

Sunday November 19th sermon: "We Have an Altar – The God of all Comforts (Pt 40)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

Hebrews 13:9-14; Leviticus 16:27

Scripture declares that God has made all believers priests to Himself!

We are never to offer Him sin offerings, but only spiritual sacrifices of peace and praise and worship because He saved us.

Peter informs us that we who were nobodies, are now made royal priests, fit to offer spiritual sacrifices!

God has assigned to believer priests offerings different from Aaron's and Christ's – He has ordained our offerings of worship, and praise, and thanksgiving, and obedience, and kindness to each other.

God has told us that with those sacrifices, made by His believer priests, He is well pleased!

All the glory for this astounding turn of events goes to our God and to the Lamb that was slain!

Hebrews 13 warns believers not to trust in strange doctrines and rituals with sacrifices and meats, such as the old Jewish religion under the Mosaic law. Rather, believers must be established in God's grace, His Gospel, our salvation through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Those who have been preoccupied with animal sacrifices, physical rituals, and strange doctrines have never received any profit from what they are clinging to.

This text summarizes Christ's teaching in John 6, that He is the Bread of Life, and that to partake of Him is to trust in Him, and believe His promises of salvation and everlasting life.

The Gospel grace that establishes our hearts comes from our spiritually feeding upon Christ's body and blood – not some ridiculous notion of transubstantiation, or trust in the eating of the symbols of the Lord's Table.

Christ offered up His actual body and blood as a sacrifice to God in our place, and for our crimes. We have no access to the physical body and blood, for now He is at God's right hand in glory, but we are given eternal life and forgiveness as we partake of those things spiritually by faith.

Any religion that requires a continuing physical offering for sin or other works of the law – the meats that Hebrews is warning against – will not profit anybody.

But even worse, those who still partake of those abolished and worthless physical things are barred from eating at the Altar of Christ, His sacrifice, and His priesthood. If you are still serving at the Old Testament Mosaic sacrificial tabernacle – or any other sacrifice than Christ's – you are barred from Christ and all His benefits.

The Lord's people eat at Christ's Altar by feeding upon His body and blood spiritually, in faith, putting all our trust in what he did, and what He promised – forgiveness of sins, redemption, and eternal life!

The Sacrifice of our Altar lives forever, and presents His sacrifice before God forever for us!

All others have no right to partake of Christ's Altar at all, which is profoundly sad, since what they depend on provides no life and no food at all.

That's because, under the rules of the Mosaic altar, the bodies of the Day of Atonement sin offerings, which Hebrews has focused upon, could not be eaten, but were taken outside the city walls and burnt up.

In the end, the animal sacrifices provided no food to eat at all, they provided no life at all, or sustenance, or forgiveness of sin. They were all used up, burned up, with nothing permanent left to show for it.

But our Altar, alive forevermore, provides food and drink indeed for believers – eternal life, and forgiveness forever, and peace with God!

We are to follow after our Altar outside the camp, against the crowd that rejects Him, outside the comforts of the religions of man, into His presence where He was sacrificed for us.

But notice the sad contrast: while we follow after Christ, to His Altar, to receive spiritual food and comfort and blessing, nobody followed the Old Testament sin offering outside the camp.

There was nothing left to follow after! It was all burnt up, and provided neither physical nor spiritual food, no forgiveness, and no meat.

We live forever by spiritual feeding upon Christ as the perpetual Bread of Life, at His Altar where we have a right to eat!

The reproach of Christ doesn't scare us away from keeping close to Him by His Altar.

Old Testament saints brought sacrifices to the altar, but only their priests could offer them to God.

But because we are made royal priests to our God, we have the privilege to bring our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving and worship and kindness and obedience directly to our God, and offer them ourselves!

There is no need, and no permission, for man-made "priests" to intervene between us and our God, between us and our High Priest, the Lord Jesus!

This is yet another example of our exclusive right to eat at the Altar of Christ – as priests ourselves come before Him, come into the Holiest place in heaven by Him, the place in the tabernacle where ordinary Old Testament saints could never go.

No wonder God has comforted us by His oath to Christ, to make Him our high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek!

All of this reminds us of that precious hymn:

Outside the camp unto Thy dear Name,
Draw me, O Lamb of God;
Far from the world with its sin and its shame,
Cleansed by the Savior's blood.
Outside the camp, 'tis a lonely place;
Outside the city wall;
Here on Thy breast let my soul ever rest;
Outside the camp with Thee.

Outside the camp unto Thy dear Name;
This in Thy Word I see.
Unto that Name, then I share in His shame;
Privileged place to be.
Feasting on Christ, His reproach to share;
Tempt not my soul away,
Naught can compare with the blessedness there,
Outside the camp with Thee.

Outside the camp unto Thy dear Name,
Blest gath'ring place for me.
Banner of love from Thy presence above;
Draw forth my soul to Thee.
Shame on my soul that I ever sought

Inside the walls to dwell,
Riches of grace, gazing here on Thy face,
Outside the camp with Thee.

Outside the camp unto Thy dear Name,
Lord, may I here be found;
Weaned from the world, with its pomp and its fame;
Resting on holy ground.
Outside the camp in Thy presence till
Earth's little day be done;
Then face to face, all Thy mercies to trace,
Inside the veil with Thee.