July 23, 2023

Sermon 34

Hebrews 13:9-16

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It's been really cool, people asking how Alani’s doing, and continuing to pray for her. It’s been cool to see. People praying for Kilby. The Church is doing what we’ve been called to do, which is lifting up brothers and sisters that are hurting. And I’m thankful for y’all. I’m thankful for the global Church, as well. When we send out emails and texts about Kilby being sick – Brody was talking about it tonight – just the overwhelming response of people blowing his phone up, saying, “Hey, I’m taking your daughter to the throne of grace and I’m praying over her.” So, thank y’all for that, and continue to lift them up.

It’s hard to believe we are almost done with our study of the book of Hebrews. We are now in the last chapter and the author is taking these last verses of this book to exhort the Church. For me, when I think of the book of Hebrews my mind immediately goes to the word ‘consider.’ Consider, remember, think on. And in this last chapter the author wants the reader to consider what they have been pointed to.

Consider – how Jesus is superior; how He is worthy of our worship and trust

Consider - how you have been challenged to remain faithful to Jesus

Consider - how He is our Ultimate Priest King!

Consider - how He is our Perfect Sacrifice!

Consider - how Jesus is the Ultimate Revelation of God’s mercy and love

Consider - and remember these truths always.

That’s what the author has been pointing us to continually. Consider these things, think on these things, and that’s where I want our minds to be tonight, as we walk through these verses.

I’m going to be reading Hebrews 13, and I’m going to be going back into verse 7, so follow along with me. I’m going to pick up in chapter 13, verse 7.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 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. 10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. 11 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. 12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. 14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. 15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Last week, Spencer walked through verses 7-8, but I wanted to back up and read them again. For me, as I started working through this chapter in my own personal study, the Lord led me to remember and to consider leaders who have pointed me to the truths that we just read through and studied for the last few months. The Lord led me to remember a funny story about a guy. We all have these people in our lives that we may not know or have a personal relationship with, but we’ve read their books, and listened to them preach sermons, and for me, Paul David Tripp is one of those men. And a few years ago, I got to talk to him. It was funny. It was at a Together for the Gospel conference, and I saw him across the hallway. It was one of those moments, and if you remember the old *SNL* Chris Farley, where he’s interviewing people, that’s what was playing through my mind. I was like, how do I start this conversation? I don’t want to bother this guy. He’s busy. He looks like he’s in study, but I really wanted to thank him for the investment that he has made on my life. So, I started thinking how I start this. “Hey, Mr. Paul David Tripp…” No. Umm… “Hey, Mr. Paul….” No. Ummm… If you know him, I was thinking, “Hey, Moustache…” No. It was like that Chris Farley moment where he’s like, “No, stupid. Get it together.” I had this concrete pillar between us and I was looking around it. He’s still there. Look around the other side. Finally, I just walked over to him and I was like, “Hey, you don’t know me but I just want to thank you for the investment that you’ve made in my life through your books and the way that you explain Scripture. God has used you to open my mind.” So, I was very thankful for that.

For us, tonight, we’re going to be looking at verse 9, which mentions the ‘heart.’ For me, he’s one of those guys that the Lord brought to my mind when we are looking at the heart, our center, our soul. I wanted to share a little bit of his writing, and this is called *The Case for the Study of the Heart.* I’m going to read this excerpt from one of his writing.

It says,

Well, one of the dominant themes in Proverbs is the centrality of the heart. You cannot read the Proverbs without concluding that your body only goes where your heart has already gone; your mouth only goes where your heart has already gone; your eyes only go where your heart has already gone. And so, we need this emphasis in Proverbs. It probably reaches its early crescendo in Proverbs 4, where the father says to his son, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” We could put it in modern language, “Son, if you do anything. Guard your heart because life comes out of your heart.”

Now, we have to unpack what this word means. ‘Heart,’ if we take all the ways the Bible talks about this word, the Bible describes the heart as the control center of your personhood; it's the center of your thoughts, it’s the center of your desires, it’s the center of your emotions, it’s the center of your purposes and your motivations. And so, the father is saying, “This is what drives you, this is what controls you, this is what shapes your living. You have got to be concerned about your heart.” And the Proverbs would tell us the way to guard your heart is to have a Godward heart, to surrender your heart to the will and the way, the presence and the glory, of this God who looms so large in Proverbs.

Proverbs is a case study in what the heart does. You have all these different postures of the heart that are discussed in Proverbs: The foolish heart, the wise heart, the joyful heart, the grieving heart, the evil heart, the righteous heart, the tranquil heart, the understanding heart, the foolish heart, the just heart, the cheerful heart, the arrogant heart, the greedy heart, the angry heart, and the list just goes on and on.

