

The Main Thing

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] I was a wandering sheep. I did not love the fold. I did not love my father's voice. I loved afar to roam. I was a wandering sheep.

! Things are different now, but still inside of me there is a pool. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, we sing.

And I know that from my experience. I'm sure you would say the same as well. We wander, we go astray, we get carried away looking for a new way, something better, a new idea, better idea. Something that might fix us, something that might fill us up, something that might satisfy us in a way that we're not being satisfied.

Hebrews was, the book of Hebrews was written to people like us that were in danger of being carried away into foreign, strange teachings.

[1:10] And they needed to be brought back to the main thing, to Christ and Him crucified. And tonight, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are brought back again to the main thing, Christ and Him crucified.

So I would invite you to turn to Hebrews chapter 13. Hebrews chapter 13, and we're going to look at verses 9 and 10 as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper.

And our author says in verse 9, Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. So as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper, I want to look at these two verses under four headings.

And the first is simply that true spirituality comes from grace, not foods. True spirituality comes from grace, not foods.

[2:35] That's 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 are of no value to those who eat them.

Now, we really can't be sure of what exactly the author is talking about, what he means by ceremonial foods. But it's probably some sort of unique Jewish idea.

It probably took some of the ideas from the Old Testament, some of the teachings of the Old Testament, and twisted them where strength and grace actually came directly from the food themselves.

So by taking and eating the food, they would receive strength and spiritual grace for these things. And it's hard to tell the details.

We're not sure what exactly it's talking about. But if you were to think about it for a little bit, it's obviously just another human religion where it's what I do.

[3:40] It's what acts I perform that turn the key of the dispenser of grace in heaven. And so it was looking for grace from something that I did, from something I do, instead of through Christ.

And it was works. Whatever it was, it was works instead of grace. Human performance instead of God's free grace to sinners in Christ.

And the author says, but what we need is grace. What we need is grace. We need God working for sinners. We don't need man working for God's favor, for working for God.

This point clearly, as we apply it to tonight, it's obvious that just taking the Lord's Supper, just going through the motions, won't do you any good.

Like verse 9 says, they're of no value to those who eat them. Merely taking the food, merely taking the bread, merely taking the cup is of no value to you.

[4:59] Taking the bread, drinking the cup will not make you virtuous. It will not wash away your sins. It won't save you. It won't impress God. He won't look down upon your actions and think, wow, that man is a religious man.

Because all those things are trusting in something that you did. Something that you do. The mere act. Some fleshly thing. It's putting yourself in front of Jesus.

It's to make an idol out of your own doings. In a heart that is bent that way. In a heart that is set on doing that. There's no true spirituality that comes from that.

There's no strengthening of the heart. There's no grace that comes that way. What we need is something from God. Not something that we do toward God.

Now, secondly, this is the alternative. And it's a question. What is our altar? What is our altar?

[6:05] If we're not to be strengthened by ceremonial foods, then what are we to be strengthened by? Look at verse 10. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

That verse might, it probably sounds odd to some of you. Eating from an altar. We don't normally think of that as what goes on.

What's that about? I think this is something that we do forget. That in the Old Covenant, you remember the Levites, they had no inheritance. They had no set land. Instead, the Lord was their inheritance.

And the Lord provided for the Levites through the offerings and the sacrifices. Of his people. And so, in the act of the sacrifice, the priests were able to take part of the sacrifice.

And eat from it. Live from it. And share it with their family. And so, that's the picture that the author takes up. And that's the picture that he takes up.

[7:09] And then he applies it to his readers and to us. We have an altar to eat from that they don't. That they have no right to.

And so, what is this altar? That's the question. And it's clearly Christ's sacrifice for sinners. It's clearly the cross.

In the next few verses, he goes on to talk about the high priest offering up sin offerings. And then he talks about Jesus suffering as a sin offering.

Going outside of the camp and suffering for his people. And so, in the context, it's clear that this altar that we eat from is the cross.

Just like the Levites were to feed on the old covenant sacrifices, we are meant to feed on Christ sacrificed. The Levites were to be nourished by the ceremonial food.

