

Bearing His Reproach

by Graham Harrison

The sermon explores the problem faced by the Hebrew Christians, who were being pressured to apostatize from their faith in Christ due to the conflict between their Jewish background and their newfound faith.

Duration: 46:45

Scripture: Ezekiel 33:31-32, Hebrews 13:5-6, Hebrews 13:8, Hebrews 13:12-16

Topics: "Reproach"

Description

In this sermon on Ezekiel 33, the preacher highlights the problem of people who hear the word of God but do not act upon it. He describes how some individuals may attend church and engage in religious activities, but their hearts are focused on worldly desires. The preacher challenges the audience to reflect on their own motives for attending church and emphasizes the importance of allowing the word of God to penetrate their lives. He also discusses the sacrifices and sufferings that believers may face for their faith in Jesus Christ, contrasting Christianity with Judaism and emphasizing the superiority of Christianity. The sermon encourages listeners to seek a heavenly city and to bear the reproach of Christ.

Transcript

For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. And it is particularly with the thirteenth verse that I want to deal this evening, Hebrews 13 and verse 13. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

And the reason why I want to consider these verses with you together this evening, is because it seems to me that although there is a sense in which they deal with a problem that was a very peculiar problem, peculiar that is to these particular Christians to whom this epistle to the Hebrews was first written, yet at the same time the essence of that problem is by no means peculiar to them. But it is a problem I'm quite sure that many many Christians who are here tonight have had to face up to and experience themselves, and a problem that anybody who would become a Christian will most certainly have to grapple with sooner or later. It had all come in a particularly acute way to these Hebrew Christians, and in a sense it is the great burden of this epistle.

You see, what had happened was this, they had discovered that on becoming Christians a conflict had arisen. A conflict that marked them off from those who previously and indeed at that present time still were their nearest and dearest. People who loved them, people who respected them, even hated them, because they were Christians.

And you discover as you read this letter that these poor people were finding it very very hard indeed to be Christians. The very title of the letter, the Epistle to the Hebrews, it gives us an adequate understanding doesn't it, of the sort of people to whom it was addressed. Indeed some of the commentators on this epistle, they actually suggest that it is not only that these Hebrews were just ordinary Jews who had been converted, but quite possibly they were Jews who were priests and Levites.

You remember it's recorded in the Acts of the Apostles that on at least one occasion many of the priests believed. And as you read through the Epistle to the Hebrews you realize that it is written against the background of those who are deeply involved and who were deeply involved in all the worship of the temple. They were familiar with the ritual and the ceremony, indeed to a degree that I suppose many of us when we turn to this epistle today we find quite difficult to follow.

Because we are not as they were, we are not familiar with all the detailed rules and regulations that were laid down in the Old Testament for the worship of the Jewish people. But you see this was the essence of their conflict. Now they were Christians, formerly they were Jews, and their fellow Jews did not approve of their being Christians.

You see to be a Jew in the ancient world, and I suppose to some extent in the world today, is to be a marked man. Everything about your background, your upbringing, your family, the whole ethos of society so far as you were concerned, it marked you off and made you someone who was quite distinctive. You were a nation, you knew it.

You knew that it was God that had established you or your forefathers many, many centuries earlier, established them in a special sense as the people of God. The whole of your culture, it was different from anything in the ancient world, the very ethos of society. It was governed by the Old Testament and by the beliefs and the traditions that rightly or wrongly had arisen from the Old Testament.

And even your language, well it wasn't the sort of thing that was used by the rest of the world. You knew Hebrew or Aramaic as many of the Jews would have spoken at that particular time, and that marked you off. And of course, above everything else, your religion made you different.

Nobody else in the world had anything to do with the Jews. They were separate, they were distinct. They alone, of all the people at that time, they alone believed that God was one, that all the gods of the nations were idols, and that God is a spirit and is to be worshipped in a spiritual way.