The Proverbs helps you to realize that what's hot and happening in you is your heart; that what controls your heart has you. Your life always lives under the control of the heart. That means lasting change, in any person's life, always starts with your heart. Proverbs would say the heart is a problem, and Proverbs would remind me that my greatest problem in all of my life doesn't exist outside of me; it's not those less-than-perfect people and all those less-than-perfect places in my life. My greatest problem is inside of me. It's the thoughts and motives and idols of my own heart. It's the tendency for me to put myself in the center when God must be in the center.

Well, this means that we can all find comfort in the bright golden promise of the New Covenant. What’s that promise? “I will give them (Can you finish it?) a new heart.” (Ezek. 36:26) You see, if in the grace of Jesus, there isn't renewal of my heart, rescue of my heart, that grace isn’t grace. You don't need so much reformation in your behavior because your behavior only changes in a lasting way if your heart first changes. So, you read the Proverbs and it's your heart, your heart, your heart, your heart, your heart, your heart. So that, you and I would pray with David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalms 51:10-12) My prayer is that your study of the Proverbs would lead you to pray that prayer. “Oh, Lord, won't you create in me a clean heart,” Because, if there is not a hope of a clean heart, there is no hope for me!

So, walking through verse 7, as I was talking about earlier, the Lord brought Paul David Tripp to my mind. And as I started to work through verse 9, the writer of Hebrews mentions the heart. For those of you that know, one of our programs at Snowbird is Snowbird Missions and Outreach, where we take students out into the community of Andrews, and we teach them to use acts of service as a platform to take the Gospel to their communities. And one of the things that we do before we go out on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, before we go out on the work projects, we’ve been walking through Ephesians 6:10-20. And if you know anything about that, that’s the armor of God. We’ve been walking through those verses because we want them to know there’s going to be a struggle within their heart for what they are doing. Our three enemies: our flesh, the world, and Satan, don’t like or want them to do what they’ve been called to do for that week of camp, or to serve at all at any point in their lives. So, there’s a struggle, there’s a battle that goes on in their hearts, and we want to walk through those verses because we want them to be prepared for those selfish motives that are going to attack them, those complaining thoughts, those things that are going to combat them during that time that they are serving. But not only in that time that they are serving here, but every day that we wake up, we know that the battle for our hearts is on as soon as our eyes pop open. Our flesh, the world, and Satan are waiting for us. So, we need to be continually reminded of that. The writer of Hebrews, in verse 9, is not talking about our physical hearts, our hearts that are beating in our chest physically. He’s talking about our inner self, our soul, our spirit, our mind, our will, and there is that battle that constantly is being waged over control for our hearts.

I want us to think about us today, as we walked into this building. Where’s your heart today? Where has it been this past week? What have you been giving your affections to? What have you been giving your soul, and your mind, and your attention? What have you been giving them to? I know that for me, I’ve been guilty of walking in those doors on a Sunday afternoon and my heart has not been in the right place. So, I want us to take time right now, before we go any further, and ask ourselves that question: “Where is my heart? What have I been giving my time and my affections to?”

See, the writer of Hebrews was trying to prepare these believers for storms. The storms that were coming from outside influences, like Roman oppression. They were getting ready, and already feeling that oppression from the Romans. But he wasn’t just talking about that. He was also talking about attacks that were coming from within the Church.

I want to read again verse 9. He says,

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.

There were people infiltrating the Church, saying, “You have to do this plus Christ. Yes, it’s okay to follow Christ, but you also have to add this to your life.” They were trying to drag these Jewish believers back into adherence with Jewish dietary laws and to go back to practicing the Levitical sacrificial system.

For us, we need to think about if certain foods are better for our bodies. And the answer is yes, sure. If I were to hold to some Jewish dietary restrictions, would I be healthier? Yeah, probably. But it is not right, and it does not honor God, to try to hold others to a certain way of eating. And that’s what those people who were infiltrating the Church were trying to do. They were trying to drag them back into those thoughts.

1 Corinthians 8:8 says,

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

These people pushing this mindset were attracted to the power and the control they felt. And we, too, can fall into this same trap with other things that we run to, to try to fill up guilt, shame, and when we try to cover up our sin we run to these things. What starts out as what we think of as power and control can quickly spiral to a place where we are far away from the Lord.

I’ve seen this. I’ve had this happen in my own life. And I’ve seen it happen in instances where people try to hold to certain traditions. Like they were trying to hold to certain things they were supposed to eat and then hold others to these certain traditions. Then, at times, people can’t uphold these traditions, or they can’t adhere to this standard, and they fall, and then they start heaping self-guilt on themselves. And a lot of times, they start running to self-medicating, because they can’t hold up to this certain standard. And God doesn’t want that for us. He doesn’t want us to run to these things.

