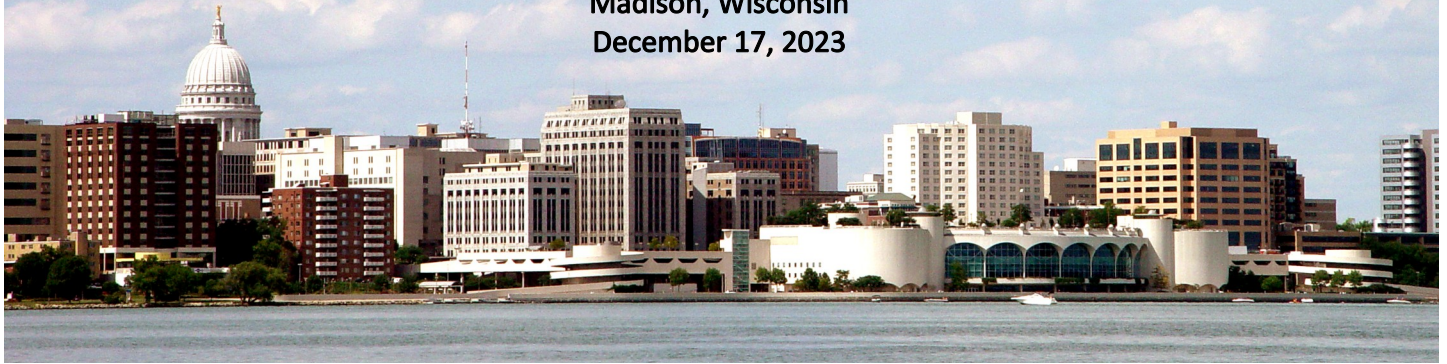


# Our Sacrifices

Hebrews 13:15-16

Baxter T. Exum (#1716)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
December 17, 2023



Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to honor God, and one way we do this is by preaching the good news that he loves us! And the gospel (or the good news) is that God sent his only Son to die in our place, he was buried, and he was raised up the first day of the week. We obey this good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And (as our tradition has been) we have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from a gospel preacher and friend, Cliff Sabroe, from the Lord's church over in Visalia, California. You may remember an update several months ago, noting that their song leader has a pink beard. I'd love to meet that man some day and ask about that, but Cliff posted several days ago, and he says that today was a, "Great way start to the day at the West Visalia Church of Christ. Join us in congratulating Sam Barletta on his decision to be baptized into Christ!" And then they added the hashtag, "#bornagain." So good to see this! Good news from California this week!

And then we have an update from Herbert Moore, who preaches down in Stockbridge, Georgia. He simply says that "The angels in heaven are rejoicing." We don't have a name or any information other than that, but as a preacher I just love what's going on here as he's obviously explaining what's about to happen. Baptism is a very simple act of obedience to God, but the preacher does have a role in making sure the person is completely immersed in water and that its done in a safe and dignified way, and brother Moore is simply explaining that. But it's so good to see this!

We had many more that we could have shared this morning, but I'll wrap it up with these three from the Airport Road congregation in Mombossa, Kenya. They posted an update a few days and say that "Dickson, Priscilla and Irene gave their lives to Christ this morning. We rejoice in the Lord together with them as they start a new life in Christ. We are thankful for sincere hearts seeking Christ. We appreciate your prayers for these three souls. To God be the Glory." As always, we share these examples by way of encouragement, and this is our invitation to you to obey the gospel. If you have not yet done what these men and women have

done, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship this morning, or give me a call, send a text, or send an email using the contact information in our bulletin or on the website, and we would love to study together.