Now that would have been the background, the ethos, the environment out of which these Hebrew Christians had come. And the problem was this, at least as it was being put to them very, very forcibly. Is it worthwhile being a Christian? Surely now that you've become Christians, it's as if you've turned your backs upon all that you held most dear before.

You don't engage in the various rites and ceremonies as once you did. And it seems as if in becoming a Christian, instead of gaining, you have lost out. And it was all put to them with a tremendous forcefulness.

So much so, and this is the whole problem of the book of Hebrews, it was put to them with such forcefulness that many of them apparently were even thinking of abandoning their faith in Christ and going back into the Jewish religion out of which they had come. It seems as you read through this book, well there they are teetering on the brink of apostasy. And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, it's as if he uses every means at his disposal somehow to keep them back from taking that fateful step over the brink.

He reasons with them from the scriptures, he argues, he pleads with them, he warns them and threatens them. You know some of the most terrible and terrifying passages that are to be found anywhere in the Word of God are to be found in this epistle to the Hebrews. And they are addressed not to unbelievers, they are addressed to these Christian men and women.

He's seeking, as you see, to plead with them and somehow to persuade them to stand firm for the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet for all that, it seems as I say, that many of them were really thinking about going back from faith in Christ and going back into the Judaism out of which they had been delivered. And there were many arguments that pointed them in that direction.

There was one very powerful and persuasive argument, there's not much mental logic about it, but there's a tremendous amount of emotional force in it. It's the argument that's spelt out in the word persecution. And these people had begun to experience persecution.

Oh, it had not come to the degree that some of their brothers and sisters in Christ had already experienced. They had not yet had to shed blood and pay for their faith with their lives. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, he tells us, tells them that in the twelfth chapter he says, you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

But even so, they've had a very hard time of it. Back in the 32nd verse of the tenth chapter, he puts it in this way, call to remembrance, he says, the former days in which after you were illuminated, soon after you became Christians, I suppose we would put it, you endured a great fight of afflictions. Partly whilst you were made a gazing stock, both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst you became companions of them that were so used.

It was as if these poor Christians, when they were converted, if you like, they had a sort of baptism of fire. The fire, not of the Holy Spirit coming upon them, but the fire of persecution and affliction. And yet they'd come through that.

But now, some years on from that initial persecution, they were feeling the weariness of it all. Is it worth it? Have we made a mistake? Have we lost out? Must we, as we hear is true of some Christians, must we go on to the bitter end and even die for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ? There was that argument, a very powerful argument. And then there would have been another argument, the argument of family tithes.

You see, just picture the scene. I don't know how the domestic life of the Hebrews was organized, but let's put it into modern terms. Imagine one of these young men or women coming home to the family one day.

They've been down in the marketplace. They've heard one of these Christian preachers preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and declaring that that Jesus of Nazareth is none other than the Messiah. And the word came with power.

And this young man or this woman believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. He might even have been baptized there and then, as sometimes seems to have been the case in this, in the New Testament era. And home

he goes, and there the family is gathering for its evening meal.

And he says to them, you know I've got something to tell you. Yes, what is it? You know that carpenter from Nazareth that we've heard about, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you know that he is the Messiah? Do you know that when he died upon the cross, it wasn't a tragedy, it was a triumph? He was actually dying to atone for the sins of men and women. Now I wonder what the reaction from the head of the family would be.

I'm sure at the very least there would have been an awkward silence. Perhaps some of you young people, you've had something like that. You've come home from camp.

You were converted, and you tried to tell your parents what has happened to you. And at best perhaps you were faced with a stony silence. Or perhaps they thought, oh well they're only teenagers, they go through these phases, they'll grow out of it in a year or two.

We'll grin and bear it until they come through it all. Or perhaps there was a blazing row, and you were warned in no uncertain terms not to have anything more to do with this stuff and nonsense about Christianity. Well you see that would have been the sort of pressure that would have been upon these people.

