

Title: Looking to Jesus
Date: March 4, 2018
Subject: Jesus as the only way to God
Scripture: Hebrews 13:7 - 14

Thanks to (rd.com/funny-stuff/funny-warning-labels) we learn that companies have posted the following warnings: on a wheelbarrow – Not intended for highway use; on a hair dryer – Do not use while sleeping; on a baby stroller – Remove child before folding; on a package of fireplace logs – Caution: Risk of fire; and finally, on a bottle of dog medication – May cause drowsiness...Use care when operating a car.

We can laugh at those warnings but there's nothing funny about the caution concerning strange teachings.

READ Hebrews 13:7-14

I. Warning sounded about strange teachings v. 9

Hebrews issues numerous calls to persevere in the faith of Jesus as Savior. Some are cloaked as warnings. This is the latest. Here are the previous: Do not drift away (2:1); Do not ignore so great a salvation (2:3); Hold on to the courage and hope of which you boast (3:6); Do not harden your hearts (3:8); Don't have a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (3:12); Don't be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (3:13); Hold firmly till the end the confidence you had at first (3:14); Don't be found to have fallen short of entering God's rest (4:1); Don't follow Israel's example of disobedience (4:11); Hold firmly to the faith you profess (4:14); Show diligence to the very end in order to make you hope sure (6:11); Take hold of the hope offered to you (6:18); Hold unswervingly to the hope you profess (10:23); Do not throw away your confidence (10:35); Persevere so you can receive what he has promised (10:36); Run with perseverance the race marked out for you (12:1); See to it that no one misses the grace of God (12:15); Do not refuse God who speaks (12:25).

The immediate concern of the text is those who were tempted to go back to Judaism. That teaching is strange in that it is different from the truth in Jesus. There are many strange teachings in our day. Some rise within biblical Christianity and morph into cult status. Some have taught/teach to abstain from certain foods, abstain from marriage or about angels that go beyond what the Bible says about those beings. There are claims to have the newest teaching or the teaching for only the select few, the enlightened.

There are strange teachings that attack biblical Christianity from without. We live in a society where it's fashionable to mock Biblical truth in the public arena. Belief that the Bible is to be taken literally is at the lowest in the last 40 years. A Gallup study revealed the figure as 24%. Senior editor Lydia Saad, "That could

mean people are more willing than in the past to believe it is open to interpretation—if man, not God, wrote the Bible, more can be questioned” (from Answers magazine).

Anybody get spam emails or phishing ones? Or phone calls about a refund from the IRS that’s not really from the IRS? Someone posing as an agent calls to see if you got the refund and that it was an error as it was too big. Deposit in the bank and then send them a personal check. It’s not how the IRS works.

There’s lots of spiritual spam and phishing. The warning is to not give in to novel, new teaching that tickles the ears, that makes promises beyond the Bible’s teaching. Any change, whether it’s back to Judaism or an alternative other than grace from Jesus is to be shunned. Stick with Jesus. Persevere in the faith.

II. Continue in the way of grace vv. 9, 10

It’s the better way, the only way. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Compared to what grace provides, ceremonial food is a nothing burger. It has no spiritual value. Though the Lord intended people to find him through the Old Testament sacrifices as a means of grace, they were corrupted into a works based approach to God. It operated from an earthly altar where people could boast about what they were doing to get to God. They reject what Christ has done and his direct access to the Father.

The writer dips into imagery of the Old Testament sacrificial system. First, when the high priest or the entire community sinned (Leviticus 4:5, 12, 21), a bull was to be sacrificed. The blood was sprinkled seven times before the Lord in front of the curtain in the sanctuary. The animal was taken outside the camp to be burned up as it was considered unclean since the sins of the offerer had been transferred to it. None could be eaten.

The other is the process of granting cleansing to someone who became ceremonially unclean (Numbers 19). A red heifer was slaughtered, not sacrificed. This was done outside the camp. The ashes of the heifer would be placed in a jar and water poured over it. The water of cleansing would be sprinkled over the unclean for the purification from sin (Numbers 19:9).

An earlier passage from Hebrews combines the two. “The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:13, 14)

Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem. It was the place where criminals were executed. They were considered to be unworthy to be associated with people of the city. Christ was considered to be unworthy to be associated with the people of the covenant. The reality is he set aside the Mosaic covenant, replaced it with one that was vastly superior. This is the message of Hebrews. Christ is superior.

Followers of Christ are to be willing to associate themselves with him – go outside the camp. Leave the world’s religions and the sinful lifestyle that had accompanied us. It’s no disgrace to do so. It’s no disgrace if others want to cut us off for remaining true to Christ.

