

Living Differently Through Jesus

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Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 0 0] Yes, good morning, everybody. How are y'all doing? Good, good. And happy Father's Day again to all the dads out there. And I just want to say hello to those listening online.

And like Alan said, this is our very last sermon in Hebrews, right? And I always feel like coming to the end of like going through a big book, it's like, man, we should get a trophy or some kind of t-shirt, you know?

It's like, I survived Hebrews 2021 or something. I don't know what it is, but it's been an amazing journey through quite an amazing book. And today we're going to be covering all of chapter 13, which I say that because it means I really can't unpack everything that is in this chapter. There's so much good stuff in here, but I'm going to really touch on its main theme, which is living in response to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, I'm not saying that we live differently so that Jesus will save us and we'll earn our spot in heaven. We live differently because he has saved us. And so it's living in response to that revelation. The salvation package that we receive in grace is that we are given the Holy Spirit. We are given new hearts. We're transformed that way. And the Holy Spirit comes into these new hearts that are now like bent toward and biased toward doing the will of God. And then the Holy Spirit comes in and he empowers us and he strengthens us to do that, to live for Jesus, which means our lives start to look more and more like Jesus's life, which in turn means we live to please God alone. And the center of this chapter summarizes this very thought. Hebrews 13 verse 15 says this, through him, through Jesus, then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. And here's what it's saying here. You know, oftentimes as Christians, we think of worship as what we do right here on a Sunday. We limit our worship to church on Sundays. But in the Bible, the following Jesus, the way of Jesus, it says Monday morning is just as important as Sunday morning. And here is the hard truth. You and I, we spend most of our time where it is hard to live a life of worship that pleases God. Let's be honest. It is not easy to do that.

Now, we have to be careful when we say that God is pleased by what we do. This doesn't mean that God isn't pleased with us until we do good things. You know, one of the freeing truths of the Christian faith is that through Jesus Christ, we're adopted into the family of God, right? We've been talking about this from the time Freddie did the call to worship through the songs we sang today. We're saved and we're adopted into God's family. We are his sons and daughters. God is pleased to call us his children, and we get to call him our heavenly father. And when you're in God's family, it means his love isn't dependent on your good works. But that doesn't mean God doesn't take pleasure in our good works.

[3 : 0 4] You following me? Because if our good works are truly empowered by the Holy Spirit, it means that his grace, his work in our lives is flowing through us to others. That's what's happening. That's what's happening. God uses simple people like you and me to further his purpose of redemption in this world.

And God delights in seeing his purpose accomplished. God delights in seeing his will fulfilled. And so when he takes pleasure in our good works, really, he is doing what he did at creation. He is looking at his own work and saying, it is good. That's what he's doing. And he's saying it over you and me.

Think about this, parents. It's like watching your kids do something nice to each other, right? Quite the break from the ordinary. I'm sure you understand that. But when we see that happen, those two seconds of miraculous work, we stop and we're just like, oh my gosh, that's amazing. We get pleasure from that. Why? Because we've been teaching and training them to act this way, to be kind to one another, right? And so two things, and I would argue two things are happening in that moment as parents.

You are rejoicing in what they did, but also you are taking pleasure in that your will is coming through in their lives. It's coming to bear. You might even say, and I might even argue that you are coming, you yourself are coming through in their lives in that moment. So the question still remains for us, what are the things that please God? It's fascinating here how simple God keeps it in this chapter. You would think there would have been a long list of things to do, right? Just like, hey, let me get out the big huge scroll and start writing them down. But at the heart of it is actually an ordering of our hearts toward love, contentment, and submission. That's what we're going to be covering today. Living lives of love, contentment, and submission. And I would argue that every sin we commit denies, dilutes, or disfigures those three seedbed motivations of our heart. And the Hebrew writer, he calls that ancient church that he was writing to, and us today, not to forsake living this way.

And so here's how the chapter opens up. Verse 1, Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you are also in the body. So first we see here this call to let brotherly love continue love. That's like a popular motive today, not very controversial.

[5 : 55] I think everybody, whether you're a follower of Jesus, not yet a follower of Jesus, you would say, like, yeah, being loving and kind, that is a good thing. And when we look at Jesus's life, it's a loving life. He lived a very loving life. He was kind towards others. And so if Jesus was loving, it would follow that. He would want his disciples to be loving too, right? I don't think any of us would really argue with that. So then it wouldn't be surprised that we please God by loving people.