Our Lord had prophesied it. Our Lord himself you remember had told his disciples that he had come not to bring peace but a sword. And he said in fact that a man's enemies shall be those of his own household.

And there can be no doubt but that many of these Hebrew Christians they were discovering the truth of what the Lord Jesus Christ was saying. And there was another argument. You see to be a Jew was really something very very exclusive.

After all you were marked off from the rest of the world. Probably the rest of the world sneered at you and laughed at you. And there was a sense in which the nation was an inward-looking nation.

You either were a Jew or you weren't a Jew. And there were those comparatively few people that came and joined themselves. They became proselytes or God-fearers.

Allied themselves as far as they were able to with the Jewish people. But by and large the Jews were an exclusive small group of people. A nation yes but just a drop in the ocean as it were of the nations.

And they began to look in upon themselves. No outward vision. No looking out on the world in all its need and its pathetic hopelessness.

And realizing well yes in these sacred oracles that have been delivered to us by the Spirit of God we have the answer to all the needs of the world. The hope of the world is here in the Word of God. No they're not concerned with that.

They were very very much concerned with themselves with their own welfare. There was something essentially inward looking about them. But then you see these people they become Christians.

And immediately they'd stepped into a totally different environment. Gone was the old exclusiveness. But instead of looking inward they began to look outward.

After all some of the final words of the Lord Jesus Christ to his followers constituted a command for them to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Something that the Jews never did. But this was something that the Christians did.

And so you see there was there was a lot of bitterness that would arise. Are you still a Jew? Have you turned your back on your upbringing? Aren't we good enough for you? What's wrong with you? Got a bit big-headed this man Jesus of Nazareth. You're too serious about him.

He's a heretic. He isn't who he claims to be. You don't want to believe all that nonsense that these Christian upstarts are preaching to you.

And before very long there'd be very very great bitterness. And you know the greatest bitterness usually comes from those perhaps who are closest to you. You see it not just say in the realm of the family.

You think for example occasionally it doesn't happen more than that. But occasionally you discover that there's a politician who suddenly comes to a conclusion. I've got it wrong and the others have got it right.

And he leaves the party that hitherto he belonged to. And crosses the floor of the house of commons. And he belongs to the other side.

And those who were once his friends. Those who once perhaps might have spoken highly of him. Well they look upon him as a complete fool and an idiot.

And they cannot understand why they've never seen through him before. It doesn't happen very often. Politicians are far too concerned about their reputation and all the rest of it.

But it does happen sometimes doesn't it. Or occasionally or perhaps that's not an adequate word. More often it seems to be taking place.

You have a man born and bred and brought up in one country. And perhaps able to have access to certain secrets of that country. And then for what to him may be high and worthy motives.

He becomes a spy for a foreign power. And immediately his own family, his own nation. They turn on him.

They disown him. They castigate him. They speak disparagingly of him.

You know the sort of thing that I mean don't you. Or we can come if you like a little bit nearer to home. What's the difference between a miner and a scam? They were one and the same thing a few short months ago.

But now you've got families and communities torn apart. There isn't any difference. Just a political difference perhaps or an industrial dispute.

But there's this terrible conflict taking place. Well if you like you can multiply all that up. And you've got the sort of background situation that these poor people had to cope with.

Even from their own families and loved ones. And then to cap it all as it were there was the linchpin of the argument against them. Religion.

The spiritual argument. You become Christians. You think that you're doing something worthy and commendable.

You want us to become Christians as well. But what have you got to offer us? Where's your priests? Where's your sacrifices? Where's your temple? Do you ever go up to Jerusalem like we do three times a year to the great Jewish feasts? Where are all the signs and the evidences of a religion that comes from God? And you see these New Testament Christians they had none of these things. They didn't have uniforms for their preachers.

They didn't have great meeting places in which to gather. I dare say the churches often used to gather in the large courtyard of the home of one of the richer members. It wasn't for many years after this that proper meeting places began to be built for Christians.

