

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: About Worship

Lesson: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 NRSV

13 Let mutual affection continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶ So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" ⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

According to one media, the Bible is the best-selling book of all time with an estimated 5 billion copies sold and distributed. We, Christians, accept the Bible as an essential source of our religious life. Each of you, I presume, will have some of your favorite verses. In addition to the love of God and the salvation of Jesus Christ, the Bible gives us important lessons such as the preciousness of humanity, family order, marital relationships, happy life, and healthy communities. Among the many verses, chapter 13 of Hebrews we read today talks about what true worship is.

Friends, we gather at church every Sunday for worship. What is worship? What does worship mean? What does it mean to worship? And there are sacrifices that God accepts and sacrifices that He does not. What sacrifices does God accept and what sacrifices are pleasing to God?

When you hear my questions, you probably already have your answers. The worship we offer to God today was called sacrifice in the Old Testament times. When people participated in the sacrifice, they brought their sheep or goats to the priest and offered them to God. And those who made the sacrifice were forgiven of their sins. For people at that time, sacrifice was a time to receive forgiveness of sins. However, God did not accept everyone's sacrifice. As an example, we need to remember the story of Cain and Abel.

Abel was a shepherd, and Cain was a farmer. Abel offered the firstborn of the sheep and their fat to God, while Cain offered the produce of the soil. And, God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's. The reason is given in Hebrews 11:4. Let's read together: " By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts."

People look at outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. Abel was a man who believed in God and obeyed God's Word. But, Cain didn't obey God. Cain's heart was filled with anger, arrogance, and jealousy. Therefore, God accepted Abel's offering but did not accept Cain's.

After Jesus Christ came to earth, we no longer take sheep or goats to churches or synagogues because Jesus became our sheep and was sacrificed on the cross for us. Therefore, anyone who believes and confesses that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was resurrected and is still alive as the Son of God, can get forgiveness and become children of God. However, God still does not receive all worship if our lives are still full of anger, arrogance, jealousy, and sins like Cain even though our lips worship and confess God's love because we are still in the chains of sin.

Therefore, the book of Hebrews explains the Old Testament regulations on sacrifice in relation to the love of Jesus Christ so that we can understand it, how we should worship, what the life of a worshiper is, and what worship God is pleased with.

First, let's read Hebrews 13:1: "Let mutual affection continue." In other words, it means continuing to love our brothers and sisters. I understand love as forgiveness. All of us are not perfect. We are weak. And it is easy to fall into the temptation of sin. David, whom many consider a great king, was also not perfect, and he sinned. That is why we need to forgive and be forgiven by each other for our shortcomings and limitations. Loving and forgiving our brothers and sisters is a sign of the kingdom of God we experience on our journey of faith.

Next, we read verse 2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." We should remember the story of the Good Samaritan. As the Good Samaritan saw those in need, he did not ignore them and helped them. In particular, Luke 14:13-14 says: "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Most people are used to giving and

taking. Some even say that in order for a relationship to last long, it has to be a relationship of giving and taking. When we have a relationship with others, we prefer to be a friend with people who give us something back when we give something to them. So we prefer to have relationships with people who are on our level because we can get back what we give.

However, Jesus encourages us to give to those who cannot repay us, because God knows all things and will repay us on their behalf. Therefore, when we encounter people in need, we should help them without any calculation.

Let's read verse 3 together: "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." This verse is similar to verse 2 we just read. At the time when the book of Hebrews was written, there were persecuted Christians. Many Christians were imprisoned and punished for their faith. At the time, supporting imprisoned and persecuted people was a huge risk. Although there is no more persecution of Christians today, there are still people who are poor, marginalized, and minorities in our society. We need to pray for them as Christians, and if possible, we can support them and do something for them.

Let's read verse 4: "Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers." A new word was coined in S. Korea: graduate from marriage. It means that couples get married because they loved passionately when they were young, but they decide to live separately without divorce after living together for more than 30 years because of many scars and wounded hearts caused by their very different personalities, lifestyles, and unresolved differences of opinion. Marital life is not always easy for anyone. That's why books on healthy marriage are always in the best-selling section of bookstores. There are personality type tests such as MBTI or Enneagram. According to those personality type tests, there are countless personalities, and everyone has different personalities, and we have to try to understand and accept each other's differences. Christian teachings to love and forgive one another can be applied to a healthy marriage as well. We should constantly try to love and forgive our spouse's weaknesses.

Finally, let's read verse 5: "Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you.'"

Many people live their lives to make a lot of money. Especially, people in Korea work very hard during the week and relax on a trip or camping or hotel on the weekends believing this is true life. And some work very hard during the week and take a nap until 2 O'clock on the weekends to relieve their tiredness and stress. And some say that the reason they cannot worship at church on Sunday is that they are just too busy to go to church. About this I saw a posting on Facebook: According to it, "The average church time in America is just about 90 minutes to 2 hours a week. For a grand total of about 4 days in attendance time an entire year. On the other hand, the average American spent 2 hours a Day watching Netflix in 2020. That's about 600 hours or approximately 25 days a Year. We are not too busy."

In many people's life priorities these days, God, church, and worship are often pushed back or replaced by money and entertainment. Some say they believe in God but don't want to go to church, read the Bible, or pray. All judgment will be made by God, but it is difficult for me to understand their words of loving God and loving neighbors without attending worship, reading the Bible, and praying.

For us, worship should be a time when the love of Christ in our hearts is restored. It should be a time when our weaknesses and shortcomings and sins are filled with the love of Christ and forgiven. And worship should be a time for us to be renewed through the love and grace of Christ. And for us, worship is not only an hour worship service that we gather at the church on Sunday, but our life after church should be worship. God accepted Abel's worship. Why? Not only did Abel offer sacrifices to God, but his life was already worship. However, God did not accept Cain's worship. Why? Cain made an offering to God, but his life was not worshipping God.

Siblings in Christ, it is very important that we gather at church every Sunday morning to praise God, worship God, pray, read and listen to His Word. However, when we return to our daily lives after church, it is also very important that our daily lives worship God. Thus, let's continue to try to love each other as siblings in Christ, show our hospitality to strangers, neighbors, marginalized, oppressed, and minorities by the love of God, and love and forgive our partners, and invite your friends and family to the worship of our lives. That is why we gathered here this morning and that is why we do worship to God as the children of God. Amen.