

Without [Outside] the Camp

“We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. ¹¹For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. ¹²Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. ¹³Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. ¹⁴For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13:10-14)

Are you inside or outside the camp?

We’re living in a very different church atmosphere today. Whereas the true church of God has historically been persecuted, slandered, falsely accused and generally rejected by the world, today’s church seems to be quite different in its approach. Instead of being different to the world in our beliefs, morals and methods and calling them to salvation from our position, the church is now becoming like the world in hopes of infiltrating them and winning them over. Christians today are obsessed with being seen as attractive to the world, successful, charming, intelligent and even funny and socially ‘with-it’. Christians today are horrified at the thought of being scorned, laughed at, insulted or rejected by the world. The church sees it as a triumph when one of its songs are played on secular radio, and seems to dance for joy if a prominent sportsman or celebrity claims to be a believer. What is going on?

In our text today, the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus suffered outside the camp, outside the city. He then instructs us to join Jesus where He is, bearing His reproach. What does this mean, and how do we relate to it?

First, let’s get a bit of context to understand what the writer meant. Remember, the writer was specifically targeting Jewish believers, who were familiar with the O.T. law, with its rituals and sacrifices. In the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the same words ‘without the camp’ or ‘outside the camp’ come up frequently. Firstly, whenever the sin offering was made, the flesh, skin and dung was to be burnt outside the camp. This had to do with atonement. The same thing occurred with the ashes of the burnt offering and in the consecration of the High Priest.

Second, when there was purification to be done, it was done outside the camp. The red heifer in Leviticus 16:27, and the cleansing of the people in Number 3 speak of being purified outside the camp. Likewise people who were ceremonially unclean or defiled were to be outside the camp, till purified again.

Third, the place was also seen as a place of repulsion and rejection. Lepers were to dwell outside the camp. All that was vile, refuse and dirty, was put outside the camp.

Fourth, outside the camp was the place where people were executed. Stonings for Sabbath breaking and blasphemy are recorded as having been ‘without the camp’.

Finally, very importantly, the tent of meeting, the place where the people met God before the Tabernacle was built, was outside the camp according to Exodus 33:7. God Himself was there. So we see that we have quite a lot to deal with when trying to understand what the writer meant when he said we must join Jesus outside the camp.

Clearly, it means we are to make a break of some kind. The implication is that we are in the camp, and we must go out to where Jesus is. But where is Jesus? Where are we? The answer is found in the next verse, v 14: “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. ¹⁴For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.”

‘No continuing city’ speaks of a permanent dwelling place. He is using the same terminology he used in chapter 11 when describing the heroes of faith 11:13-16:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. ¹⁵And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. ¹⁶But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

The heroes of faith did not live for this world, and put their roots down because they realized that they had no real abiding place here on earth. Their relationship to God, their morality, their goals and ambitions made them strange, odd-ones-out, people out of step with the crowd. They truly were not at home here, and thus lived for the place they knew would be suited exactly for them: Heaven. The call is for us believers to be the same. How?

Let’s start with the first aspect of outside the camp: atonement. Believers find their peace with God not in a nice, cosy religious ritual with glowing candles and beautiful music, but in a gruesome thing called the crucifixion of Christ. Jesus, who was crucified outside Jerusalem, as were all criminals, purchased man’s salvation there. It is a place of shame & reproach, and physical and spiritual gore, where man’s sin was placed on God the Son. If man wants salvation, he cannot remain attached to this world and its system, he must go outside the camp to where Jesus is.

Today, there are some who would like salvation to be politically correct, so they take out the words ‘blood’ and ‘death’; these just seem too negative. They speak of making the Gospel non-confrontational and non-threatening to the unbeliever, and so they change the terms and meanings of the Gospel. But ask yourself, could Jesus on His cross be carried back into the city? No. People had to come out the city to Him. So today. People wanting salvation must turn their back on this world to find Jesus waiting, risen from the dead, outside the camp.

There are others who wish to make the Gospel a blank cheque for physical wealth and health. Why? Because they wish to curry the favour of the world, because their feet are firmly planted in this world and in this life. They truly call this place home, and heaven is foreign to them, thus going outside the camp is foreign to such teaching. The cross is an offense. It insists that Jesus alone is the way, that man’s works and religions are worthless, that God will accept no one for their moral life, and only Jesus will suffice. It insists that you accept your guilt, your debt before God, that you accept your own death in Christ and receive Him totally as your new life and Lord. It is not a bump in the road, it is a major crisis-point, a life transformation. This kind of religion, this kind of Gospel offends. It is without the camp. To truly be saved, you accept the

Gospel on God's terms, not on your own. You leave the place of worldly acceptance and respectability to accept the foolishness of preaching. You say, God, you are right, even if they all laugh at me, I believe it.