And then there certainly was no altar. There were no sacrifices. Their ministers weren't priests.

And there seems to be a sort of force in the argument. Indeed you know some of the pagans of the day when they used to try and account for this phenomenon of Christians, Christians that didn't have any of the apparatus as it were of the run-of-the-mill religion. Whether it was Jewish religion or Greek religion, Roman religion, whatever it was.

They actually used to call Christians atheists. Because they said you haven't got any priests. You haven't got any sacrifices.

You haven't a temple. You haven't an altar. What are you? Do you believe in God at all if you haven't got all these things? And that was the sort of thing that they had to cope with.

I remember, oh it must be about twenty years ago now, I had a rather amusing experience that in one sense epitomizes to me the whole argument of the epistle to the Hebrews at this point. It wasn't very long after I'd gone to Newport and I had to go along to the local primary school. I was invited along to share in their harvest festival service.

And when I got there I discovered that the local Anglican vicar was there as well. I hadn't bargained for that but I was in it and there was nothing much that I could do about it. And of course they had the parents of the children.

It all turned up to see little Johnny and Mary saying their peace and doing the little sketch, whatever it was they were performing. And at the end of the proceedings the headmaster had planned a collection, an offering taken up by the children. And so there were, well almost as many children I felt as were in the school were taking up the offering.

And eventually they came and they lined up in front of myself and the Anglican priest. And there was a problem, because I discovered as I looked along the two lines that there was not an even number of children. It was an odd, not an odd man out, it was an odd girl out about seven years of age.

And I could see she was having a deep theological discussion in her mind. She was literally moving back and forth between the two lines. She looked at me, and there I was, I just had my best suit on, she probably thought I looked too much like the headmaster.

But she looked at me and then she looked at the priest. And he was in all his finery, his surplus, I think he had his academic hood on as well. And as the front of the line came to me I just took the plate, turned round, put it on the table behind me.

Oh but not so the priest. He took it, raised it to the heavens, turned it round and put it on the table. And here was this little girl having this theological argument with herself.

Which is the real minister? He, that is me. He doesn't look like one. He's just dressed up in his Sunday best.

Ah but look at the other men. Look at the robes, look at the finery, look at the way he's lifting up the plate. There's something distinctive about that.

And I knew before the line had got half way through its time, I knew that I'd lost. And sure enough, she went to him. Well, you see, that in a sense, perhaps in a bit of a banal sense, that's the argument of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Or that's part of the pressure that was upon these people. What have you got in becoming Christians? You haven't any priests, no robes, no ceremonies, no feasts, no altars, no sacrifices. And you're presuming to tell us that not only do you want to be Christians yourselves, but you want us to become Christians as well.

You must have taken leave of your senses. And so all the pressure was on these Christians to apostatize from the faith. And the epistle to the Hebrews is nothing less than this extended attempt to rescue these people.

I say he pleads with them, persuades them, argues with them, and comes back at them again and again. And now, as he's almost come to the end of the letter in this last chapter, which incidentally like so many final chapters in the New Testament epistles, it seems to be a collection of different bits and pieces, in some senses, perhaps just like our letters. At least if you're the sort of letter writer that I am, you've got to sit down and scratch your head, what have I forgotten? And in goes a sort of ragbag collection that makes up the end of the letter, and then you sign yourself off.

Well, it isn't quite like that with the epistle to the Hebrews. But I think you can say that you've moved out of the theological argument of the epistle when you come to this last chapter. There are various greetings and salutations, occasional, how shall I put it, blessed thoughts that the writer of the Hebrews throws in for their blessing and their edification.

And then, well, what he does is to show himself to be not a letter writer, but a preacher. It's as if he's saying, now look here, I've done all my arguing, I've done my pleading, I've done my best with you to pull you back from this path of destruction that you seem intent on taking, but I can't let you go. I've got, as it were, to sum it all up.

