the plans for the Tabernacle, He instructed them to build two altars for worship. The large brazen altar was built outside in the court of the priests. It was square, with each side measuring 7.5 feet. It stood 4.5 high. It was made of wood overlaid with bronze. To put it in terms that we can understand, it was like a big barbecue grill where the fire never went out. The sacrifices were offered as a sweet aroma to the Lord—and there's nothing quite as pleasant as smelling meat cooking on the grill. This food wasn't wasted. After it had been ceremonially offered to God, the Priests and their family would eat much of the food.

According to this passage we have a different altar. The Bible says, "We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat." (Hebrews 13:10 CSB)

So where is our Christian altar? I've performed hundreds of wedding ceremonies and it's not unusual for the bride to be nervous. One bride was so nervous that when it came time to walk down the aisle, she froze up and couldn't take another step. So the wedding coordinator told her to just look at the aisle, then look up at the altar, and then look at your groom. Just say those three words to yourself and you can make it. So as the bride walked down the aisle she was heard saying, "I'll altar him. I'll altar him. I'll altar him."

I usually tell that joke in the context of marriage saying that it's hard for you to change or alter the person you marry. Sometimes it's hard to change someone else; we can only change ourselves.

But in this context, I want to focus on the word "altar." Is this the altar? When churches sometimes have an altar call, they are asking people to come forward to the steps leading up to the stage. Sometimes we talk about coming forward and laying your gift on the altar. But is this the altar for a Christian? You'll never hear me call it an altar.

If you go into a Catholic Church, or even some mainline Protestant churches, there is a table where communion is prepared that is called the altar. Is that the altar referred to in Hebrews 13? No, we have a better altar. Every item and part of the tabernacle was a picture or type of Jesus Christ. And just as the altar was the means of access to the presence of God in the Temple, Jesus is our altar through whom we are granted full access to a Holy God.

The 2018 Masters Golf Tournament is going on now. Only a fortunate few thousand people score patron tickets to the tournament. But they have to stay outside the ropes and can't get into the clubhouse. But the club members, and a few sponsors and "friends of Augusta" are given an all-access pass that gains them entry to the clubhouse and to a hospitality section called Berkman's Place near the fifth fairway, that is so secret there are no pictures of it. It is said to be the toughest pass to obtain in the world of sports. I'll never have one of those all access passes, but I have something better. Through Him, Jesus Christ, I have an all-access pass to God the Father. He is our altar of sacrifice.

2. The Fellowship of Worship: Let us

God is calling us to be a community of praise. We live in such an individualistic world, that there are people who think they don't need to come together with others to worship God. Their excuse is they can worship God all by themselves on the lake, or in the mountains. Of course, private worship is very important in the life of a believer. But the New Testament enforces the importance of coming together to worship God. King David sang, "O magnify the Lord WITH me and let us exalt His name TOGETHER!" (Psalm 34:3 KJV)

There are a few musicians who can play an instrument solo and it is delightful to hear. But there is something more powerful about a huge orchestra playing together that a solo artist can never match.

Pastor David Mathis has written a lot about congregational worship. "Our heart in corporate worship should not be to drown out the other worshippers from our consciousness with tightly shut eyes and a narrow focus on God, but to praise Him as one of His people, from among His people, gladly part of a gathering. We widen our eyes of worship to include our neighbor, not as the object of our worship, but as joy-multiplying, praise-accenting partners in worship."

We need the experience of coming together to worship. That's why we have songs like, "Oh come let US adore Him." Or "Come we who love the Lord and let our joys be heard."

3. The Frequency of Worship: Continually offer up

So how often should we worship God? Continually. That word doesn't carry the idea of every moment, it means "on a regular basis." That doesn't mean that you walk around saying, "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord" to every person you meet. They would probably think you are crazy.

There should be a regular pattern for your worship. I think you should worship privately every day. You should worship several times a week with your family. And you should gather at least every week to join your brothers and sisters in corporate worship.