Through our study of Hebrews, we’ve already seen that Jesus is better, and that the old system was just to point to the true Messiah. For us, today, we don’t struggle with wanting to walk back into the Jewish tradition, but we do struggle with the same pride and the same self-righteousness, that this ‘Christ-plus’ mindset brings. Our hearts can’t handle this. Our faith has to be solely focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The writer points to the source of true strength and help. He points to grace.

I’m going to read again verse 9.

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.

Grace, here, is synonymous, and always, with the Gospel. Yes, grace is unmerited favor. It is a gift from God that saves us and pays a debt for sin that we couldn’t pay. But grace also brings power to overcome. Grace is the Holy Spirit’s work in us and through us, working in us to help us to live in a way that pleases God; to help us live in a way that we can’t do on our own.

James 4:6 says,

But He gives more grace, therefore, it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

2 Corinthians 12:9,

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

When we are weak, He is strong, and His grace is sufficient for us. The writer wants us to realize that the focus should not be what you are eating physically, but what you are running to and filling up with, spiritually.

Grace is also a way of referring to the finished work that God has done through His Son, Jesus; through His life, and through His death, and through His resurrection. Some of us sitting in here tonight have been running to and worshipping other things. It may be a job, it may be money, or a relationship. It may be food. It may be drugs or alcohol. You fill in the blank. And what you are ultimately living out is what we see in verse 10.

In verse 10, he says,

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

Right now, you are worshipping at another altar. Either you are an unbeliever that needs to cry out to the Lord for help and for rescue, or you’re a believer that has been operating out of a heart of unbelief, and this unbelief that the Lord can’t help you or save you out of your current state. And we’ve all been there. I know I’ve been at this point where I’ve been in a storm, where there’s this overwhelming, and I run to things to comfort me in that moment. And in that moment, Paul Tripp would call this momentary amnesia, where we forget how God can rescue us from anything. He can overcome anything, and help us, and rescue us. And in that moment where we are self-medicating, or running to other idols, little gods, in that moment, we are operating out of unbelief. And the Lord wants us to stop that mode of operation and run to Him. Some of you are there tonight, where you’ve been running and living your life that way. And He is here and waiting for you to cry out to Him for help.

As we move on to verses 10 and 11, I’m going to read 10 again. He says,

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. 11 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.

FF Bruce says this,

The great sacrifice of Christ was the antitype of the sacrifice offered on the great Day of Atonement, and the flesh of the animals slaughtered in the course of that ritual was not eaten;…

So, on that day that they slaughtered these animals, and the blood was taken to the Holy of Holies, the priest did not eat those slaughtered animals on that day.

…their bodies were “carried forth outside the camp” and there completely burned (Lev 16:27). There were other sin offerings in which this was not done; when the blood was not presented to God in the Holy of Holies, the flesh was eaten by the priests in the sanctuary. But since the blood of the bullock, which made atonement for Aaron and his family, and of the goat, which made atonement for the people, was carried into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, their bodies were incinerated. In other words, “those who carry out the worship in the tent” have no permission to eat from the altar which typically foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ. But the sacrifice of Christ is a better sacrifice, not only because those who enter the heavenly sanctuary “by Jesus’ blood” (Hebrews 10:19) know that the One who became their perfect sin offering is permanently available as the source of their spiritual nourishment and refreshment, as they feed on Hm in their hearts by faith.

And as believers, we get to do this every day. We get to go to this altar every day. And for us, this should remind us, as we feed on Christ spiritually, we should be reminded of how we do that monthly here. As a body, we remember the broken and bloodied body of Jesus, and we take the Lord’s Supper together, and we get to worship, and remember, and thank Him for what He has done. We get to do this every day, if we choose to do so.

Like I was talking about before, that battle for our hearts that is being waged, we have to run and turn to Jesus every day. Remember His broken body. Be thankful for His broken body. And go to Him in praise and worship and ask Him for help.

Verses 12-13,

12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

The writer of Hebrews, right here, is talking about us taking up our cross and following Him. A life following Jesus is not going to be easy. If we are truly following Christ, things are going to be difficult, because things were difficult for Him while He was here. And He told us things would be difficult. We will have to go outside of what is comfortable for us. We will have to take chances. There will be uncomfortable conversations when we share the Gospel and point people to Jesus. We have to remember that this is not our home, and we will never be at rest until we draw our last breath here in this physical body. And when we do, we will be face-to-face with Jesus, but until then things will be difficult for us. We will have to go outside the camp to Jesus, go outside of what’s comfortable for us.

I thought about this many times in my life, times where the Lord has convicted me, where I have fallen into these pockets where life is just comfortable and I’m just going through the motions. Some of us have been here, where you’ve learned how to walk through and make the appearance from the outside look like everything on the inside is okay, when things are not, when your heart is not where it should be. And those are the moments where we have to cry out to the Lord for help, and for correction in our heart.