I've got to make one last, one urgent, one final appeal, lest you take this fateful step, this absolutely deluded step of turning your back upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And what he does is really to tackle the whole problem of the superiority of Christianity to the very best that Judaism could offer. And he does it in the course of these verses.

We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat, which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. And in a sense what he's doing is this.

Right, he says, these fellow Jews, they've come to you and obviously they brought great pressure to bear upon you that have moved you in this direction. You've, you've considered Judaism and you're beginning to think that perhaps you ought to be back in it pure and simple. Well he says, have you ever considered the meaning of all those sacrifices? That whole sacrificial system that is at the very heart and is the very essence of Judaism.

Have you ever considered the meaning of those sacrifices? You're saying or you're being tempted to say that Christianity is inferior to Judaism. Right, let's take the great glory of Judaism and I will show you, he says, I will show you that Jesus Christ and him crucified infinitely transcends the very best that Judaism could ever offer you. And so here in these verses as he's been doing in the epistle, he produces his argument.

In one sense it's a general argument, he's saying in a sense there's, there's something temporary, there's something provisional, there's something prospective and forward looking about all these things in the Old Testaments. They're shadows, they're types, they're not realities, they're looking for something, for someone to come. In, in one sense you don't even have to argue biblically and theologically to do that.

He says in, in the, back in the tenth chapter he says, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin. It isn't a theological point, it's a common sense point. How on earth can the slaying of an animal and the shedding of that animal's blood, how on earth can it do anything about the defilement, the moral defilement in the heart and the soul of a sinner? How can it do anything about that problem? It is not possible he says, that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin.

But then he comes down not, comes down from the general to the particular and he, he puts it like this. He says now those various sacrifices, there were many sacrifices of course in the Old Testament and we haven't the time and I doubt if I have the ability in any case to go into them in, in any great detail. But you know there were, there were many different sacrifices.

Sometimes they would bring a sort of serial offering and it would be consumed in fire before the Lord. Sometimes they would bring various animals that were prescribed there in the book of Leviticus and they would be offered and in some cases the priest that made the offering and the person that brought the offering, after certain parts of the animals were consumed on the altar, they would sit down and they would have a meal together, a sort of fellowship meal together. And there were actually some of the sacrifices that after parts of them were consumed by fire, the remainder was for the use of the priests and their families.

It was partly a way of praying them and providing for their bodily welfare. But, and this is the whole point of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews in these verses, but he says there was a special sacrifice, a sin offering, and not just any sin offering, but the sin offering that took place on the most solemn and sacred day in the Jewish calendar, the day of atonement. And then on that day the high priest would first of all sacrifice a bullock for the sins of himself and his family.

And then there would be a goat that he would have to sacrifice for the sins of the people. And having slain them there in the tabernacle and later on in the temple in Jerusalem when that was built, he'd take the blood of the sacrifice, he'd go into the holy of holies, it was the only time in the whole year he ever penetrated in there. And he would sprinkle the mercy seat and sprinkle the ground in front of the ark with the blood and out he would come once more.

There was the carcass of the slain animal, the carcasses of the slain animals. And a man would be deputed to take those carcasses, take them without the camp, far off from the camp, and there they would be burned to ashes. And it was as if something of the defilement of that sacrifice, a sacrifice for sin had rubbed off onto the poor man that took the carcasses out to burn them.

Because before he could come back into the camp, he had to strip off, he had to bathe himself from head to foot, he had to wash his clothes, and only then could he come back into the camp. Sin was abhorrent, sin defiled. And that place outside the camp, without the gate of the camp, that was where the carcasses of the sin offerings were burnt up in that conflagration.

Now says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, the priests, they never ate any of that sacrifice. Ah, but he says, we have an altar, an altar whereof they have no right to eat, which serve the tabernacle for the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. What does it mean, he says? I'll tell you.