[8:06] Physically nourished. But we are members of a new covenant. A better covenant. They fed on the shadows. We feed on the reality. They fed on actual animals.

We feed spiritually by faith on Christ sacrificed. And so, it's we who have believed on Jesus that have this right to come.

It's we who have forsaken this world and who have gone outside of the city. Who have accepted the scorn. Who have said of a crucified Savior, that is my Lord.

That have the right to come to this altar. And so, we have the right to come to the altar and be nourished. The altar of Christ sacrificed for us.

To the cross to receive grace for us. And so, it's at the cross where God dispenses grace to those who are in need.

[9:06] And so, it's by eating from Jesus by faith that we live. Jesus was in his hometown. And he was in Capernaum.

And it was while he was teaching there among his friends and among his relatives and among the people that he was, that were accustomed to seeing him. That he dropped a bomb on their playground and totally blew away all their ideas about who he was.

They had to come to real terms with what he had said. Listen to what John 6.53. Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth. Verily, verily. Amen, amen.

In other words, this is going to be hard to hear. But this is the absolute truth. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food.

[10:14] And my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me. And I in him. Just as the living Father sent me.

And I live because of the Father. So the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died.

But he who feeds on this bread will live forever. So where does eternal life come from? It comes from living off the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus.

This is going to sound kind of gross. But it's true. It's by willing to live as a parasite on him.

Ticks aren't very nice little bugs, are they? Children, when you come in from outside and your parents find a tick on you, your mom will say, oh, gross.

[11:19] And she'll pull and throw it off, right? Ticks aren't very nice because they live on the blood of others. They live on the life of others. They don't have what it takes to survive on their own.

They have to live off of the strength of others. And Jesus is saying, unless you are willing to step to that level, you have no life in you.

If you're not willing to step down to where all of your life comes from me, unless you're willing to, you're not, if you're willing to confess that I am your life, you have no health, you have no hope, that you must totally live off of me.

Unless you are willing to say that, you have no life. You have no hope. But those who have repented of their sin. And a lot of our sin is this idol making and the self salvation.

Unless unless we repented of our sin and our self salvation and we believed on Christ. But to those who have done that. To those who have repented and believe the altar is open.

[12:28] And I'm not talking about this. I'm talking about the cross. Every grace you need flows from Jesus Christ and his sacrifice from Christ broken, from Christ bleeding, from Christ dead for you.

So the cross is the altar. And by believing, by applying it to ourselves, is how we eat. We live. We find joy.

We find peace. We find comfort. We find righteousness. We find all the grace of God. At the altar of the cross. Now thirdly, who feeds us from this altar?

So this picture is taken up. Of people eating off of an altar. Well, who feeds us from this altar? Well, on the altar of the cross.

Christ offered himself up to God. And then he offers himself to us. Jesus Christ offers himself as the crucified one for us.

[13:40] And so Jesus himself feeds his people. He offers his body and his blood to be life for his people. And that's the reality behind the picture of the Lord's Supper.

And so this is his supper. He's the host. He provides the feast. He invites his people to eat and to be filled, to drink and to be satisfied.

To be satisfied in his love for them. To be satisfied that his death was enough. To remind them, to encourage them. That just as they take in food for life, they take him in.

And he is their life. To nourish us by faith. Listen to what John Calvin wrote. As Eve was formed out of the substance of her husband.

So remember, Eve was taken out of the side. She was taken out of the substance of Adam. And thus was a part of himself. So if we are true members of Christ, we share his substance.

[14:50] And by this intercourse, unite into one body. Paul says that we are members of his flesh and of his bones. Do we wonder then that in the Lord's Supper, he holds out his body to be enjoyed by us.

And to nourish us into eternal life. So just as Eve took life from Adam. We find and take our life from Christ.

And Christ in the Supper holds out his own body and blood to be enjoyed. To nourish us. And this is the grace that strengthens us.

And as we see all the grace that comes to us. Our hearts are established. They're rooted. That's the word. We're established.

We put down roots. And we're able to grow. And we're able to flourish. Remember Psalm 1 about the man who is planted by streams of water. And he bears forth fruit.

[15:54] This is how we bear forth fruit. As we're rooted and we're established in this grace. And we wander away so easily.

