

Hebrews 13: 14 & 15; “Seeking the Continuing City”, A Sermon for the Thanksgiving Season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 21st, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

It says here that since we have no continuing city; that since we seek the city that is to come, therefore we ought to offer the sacrifice of praise, regularly, during the time of our earthly sojourn here upon the earth. The 1st thing that the apostle would have us to remember to do is that while we are seeking the city which is to come, we ought to continually praise God for what is coming. And 2nd is, that in offering the sacrifice of praise we are to continually give thanks to His holy name, remembering how great and glorious a God He is. It is fitting for us to think about these things in light of the Thanksgiving season that we are in, and fitting that we remember to praise Him and thank Him at all times.

1st of all – While we are seeking the city which is to come, we ought to continually praise God for what is coming.

Verse 14 says – For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” This letter was written to the Hebrews, and the apostle wanted those Hebrews whom he was writing to, to understand that in a few short years Jerusalem would not be a city that they could continue to live in. The Lord Jesus had prophesied that not one stone would be left upon another when Titus and the Roman armies came down upon them in 70 A.D., to deal with those rebellious Jews who had not recognized the time of their visitation by the Son of God. But I think that we who are Gentiles need also to see that this verse speaks to us, right now, where we live, as well.

The world is being pictured for us here as a city, the apostle Paul says. And, as such, it will not forever continue in the way that we know it now. The world is passing away and the lusts thereof, but he who does the will of God abides forever. The world has existed for over 6,000 years now, and many generations of people have come and gone. Why is the world passing away? Why will it not continue as the great city of humanity? Didn't God create it to stand forever? Yes, He did, in the Beginning. But then Adam and Eve, the first persons created by God, sinned against Him. They did not heed the word that He spoke to them. They disobeyed His one good commandment that He gave them to keep. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they thought would make them wise, actually made them over into sinners.

Sin entered their very mind and heart. It brought about their fall from their original righteousness. And so, having eaten of this fruit, eventually they would die physically. And because sin entered them, body, soul, and spirit, it entered the world too. It entered the world through their sin, and whole world fell with them, too. Romans chapter 8, verse 20 – “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” Oh, how true this is! Since we know that the whole creation is groaning, let us praise God that He upholds His creation each and every moment, even so. And that He is faithful to a thousand generations, even though there is no continuing city here.

But every generation of people has had to come to terms with the fact that each and every person will die physically someday. And furthermore everyone should remember that all men by nature are dead spiritually when they are born into the world. Each generation of people must understand that they have no continuing city here. Each generation of people must find God Himself to be their dwelling place. Psalm 90, verses 1-12 – “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” “You turn man to destruction, and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a wrath in the night.” “You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep.” “In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and

grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.” “For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.”

“You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins I the light of Your countenance.” “For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.” “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” “Who knows the power of Your anger?” “For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.” “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Ah, that is the truth, isn’t it? It doesn’t take long for a generation of people to live and to die, and to be largely forgotten by the rest of the world which continues on! But not forever. It is very true that none of us has any lasting city here.

But then, if this is the case, why should any man, even Christian people, have any reason to rejoice, and to continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God? It is because all believers are looking to the future. We look to the future because of what God has promised us in relation to His redemptive work through Christ. When He saved us, we were crucified to the world, and the world was crucified to us. Galatians 6: 14 – “Therefore, God forbid that we should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” It is because of Christ’s going to the cross that we can praise God everyday that the world is not really our home. We presently have everything we need without desiring what the world would tempt us to .

We have peace and pardon, we have righteousness and life. We have salvation and eternal glory coming, because of what Christ did for us. Therefore we should be continually offering the sacrifice of praise. Praise is beautiful and it is what glories God. We are seeking the city which is to come, and our sacrifice of praise now is something that every Christian should do because they believe in Christ, and they are seeking the city which is to come. All believers in Christ, both Old Testament and New are seeking the city which is to come. Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 11, verses 8-10. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance.” “And he went out, now knowing where he was going.” “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of the same promise; for he waited for the city which foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.”

So we find here that Abraham, the father of our faith, when he was called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldees, and go the land of Canaan, obeyed, because he knew that he would eventually receive an inheritance. Every Christian when they are called it is just like this spiritually for them.