Verse 14,

14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Sam Storm says this about verse 14,

We can joyfully embrace the reproach that Jesus Himself endured because we are looking for the city to come, the heavenly Jerusalem that God has prepared for His people who trust in Him and put their hope in Him.

Again, we’re reminded that when we draw our last breath here, we will be face-to-face with our Savior, the sacrificial Lamb, the Son of God, the One who has rescued us from sin and death. But until then, we’re going to have to continually cry out for help.

Verse 15,

15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

In verse 15, offering up praise and worship, just simply saying, “I love you, Lord. Please use my life for your glory and your honor,” a daily recognition that we need Him, we need His help, and we need His rescue to guide our hearts. Jesus, in Matthew 22, is asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” and Jesus tells him, “To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” Love Him with everything that you have. And if we are seeking to do this, it leads us right into verse 16, where he says,

16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

If we are loving the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we will obey the second great commandment, and that’s to love our neighbors as ourselves.

So, how do we practically do this? How do we practically get our hearts in line with Jesus? The first thing I want to look at is, every morning, like we talked about before, run to Him, knowing that the battle is on, that your flesh, and this world, and Satan are waiting. We know that the most natural thing for us outside of following the Spirit’s work in our life, in us and through us, the most natural thing for us to do is to follow our flesh. That’s imbedded into this physical body, and that’s the most natural thing for me to do, to follow wherever my flesh leads. That’s why it’s so important to take the Word of God, and to listen to Him, and to obey Him, because my heart can be easily influenced by my flesh. It can be easily influenced by what the world is calling me to. It can be easily influenced and lied to by Satan, and so we need to run to Him every morning.

Number two, memorize, meditate, and reflect on verses such as Galatians 2:20,

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Turn to verses like that. Memorize those verses. Meditate on those verses. Speak those verses to ourselves. Also, verses like Romans 8:32,

32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Speak those truths to ourselves. Let those continually pour over us all day. We need verses like that, that will take us deep into the heart of God and into His mind.

The third thing we want to look at is to pray continually, that God’s love will strengthen your heart. I want to read out of the book of Ephesians. Ephesians 3:14; we need to pray prayers like this.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We need to be praying prayers like that over our own lives and others. Hearts to be strengthened by the love of God. And as we close tonight, I want to say this. I get brokenhearted, first and foremost over the condition that I allow my heart to get into at times, and then second, as a pastor, I know and I feel where a lot of you are today. I know a lot of different situations here today, and I feel that, and I take those concerns to the Lord, those burdens, and I feel where your hearts are, and where you allow your hearts to wander. And I know the emptiness that some of you are walking in today, because I once was empty. I once ran to fill my heart with things that didn’t glorify the Lord, so I know where a lot of your hearts are today. So, I’m asking, as we go into a time of prayer, and a time of worship, if that is you tonight, if you have that emptiness, that void that you’re trying to fill with different things – if that’s you – just know that other things won’t fill that void. They won’t fill that emptiness. You will just continue to chase after different things. You will continue to fall on your face and you will continue to struggle. Only the Gospel, only the rescuing power of the Gospel, will save you out of that emptiness. And for those believers tonight, who haven’t been pursuing the Lord, who haven’t had your hearts turned and fully focused on the Gospel, repent, turn back to Him, and cry out to Him for help, and He will do that. He will meet you there. But we have to make that step towards Him and cry out to Him for that rescue.

Please pray with me.

Lord, I thank you for your love for us that is so clearly seen by the work you have done through sending your Son to rescue us out of sin and death. And Lord, I know that there are people sitting in this room tonight who don’t know you. They still have a broken relationship with you. There is still an emptiness that only you can fill. And I pray that tonight would be the night that they cry out to you for help and for rescue, that they would call upon your Son, Jesus, and He will rescue them. And Father, I know that there are believers who have been struggling, and going through the motions, and pretending like everything is okay, when everything is not okay. Their hearts are turned away from you and they need to be drawn back and walk in repentance. I pray that you would do that work in them, and that they, too, would cry out to you for help and for rescue. Because the Gospel not only rescues us at salvation but it daily rescues it from ourself, from our flesh, from this world, and from Satan’s lies. So, Father, I pray that your Spirit would fall heavy upon us tonight, that your people would get real and cry out to you, and would worship you, and like Joseph was talking about, that we would just cry out to you in thankfulness and adoration, and praise. And Father, I thank you for your Church. I thank you for how you’ve created us to operate as one body and that we can look out for one another, and watch each other’s lives. So, Father, I pray that if we know that we have a brother or sister that’s walking in sin, I pray that you would give us the strength to go to, and to help them through the leading of your Spirit. And Father, I pray that you would just be worshipped tonight. We thank you for loving us. Thank you for the Gospel. We love you. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.