This morning, we are continuing in the very last chapter in our study of Hebrews! And in this last chapter we find ourselves in what we might describe as the “invitation” part of this message. As we have said from the beginning of our study back in January, the book of Hebrews perhaps started out as a sermon. So here in December we’re pretty much looking at the invitation, the conclusion, the part of the sermon where the author boils it down to what these people actually need to be doing. He’s made the argument throughout the book that Jesus is better, and now we come to what this really means in very practical terms. Well, at the end of our study last week, we noted how the author tells us to imitate Jesus, bearing his reproach, and following him outside the camp. We do this because **“...here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.”** He makes a distinction, then, between worship in the temple and worship under the new covenant. Instead of entering Jerusalem to be made holy, we must follow Jesus outside the city to be made holy. But what about those sacrifices that were made under the Old? Do we no longer have anything to offer to God in worship? This brings us to Hebrews 13:15-16, where we have the last of 13 **“let us”** statements in this book, and the final **“let us”** is an invitation to offer up a **“sacrifice of praise to God.”** So yes, we still have something to offer up to God under the New Covenant, but like Jesus, our sacrifice is also better.

This morning, then, let’s take a look at Hebrews 13:15-16, and let’s keep an eye out for the sacrifices we offer under the New Covenant. This is Hebrews 13:15-16. With reference to Jesus, the author says,

***15 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. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.***

This morning, let’s take a few moments to notice the two kinds of sacrifices God wants us to make (even though we no longer worship in the temple).

**I. And we start with verse 15, where the author refers, first of all, to this SACRIFICE OF PRAISE TO GOD.**

There is so much in this one verse, but let’s start with the reminder that this **“sacrifice of praise to God”** is to be offered up **“through Him then.”** And this is obviously a reference to what we just studied last week, that we bear his reproach, following Jesus outside the gate, where he died for us. Because of what he’s done, and because we are looking for this city which is to come, we offer a sacrifice of praise **“through Him.”** So we learn from this, first of all, that what we know about Jesus is incredibly important, and what we know about what he’s done for us is important. We aren’t simply and blindly following a command, but when we worship, we worship because we are overwhelmed with what he’s done for us. And that’s the message of Chapters 1-12, that Jesus truly is better, he’s offered himself for us, and in response, we offer this sacrifice of praise, **“through him.”** As our great high priest, Jesus is the go-between. We praise God **“through him.”**

We should also note that we offer this sacrifice of praise **“continually.”** Under the Law of Moses, sacrifices were offered by individuals quite sporadically. Sacrifices were offered on certain special days and special occasions throughout the year. As a nation, though, I believe that the fire under the altar was to burn continually. And so in this regard, it sounds like the author of Hebrews may be making a contrast. Unlike under the Law of Moses, where sacrifices were offered sporadically, under Jesus, we have the ability to offer up sacrifices continually. Now, I don’t think this means that we have to sing 24/7, but like Paul’s command to **“Pray without ceasing,”** and **“in everything give thanks”** (in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18), it seems that the author

is encouraging an attitude of continual praise. When we are truly thankful, we tend to express it – in our families, in what we do for fun, in how we interact with people at work, and in all areas of life. Some compared it to Niagara Falls. Have you guys been there? I think I’ve been two or three times – once on vacation, once to visit family, and once to meet with the church there – but to stand next to those falls is truly amazing. Millions upon millions of gallons tumble over those falls, one drop after another, wave after wave, and it never stops. So also with our praise. We offer this sacrifice **“continually.”**

But I should also point out that just because we praise God continually doesn’t mean that we don’t need to come together as a group. Daily worship is important, but worship on the Lord’s Day seems to be especially important. We might compare it to marriage: It’s important that I love my wife every day, but that certainly doesn’t mean that I can ignore our anniversary! We just had the 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of our first date a few weeks ago. We’re coming up on the anniversary of our first kiss (on December 28). I remember it well: Out in front of her house on an air force base on a cold night in Illinois, while her entire family watched through the blinds! So again, it’s important that we love each other continually, but that certainly doesn’t diminish the importance of special days. So also with worship. We come together on the anniversary of the Lord’s resurrection, the first day of every week.

And the fact that worship is to happen **“continually”** also reminds us that we can praise God anywhere, with the emphasis here being that we no longer have to worship God in the temple. Do you remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4? She chimed in on that debate concerning where to worship: Up here in Samaria or down in Jerusalem? And Jesus replies by saying, **“Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”** And then he said, **“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”** Worshiping **“continually,”** then, means that our worship is not limited to one place.