Abraham went out of Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing where he was going. Even so, we forsake the love of the world, not altogether knowing what this will mean either. We live by faith and not by sight. It says that Abraham sojourned in this land as a pilgrim, he dwelt in tents with his children, Isaac, and Jacob. He didn’t actually own any single portion of the land of Canaan, even though it was promised to him. But in doing this, he was actually living by faith, looking for a city, waiting for a city which had foundations, whose builder and Maker is God. Now look at verses 13-16. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off (that is by faith)...they embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

“For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.” “And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.” “But now they desire a better, that is a heavenly country.” “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” So Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all those who believed in their respective families, they all died in faith seeking a homeland, but not finding their ultimate happiness or satisfaction in this world. Because we are worshipers of God, and followers of Christ.

Abraham and his godly descendants did not desire to back to Ur of the Chaldees. They knew that God had called them away from idolatry, and He was bringing them into an inheritance which

He had promised to them; that heavenly inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled. Because grace was working in their hearts, they desired a better country even than the literal physical land of Canaan. They desired a heavenly country. They desired a perfect sinless place in which to live. God was very pleased when He saw this desire which was formed by His grace working in them. He was not ashamed to be called their God. It is because God is faithful, that He has prepared a heavenly city for them, and us as well. This is how we should live as well; as they did, in the spiritual sense. We too, should see ourselves as pilgrims and strangers in this world.

Although we may know and be earthly friends with many people in this fallen world, we as Christians should, by faith, be leading deliberately separated lives from unbelievers and worldly people. Even though we should love of neighbor as ourselves, and try to win them to Christ, our ultimate aim before God is living righteous lives, and pursuing holiness. You probably know that the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is called by Him in Matthew chapter 5, verse 14, “a city that is set on a hill”? So the City of God is actually the people of God in a very real sense. But there is coming a time when there will be greater manifestation of sons of God, as I read to you from Romans chapter 8.

That time will come when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will return, and He will bring an end to this city of the world as we know it now, in the future. He will do this for all believers, so that they might know the glorious inheritance of a New World which He and the Father have promised us. Are you looking forward to this dear Christian? Do you seek the city which is coming? A few Scriptures will help here. Philippians chapter 3, verses 20 and 21. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

And also Revelation 21: 1-4 – “Now I saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” “Also there was no more sea.” “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people.’ “God Himself will be with them and be their God.” “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.” “There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

And also 2nd Peter 3: 10-13 – “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” “Therefore since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of Persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for New Heavens and a New Earth in which righteousness dwells.” This is the country and the city which we are looking forward to. This is the continuing City which we seek; the one to come.

Let me ask whether you praise God for all that He is going to do in the future? For His plans were perfectly formed in complete faithfulness before time began. Do you praise Him that not one purpose of His will fail? Will you not thank Him that you are a part of the City of God now, as one of His people; but also, that you are moving toward that eternal city, made by God’s hands? Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you that where I am, you may be also. In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I pray that each of you will be exercising faith and hope in relation to what is coming, and give thanks to God for what is coming, for it will be exceedingly great!

2nd – In offering the sacrifice of praise we are to continually give thanks to His holy name.

Verse 15 – “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.” I wonder if you see praising God, for how it is described for us here in this verse; as a sacrifice, and one which you are told to continually offer to God through Christ? The reason that you are told to continually offer up the sacrifice of praise, is because this is the best way to be ready for that great Day when Christ will return and the eternally City will begin. As a believer in Christ you are here urged to take up your responsibility as a priest to offer the sacrifice of praise. Praise leads to joyful obedience. Do you believe in the priesthood of the believer; that every believer should offer the sacrifice of praise continually?

You needn't go to a priest for this. You are the priest who is offering the sacrifice. Your heart is the altar that you place the sacrifice on with the thoughts and prayers of your mind to God and Christ. George Herbert the Puritan poet said this – “A broken Altar, Lord thy servant rears, made of a heart and cemented with tears: whose parts are as Thy hand did frame; no workman's tool hath touched the same.” “A HEART alone is such a stone, as nothing but Thy power doth cut.” “Wherefore each part of my hard heart meets in this frame, to praise Thy Name: That if I chance to hold my peace, these stones to praise thee may not cease.” “Oh, let Thy blessed Sacrifice be mine, and sanctify this ALTAR to be Thine.” I think that you can see what Herbert is driving at. He is saying that our hearts by nature are hard like a stone. Nothing but His power can cut through to make it offer to God what it should.