Wherefore, Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Remember in the gospel of John, foretold it was outside the gate of the city, that hill Golgotha, where the cross was erected. Not in the city, outside the city.

There is a green hill far away, outside the city wall, where the dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all. Outside the gate, without the camp, Christ Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. And you see the point of it.

It's a place of shame, that place in the Old Testament outside the camp. It was an abhorrent place, a place of shame and judgment. Do you remember that terrible incident in the Exodus period, when Nadab and Abihu, they offered strange fire before the Lord, and the fire of the Lord came down upon them and consumed them.

And do you know what happened to them after that? The word was given that their corpses were to be carried outside the camp. A blasphemer, when he was convicted, he was taken to the same place outside the camp. They laid their hands on him, and then they executed him by stoning him.

Miriam, the sister of Moses, when she spoke against him, and when God judged her with leprosy, she was banished outside the camp for seven days before she was allowed to come back in. It was the place of judgment, the place of reproach, the place of shame. And says the writer to the Hebrews, it wasn't an accident that Jesus Christ died outside the gates of Jerusalem.

He turned his back on the nation that had turned its back on him. He turned his back upon the city that had disowned him, and he went outside the camp, outside the gate, outside the city. The three phrases are used in these verses.

And there, in a place of reproach, he was killed, crucified. The Jews, they jeered at him. The Gentiles, they didn't want to know him.

The judgment of God fell upon him there, upon that hill of Calvary, as he hung upon the cross between heaven and earth. It was a place of judgment and reproach. You ever read the words that come in one of the Psalms, one of those Psalms that are so prophetic of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the life, and the ministry, and especially the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Psalm 69, Because for thy sake I have borne reproach, shame hath covered my face.

I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them that reproach thee are fallen upon me. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonor.

Mine adversaries are all before me. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. And I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.

That's speaking of the death of Jesus Christ. He was there on that cross outside the city wall, and it was the place of reproach, where men hated him, and abused him, and hurled their contempt in his face, where God's judgment fell upon him. Now, says the author of this epistle to the Hebrews, have you ever thought of the connection between those Old Testament shadows and types that you're so familiar with, and you want to go back to? The connection between them, and Jesus Christ, and him crucified? He died as the realization and the fulfillment of all that was but typified and signified in them.

And you know, he says, if you want to share in the benefits of his death, you have to go out there. You have to align yourself with him. You can't have it here in the city.

You can't go back into Judaism. Christ has come from that. It disowned him, and he disowned them.

You have to go out to that place of contempt and reproach. And so comes the exhortation. Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

That's it, says the writer of this epistle to the Hebrews. You haven't seen it. You thought he said that Jesus Christ was inferior, that Christianity, that it was something less and other than the best that Judaism could offer.

And you haven't seen that. It's the fulfillment, it's the realization, and all these sacrifices, and especially that great sin offering on the day of atonement, they all find their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you want his blessing, that's where you must go.

Yes, it's a place of reproach, but you have to share his reproach, not the reproach of God that fell upon him. Oh, thank God for that. But you may have to share the reproach of men.

You may find that your own family will disown you. You won't be the first Christian, my friend, that that has happened to. You find that your friends become your enemies.

They'll begin to think that you're soft in the head, that you've got religious mania, that you're a fool, you're incompetent, naive, sentimental. They'll hurl all sorts of epithets at you and condemn you with them. Blessed are ye when men shall speak evil of you and revile you in that way.

They did it with the prophets before you. They did it with the Lord Jesus Christ. They do it ever with those who are faithful to him.

And far from being an argument against Christianity, it's one, says this writer, it's one of the most powerful incentives and arguments for becoming a Christian. If you want the benefits of Jesus Christ, let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp bearing his reproach. It means, you see, let's be very practical about this.

It means that there is no human tie of allegiance that takes priority over that which you have to Jesus Christ. Oh, it was bitter for these Jews. You know, I wonder, I wonder what they felt like.

