

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

HEBREWS LESSON 8 (Chapters 12-13)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Welcome to our study of the Book of Hebrews. Today, in chapters 12 and 13, we are going to see how Christianity and Christian living are superior to any other way of life. We begin by reminding ourselves of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 who were great people of faith from the Old Testament. In Hebrews 12 we then learn that it is these great people who are, as were, “cheering us on.” We need to run with endurance the race of Christianity. Notice Hebrews 12:1-2, which is one of the most motivating and stimulating passages in the Bible.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Here we are told that we must not give up. Rather, we must run with endurance (stamina) the Christian race. The Bible says that because we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, we need to run with endurance. Look at all the people of old who never gave up. We must follow their examples and endure to the end. Then we will be saved. Endurance is an important element of the Christian walk. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7-8,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

How we need to be people who are ready to fight for the faith (Jude 3)! We must not give in when temptation arises, but instead we must be ready (with endurance) to run the race that has been set before us. The writer of Hebrews, in considering the example of a racer, says that we must lay aside every weight, as well as the sin that so easily ensnares us. If a person wants to run a race, he must get rid of that which is heavy. He must wear light clothing and shoes, and must make himself run faster by taking off anything that encumbers him. The same is true for Christianity. To run the Christian race, we must lay aside that which drags us down or holds us back—sin itself. Sin is a hindrance. It is a heavy weight for us to carry. The psalmist said, “For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps. 38:4). Like weights that we cannot get off our chests, sin is a heavy burden. It is what “grounds” men in this life. We must remove the weight.

If you are trying to run the Christian race, do not fool yourself into thinking that you can win it while living in sin. No person who lives in sin has ever been pleasing to God. To run and finish the race, we must get rid of anything that might be in the way. We must avoid stumbling blocks, and remove anything that encumbers us. And, we must keep our gaze focused on Jesus. We must “look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.” Any runner, especially a long-distance

runner, realizes that in order to make it to the end, he must find a spot out in the distance—something on which his gaze must be focused so that he has a goal on which he will never give up. As we run the Christian race, Jesus is the One on Whom we keep our gaze focused. We “look unto Jesus,” Who already has won the race. He made a perfect course, and is our perfect Captain (Heb. 2:10). If we follow Him, it will impossible for us **not** to make it. Look at what Jesus did for you. As you walk the Christian life, ponder all that Jesus suffered for mankind (Mt. 27). Think about how Jesus was beaten, how He was spit upon, how He was mocked, how stripes were laid on His back, and how He was crucified by having His hands and feet nailed to a cruel cross. When you begin to suffer, think about what Jesus did and how much He suffered. Our suffering cannot begin to compare to His. Think about what it really means to follow Jesus. In 1 Peter 2:21 we are told concerning suffering that we were called to it so that we might walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Think about all that Jesus gave up so that we could have the hope of Heaven. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we are told, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Jesus gave up everything. We, therefore, must keep our gaze focused on Him because He is the One Who won the race. He is the One Who suffered more than we could possibly imagine, and He is the One Who gave up so much so that we could have Heaven as our eternal home. We must never forget those things.

In Hebrews 12:10 we are told that our earthly fathers “indeed, for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.” Hebrews 12:5-11 discusses God's discipline. Sometimes God disciplines His own children. The point the writer is making is that we accept discipline from human fathers because we know they love us. We understand that. But God is no different. Sometimes things happen in our lives that cause us to really focus on what is important and to think about how much God really loves us or how we have gone astray. Hebrews 12:10 makes the point that sometimes our human fathers (who are not perfect) discipline us, yet we respect them. God—“for our profit”—sometimes disciplines us, too, so that “we may be partakers of His holiness.” God disciplines us because He loves us. Proverbs 27:5 says that “open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.” Because God loves us, He sometimes disciplines or chastises us so that we can return to Him and realize the error of our ways. He wants us to have our faith strengthened and to know that we are right with God because our actions prove so.