Now, there are three expressions of love in the verses we just read. The first one that is brought up is brotherly love, okay? Now, that Greek word there for brotherly love is the word Philadelphia. And it refers to the kind of love that families share, right? Now, I realize that some of us may have not grown up in families that we're very loving, right? And because of sin, brotherly love is often distorted into lots of dysfunction, abuse, and we miss out on that. But still, I would argue, I would argue this, that longing to be part of a family might be one of the strongest desires and drivers we all have as human beings. See, I'm amazed at what kids are willing to forgive or overlook in busted up homes with bad parents. Like the love a child has for a father or a mother runs deep. They give us mulligans. They give bad parents like mulligans all the time, nonstop. And you're just thinking like, man, if I was in that situation, I don't know if I could do that. But that brotherly love, that family love, man, it is a tie that binds that is hard to break.

Think of the love we have if you have a sibling. Think of the love that you have for them. It's incredible what we put up with with each other and what we are willing to do for each other.

And here's the thing, the family of God, the church is just that. It is a family. It's not a secondary family, way down the list after your own. No, no, it is family. There's this new bloodline in Jesus that we all share. And I would say this, the fact is, it is the only family unit that is going to last into eternity. It's the only family unit that is going to be forever and ever and ever. Look around this room. This is your family forever and ever, guys. If you are a follower of Jesus, this is us. And then more so, when we get into heaven, that is going to open up to all the people that have believed in Jesus across the globe for all of history. That is a beautiful and amazing and wonderful family to behold. So here's the thing, as God's family, we should behave like we are family, right? And not taking our cues from earthly parents and older siblings who have faults and failures, but we take our cues from our heavenly father and big brother Jesus.

And they show us that a healthy family cares for each other and shows compassion. And compassion is this other expression of love we see in these verses. In verse 3, it says, remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Now, what I'm saying is that if you don't join a prison ministry, you better do it or you're a bad Christian. That's not what I'm saying.

[9 : 19] Think about this. Like, why is he bringing up the prison thing? What's the big deal? Well, this was written at a time during the Roman Empire. Guess what? In the Roman Empire, especially first century, second century, like, it was not cool to be a Christian. Not at all. They were persecuted. They were looked at very suspiciously and actually often outright hated.

So when you read church history, there's like funny things that, well, probably not to them, but funny things now. You look back, some of the rumors that were being spread around about Christians in the Roman world was that, like, you know what they do when they get together, the little hidden secret meetings that they do? I hear that they put babies and bake them in a pie and then they eat them. Like, legitimately, that was one of the rumors floating around the Roman Empire about Christians in the day. So consequently, many followers of Jesus were being wrongly accused for a whole host of things and thrown into prison. Many others were beaten or had their property and possessions taken from them unjustly. They suffered all kinds of injustice simply because they believed and followed Jesus. And so these verses were a call to remember your family that's been mistreated. Remember your brothers and sisters who have been mistreated. Don't go to God in prayer and be like, Lord, thank goodness that wasn't me, right? Jesus wants us to remember the victims of injustice. But compassion goes way beyond just remembering. Compassion compels us to take on their injustice like our own, right? It's said in there as though in prison with them.

My family, we sponsor a Compassion International Child, and, you know, we give money every month. To hopefully help raise that child out of poverty. But to be honest, I can't quite say we are nailing the compassion part of that, right? We are dutiful in giving the money, but she is not on our mind all the time. We're not remembering her and lifting her up in our prayers very often. And by the way, side note, there's a Compassion Sunday coming up July 25th that we're going to be like adopting, adopting, giving you a chance to adopt some kids to support them. So just, you know, free plug there.

But what I'm saying is compassion for people, it flows out of this revelation that we are God's family knit together. Our hearts are knit together. We care for one another. And so when one of us suffers, we all suffer too. And I would say to the church, our job is to have our eyes open and intentionally looking for those suffering among us. It is very important. When you look at the life of Jesus, that's what he was always doing. He walked around this earth, and oftentimes before he would do something, it would say, Jesus saw. Jesus looked and he saw something. Like when before he fed the 5,000, he looked at the crowd. He said he saw the crowd and he had compassion on them.

To quote Paul Miller, he says, looking shapes the heart. Paul Miller's looking at the life of Jesus, and he just sees how Jesus was always looking. And he comes to this conclusion, looking shapes the heart.