The means of grace is through Christ. He provides access to God through the superior altar. This has been viewed as the cross where he sacrificed himself, offering his own blood, or as Christ himself, or the heavenly altar where the Savior serves as the Great High Priest presenting himself as the perfect sacrifice. In communion we spiritually partake of Christ’s death. The important element is that the concepts of sacrifice, atonement, pardon, acceptance and salvation are present.

The door to heaven was slammed tight by sin. There was nothing any person could or can do to pry open the door just enough so that can squeeze through. Many attempts have been made – own goodness, comparison to others, different belief systems. None are successful. Enter the expert to open the door. Jesus didn’t merely open the door a crack. He blew it off its hinges to allow all who place their trust in him to enter.

III. Look for guides to the correct path vv. 7, 8

A. Earthly leaders. They most likely had died. They would be a continuation of the hall of faith in chapter 11. Remember them and consider the outcome of their lives and teaching. What kind of fruit did their faith bear? They had proclaimed Christ as the one and only way. They held on to that commitment to their dying breath. Imitate their faith, their trust in God.

The celebration service for Billy Graham had audio of him, “Some day you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.” Other quotes about heaven – “I'm counting totally and completely on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not on Billy Graham. I'm not going to Heaven because I've read the Bible, nor because I've preached to a lot of people. I'm going to Heaven because of what Christ did.” “For the Christian the last mile of the way is a testimony to God's faithfulness”

B. Christ himself. Christ is the ultimate example to be considered and imitated as human leaders aren’t perfect and die. Christ won’t die and is perfect. There are various ways to look at the meaning of Jesus being the same yesterday, today and forever. Yesterday could go back to when Christ lived in a physical body. It could go back through the Old Testament times to the beginning. What Christ was to early followers he will be to current ones and futures ones. He’s unchanging in his person and message. He doesn’t change with the seasons or the weather. He doesn’t have to change his clocks. He doesn’t have to go through an update. He’s eternally merciful, powerful and all sufficient. The message of Jesus given by human teachers in the past was the one currently being taught and would remain till Christ comes. It was, is and forever shall be the truth, the whole

truth and nothing but the truth. He can do the same for us as he has done in the past and is doing for us now. Yesterday Christ gave himself as the sacrifice for sins. Today He lives and serves as the high priest interceding in heaven (Hebrews 7:25) and forever he will reign as King.

The conclusion in verse 6 leads into the conclusion in v. 14. What can people do to me? I'm rightly connected with God who is my helper. So what if persecution comes? When it's all over, we're out of here. As nice as these accommodations are, they're lousy compared to what's in store. And if our lodging and surroundings get run down, well, that's even better. In the future we'll go way outside the camp to a place called heaven. We're strangers and pilgrims trapped in a land that isn't real (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16). We're looking for a better city, one that endures in contrast to this one that crumbles and will be discarded.

Dan Schaeffer writes about his first experience to Disneyland as a boy (A Better Country: Preparing for Heaven, pages 81-83.) The drab parking lot didn't aid his imagination. He says "When I entered the gates for the park, however, everything changed—*suddenly!*...The visual stimulation was so sudden and powerful that I could not take it all in at once. But what I remember most clearly was the activity. From the humdrum, boring, mostly empty parking lot, I suddenly encountered a bustling, busy, exciting, and enchanting place...With each new discovery I was entranced and all the more eager to find the next magical place. I had truly wandered into another world, and my physical and emotional senses were on overload. I soon realized that this exciting and magical place had been here for quite some time, existing even while my boring and often difficult life went on elsewhere. Outside, everything was predictable and ordinary. Here—well, here was something else again.

"It appears heaven will be, for us, much like that. Not in any sense like a human Disneyland, but a place and experience so vibrant, alive, colorful, and enchanting that all our human senses threaten to begin blinking 'tilt' at our first sighting...Our first emotion will most likely be astonishment and wonder at the people we see, sights we behold, and sounds we here, followed closely by an overwhelming feeling of joy and peace. Like my experience on my first trip to Disneyland, each new sound and sight of heaven will elicit greater joy and wonder and a corresponding desire for worship. Yet unlike the Disneyland experience, which can be fully enjoyed in a few days and can also include many unpleasant aspects of life on earth (cost, crowding, impatience, fatigue, selfishness), heaven's wonders will be perfect and never cease, nor will we ever be able to fully experience it all.

"Heaven, unlike Disneyland, is not manmade, man-inspired, or subject to decay but is eternal; its architect, builder, and creator is God Himself. Its wonders will eternally draw our attention back again and again to its creator and sustainer."

Our hope is in Jesus. Nothing but Jesus.