The second aspect of being outside the camp had to do with purification. God seemed to be teaching the Israelites that in order for real cleansing to take place, you could not just carry on with your life as normal. A complete break, a real, sudden, public change was necessary. Lepers, defiled people had to publicly leave the camp for their purification.

Believers who wish to truly walk closely to God must seek a separated, holy life. We are to turn our backs on the practices and activities of a world system in rebellion to God (2 Corinthians 6:17). We should not be joining the world in their cavorting, their revellings, their immorality. How is it that believers today are found in places that Christians 100 years ago would never have been caught dead in? Is it because we have progressed? Is it because we are more knowledgeable? Is it because we are actually more mature than they were, and are just enjoying our freedom in Christ? No, it is because we are living in compromise. In Revelation 3, Jesus shows us a mirror of ourselves today in the church of Laodicea. Neither hot, nor cold. Not fully in the world, not fully of it either. Just trying to get the best of both worlds. But you can't. Jesus told us this in Matthew 6:24, you cannot serve two masters. Christians today are so frightened of losing out on fun, good times and growing old without having experienced all the world has to offer, that we are truly unfaithful partners, committing spiritual adultery. James 4:4.

Like Lot's daughters, who were so worldly after living in Sodom, cried out 'Now there is not a man for us in the earth', and so, because they didn't want to be left on the shelf, they committed incest with their own father.

How many believers find themselves in gross sin, because they believe life is passing them by. They do not take God at His Word. He promises a rich and full life to His children, but He does not promise that it will work both ways. You either put God first, leave the camp of the world and go totally to Him, or you stay in the world and try and find happiness there. See, God is not going to indulge you while you stay in the camp and try to figure out if it's worth it following God after all. You take a step of faith, endure the necessary losses, and go to Him. And yes, there will be losses. There are TV programmes to switch off permanently, friends to see less often or altogether, cancellation of subscriptions to worldly magazines, less time on the Internet, or even cancellation of it, music to be thrown out, leisure activities to be scrutinized and adjusted, places to be avoided. There must be a separation from the world. Immediately someone cries out, "Well, we can't become hermits and monks! We can't become isolated fanatics". Well, the Bible never asks you to. In I Corinthians 5:10 Paul says that separation does not mean avoiding people, for then we would need to get on a ship and escape the earth. But the Bible teaches that we are to be separate nonetheless. In other words, in the world, but not of the world. Not isolated from the world, but insulated from it. How do we insulate ourselves? With the Word of God. By being so saturated with it that we redefine what we love and don't love. John tells us that to love what the world loves is hatred toward God, I John 2:15-17.

Paul puts it simply Romans 12:2. Literally, do not allow the world to press you into its mould, but allow your mind to be renewed, resulting in a metamorphosis. Christians who do not want to go out the camp, turning their backs on the world, and placing their sole joy in Christ will inevitably become more and more conformed to the world. Christians who will leave the camp, to be purified, will have that much more impact on the world because they are truly salt and light.

Furthermore, let's ask, if God called you to become an isolated fanatic, would you do it? The problem is often simply a heart of obedience. We have not submitted to the lordship of Jesus, and so we are busy trying to re-cast Jesus, re-shape Christianity into a mould which suits our worldly lifestyles. Jesus said in Luke 14:33: "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." See, has the world noticed that you are outside their camp when it comes to where you go, what you watch, what you enjoy, your goals, your morality, your leisure habits, your time, finances, family life? Is every area of your life truly under the lordship of Jesus? If it is, then it is unlike the world, and it is outside their camp with Jesus where He is.