[12 : 35] When you see someone suffering, it moves your heart with compassion. You want to be compassionate towards them, which is a verb. You want to compassion towards them. You want to do something to be with them or help them, whatever it may be. We don't want, when you look at somebody suffering, you don't want them to be alone. And I would say a side note really quick. If you are suffering, don't hide it. If you are suffering in the family of God, don't hide it. I'm not putting all the burden on you if you are suffering. I'm just saying, don't burden yourself unnecessarily by hiding your suffering from the rest of us. We want to enter into it with you. And I would say this too, when it comes to suffering in the family of God, we need to recover a biblical truth called the communal lament. And this is some wisdom right from the Bible. You see it all throughout. When people suffered, when they were going through trial, the community knew about it and they surrounded them.

And I would say this, guys, grieving and lamenting and mourning with each other, this is a community project of compassion. It's a beautiful thing that we can enter into as the family of God.

It's important. But this means that we, you and I, we have to get comfortable joining people in their pain. And we don't like doing that because oftentimes we don't want to, we just don't know what to say, right? It's like oftentimes, like when something happens to somebody, one of the things I don't want to reach out to is like, I really don't know what to say to them right now. This is going to be an awkward conversation perhaps. And so a big part of me is like really reticent to do that.

But here's the beauty of compassionate lament. You don't have to fix the situation. And I think that's probably why a lot of us don't want to reach out because we think of it, we look at it and we think of it and we're like, I don't know how to fix this. We don't have to fix the situation.

You and I just need to be there. The Bible says, weep with those who weep, mourn with those who mourn. That is enough. Cry with them. Acknowledge the pain and the hurt, right? Man, so there was an opportunity like, this is how God's compassion works out in the church. Here's a tiny little story.

[14 : 46] Like the Holy Spirit put it on someone's heart as they were driving to call this person in the church, an elderly widow. And they called her and they found out that, you know, the next day she was going to court. Nobody knew about it. And they not only prayed with her on the phone, but they offered to go and support her in court because she was going alone. And that's a tough thing to face all by yourself. And that person sat with her for most of the day in court as she was waiting for her trial to come up. And it didn't necessarily go her way, but that person got to grieve with her, to mourn with her, to sit with her. And she got to experience the family of God. And she was facing a tough situation, but she wasn't facing it alone. That is the power of the family of God.

Now I'll admit that is stretching for many of us, but love will stretch us out of our comfort zones. It not only drives us to reach out to the hurting within the family, it also compels us to reach out to welcome the stranger. In verse 2, it says, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. We see here hospitality is the third and final expression of loving people that these verses talk about. And that Greek word literally means love for the stranger or love for the outsider. So my dad grew up in a relatively poor family. He was from eastern Kentucky at the time where coal mines were still the main business. He was a coal miner's son. But one thing he knew, regardless of how poor they were, he knew that any night he could bring a friend to the dinner table.

There was always room at their table for one more. And his mom always cooked for more than were sitting around her table. And that's what a heart of hospitality is. It's a heart that always has room for an extra seat around the table and food to share. Since writing this sermon, I've literally thought about keeping the empty chair and dinner setting at our dining room table every single night to symbolize this and to remind us that this is gospel hospitality. There's always room for one more.

And loving people this way, guys, isn't an easy thing to do. That is not an easy thing to do. You will lose time. You will lose energy. You will lose sleep. You will give away resources. And you know what? That can easily start to make you bitter unless we learn contentment. And we please God by being content in Him.

Now, let me be clear. This goes beyond being content with what God's given you. That's a good thing. I'm not saying we shouldn't do that. We should be content with the things God's given us. But you and I need to get in a place, if we are following Jesus, you and I need to get to a place where He is enough.

[17 : 38] That's it. Like, take the world, but give me you. We have to get to a place where He is enough. And that is what the verses 4 to 6 are getting at here. It says this, Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have. For He has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

Jesus said that. The Father says that. So, we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? So, you might be thinking, like, you know, what does a person's sex life have to do with contentment in God? If you have little kids in here, don't worry. This isn't going to get graphic, all right? I would just argue, yeah, actually, there's a significant link between the two. Contentment in God means you accept His gifts, but you also accept His guardrails, okay? And God never gives gifts without guardrails.

Even in 1 Corinthians 12, it says, when it talks about the various spiritual gifts endowed to the church and endowed to His people by the Holy Spirit, like you read later on, and also in chapter 14, when it picks up the spiritual gifts again, it says, do everything for the building up of the church. That's our motivation for using the spiritual gifts. And then it also says, let everything be done decently and in order. Every gift of God has a guardrail. Whenever God puts a gift in your hand, He has a purpose for it as well. And sex is a gift. God made us sexual beings, but His guardrails for sex are within the marriage covenant between one man and one woman. That's it.