In Hebrews 12 we also learn that God has spoken, and just like during Old Testament times, we must never refuse to hear the voice of God. Verse 25 tells us that part of the Christian life, which is supreme, is listening to and obeying the voice of God. “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.” If God spoke through Moses and the prophets, and people did not escape, how much more shall we not escape if God spoke through His Son, yet we refuse to hear His voice? The point is that we must never refuse the voice of God. Being a faithful child of God means that we listen carefully to God's voice. In Revelation 2:3 there is this refrain: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says.” Each of us needs to listen carefully to the voice of God. We need to realize that obedience to Christ is one of the most supreme things we can do in this life. Matthew 7:21 makes it clear that we must obey God in order to be saved. Revelation 22:14 says, “Blessed are those who do His commandments.” The reason we will not escape today is because the New Testament is the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. It contains “the faith once for all delivered” (Jude 3). When we stand before the throne of God, it is the New Testament that will judge us (Jn. 12:48). When the books are opened at Judgment (Rev. 20:12-15), one of those books will be the Word of

God. So we must make absolutely sure that we are listening to God's voice and that we are obeying it. We must be certain that we are worshiping and serving God acceptably in this life.

Part of being a faithful Christian is giving our lives in service to God, and that we are willing to worship Him in reverence and in fear. Look at Hebrews 12:28-29, where we read, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." How do we worship and serve God acceptably? Notice that we are to do it "with reverence." Proverbs 28:14 says, "Happy is the man who is always reverent." To be reverent means that we esteem holy things as being exactly that—holy. God is holy; the Bible is holy; worship is holy; the Christian life is a holy life. We must hold these things in high esteem.

But we also worship God acceptably when we do so with godly fear and with a sense of awe and respect for who God is. In Ecclesiastes 12:13 we see that Solomon came to the following conclusion: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." We need to respect God as our Creator, as the Sustainer of life, and as the One Who has the power to condemn and to save. Hebrews 12:29 says that "our God is a consuming fire." In Hebrews 10:31 we read, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Why is that the case? It is because God is a consuming fire. If we are not willing to serve God and worship Him acceptably, then we can be sure that we will be lost forever in the fires of Hell. Jesus said that Hell is a place "where the worm dies not and the fire is never quenched" (Mk. 9:44). There is a place of eternal torment that is spoken of as a place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is a place where no one wants to go. That is one motivation for us to serve God in this life with reverence and godly fear.

In Hebrews 13 the writer moves on to some practical principles for Christian living. If we want to live the Christian life correctly, what must we do in order to be faithful to God? Notice Hebrews 13:1, which is one of the great encouragements within the Scriptures. "Let brotherly love continue." How important it is for us to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are the family of God (Eph. 2:16-19). We are adopted sons and daughters of God Himself (Gal. 4:4-6). In this family, we need to love each other. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." How is the world going to know that we are followers of Christ? By our love—because we truly care for one another! John said in 1 John 4:8, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." In the context of 1 John 3 and 4, John is talking about not only loving God, but also about loving one another. How can we say we love God and hate our brother, who is made in God's image? We are not like Cain, who murdered his brother Abel because his works were righteous. We must truly love one another and God because we are looking out for one another's interests. In Mark 12:29-31 Jesus said,

"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

How sad it is when Christians are mean or unkind to each other, do not care about one another, or treat each other like people in the world. We need to be identified as meek because of our deep, abiding love for one another.

In Hebrews 13:4 we then see that another part of living the Christian life is that we must keep marriage in the holy state for which God intended it. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Marriage is a holy union that represents the beginning of the family that God set apart as something intended to be holy and special. Going all the way back to Genesis 2, we see that Adam gave names to all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air, but he found there no mate suitable for himself. Thus, God took a rib from Adam's side and made woman. Adam said of her, "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called 'woman.'" God then said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). That is how God created marriage to be a holy estate. How we need to keep marriage holy today! God gave man a helper—woman—to help him get to Heaven. We realize that marriage is not about the lust of the flesh. Yes, part of the marriage relationship is the physical relationship between a man and a woman. But marriage is about helping one another develop spiritually in order to get to Heaven. If we get caught up in the lust of the flesh and go outside the bonds of marriage, God says that He will judge us as whoremongers and adulterers. Look at the harsh language that God used to describe people who violate the holiness of marriage. He refers to them as whoremongers and adulterers—people who are out for what they can get out of the flesh. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 we read that these people will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that there is only one reason (apart from death, Rom. 7:1-3) for a marriage to end—fornication (Mt. 19:9). We need more people like Joseph. He realized that it would be a sin against God to have relations with another man's wife. How we need more people to keep marriage holy, just as God intended for it to be.