The third aspect of outside the camp had to do with rejection and repulsion. Verse 13 says 'bearing His reproach'. Criminals were killed outside the camp. Defiled people and lepers dwelt there. It was a place of social rejection. The Bible is clear that to truly follow Jesus will result in the world rejecting us. John 15:18-20. Likewise, Jesus said in Luke 6:26: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." Christianity has always been an absolute choice 2 Corinthians 2:16: "To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?" Christianity is either a repugnant stench or the water of life. You cannot try and change the label. The Gospel will offend, it is meant to. The fact that Christianity is an exclusive, one-way faith, with no alternatives that calls sin *sin* and confronts man with his need of repentance make it highly unpalatable to the man in the street. Only God can break through the heart and show the man His love and desire for His soul. True Christians then will be as offensive to unbelievers as the Gospel they believe. Not in their manner of living, but in the fact that their lives convict sinners. Christians will be hated, persecuted and rejected as long as they are truly representing Christ. He was spat upon and cast outside the camp, we are to go unto Him bearing His reproach. How sad, then, that some Christians are trying to change the label, and make Christianity non-offensive. They desire worldly accolades, approval and admiration and so set about to convince the world that 'we're just like you, only with Jesus' And so we have music that is worldly, but it 'has Christian lyrics', places that were always avoided by Christians are now made 'Christian', why? Because we just as cool! "We're the same as you guys, we've just added Jesus". The problem is, they never subtracted sin, and that kind of maths fails in God's book.

The sad thing is how the world laughs at believers who are trying to impress them. Like a goofy teenager trying to look good for his first date, the church seems like a foolishly awkward bunch of innocents trying to be as mean, sensual and cool as the world. Since when did sheep try to behave like goats? Let God convert the goats to sheep, and let the sheep simply follow the Shepherd.

The excuse is made, we have to be relevant. We must be like them to win them. Win them over. The truth is, Jesus never taught a gospel of infiltration. He never told us to become like the world, win their friendship and then try and coax them into believing.

Because ultimately, when you do that, you end up changing the Gospel itself. How can you imitate the world's activities in an attempt to evangelise them? So you say, 'look we dance even like you do' to the world, and then when they are supposedly saved, tell them, 'Ok, now Jesus wants your whole life to change'. What a sham. I would not try and get people to a conference on staying pure until marriage by having raunchy music videos on a big screen because, 'that's what young people relate to'. I'd tell them that there is a completely different alternative, and they should come and hear it.

No, to truly be without the camp is to endure the mocking and scoffing of a world that scorned Jesus Himself. Our goal is not to bring respectability to the Gospel, it's simply to follow our leader. If He was mocked, then the servant is not above his lord and it's good enough for us. Our goal is not to try and make Christianity seem hip, cool and relevant, but continue by the foolishness of preaching to declare the offense of the cross, and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

Finally, without the camp was a place of execution. Criminals were executed there. Our Lord was crucified there. It is also where we are to be executed. Executed? Yes, the Christian life includes a lot of death, so that we might truly experience real life.² Corinthians 4:10: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." We must die to our own ambitions. We die to self-will. We die to fleshly desires. We die to personal comfort when it conflicts with service to God. We die to worldly approval. We die to personal reputation and praise from the world. We die to all forms of sin and self. Why? That we might truly experience the life of Christ flowing through us. And this is the point of the passage. The writer is saying, Jesus is outside the camp, your comfortable camp of worldliness. He is not going to come into the camp. We must daily, continually be going out to where He is, a place of reproach, suffering and death, bearing His reproach, to join Him there. The implication is that we tend to slip back into the camp, it's easier there. But the writer says, go out, we must make that effort. Jesus echoed this when He said "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross **daily**." But we go to Him continually, because that's where He is. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 The closest fellowship between Jesus and one of His children is reserved for those who will truly die to self, and come out to join Him outside the camp. The writer tells us, we have nothing here, we have no continuing city, let us go to Him. It's where He is, it's where we belong.

Moses set the tent of meeting up outside the camp. Our closest place of fellowship with God is when we do not demand that He come to where we are, but to join Him where He is. That means we accept the Gospel on His terms, an offensive, life-and-death Gospel that demands man's submission. It's a Gospel, an 'only way' religion that offends and is outside the camp. It means, secondly, that we seek purification from this world system. Our behaviour, our norms and loves and different, molded by the Word, not the world. The world must clearly see that we are different in what we do and don't do. We love not the world, and realize that we have no permanent place of dwelling here.

Thirdly, we embrace the rejection and persecution that comes to the believer who truly follows Jesus' example. We are not afraid of the world's mocking; Jesus felt it on the way up to Calvary, who are we to try and avoid it? Finally, it means enduring the death of self daily, to enjoy the life of Christ daily.

It's so much easier to live in the camp. But it's cold here, because Jesus is outside the camp. Real love, life and fellowship are in Him, where He is. Let us then go out to Him, bearing His reproach that we might truly live in Him.