And then, **“continually”** also reminds us that worship does not depend on our circumstances. We can worship in good times and in difficult times, in times of clarity and in times of spiritual doubt and confusion. We think of Job, who lost everything and was able to say (in Job 1:21), **“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”** Even in difficult circumstances, Job was able to praise God **“continually.”** The same goes for Paul and Silas who sang hymns of praise at midnight in a Roman jail in Philippi. The same goes for the old preacher who was robbed many years ago. When he got home that night he wrote in his journal and said, “Let me be thankful, first because I have never been robbed before; second, because although they took my wallet, they didn’t take my life; third, because they took everything I had, it wasn’t much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.” That’s thanking God **“continually.”**

We should also note (in verse 15) that praise is described as **“sacrifice.”** Obviously, the people who read or heard this message for the first time would have thought of bulls, and goats, and lambs, and birds, and grain being offered – first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. Under the New Covenant, though, the imagery changes: Now, we are the sacrifice. We think of Paul’s words in Romans 12:1, where he said, **“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”** And notice, Paul also has the idea that our sacrifice is to be continual. Our lives are a sacrifice of praise to God. But here in Hebrews 13:15, our praise is specifically referred to as being a **“sacrifice.”** In other words, just because we aren’t offering a bull or a goat doesn’t mean that we come before God empty-handed. We come to him with our **“sacrifice of praise.”**

And this leads us to the fact that our sacrifice is to be **“the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.”** Our worship here is to be verbal. Words are involved. We might think of what Jesus says concerning the Pharisees

in Matthew 15:8, when he calls them hypocrites and quotes Isaiah saying, ***“THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.”*** The honoring God with their lips part was good, but what they said did not match what they were doing. Without the heart being engaged, worship is worthless; even worse than worthless, it’s offensive to God.

And I know singing isn’t mentioned specifically, but isn’t that what we’re talking about here? We think of what Paul says in Colossians 3:16, ***“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*** Singing allows us to express emotion in a way that merely speaking does not. And not only that, but singing allows all of us to participate, together, at the same time. We are not to get drunk, Paul says in Ephesians 5, but we are to ***“...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”*** Just notice how Hebrews 13, Colossians 3:16, and Ephesians 5:19 all tie singing to being thankful. Singing is how we offer this ***“sacrifice of praise”*** to the Lord. This ***“sacrifice of praise,”*** then, is described as being ***“the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.”*** This is the first sacrifice that we offer.

## II. All of this leads us to verse 16, where we have a second category of sacrifices we offer, the SACRIFICE OF A SHARED LIFE.

***“And do not neglect doing good and sharing,”*** he says, ***“for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*** Oh, and by the way, you know the first and second commandments, according to Jesus? Love God and love your neighbor as yourself – we have both of these in verses 15 and 16! We sing to God and we share. We love God, and we love our neighbors! And let’s notice how we have a reference to ***“sacrifice”*** in both verses; so, there’s a contrast, but there’s also a caution: Don’t neglect this! And he gives the reminder in the form of a warning against ***“neglect,”*** because it’s so easy to miss this. It’s easy sing right next to somebody and to be completely unaware that this person might need something that I have. So, it’s easy, to get out of balance here. We obviously need to be praising God, but we can’t be so focused on heaven that we are of no earthly good. There’s a practical aspect to the sacrifices we offer. We sing, but we must also serve and share (right here and now).

And as with the sacrifice in verse 15, this one also has a parallel in the Law of Moses. Some of those sacrifices back in those days were to be shared with the widows and orphans. The author is saying, though, that God’s concern for those in need continues from one covenant to the other. And this taking care of physical needs is described by Paul in Philippians 4:18, where he writes the church in Philippi and says, ***“But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”*** And by the way, the only other place this phrase ***“a fragrant aroma”*** is found elsewhere in scripture is in Ephesians 5, where Paul says that, ***“...just as Christ also loved you,”*** he ***“...gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”*** Because he sacrificed himself for us, we sacrifice ourselves for others. And the truth is: We cannot praise God (as we are told to do in verse 15) if we are selfishly holding on to our blessings and refusing to help others (as we are told to do in verse 16).

