

Live It! (I)

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[0 : 0 0] This morning we are going to look at the last section, or the section we read, not the last section, it's the second last section of Hebrews. We'll do the last section which is 20 to 25 next Sunday morning.

God willing, but today we're going to look at this section that we read on page 1211, which is Hebrews 13. And I guess as I mentioned with the children, if there was to be a pivotal verse that sums up this section, it would be verse 15, which is, Through Jesus therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

And really that is what we'll be looking at a little bit today. This section, it's like the end of any kind of good letter. It kind of focuses again and nails the theme of the letter.

You know well now that the theme of this letter to this Jewish believers who are tempted to give up their faith and return to a Judaistic ritualism is nailing the supremacy of Jesus, the supremacy of Jesus Christ as Lord and as God.

And there's no turning back. There's no giving up. There's no pretending that there's a different way. And so the writer is encouraging this people to think of what they possess and what they own and what is so great about being believers in Jesus Christ.

[1 : 3 4] And so there's this theme I guess here of our lives should be offerings of praise to God, a sacrifice of praise.

You know when we come to church or when we say that we're Christians, we're confessing his name. We're saying that we belong to Jesus. And so what Hebrews the writer is saying here is he's saying well what about the fruit of your life?

Does that match the confession of your lips so that you say you believe in Jesus? We say we believe in Jesus. Therefore does our lives bear the fruit of that and does our life?

What kind of song are we singing to use that imagery with regard to Jesus Christ and his Lordship of our lives?

We confess him and therefore is our life reflective of that? Is it a life that is sweet and gracious and melodic at that level if I follow through on that imagery?

[2 : 3 8] Like a choir of angels. Is that the kind of spiritual praise that our life or day-to-day living offers? Is it a sweet aroma that reflects the change that Jesus Christ has made in our lives and the grace that he gives us?

Or is our Christian life, is it discordant and flat and out of tune? And out of tune with what we confess, is it more like the spiritual Eurovision?

Is that the kind of life we have, you know, really rotten songs that come up once a year or whatever? Or, sorry, maybe you like Eurovision. Excuse me, I'm just going to put on my glasses, okay?

This finally happened after 50 years. I have to put on my glasses to see what I'm seeing here and I have to wear them here so I can look at you differently. So I want to keep my eye on you, but I also want to keep my eye on the text.

So it's very important that we know and that we have an understanding of our Christian lives and what our Christian lives are like. Are the lives that are going to be singing praises to God.

[4 : 01] And what's very important here, now that's rubbish. I'll just have to squint, okay? And again, what's very important here is the significance of the Christian community.

And we're going to be looking at that here, the significance of the Christian community. And how that is the way we reflect, or the way that we, how it reflects the theme of our lives, is how we interact with one another in the Christian community.

And that's where we primarily live out grace. I'm going to thump this again and again and again today, is that we're drawn into Christian community. And we live out our Christian lives first and foremost with each other in Christian community.

And therefore we have here, as the letter draws to a close, seven characteristics of living out melodic Christian life with one another.

And we're going to look at them very briefly, I assure you. But we will look at each of them as we give it, we have a kind of ratatat here in the first few verses, particularly verses 1 to 6, of the kind of living that Christ wants us to live as a reflection of thanksgiving for the grace that He has gifted to us.

[5 : 29] The salvation that we don't work out, we don't earn. This is not about earning our salvation. This is about living in gratitude with His transforming grace in our lives.

And the first is Philadelphia. Okay, that's the first thing He says here, keep on loving each other as brothers. Brotherly love, that's the first thing. And that's Philadelphia.

That's exactly the word that's used here in Greek. So we have Philadelphia as being the first thing. Brotherly are family love within the community. And in many ways it's the kind of overarching theme of the song of our lives that the others all fall into or that play into.

It's this love that is first of all pure because it comes from Christ and is then peaceable. And it's a love that also covers a multitude of sins in relationship with one another.

It's a love that's accountable and it's a love that serves. And it's not a love that is the outworking of our fickle emotions. It's not just how we feel about someone on any particular day.

[6 : 38] Sometimes you might feel a lot better about people than others. But it's more than that emotion that is within us. It is an act of our will that will never walk away from people because that reflects the love of Jesus Christ for us.

You angry or frustrated or wanting to give up on people, community of the church. Do you understand the grace where Jesus says, I'll never walk away from you.

And therefore we play that into our Christian lives that we are committed and persevering with one another. Because that is a reflection of what Jesus is like with us.