George Herbert's raised an altar in his heart to God, and he cemented with his tears. Each part of His heart met in this holy frame of mind, to praise God's name. And if he chanced to hold his peace and not praise God for the greatness of His Being, and the blessings that He had been given in salvation, and all the wondrous works which He had done for him, it was still his desire, even so, to do better. And so he asked that Christ's blessed sacrifice would be his, and sanctify this ALTAR, his heart, to be God's. Oh, to be more spiritually minded and to even begin to offer to God in praise and thanksgiving what He deserves. Psalm 106, verse 2 says – “Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?” “Who can declare all His praise?”

How do you praise His name continually? I think that our text itself gives us a great hint in this regard. It begins and continues with meditation upon God's word concerning the greatness of His Being, the greatness of His attributes of Holiness, Righteousness, love, goodness, and the fact that He is infinitely wise and holy, and able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Praise then, will become more and more natural to express when you are thinking about Him in this way. You will also think upon the greatness of God's gift of Christ, and the work of grace that He has done in your heart, and in the hearts of the brethren in your church and others of the brethren from other churches that you know.

Study the prayers of men and women in the Bible. Through their prayers, fill your mind with the truth of what God has done for His saints, and these things will come out in your own prayers, in praise and thanksgiving for all that He has done for them and all that He has done for you in the past, and all that He will do in the future. When you read the Psalms, make them prayers of praise of your own. Psalm 71: 5 and 6 – “For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth.” “By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb.” “My praise shall be continually of You.” Verse 23 as well – “My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul, which You have redeemed.” “My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought to shame who seek my hurt.” “The name of the Lord is a strong tower,” it says in Proverbs chapter 18: 10, “the righteous run into it and are safe.”

In Psalm 113, we are instructed as those who would be the Lord's servants in this good work of giving thanks to His name. It says there – “Praise, O servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord!” “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore!” “From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised.” What specifically is the Lord's name to be praised for? Verse 4 – “The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens.”

There is none like Him; none so great as He is. Verse 5 – “Who is like the Lord our God, who dwells on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?” Is this not true greatness, that God humbles Himself in this way, to behold all that is going on in heaven and earth and to consider it in His goodness and righteousness?

What specifically does He do? He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes – with the princes of His people.” In New Testament language, believers are kings and priests unto our God. He seats those who are poor in spirit, and poor in earthly money and possessions, and goods, with the princes of His people in the church of Jesus Christ our Lord. He gives them a princely spirit. He lavishes upon them all the blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. He adopts them into His spiritual family. He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children.

Surely this is not only true in an earthly physical sense of what it means for the barren woman, but also what it means when a person comes into the family of God, and into a local church. A person may have led a life in which they learned of the vanity and barrenness of living to themselves and to the world, but nothing lastingly profitable came to them. When they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, immediately God began to work in their heart. They began to be fruitful in righteousness, holiness, and good works. In that local church setting and in their life in the community that they live in, they began to bear fruit to God. And in time, they had spiritual children that were born in connection with their words, their life, and their labors.

Being fruitful in this way leads to true and lasting joy in the journey to the Continuing City. Being a person who prays to have spiritual children of your own will lead you to the place of bearing witness to Christ as your spiritual husband. You become wise and you will win souls to Him. You will be like the apostle Paul and realize that God will allow you to beget spiritual children to Him, even if you are persecuted or imprisoned for your faith. In the book of Philemon this is what Paul says to his brother and friend. He gave thanks to God for him. He said – “I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good things which is in you in Christ Jesus.”

Then he writes this way to him about his spiritual child begotten by him there in prison – “For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you brother.” “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you – being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ – “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.” “I am sending him back.” “You therefore receive him, that is my own heart, whom I wished to keep with, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.”

Let me ask if you believe that you can bear spiritual children? Do you love Christ and the brethren? Then the Lord may grant you spiritual conception. Ah, let us all of us rejoice for those who can conceive and beget spiritual children. Let us rejoice and give thanks in working of God’s Spirit. Let us rejoice in being a part of Christ’s Church and members of this local church. For it says in Psalm 87: 5 – “And of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.’” “The Lord will record, when He registers the people: ‘This one was born there.’” Realizing the greatness of all that God is doing through Christ, let us seek for City which is coming, and while we are seeking, let us by Christ, offer the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.