Well, how does ***“doing good and sharing”*** praise God? How is this some kind of God-honoring sacrifice? As I see it, when we willingly pass along some of what God has given us to help others, we’re making a public statement that we are living not for this world, but for the city to come. We’re proving in a very concrete way that God means something to us, that we take his word seriously. We are proving that God makes a difference

in our lives. We're proving that God is more valuable than stuff. We are proving that we worship the Creator, not the creation.

And there's another aspect of this: When we share, it gives us yet another chance to praise God, to make God look good. If my mom gives me a giant plate of Christmas cookies, I can certainly take those home and hide them and eat them myself over the next month or two; however, if I share those with others and say, "Hey, these are from my mom." You know what I've done? I've just made my mom a celebrity. And whoever I give those to will have an even better opinion of my mom than they did before. So also when we share God's blessings. The author describes *"doing good and sharing"* as sacrifices with which *"God is pleased,"* because *"sharing"* is an act of worship; *"doing good"* is a sacrifice.

### Conclusion:

**\*\*PPT\*\*** And as we close, that leads to the last thing I'd like to point out from these two verses: Unlike some relationships here in this life, God tells us exactly what it takes to make him happy! I think most of us probably know at least one or two people who almost seem to try to keep it a secret as to what it takes to make them happy. Hopefully your spouse isn't like this, and hopefully your supervisor at work isn't like this. But there are some people who are completely unclear as to what they want out of us. And so, we may try, and it's almost like they're just waiting for us to fail. God, though (thankfully) is not like that at all! You want to know what makes God happy? 1.) Offer him a sacrifice from the fruit of your lips, giving thanks to his name, and 2.) Do good and share, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Aren't you thankful for that; that God tells us exactly what he wants?

This is our mission – as individuals, and also as a congregation: Praise God and do good! This is who we are. These are the sacrifices we offer, and our goal is to please God. How do we apply this? First of all, as far as praising God continually, I would suggest that we count our blessings, that we make a list of the ways God has blessed us. Try going on a walk, and see if you can think of things to be thankful for, for as long as you're walking, a walk of prayer, so to speak. I can do that for half an hour or more, easily. And then praise God for those things. Or if you're not up for walking, try to go for 24 hours this week without complaining about anything at all, but being thankful for as much as possible. Write it down if you can, and look at that list at the end of that 24 hour period. As God once said through the prophet Malachi (in Malachi 1:11), *"For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations."* Take a day to focus on praising and thanking God, making a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips that give thanks to his name.

Secondly, in terms of doing good and sharing, I would suggest that we actively look for ways to do this. If you need any ideas, give me a call! I will not let you down! We have two members in nursing facilities right now. We have a lawn that needs to be mowed, sidewalks that need to be shoveled. We have a church library that could probably use some attention right about now. If you have the least bit of tech knowledge, get in touch with Silas Morris if you'd like to get trained on running the livestream. I worshiped in Las Vegas back in September, and that morning all four of their tech people happened to be either sick or out of town all at the same time, and one woman was running around in a panic, completely unfamiliar with the system, and trying to figure it out at the last minute. I'm just saying it's good to have more people trained on that. John is the latest to jump on board, and I think he will tell you that it is doable. We have a building that needs to be cleaned. A week or two ago, I was thinking about this and I was just wondering: How many times do I use the bathroom in my own home every week? I've never counted (and don't plan on it), but the figure that came to my mind was 60. And then I realized: We may have 60 people use the bathrooms here in this building once a week. Do we think those need to be cleaned? That falls on somebody, but you can lighten that load. There are

so many ways to do good and share, but we need to be open to it, and we need to go looking for those opportunities.

We've been challenged by God's word this morning. Thank you so much for your kind attention. We have two more lessons to wrap up the book of Hebrews this year. Let's go to God in prayer and then John will lead us in a song as we think about what we've learned this morning:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for allowing us to come before you in worship – again and again – to offer a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that give thanks to your name. You have blessed us in many ways, so we ask for your help as we work to bless those around us. Use us, Father, in any way you see fit.

We love you, Father, and we come to you today through Jesus, who gave everything. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)