Sin in our hearts is all about me. Grace in our hearts is all about others. And so it's that recognition that we've moved from a very significant place where life is all about me.

And I'm the centre of my universe to where it's all about Christ. And Christ in His grace and love as Lord and God is the centre and we serve and love Him.

[7 : 45] Because that is how we have been made. Philadelphia loving one another. How does that outwork? It outworks itself in many different ways. The second way or the first way if we're looking at Philadelphia as a kind of cover all and how it's outworked is in hospitality.

This is how we fix our eyes on Jesus and we work out grace in our community. First is keep on loving each other. Second verse, do not forget to entertain strangers by doing so.

Some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Entertainment, hospitality, it means opening our home. The first is about opening our heart.

So the second outworking of grace in the community is that we open our homes not just to one another but to visitors that come to us. Christian visitors, I think probably the very first practical outworking of this command in the New Testament would have been to itinerant preachers or Christians who were in a community and maybe it was dangerous for them to be out late or in the dark and there wasn't ins or places for them to stay.

So the Christians opened their homes and they invited them in and they didn't know these people very often. They would be Christians who would be travelling or preachers who were travelling and yet they have this great encouragement to do so because they don't know when they are entertaining angels.

[9 : 20] They don't believe that anymore. But it's speaking of this open hearted, open housed, open resource of our lives that those, maybe particularly those who are in most need, those less least likely to reciprocate.

Oh yeah, we can all invite people because we know we'll get an invite back and that's good and right and proper and important within our fellowship. But here is the idea is kind of those who are least likely, least able to invite you back.

Those who are maybe passing through, those who are visitors or strangers to us, those who may be angels.

And that I think is a general attitude that we look to have, not just for ourselves and not just among the Christian community but even potentially at a wider level. How will we evangelise? How do we find it easy to share the gospel?

Will we open our hearts and we open our homes because that's where we are and that's what we are. And that will be what reflects the Lordship of our lives most. Now it's easier for some than for others but it's certainly something we look to do as a people that we don't forget to be hospitable and to entertain visitors and strangers as it is termed here by opening our homes.

[10 : 51] What's the third thing that reflects this Christ centredness, this sweet melody of our lives? Well, it's empathy. Third thing is remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners and those who are ill-treated as if you yourself were suffering.

So there's empathy here as a Christian characteristic, a recognition that the church and the people of God are suffering and it was very practical here in Hebrews because they were a persecuted people and some of them would have been in prison.

Some of them had been in prison. Remember earlier on in the book he commends them for going to visit their brothers and sisters in prison and caring for them and loving them and it was a great testimony to the care that the Christian community had for one another even with the threat and the cloud of martyrdom being over them.

They had this great love and this is the second wave of persecution as it were and he's encouraging them to again visit the suffering church. You know, sometimes I think we think a friend in need is a pain in the neck and often we feel that we've got so many of our own needs and so many of our own burdens we can't think of other people and their needs and oh no, there's need here and they're suffering and there's commitment required from us.

But he says here, very interesting concept, he says as if you, as if and those who are being treated, ill-treated as if you yourself are suffering.

[12 : 27] What's that principle that he's giving us there? We would maybe say it differently, we would say putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

That's what he's asking us to do. Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you yourself are suffering like them and imagine what you would want from the Christian community and he says that's how we're to have an empathetic heart and mind and action towards those who are in need.

Be their advocate, speak on their behalf, support them. Now for us that might mean a micro level in the congregation, those who are going through difficulty, might not be many in prison.

Although having said that, can I just broaden that and say great thing to visit people in prison, whether they're Christians or not. Wonderful ministry. Peter does that and some others are involved in it and we're visiting and shocked in other places.

It's a great ministry, people are isolated and alone and although this might not primarily refer to just the wider group of prisoners, it's surely a great thing for us to do.

[13 : 39] So at that macro level, thinking of injustice and injustice in the world in which we live in whatever form that we stand against that and that we put ourselves in the shoes of the vast majority of people in this world who are not like us and who don't have what we have and who don't own what we own and don't have the resources that we have and aren't safe as we are and aren't protected as we are and are vulnerable and lost and hungry and needy and we empathize particularly with our Christian community at that level.

So that's the third thing. In terms of the theme of the song of our life, the fourth thing is purity. Moral purity, marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure for God will judge the adulteran and sexually immoral.

So cheap grace for us is grace that confesses with our lips that Jesus is Lord but doesn't allow him to be Lord of our lives, of our marriages, of our morality, of our thinking because grace is something that results in a fundamental change of our nature which sinfully is selfish and unfaithful and proud which will reveal itself in our sexual relations unless we allow grace to transform them and is radically again for us counter cultural.