There they were, Hebrews. Isn't there something, in one sense, almost pathetic about it? Hebrews, they have a letter written to them in Greek. That must have gone against the grain with some of them.

Yet here they've been called upon to go without the camp and to suffer the reproach of Christ. Their nation didn't matter. Their family didn't matter.

Their culture, their language, everything that was precious to them and that which is in one sense was part of them, it didn't matter. Their religion, it didn't matter. The only place to go was without the camp.

Where was the Lord Jesus Christ? And very simply, my friend, tonight all that I'm here to do is to ask you a question, and it's this. Tonight, where are you? Where are you with regard to Jesus Christ? Without the camp or back inside the gates, in the camp, in the city? I quote it from the Old Testament. Let me quote from another part of the Old Testament from the book of the prophet Ezekiel.

You remember, he has a complaint, a sad and lonesome complaint against the people to whom he preached because they come to him and they listen to him. They listen to him gladly. Listen to what he says, prophet Ezekiel, the 33rd chapter.

They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart doeth after their covetousness. Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

Does that describe you tonight? You're in this building, this gathering of Christian people. You're here to worship God ostensibly, to hear a sermon, to study the word of God. But does it mean anything to you? Is it just that you like the religious atmosphere? Do you even like preaching and singing hymns and things like that? Oh, but the word of God doesn't penetrate.

You're still back there in the city. It may be your family that you have to put in its proper place. It may be your friends, may even be your church.

It was like that for these people. They were cutting themselves off from their religion, but they could do nothing else, because it was Christ for that. And so I put to you, my friend, the question again this evening.

Where are you? Have you come to Jesus Christ? Do you hold back from Jesus Christ? Do you say, oh, but if I go there, they'll laugh at me. They'll scorn me. They'll make it difficult for me.

They might even, after their fashion, persecute me. My family won't understand. My friends won't understand.

They'll think I'm odd. They'll think I'm peculiar. Friend, you can't have Christ on that basis.

You have to go without the camp, bearing his reproach. Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. Have you come to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you gone forth to him? Are you willing to bear his reproach? Have you identified with him? And if you haven't, my friend, it's my great joy and privilege this evening, in the name of Jesus Christ, to urge and to invite you to come.

It's a place of reproach, but it's a place of blessing. It's a place that he doesn't abandon you in. He stands with you.

He never leaves you. He never fails you. He never forsakes you.

The apostle, the writer, has thrown that in already in the chapter, hasn't he? He says, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear what men shall do unto me. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever, he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake me.

Let the world forsake you. They forsook Christ. They forsook these Christians.

They forsaken Christians, down through the ages. What does it matter? This world one day is going to perish. This world is under the judgment and the damnation of God, and even our own society.

For any seeing eye that ought to be clearer each day of our lives, that God's judgment is upon it. Are you willing to stay there in the camp, enjoying your temporary benefit, and abandoning your eternal blessing? Or will you be wise indeed? And will you listen to the call, and the summons, and the exhortation? Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. Can you say that hymn? Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow thee.

Destitute, despised, forsaken, thou from hence my all shalt be. Perish every fond ambition, all I've hoped, or thought, or known. Yet how rich is my condition.

God and heaven are still my own. Can you say that and sing it from your heart? If you can, you're where you should be, outside the camp, bearing his reproach. But if you can't say it, friend, before you leave this building tonight, come where you should be.

Come where Christ bids you welcome, and urges you to join him. Come to that place of shame and disparagement, where Christ, the sin offering, expired in order that we might be reconciled to God. Confess your sins to him.

Tell him the worst. Admit all the truth about yourself, and plead the promise that he, and he alone, is the only savior of sinners. And I assure you, on the authority and in the name of God this night, that if you do that, he'll take you.

He'll welcome you. Though the world might abandon you, Christ will embrace you. May God give you all grace to do it, for his namesake.

Amen.

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