Look, too, at Hebrews 13:5-6, which is one of the most comforting passages in all the Bible.

"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'"

Our lives are not to be filled with a desire for worldly goods. We are told, "Let your lives be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have." We are not here in this life to see how many worldly possessions we can gain. Worldliness is opposed to godliness. We are told in 1 Timothy 6 that people will be lost because they have a love of money. Worldliness and godliness are exact opposites. James 4:4 says, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Things of the world are passing away (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Instead of getting caught up with covetousness, we need to be content. We need to look at what we have, and consider how we have been blessed. This life is temporary. All we need are the things that are necessary to sustain us in this life. We must realize that God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Friends, or those close to us, may forsake us. We might even be forsaken by those in the body of Christ. But we must realize that God will **never** forsake us, no matter how bad our situations are or how hard our lives may be. Psalm 46:1 teaches us, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." In 1 Peter 5:7 we are told, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." There is no place too high, too deep, or too dark for God to be present (Ps. 139:1-12). God knows and sees all (Heb. 4:13; Prov. 15:3). How it ought to encourage us that the Lord has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you so that we can say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" Imagine how this must have strengthened first-century Christians. Some were undergoing persecution. Some were even dying because they were Christians. Others had lost family members or spouses. But God told them, "I will never leave you nor forsake you so that

you can say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" Let's say that during the first century some Christians were killed. Was that a bad thing? Not if they had been faithful to Jesus. Revelation 14:13 tells us that the Lord took care of them and took them to Heaven. We, too, need to realize that when suffering comes, when trouble arises, and when sin tempts us, the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us. In fact, God does not change.

Hebrews 13:8 is a wonderful passage about Jesus that also teaches us about the nature of God. There, we are told that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." In the past, present, or future, God is someone in Whom we can place our trust. In Malachi 3:6 we are told, "I am God; I change not." In the past, God always did what He said He would do. In the present, we can see in the here and now that He always takes care of us. In the future, because of the past and present, we have hope for that future. We know that God will do what He has said He will do. In Titus 1:2 we learn that we live "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began." This hope we have is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. What hope? It is the hope that God will not lie (Heb. 6:18). We put our trust in the God of the past, the God of the present, and the God of the future. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. How that ought to encourage and comfort us—knowing that God will always be there for us. Because of that, we are to keep on seeking that heavenly home. Because of the fact that God will never leave us or forsake us, but will always be there for us, we need to strive to go to Heaven.

Notice now the encouragement given to Christians is Hebrews 13:14—"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." We are not looking for a physical dwelling in the here and now. We are not looking for a mansion on the hilltop now. We are looking for the city that is to come. It is the city "whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10), and whose foundations were made by God Himself. It is a city that is pictured in Revelation 21 and 22. It has streets of gold. It contains the river of life. All of those things are figures that represent the wonderful place that we know Heaven will be. It will be a place where there is no sorrow or pain (Rev. 21:3-4). It will be a place where we will be in God's presence at all times. It will be a place where we will be with loved ones who have gone on before us. Perhaps you have had a mother or father, or a son or daughter, who has passed from this life, but who was a faithful child of God. You need to keep seeking the heavenly city so that you can be reunited with them. We must never give up on going to Heaven! That is what this life is all about. We must keep seeking the heavenly city.

And, as Hebrews 13:15 tells us, we must keep praising God in this life. "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." Our purpose in this life is to glory God in everything we do. Whether we eat or drink, we are to "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:13). We were created to glorify God (Is. 43:7). That is our purpose in this life, and we need to do it with "the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." How do we praise God with the fruit of our lips? We can do that by singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We can "sing and make melody in our hearts." We sing "with the spirit and the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). But singing is not the only way that we can praise God with our lips. We can praise God with our lips when we pray to Him. When we pray, "Our Father in Heaven," we are giving glory and honor to His name through our prayer life. We praise God with our lips when we tell someone about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we tell someone who is not a Christian about the mercy and love of God, and about how He wants to save that person, even though the person to whom we are speaking might not think so, the fact is that we are giving God honor and glory by telling him about Jesus, the Son of God.