It's protecting that core reality of family and of marriage and of the Christian community again and it's reminding us that the Christian community is to be a place for those who are married, for those who are single, for those who need to be part of a family in their lives.

God judges and will judge a lifestyle that hasn't bended to his will, that hasn't said my lifestyle and my morality needs to match the confession of my lips.

[15 : 43] Yes, of course there's forgiveness for us, of course we fall and make mistakes, but we can't live a life of presumption and live a life of deliberate, rebellious, immoral living just because everyone else is doing it around us.

We can't lower our standards, grace shouldn't lower our standards, it should heighten them because we recognise his pattern, we recognise his model, we recognise his grace and his strength and his model for us.

So purity. And the fifth thing is generosity. In that first section, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have for God said, never will I leave you, never will I seek you, I seek with confidence, the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.

And maybe if you flick on to verse 16, which is kind of related, and do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. So he talks about not having your lives free from the love of money, be content and be generous, share with those and be sacrificial in that.

So it's a great mark of grace and it's a beautiful melodic song that we sing when we're generous in our lives and when we're not stingy and selfish.

[17 : 04] It's the same characteristics, isn't it, that apply to morality and apply to love and everything else, is that we often, our attitude to money will reveal our heart and reveal sometimes a greedy or a self-centered heart or one that regards materialism as the answer to happiness.

If I possess a lot of things, I will be a happy bunny. I will be really able to rejoice. And it's that misunderstanding that happiness is a spiritual reality that comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ and not the amount of things that we own or possess in our lives.

I was reading this week about a very sad man who spent all his life travelling between Austria and I think it was the Netherlands because he had a massive horde of paintings that had been owned by Jewish people that had been confiscated or stolen or taken mainly during the war from them by the Nazis and he spent his life guarding something like 1500 of these pictures and paintings in two houses selling one occasionally in order to live by and he sat alone and he spoke to these paintings and he lived his life in fear of being found out and there was such an abject sadness about the thought that his life revolved around protecting these pictures that now have come out into the open and he's so ill and old that he can't even enjoy anything about them anyway.

But the whole idea that possessions and wealth bring us that, what we're looking for, but the whole of Hebrews is about finding our generosity and finding our happiness in communion with one another, in sharing with one another, in giving of the grace that we've been given so freely and shared with so much by Jesus in our relationship with others.

So being generous with what we have, it's not coming with us. We can't take it naked, we were born naked, we will return to the womb, naked we came from the naked, we will return to the ground.

[19 : 36] We will not take any of it with us. So let's be generous with what we have because our confidence is in the presence of the Lord with us, that he's not going to forsake us and he is going to be our helper as the writer quotes from the scripture about the character and the nature of grace in our lives.

Share with those, be generous, be open, be extravagant in our generosity to Christ and to his people, especially with our hearts.

So the sick thing is submission in terms of the attitude and the attitude of gratitude I guess is maybe what it is. In verse 7, we say, remember your leaders who spoke the word to you, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

And then it goes on and if we get turn over to 17, we have obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give account of them so that what will be a joy not a burden, pray for us and so on.

And there's this whole idea again that what is being spoken of here is our attitude to one another in the light of God's gospel community and in the light of the structures that he has gifted to us for the preservation and for the blessing and for the fruitfulness of that kingdom and of that community.

[21 : 05] And that we recognise and submit to God's structures and to God's word and to God's example of, we hope, godly leadership and also your patience and perseverance when that isn't the case with your leaders.

The delegated authority that they have is not their own, it's a heavy weight that they bear, it's one to which they will be accountable to God in the day of judgment and they want to serve because that's what the leadership is, it's service, it's serving in love and they want to serve with joy.

We spoke about that yesterday, or David McPherson spoke about that yesterday at the history conference. How can we, this is slightly different, but he said, how can we, I was very struck by it. He said, how can we share the gospel of joy, gospel of good news, which came by the angels with good news of great joy.

How can we do that joylessly? You know, you've got to believe in Jesus. And isn't that how we do that so often? We share the gospel of joy joylessly.

We live joylessly. I'm not saying we're skipping around and wearing bright clothes, never in his funky. That's not the kind of joy that we're speaking about. It's that deep-seated reality that Christ has transformed who we are and that whatever is in our lives we can be joyful because the Lord is my helper, because he will never leave us our forsakers and be given a message that has transformed us and forgiven us and renewed us and given us a future. I don't know what that's got to do with anything to do with this, but it was important to say. Well, it does because it talks about that their work will be done with joy and not with a burden.