Worship can't be restricted to just times of gathering with the congregation of believers. You can worship God in your job or when you are at school.

Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the greatest musical composers and organists of all time. He composed hundreds of songs, both religious and secular. But he always signed his words with his life philosophy: *Soli Deo Gloria*. God alone deserves the glory. In a way, Bach worshipped God through his career as a musician. Whatever you do five or six days a week, you also have the opportunity to give God the glory.

4. The Audience for Worship: to God

In the Old Testament, worship was a spectator sport. The common people brought their sacrifices to the priests, and then they backed away to watch the worship. The priest slaughtered the animal, and went through the prescribed steps of sacrifice on behalf of the worshipper. But only the priest could enter the area of the Temple. The choir that sang was made up of Levites and the worshipped and the common people watched.

But in the New Testament, worship is not a spectator sport. We don't watch while the professional priests conduct worship. In fact, in the New Testament, the distinction between the people and the priests is removed. We are all part of God's royal priesthood.

But in practice, we sometimes still communicate the idea that worship is a spectator sport. We often assume that YOU are the audience, and the people up here are the professional worshippers. You may think that we are performing to you—but that's not worship, that's performance.

Here's the true set up. We are all one choir singing to an audience of One: God Almighty. There are some of us on stage who are leading or prompting you to worship, but it's important for you all to participate in worship.

Worship is our reaction when we catch a glimpse of the greatness of God. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the greatness of God and he fell down before this vision. His first thought was, "Woe is me, for I am ruined. I am a man of unclean lips." In other words, when Isaiah saw God in all His holiness, he also saw how unworthy he was to be in His presence.

When you are truly worshipping, you will catch a glimpse of God in all of His amazing majesty.

A.W. Tozer once wrote: "Worship is the missing jewel in the Evangelical church ... Worship rises or falls with our concept of God; that is why I don't believe in the half-converted cowboys who call God 'The Man Upstairs.' I don't think they worship at all because their concept of God is unworthy of God and of themselves. And if there is one terrible disease in the church of Christ, it is that we do not see God as great as he is. We're too familiar with God." (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*, p. 4-5)

So just remember: we aren't up here singing to entertain or please you. We are all here to sing praises to the Audience of One. And the only applause we should be listening to is the applause of the nail-pierced hands.

5. The Circumstances of Worship: a sacrifice of praise

The Bible teaches us that we should praise the Lord in all circumstances. But we all know that there are times and circumstances when it seems easier to praise the Lord. When the sun is shining, and we feel good, and everyone seems to love us, and we have plenty of money in the bank, it's relatively easy to sing, "Thank you, Lord!" That's really no sacrifice.

I believe the key to this verse is our willingness to praise God even when we are going through difficult times. That's when praise becomes a valuable sacrifice to God.

One of my favorite movies is "The Sound of Music." I love the opening scene. You can barely see someone standing in a mountain pasture. As the music builds the camera zooms in on Julie Andrews who is spinning around and then she sings, "The hills are alive with the sound of music." Wow. I never get tired of seeing that.

What a perfect example of a joyful song from a mountaintop. And sometimes our songs of praise are like that. We are living on the mountaintop of blessing. And we really FEEL like praising God and it really doesn't cost us anything to praise God from the mountaintop.

But sometimes we find ourselves in the valley of despair. That's when praise becomes a real sacrifice.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 we are told to "give thanks in ALL circumstances for this is God's Will for you in Christ Jesus." Praising God and thanking God are two sides of the same worship coin. You praise God for Who He is and you Thank God for what He has done.

The Bible never says we should praise God FOR the bad circumstances. We praise Him IN the bad circumstances. If you get a diagnosis of cancer, you don't have to say, "God I praise you FOR this cancer diagnosis." Instead you can say, "Lord I praise you in the midst of this diagnosis." You aren't thanking God for the cancer, you are thanking God because HE is good and He cares for you in the midst of any situation.