And contentment in God means that I will follow that regardless of what my preferences are. Think about this. God gave Adam and Eve the gift of the Garden of Eden. Everything in the garden, He says, is yours. But He put a guardrail. Don't eat from one tree. Not a very big guardrail, right?

And they failed at that. See, at the root of sin is discontentment with God. Adam and Eve were not content with that guardrail, so they broke right through it. And when it comes to sex and sexuality in our age, we are not content with God's guardrails around that. And so we have plowed right through them to say, we get to do what we want, how we want, when we want. And in so doing, we've distorted, diluted, and disfigured this gift of sex that God has given to us. But sex is not the only thing. Like the other big thing here is greed, this lust for money, this love for money. We just need more and more and more. And let's be honest, in our day and age, that is another big sin.

[20 : 25] Our society worships at the altar of wealth. We want more money because we think it will give us more security, more fun, more pleasure, more stuff. So instead of following God's guardrails of generosity, where money comes into our hands but flows through us to bless others, we hoard it for ourselves. And at the heart of that is a lack of contentment in God, right? God, I don't like the way you provide for me, so I'm going to go and figure it out for myself and do it my way. And underneath the surface of all our discontentment, whether it is sexual or whether it is greed of any kind, underneath that discontentment is this, who gets to be in charge of my life? As you mature in the faith, you'll begin to see that most of your sin issues have the same root. You don't want to be submitted to God or anyone else. I look at my life, this is my big issue. I mean, this pops up in my heart all the time. I want to do it Jesse's way, like, 24-7. You can ask my wife.

But guys, there's this thing of that lack of wanting to be submitted. That is so antithetical to a life that pleases God. See, we please God by being submitted to Him. And this doesn't mean that following Jesus turns you into a doormat that everybody walks over, right? Nor does it mean that everything is worth submitting to. First and foremost, there is Jesus. That is who we submit to. Over all things, that is who you and I are submitted to. He is Lord. He is King. We follow Him, right? It's the very essence of being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, in the sense we are following Him. He is leading us. He is in charge. And so you submit to Him as Lord. And one way we do that is submitting to the truth He's given us in the gospel. We find that in His Word. And it even says that in verse 7 of Hebrews 13. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. And it says this, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

So there is a significant implication to that statement, Jesus never changes. It also means His truth never changes. The gospel doesn't submit to the tides of philosophy and culture that are ever-changing and ever-adjusting and ever-morphing. And to be a follower of Jesus means that you don't live by your truth, right? It's kind of a popular phrase today. I got my truth. I'm just living my truth.

The gospel says there's one truth and only one truth. And until recently, I would say that when you look at history, until recently, truth was accepted. That idea of truth, that even word truth, was accepted as something universal and applicable regardless of time and place.

[23 : 41] What I mean by this is like gravity, right? Gravity is a truth. And that truth is the same for those who lived in 800 BC in China as it is for us today in 21st century America. That is a timeless truth that hasn't changed. But today, we have this concept of truth that is relative, truth that is good for you, but maybe not for me, but that's okay. And so what we've really done is this. We've turned our personal preferences and desires and opinions into truths. And there's a reason for that. There's a reason why we do that in our culture today. Because what it does, it gives us credence and moral high ground for our passions and desires. That's what it does. And so, a universal principle I think we all share is that denying truth is a bad thing and pursuing it is a good thing, right? So, naturally then, turning your passions and your desires into your truth becomes a new pathway to a false kind of righteousness. Like, really, I'm just pursuing what's true to me. Like, why wouldn't I do that?

And truth in this sense is always changing. It changes from person to person, and it also changes constantly from generation to generation. But here's the thing, guys. Truth that can change is a self-defeating proposition. Here's the good news for us. If you are a follower of Jesus, it reminds us, Jesus never changes. So, what he taught, how he lived, his death and resurrection, all those are a part of the truth package that we behold and look at in the Gospels, in his word, throughout the Bible. And it is as pertinent for us today as it was when it was written.

And when you study Jesus's life, when you listen to his words, you realize this thing, he lived in submission. Even though he was like the authority of heaven, the creator of all, right? He came as a man in the flesh, and he submitted. He lived submitted. He lived under authority. And Luke's Gospel tells this kind of funny but interesting story of Jesus when he was 12 years old. They go and present him at the temple, and they have this like, it sounds like it was during a festival time maybe, and then it's time to go home back to Nazareth, and they're two days' journey out. And all of a sudden, his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, realize, oh, we forgot Jesus. So, they hustle back, and they find him in the temple, and how could you do? I'm sorry.

