



Thanksgiving And The Book of Hebrews

Hebrews 13:15-16

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I am a man doubly blessed with Thanksgivings. I get to celebrate two of them every year. Diedre was raised in Canada (born in the USA), and she decided that there was no good reason not to continue observing Canadian Thanksgiving every year. After all, we want to make sure our kids enjoy *some* of their Canadian ancestry and traditions.

Well, maybe it is not so much that as the fact that I love the traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner! So I cast my vote for two turkey dinners a year and an Osman tradition was born - two Thanksgivings. One in October (Canadian Thanksgiving) and one in November (American Thanksgiving).

Like I said, I am a man doubly blessed with Thanksgivings. So I find myself purposefully meditating on the subject of thankfulness twice a year.

It was shortly after our celebration of Canadian Thanksgiving that I was reading through the book of Hebrews and was struck by the significance of one particular verse that comes near the end of the epistle. They were familiar words that I have read dozens of times and quoted dozens more.

Hebrews 13:15-16 - Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Those words are straightforward enough. There is no “hidden” meaning. We readily recognize the importance of being thankful to God and praising Him. We view giving God thanks as a spiritual duty and understand

that to not give God thanks for the comforts and blessings we enjoy, the suffering and trials He gives, the opportunities and responsibilities He affords, is the height of sin and pride.

Have you ever paused to wonder, “Why are these words in the book of Hebrews? Why do we find this command here? Why at the end of the book? What does the command to be thankful have to do with the first 12 chapters of Hebrews?”

The “Better Than” Book

Hebrews is the “Better Than” book of the New Testament. If you want to understand the significance of the book of Hebrews, you can sum up the argument of the book with two words: better than.

The author of the book of Hebrews is writing to Hebrew Christians who were facing suffering for their faith. The rejection that they were experiencing for their faith in Christ was acute.

They were viewed as apostates because they had left their Judaism and embraced the Messiah in the New Covenant. They had abandoned the law as a source of righteousness and had trusted in Jesus as their sin-bearing Messiah.

After a while they found that their friends and families did not respond with overwhelming enthusiasm to their new faith. They had been ostracized, shunned, and many had their possessions seized. They were learning what it meant to suffer the loss of all things for the sake of knowing Christ.

As a result of this hardship, some of them were

setting aside the faith and were returning to their former ways which offered a far easier road. They were tempted to forsake the New Covenant and return to the Old Covenant. The book of Hebrews is written to discourage them from such an abandonment of truth.

So the author writes to them to say, “Hey, why in the world would you return to those things when you have Christ? They are the shadows, He is the substance. The covenant that God has made in and through His Son is so superior to the Old Covenant that one can only expect sure and swift judgment if he abandons Christ for those things which could never impart life. Don’t you know that Christ is **better**?”

In **Chapter 1** we see that Christ is **better than** the angels since He has inherited a more excellent name than they (1:4) since Christ rules heaven and the angels serve Him.

In **Chapter 2** we see that Christ is **better than** the angels because all things have been subjected to Him and He has been crowned with glory and honor (2:9).

In **Chapter 3** we see that Christ is **better than** Moses since Moses was merely a servant in the house but Christ is the builder of the house and a Son.

In **Chapter 4** we find that our rest in Christ Who is our Sabbath is **better than** the Sabbath rest of the Old Covenant since those in the Old Covenant only enjoyed the shadow and not the substance.

In **Chapter 5** we find that Christ as a High Priest is **better than** the Old Testament Levitical high priests since He was perfect and did not need to offer up a sacrifice for His own sins.

In **Chapter 6** we are warned of the danger of falling away from the hope we have in Christ which is **better than** that offered under the Old Covenant.

In **Chapter 7** we are told that Christ’s priesthood is **better than** the Levitical priesthood since it is without weakness and eternal.

In **Chapter 8** we see that the ministry of Christ is **better than** the ministry which took place in the tabernacle.

In **Chapter 9** the Old Covenant and New Covenant are compared and the New Covenant is clearly **better than** the old.

In **Chapter 10** the sacrifice of Christ is **better than** the animal sacrifices that could not take away sin.

In **Chapter 11** we see that faith is **better than** sight since God is the rewarder of those who believe in Him and diligently seek Him. Even those under the Old Covenant “gained approval through their faith” but did “not receive what was promised” because God had provided something **better** for us!