6. The Expression of Worship: the fruit of our lips

When it comes to praise, we can't just THINK praiseworthy thoughts about God, we must express these thoughts with our lips—it must be verbal and vocal. It's not enough to have a feeling of gratitude to God; you don't complete the praise requirement until it is sung or spoken. An inner attitude of gratitude is the root of praise, but it doesn't become praise until it becomes the fruit of praise expressed by our lips.

I have often been discouraged through the years when I happen to glance out during a time of praise and see someone who claims to be a believer just standing there as silent as a statue. I once had a person tell me, "Well I can't sing." What he meant was that he didn't think he could sing well. But when I asked him if he ever sang happy birthday to his kids, he admitted he did. So he CAN sing—apparently he just didn't want to sing in church because he didn't think it sounded as good as someone else.

The Bible says to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. That requires you to make some noise with your lips. Some of my earliest memories in church were singing next to my mother. She had an awful voice. She was what you'd call a prisoner singer—always behind a few bars and can't find the right key! She couldn't carry a tune in a dump truck. But she would sing out in church anyway. I was so embarrassed that I can remember pulling on her sleeve during worship and saying, "Momma, please be quiet. Be quiet!" It would hurt her feelings, but she's keep singing. That's just how foolish and uninformed I was as a kid. My mom's been in Heaven for over thirty years now, and I'd give anything if I could just stand next to her again in church and hear her sing. I would say, "You go for it, girl! Make a joyful noise until the Lord." The sacrifice of praise is always the fruit of your lips, even if you don't think your voice sounds good, God loves to hear you sing to Him.

7. The Content of Worship: confess His name

Let's review the entire verse. Therefore, through him (Jesus is our altar) let us (together) continually (at all times) offer up to God (He is our audience) a sacrifice of praise (something that costs us), that is, the fruit of lips (it must be expressed) that confess his name. Praise is exalting and magnifying the name of Jesus. To magnify a name means that name becomes more and more important to us and we become less and less important.

Why don't we confess that name right now? Go ahead express it with your lips along with me. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. There's just something about that name. Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim. Kings and kingdoms will all pass away. But there's something about that name.

CONCLUSION

Let me give you a real-life example of offering up a sacrifice of praise. Stephen Curtis Chapman is a well-known singer and songwriter. He also understands what it is to offer a sacrifice of praise to God. The Chapmans had adopted a third child from China, named Maria. In May

2008, 5-year-old Maria was playing in their backyard. One of her brothers drove up in his SUV and somehow, Maria was accidentally run over when he was backing up the SUV to park. Maria died from the injuries. Stephen said it was if he was in a deep black hole. And he wondered if he would ever even sing again.

But a few days afterward he found himself weeping and singing that wonderful song, "Blessed Be Your Name" by Matt Redman. The song speaks about praising God when the sun is shining as well as when you are suffering. Part of the song quotes Job's grief as it says, "You give and take away. You give and take away."

Stephen would later say, "As I sang this song...it wasn't a song, it was a cry, a scream, a prayer. I found an amazing comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding."

Let's be reminded of those powerful lyrics that confess the greatness of the Lord.

Blessed be Your name / When the sun's shining down on me / When the world's 'all as it should be / Blessed be Your name. Blessed be Your name / On the road marked with suffering / Though there's pain in the offering / Blessed be Your name. Every blessing You pour out I'll / Turn back to praise / When the darkness closes in, Lord / Still I will say/

Blessed be the name of the Lord/ Blessed be Your name. You give and take away/ You give and take away / My heart will choose to say / Lord, blessed be Your name.

When the sun shines, or the rain falls, we are to praise the Lord. And when there is pain in our lives, that's when our praise becomes a precious sacrifice to God.

OUTLINE

Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. *Hebrews 13:15*

1. The Altar of Worship: Through Him
2. The Fellowship of Worship: Let us
3. The Frequency of Worship: Continually offer up
4. The Audience for Worship: to God
5. The Circumstances of Worship: a sacrifice of praise
6. The Expression of Worship: the fruit of our lips
7. The Content of Worship: confess His name

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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