[22 : 53] And so we recognise pastoral oversight, we recognise the pastoral accountability, we recognise that we care for one another and you pray and support us as we seek to pray and support you, pray for and support you.

And we recognise that it's not a hierarchy, it's a different role that we have. We all have different roles and that we're a community of God's people together, recognising what God has appointed and God has done and submitting to that for Christ's sake.

So that's the sick thing. And the last thing that I want to mention, I'll spend just a few moments at the end on this, is citizenship. I've just used one word for each of these points, that there's Philadelphia, this is family love, there's hospitality, there's empathy, there's purity, there's generosity, there's submission and there's citizenship.

And so this last section really from verse 8 to verse 14, which is the bits that we haven't really looked at, it's very much about Christ and it's very much about this looking for the city that is to come in verse 14, for we do not have an enduring city, we're looking for a city that's to come.

So it's talking about Christ as our King and the city to which we're looking forward to that we are citizens of. This Christ who is our King is unchanging, isn't it? Jesus Christ verse 8, the same yesterday, today and forever.

[24 : 26] That's why He's much better. That's why these people were being asked to hold on, even in the midst of persecution. When nobody else around them was believing, when it was a struggle, when it was a battle, He was saying, hold on, because Christ is much better and you're heading to a much better place.

He is the same yesterday, today and forever in what He has done and what He is doing and what He will do in the future. Christ is this timeless, overarching, supreme, loving, sacrificial being in our hearts.

And in reality in heaven through His Trinitarian glory. And in this kingdom or in this city where we are already citizens looking forward to, and I've put that if you see the questions for Wednesday night for the city groups, you'll see that we're going to spend a little time on Wednesday night looking at the heavenly city, particularly in Revelation.

But what's the mark of citizenship? Well, unsurprisingly, isn't it? It's grace. Look at verse 9, do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

It's good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which they were in danger of going back to, which are of no value to those who eat them. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle of no right to eat.

[26 : 01] So grace is the mark of our citizenship. We belong to Jesus Christ. He has gifted us eternal life through His sacrifice on the cross.

We have received that grace and that love and that forgiveness as a gift. And therefore it's now the mark of everything that we do in the kingdom of God.

So often, and what the writer here is saying is that so often you can get sidetracked, you know? Don't be carried away by strange teachings which have no value, but be strengthened by grace.

Strange teachings, you know? It's easy to be diverted of grace and the centrality of grace in our lives. It's easy to be interrupted or infatuated with flighty, strange teachings that people come up with every so often.

Well up from Christendom every so often. Strange teachings that move away from grace. Daft obsessions, minor doctrines, theological dead ends that aren't going anywhere and that haven't come from anywhere, that are simply nuts. And so often we can get sidetracked by strange doctrines, by things that aren't central to the faith and that deny the centrality of grace.

[27 : 27] We can be preoccupied, we can become neurotic, we can become experts in theological trivia, elevate things that they have no right to elevation in our Christian thinking in our lives, leaving us isolated and weak, needing to be strengthened by grace.

Grace will always strengthen us because it will take us to the core of our faith and to Jesus Christ Himself. We should really be only, there's only one single issue thing that we should be as Christians.

And that's grace filled single issue Christians. That's our single issue. Should be nothing else. There isn't anything that comes on the level with grace to be a single issue of your Christian life or mine.

Bizarre if it is. Ditch it. Because the only single issue we have is grace which strengthens us and which flows from our hearts and is the prism through which we ought to see everything.

It's what unhooks the hang-ups that so often Christians spend their time thinking about. There are no grace caveats in the kingdom. There's no place, there's no time, there's no theological understanding, there's no study that leaves grace out. Because it will be strange and diverted and weaken our lives.

[28 : 55] Let grace strengthen us. Ritual religion going to church in and of itself. None of these things will replace grace which of course we reflect in our worship together.

So we recognise that we, grace is the mark of the citizenship. Christ is our king in this kingdom and in this city. And in this kingdom we remain learners. We're disciples. We're learners.

And this little section which goes back to the Old Testament again, to the High Priest and to the example of the sacrifice outside the city wall and how that relates to Christ. It all reminds us, I don't have the time to go into that, but it all reminds us that we learn from the Old Testament shadows.

Beautifully pointers towards Jesus, all the Passover and all the Atonement Day and all the coming out of Egypt and all the slavery and the freedom and all of that points forward to what Jesus was coming to do.