The Hebrew writer closes with a warning to elders. Elders in the Lord's church were put in place by God (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). They are men who serve as shepherds and overseers. One of the responsibilities that ties us all together is expressed in this chapter. Certain Christians were thinking about going back to Judaism. But the writer told the elders to watch out for the souls of those people. He told the elders to encourage them and lift them up, and to make sure that such people stayed on the straight and narrow path. Hebrews 13:17 presents the awesome responsibility that it is to be an elder. Christians are told, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." We have a responsibility to elders that was given by God. We are to obey the elders—not in matters of doctrine, because there we are to obey Christ. Elders do not have authority in matters of doctrine. God has all that authority (Mt. 28:18). But in matters of option, in matters of how to shepherd us, or in matters of opinion, elders have authority. We are to obey them. But they are to watch out for our souls as ones who will give account on the Day of Judgment. Elders in the Lord's church need to take this responsibility seriously. The church is not a social club. It is not a business. Being an elder means that a man watches out for people's souls. Like a shepherd who tends sheep, that elder is trying to help people get to Heaven, help them develop spiritually, help point out sin in their lives, and help them grow and mature. What a serious responsibility elders had, according to what is written here in the Book of Hebrews. Those elders were to make sure that people did not go back to Judaism. And how true it is for elders today to ensure that people do not go back into a life of sin or into denominational error. Instead, people need to be constantly encouraged and to notice the supremacy of Christ.

The Book of Hebrews is all about Jesus being supreme. He is supreme over all the things in the Old Testament. He is greater than angels. His salvation is greater. He is greater than Moses. He is greater than Aaron. He is greater than Joshua. He is greater than the Levites. He is a better Priest. His law is so much better, and His covenant is so much better because actual forgiveness of sins can be realized. Hebrews 11 through 13 teaches us that the Christian life is supreme, compared to any other life. Have you let the supremacy of Christ rule in your life? Have you obeyed the Gospel? If not, why not do so today. Believe in Jesus, repent of any sin in your life, confess His name before men, and be baptized in water so that you can have the hope of salvation. To those on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Let Jesus reign supreme in your life by obeying the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS LESSON 8 (CHAPTERS 12-13)

1. According to Hebrews 12:1-2, who is “cheering us on” as we run the Christian race in this life?
2. According to Hebrews 12:1-2, who is the “author and finisher” of our faith?
3. According to 2 Timothy 4:7-8, what had the apostle Paul successfully accomplished?
4. In Psalm 38:4, how did the psalmist describe sin?
5. According to 2 Corinthians 8:9, what did Christ do for us?
6. According to Hebrews 12:10, whenever God disciplines us as His children, what is the purpose of such discipline?
7. What does Proverbs 27:5 have to say about discipline?
8. According to John 12:48, what will judge us on the Day of Judgment?
9. According to Hebrews 12:28-29, how are we to serve God?
10. What, according to Solomon’s instruction in Ecclesiastes 12:13, is “the whole duty of man”
11. What important point is found in Hebrews 10:31?
12. What important point is found in Hebrews 13:1?
13. According to Jesus’ teaching in John 13:34-35, how can people in the world know that we are Christians?
14. What important point is found in Hebrews 13:4?
15. According to Hebrews 13:8, what is Jesus Christ?
16. According to Malachi 3:6, what does God **not** do?
17. According to Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18, what is impossible for God to do?
18. According to Hebrews 13:14, for what are we as Christians searching?
19. What instructions are contained in Hebrews 13:15 for Christians today?
20. What does Hebrews 13:4 tell us about marriage?
21. According to Romans 7:1-3 and Matthew 19:9, what are the only two reasons that God accepts for the dissolution of a marriage?
22. What instructions for Christians are contained in Hebrews 13:17?