We've talked about that. And this is the situation that the Hebrews are in. We wander away and we forget Christ. We forget the main thing. Prone to wander. Lord, I feel it.

And it's always seeming like I want to go somewhere else. I want to fill in the gaps with something else. But then in another song we say, Let that grace now like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee.

And that's why Jesus has commanded us to remember the supper until he comes. Because if we don't remember the cross.

We don't remember this altar of Christ crucified. And the grace that comes to us from his death. We'll wander right away. We'll get caught up in substitutes.

[16:54] And some of them will look really good. And some of them will be really religious. We'll get caught up in the substitutes of just going to church. Of just doing my devotions. Of my own obedience.

Of my own righteousness. And we begin feeding off of our own performance. Whatever that looks like.

And what happens when we do? What happens when we turn away from Christ and him crucified? And then we begin to focus on ourselves or on other things.

When we starve. When we starve. Our heart does the opposite of being established and strengthened and bearing fruit. We wither. But in the supper.

Christ reminds us again of the true feast. Of his death for us. And he gives himself again to us. For us to trust him.

[17:52] For us to be established in his love. And his grace. And the forgiveness that comes through him. Now, fourthly. How does God strengthen us?

Through the Lord's Supper. In other words. What grace do we find in the Lord's Supper? Which is this picture of feeding on Christ.

On feeding on his sacrifice. Well, we see the wickedness of our sin. And it's a grace to have your eyes open to see how wicked sin is.

A Puritan wrote a book called The Sinfulness of Sin. It's so bad. It's its own definition for how bad it is. So how bad is sin? Thomas Kelly, the hymnist, wrote.

You who think of sin but lightly. Nor suppose the evil great. Here may view its nature rightly. And its guilt may estimate.

[18:56] We don't ever get the true measure of the sinfulness. The wickedness of sin. Until we come to the cross. And then we see. The price that had to be paid.

How bad was it? Would a little bit of good cover it over? Would a lot of good cover it over? Would my death cover it over? And the answer is no.

No. None of that will do. What is the price that had to be paid? Jesus, the Lamb of God, had to be torn to pieces.

The Lamb was crushed for sin. Last year I was at an event. And a farmer brought a lamb that was two days old.

And I've never seen a lamb that young. I don't see a lot of lambs, period. But I've never seen a lamb that young. And this might sound strange. But it was shocking when I saw it.

[19:59] I sort of had this physical reaction. It's hard to explain. Because it was so fragile. It was so helpless. And maybe I was just thinking of Jesus.

And he's the Lamb of God. But I'm looking at this. And it's almost hard to describe how defenseless a lamb is. It's so harmless. It would barely hurt the grass that it walked on.

And Jesus was the Lamb of God. So innocent. So harmless. So gentle. And yet when my sin was put upon him.

The torrent of God's wrath burst out on him. And so when you see the bread broken. You're seeing a picture of the payment for sin.

Jesus' body was broken and offered to God. So how bad is sin? Well, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was crushed.

[21:05] The innocent one was condemned. And it's all for my sin and for your sin, brothers and sisters. At the Lord's Supper, when we come to this altar by faith.

Not this altar again, but the altar of the cross. We see the wickedness of our sin. And it's grace for God to show you the sinfulness of your sin.

I've said that and I'll say it again. Too often we are like children playing with a cobra. And we think, oh, I can handle this. I can handle the bite. I'll be okay.

I can keep playing with it. But its bite is deadly. And the cure is the son of God's blood. And it's grace for God to show us the wickedness of our sin.
Or you wouldn't hate it like you should. You'd play with it. And I would play with it. Well, in the Lord's Supper, God strengthens us by showing us his love.

[22:09] By showing us his love. How he loves us. Again, we have to start back with who we are. We are sinners. We've sinned against his law.

Have you thought how reasonable and how good and how perfect the law of God is? It's good for us to obey. It's good. It's honoring for us to obey.
It's so righteous. And we throw it to the side like it's not even something to consider. We want what we want. And the law of God stands in the way.
And we break right through it. We've sinned against his law. And we've sinned against grace. And I think this is even worse.