And they are types that point us to Jesus Christ so we can learn from them. We're students, we're disciples and we're to be those who feed on Christ and who follow Christ.

[30 : 07] Because what he's saying here is we have an altar from which those who minister at Tabernacle have no right to eat. So we go to Christ. Christ is our sacrifice. He is the bread of life for us.

That is whom we feed on. And if they want to go back to the priesthood where in the Old Testament priesthood, the priest would go and he would be able to take some of the meat from the sacrifice and eat it from himself.

He says, that's not what it's about anymore. You can't eat at that Old Testament shadowy place and still partake of Christ. You've got no right to eat of both. You only put your trust in and feed on Christ.

And we are all, we believe in the priesthood of all believers that we all have access to the Father through Jesus Christ and we feed on him. So we feed on Christ. We learn from Christ. We grow in Christ.

And also we follow Christ in going bearing the disgrace He bore. It's an interesting picture that there's this part of the day, the Passover day, was the goat.

[31 : 14] The sins of the people were laid on and the goat, in the Old Testament, the goat was symbolically, was put outside the city, the wilderness, the place where God wasn't and his people weren't.

And it was to be sin was to be, you know, got rid of it that way. Symbolically the sin was laid on the head of the goat and it was put outside the city. And here it says that Jesus also interestingly, didn't he suffered outside the city, gates on Calvary Hill near the rubbish dump.

He was sent out into the wilderness. He was bearing our sins so that we don't need to be in the wilderness far from God and we don't need to be judged for our own sins, but we can accept the Christ who did that for us.

So Christ left his holy ground into the wilderness outside of God's fellowship to give us, to bring us in, to bring us in.

So we're in fellowship with God. We're forgiven and we belong, eternally we belong. So he asks us to follow Christ what? Outside the city.

[32 : 34] Let us therefore go to him outside the camp bearing the disgrace he bore for we have no enduring city here looking for a city that succumb. What does that mean? Kind of paradoxical. We're in the kingdom but we go out with Christ.

It means that we bear the shame or the disgraces it were of the cross, of following Jesus Christ. That we too are to be separate to God, holy, dedicated, unashamed of Jesus and the stigma of belonging to him.

And we let go and cut off our old selfish ways and selfish thinking, selfish heart. And we fix our eyes on Jesus as our Lord and God.

So we follow him today. Whatever that means for you and for me, we follow him. And we bear the disgrace that he bore. That is we associate with him and all that he stood for and all that he did on the cross for us.

So the question I leave with you today is where are you? And where are you in relation to Jesus? I think the Bible makes clear we can't be neutral.

[34 : 00] It says you can't have Christ plus a sinful lifestyle that you've chosen and you're not willing to give up. Yes, we will fall into sin, maybe we do, but we can't choose a sinful lifestyle and say I want Christ, but I still want all this.

He's not your Lord. He's not my Lord. It can't be lukewarm, half-hearted, dipping our life into Christ. We can't like him but avoid his lordship.

We can't do that. And then there may be some people who say, well, I like Jesus and I like coming to church, but I'm not willing him. I'm not willing for him to own my heart.

None of these particular attitudes will cut it with the sovereign God. He wants us to be those who give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him as our Lord and Savior and for Him, going to Him, seeking forgiveness and grace every day, following Him as Lord and Savior and singing His song in our lives.

What is the song? What is the praise of our lives? Therefore, through Jesus, you know, it's through Jesus we can do it on our own. Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess His name.

[35 : 30] You confess His name? I confess His name? What is the fruit of that confession in the song that we're singing? Is it melodic and sweet and Christlike and courageous and bold and beautiful and pure?

Or are we dull and out of tune and flat and discordant because we're not walking with Him? You know and I know about Me.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Mother God, we ask that you would expose our hearts to each other today. No, not to each other. Expose our own hearts before you to God.

Each of us would find that. That we would know that you are the God who is light and that light shines often into the darkest crevices and corners of our heart and wants us to give up sovereignty of some attitudes and some thinking.

And we know that that is costly, but we know it's also life giving. And we know then there is wholeness and freedom and fullness. And we pray for any who might be on the edges of commitment here today that they will fully give themselves to Jesus Christ and know that His grace is sufficient for them.

[37 : 03] And His strength is made perfect in our weakness. May our whole hope and reliance be on Jesus and may we not hold on to wrong thinking, wrong acting and wrong attitudes and may we not be separate from one another boldly going on in our own strength without the burden, without the privilege of community and family and sharing with and depending on each other.

So help us God we pray. Amen.