In **Chapter 12** it is the heavenly city and church of God which is **better than** mount Sinai and the law. We have received a **better** kingdom which cannot be shaken.

Finally we arrive at **Chapter 13** which is filled with practical exhortations based on the truths just presented. Now put yourself in the place of those first-century Jewish Christians. You have just read that everything you have in Christ is **better than** everything you once had under the Old Covenant. Furthermore, there is no need to hold onto the shadows of those things since the substance has arrived.

The Levitical priesthood? Gone. Animal sacrifices? Done. No need for those. Feasts, festivals, and sabbaths? Fulfilled. Temple worship, tabernacle forms and functions? Nullified. The Holy of Holies, the Ark, the blood, the offerings? Rendered obsolete! Why go back?! What can you hope to gain?

Does this mean, then, that there are no sacrifices or services rendered to God? Does the arrival of the New Covenant mean that we have no spiritual obligations of worship toward God? After all, the only worship that these believers had ever been familiar with had been tied up in symbols, incense, forms, rituals, animals, temples, priests, blood, and offerings. What type of sacrifices are we to make to God? What obligations does our worship bring?

That is where our verse comes in. Let’s look at those words in **Hebrews 13:15-16** again and look at how these words sum up the main ideas of the book of Hebrews, “**Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.**”

Through Him then. . . It is through Christ that we offer up these sacrifices. We don’t have to go through a high priest, but we have direct access to God through Christ who is Himself our great High Priest. We can

therefore “draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” (Heb. 10:20-21)

We don't need to draw near through the Holy of Holies, through a sinful priest, or through animal sacrifices. We now offer worship to God **through Him**.

. . . **Let us continually offer up**. . . The offering we give to God is to be done continually. We don't come on appointed days, scheduled celebrations, special days and holy days. We offer up sacrifices *continually*. How different that is from the ministry of the priests. They would only enter the Holy of Holies on *one day a year - The Day of Atonement*. We offer sacrifice continually. Notice that the standard is higher under the New Covenant than under the old!

Continually means that we don't just offer praise when the weather is good, life is comfortable, and things are going good. We offer praise even in the midst of trials, afflictions, temptations, and suffering. The people that Hebrews was written to were enduring suffering for their faith (Heb. 13:13), yet they are told to *continually offer the sacrifice of praise*. Do you just do that during the good times?

. . . **a sacrifice of praise to God**. . . Are we still to give an offering to God? Yes! It is not a physical offering (like an animal), but it is the sacrifice of praise. The sacrifice that God desires from us, is praise. He wants to hear the cry of our *lips* in *praise* to Him.

Praise is the **fruit of lips**. The mention of fruit brings to mind the grain offerings and produce that was offered as a tithe of the produce of the land. Does God want me to bring Him a basket of wheat, a box of peaches, and a bag of apples? Is He satisfied with such offerings? No. The Lord wants the fruit of my lips, not the fruit of my land. He doesn't want me to give him apples, but to praise Him for the apples He gives me.

“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” (1 Samuel 15:22)

. . . **that give thanks to His name**. . . After reading what we have in the first 12 chapters of Hebrews we can see why the author expects us to give thanks. We must give God thanks for a better priest, a better sacrifice, a better covenant, a better rest, a better hope, a better anchor, a better city, a better ministry, a better

security, a better position (being sons), and a better intercessor. Just to name a *few*.

Are these the only sacrifices we are to offer? Just words? Is that all God expects? No. We continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to Him, but he does not only expect the fruit of our *lips*. He also expects the fruit of our *lives*. Verse 16 says, **“And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”**

So what is our obligation under the New Covenant? Is it less than under the old? Far from it! It is greater. Our praise is greater. Our worship is greater. Our blessings are greater. Our responsibilities are greater. How can we neglect so great a salvation? How can we do anything but offer praise to such a great God who has purchased such a great redemption. (Hebrews 2:3)

So if I consider myself to be a doubly blessed man-Turkey dinners aside - I have Christ and He is **better than**. . . _____. You fill in the blank. We have been given that which is **better than** everything else and so we offer to God that sacrifice of praise which He desires to hear from us. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

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