Anyways, it says this at the end of that little story. He went back to Nazareth with them and submitted to them. I want us to think about that. The perfect Son of God was submitted to imperfect parents.

And even when he grew up and left his parents' home, he was always submitted to his heavenly Father. John 5, 19, Jesus said to them, So, you read that, and you're just like, man, to our modern ears, this kind of sounds like an emotionally unhealthy, codependent person. Because our modern gospel today says, write your own story.

[27 : 01] Live life on your own terms, right? Even the popular Frank Sinatra song, that song at a ton of funerals is, I did it my way. And we celebrate that. But the gospel tells us, to imitate, to follow, is truly to live. And imitation is submission in its purest form. Jesus, that's what he's saying in John 5, 19. So, God gave us leaders in the church to imitate, since Jesus isn't here in the flesh.

Paul the apostle confidently said this, follow me as I follow Christ. There is an implication that Paul is being submitted to the truth of Jesus, being submitted to following Jesus. And therefore, he is worthy, he is a leader worthy of being submitted to and imitated. Now, I do want to say this can be one of the toughest parts and the trickiest parts of being in a church family, being submitted to the leaders. This is awkward for me to say because I'm a pastor, right? But I don't want to use this truth to thump you over the head and say, like, you better get in line or I'm going to break your nose. That is not what we're going for here. We don't lead that way. Our call is like what Paul said, it is an imitation to follow. It is not a forced following. But being submitted to leaders is a tough thing because we are human. We are imperfect. Trust me, you can call any of my family, you can talk to my wife, you can talk to my brothers and sisters. I am far from perfect. We are prone to making errors.

Yet still the command here is to obey and to submit. Verse 17, obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. Now I'm sure there's not, there's more than just a few of us thinking this. Is there any reason to stop submitting to church leadership?

And I would say yes. If church leadership intentionally stops imitating Jesus, whether in their teaching or in their lifestyle, guess what? You shouldn't follow them. You should not follow them and you should not submit to them. So let me bring this to a close. Love, contentment in God alone, submission to God and his leaders. These are things that please God when he sees them flowing out of our life, being worked out in our life. Now I want to say this, if you're here and not yet a Christian, don't start with trying to do that. That is not your first step towards like becoming a Christian.

Start with submitting to Jesus as Lord and Savior. And that means this, that means like, you know what? I'm taking my hands off of control. I'm going to stop trying to earn anything, trying to earn my way into heaven and realize that I am a sinner in need of God's saving grace. I'm a sinner who needs Jesus.

[29 : 59] I need your sacrifice, your blood to cleanse me from my sins. And I can tell you that, but actually right now what I'm praying as I'm saying this is that Jesus reveals that is true to you. That has to become true into your heart. And I would say, if that is happening to you today, your response is saying, yes, Jesus, I believe, I repent, save me. That's what it is. And I want to invite you, if that's you, to do that today. Now, if you're here and not yet a Christian, oh, sorry, I already did that, sorry. If you're here and a Christian, as the band comes up, if you're here and a Christian, I want to remind us where we started.

Where we started at the beginning of the sermon, you and I can do none of what we talked about without God's help. If you go out there and try to do it in your own strength, you are going to get wore out, you are going to get burnt out, and you're going to get bitter. That's what happens to us.

And the Hebrew writer, he knows this. So at the end of this beautiful chapter, talking about living life through Jesus, empowered by him, empowered by the Spirit, he ends with this beautiful prayer, this beautiful blessing over the people of God.

And I want to pray this over us today. And I want you to carefully, I'm going to pray very slowly. And as I read this, pray with me and just agree with me. Okay? Hebrews 3, 20 to 21 says, Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the covenant, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen.

We're going to continue responding. If you're a follower of Jesus, we do communion every week. And this reminds us of this great gift that we have. We're here today because of what Jesus has done.

[32 : 16] And today as we take communion, let's thank Jesus that God's pleasure is not dependent on our doing, but what Jesus has done. And taking communion together is a recognition of his love for us.

Right? And it's a recognition that we are content with being, with him being all we need. And it is a recommitment also to being submitted to following Jesus and his perfect will.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and he broke it, and he gave it to his disciples. And he says, man, as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.

Let's eat the bread. And in the same manner, he took a cup. It was filled with wine.

And he said, this represents my blood, a blood that is forming a brand new relationship with you, by which your sins are forgiven, that you don't have to earn it.

[33 : 22] You don't have to earn your way into heaven. You don't have to earn your way into this new relationship. This blood seals us. This blood seals our redemption. And so let's drink this cup together.