Because after we've been forgiven. After God has poured out his mercy upon us. Brothers and sisters. We keep sinning. And this is the worst.

[23:07] We've sinned against his love. We've sinned against his favor. And against his grace. And he's loved us so much. And what do we do with that? So often we just.

We don't even think about it. I want what I want. And so we break through the law. And we break through God's grace. My transgressions I confess.

Grief and guilt my soul oppress. I have sinned against thy grace. And provoked thee to thy face. There's something especially provoking. Against sinning.

Against God's grace. But what do we find. When we've come through. What do we find when we come as sinners to the Lord's Supper.

And we find. That God has loved us. That Christ has loved us. For those sins. Those sins against his law.

[24:08] And those sins against his grace. Against his mercy. Christ died. And. He reminds us again. At the table.

That there's no hope in my performance. My long line of failures in the past. And my failures in the future. Rob me of. Trying to have any hope in my performance.

The only hope is in his. Free grace. To come to me. To pick me up. To forgive me. To. To have mercy on me. We need mercy. And mercy comes to us.

At the cross. And it's at the Lord's Supper. That we especially. Come again by faith. To take that in. To believe that.

Again. That his love. And his grace. Is enough. That where my sin abounded. God's grace. That is super abounded. At the Lord's Supper.

[25:04] We hear the gospel. We hear it preached. Not with words. But in pictures. The Lord's Supper. Preaches the gospel. Without words. We see our sin.

We see Christ's death. We see Christ. Offered to sinners. And by faith. We believe the gospel. All over again.

And to you. Who are lost. I just. That you had eyes. To see. The grace of God. That you had eyes. To see. Your sin. And your forget. And the forgiveness. And the love of God. And you can. See it. With your physical eyes. As the bread.

And the cup. Are passed. To God's people. And so. Don't take. But look. Because the gospel. Is being preached. To you.

[26:00] In the Lord's Supper. Christ. Offers. Himself. To you. As sacrificed. For sins. I'm not saying. He's sacrificed.

Again. But he is preached. Again. He is offered. Again. As the. The one. Who was sacrificed. For sinners. That those. Who would take. Those. Those. Who would come. And confess. What they are.

Could have life. In his death. And so. It's by faith. That you take. Christ. As crucified. If you will. Lay a hold. Of Christ. And say. He is all.

I need. My sin. Is too much. My performance. Is too little. My law keeping. Is. Will not cut it. But I. Have to have. Christ. Only.

He is enough. And if you would believe. That Jesus. And him. Crucified. And risen. Is enough for you. If you will believe that.

[26 : 54] Then God will save you. He is slow to mercy. And he's abounding in love. Ebenezer. Erskine. An old. Scottish.

Pastor. Said. God. Offers. Christ. Cordially. And affectionately. In the gospel. His very heart. Goes out. After sinners. In the call. And offer. Of the gospel. His very heart. Goes out. He offers. Christ. To you. In love. His heart. Goes out. To you. And so. Can you believe it? After all that sinning. God is standing. Christ is standing. And saying. If you will take.

You will be forgiven. And so. Take Christ. Take him. Like you would take bread. Because you need to eat bread. To live. You need food. Or you die. And without Christ.

[27 : 48] You will die. And God says. Why die? When you can take him. And live. Why make a wretched choice. And rather starve.

Than come. Let's pray. Heavenly Father. I pray that you would bring. Your truth. To our hearts. Your love.

And your affection. To our hearts. The seriousness. And the goodness. Of the gospel. To our hearts. As we take. These symbols.

Of your son's. Body and blood. I pray that. The spirit. Would come. Come. And teach us. And encourage us. And feed us.

And establish us. And that. By faith. Our hearts. Would go out. To Christ. And that we would have. Communion. With him. For those who are lost.

[28 : 47] Lord Jesus. Show that you. Are all powerful. And that you have the key. And you have the authority.

And you have the right. To come into any heart. And you. Have the right. And the authority. To bind. The strong man. And to bring forth.

The captives. I pray. Lord Jesus. That you would. Do that work. By your power. We pray that you would do it. For your glory.

And it's in your name. I pray Jesus. Amen.