

Text: Heb. 13:7-14

Title: "For me, to live is Christ"

Time: 9/11/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – How would we answer the question, "What is my life?" James in his Epistle gives us an answer to that question in terms of its duration that tells us that our life is very short, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jam. 4:14).

I was at a soccer game Thursday, and one of the player's elderly grandfather, who is a friend of mine, was there. He came up to my dog and noticed some gray around its nose and said that my dog looked a year older. I responded that I guess we all are a year older, to which this dear brother said, "Yes, and the years go by so quickly." He understands that this life of ours on earth is a vapor.

Our life is very short, but also very significant. Our Lord spoke of our earthly life not only as fleeting, but also as an opportunity to invest in treasures that will last forever. He told us to lay up treasures in heaven that will never pass away, rather than on earth where moth and rust and thieves have their way.

The Hebrew believers who first received this letter were facing the question, "What is my life going to be?" They seem to be at a crossroads. They had been saved out of apostate Judaism, but they now were being tempted to go back. Being a Christian was hard; their lives as Jews had been easier. Perhaps they had been a bit hasty in their decision to follow Christ. Perhaps they would answer, "What is

my life?" by going back to what their lives were before they found Christ.

The apostle Paul was a Hebrew believer who had the right answer to the question, "What is my life?" He articulates that answer very clearly in Phil. 3:7-8, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." He had explained earlier in that letter, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21).

So is that how you and I answer the question this morning, "What is my life?" "What is it for?" "Why am I alive?" Our author in the passage before wants his readers to have Paul's answer to that question, and so to not go back to Judaism. I have titled our study of the passage, "For me, to live is Christ," and I want us to see three ways in which that is true for us as believers this morning.

I. Christ is the example for my life (vv. 7-9).

Ill: We all know what it means to mimic something. When we moved the piano here a few weeks ago, I did my best to have us mimic a YouTube video I watched for moving grand pianos. The video was a pattern or example we tried to follow, and I am very thankful for the success we had.

Appl: At the heart of the instruction of these verses is the command *follow* (v. 7). That word comes from the Greek word from which we get our word *mimic*. The Lord wants us to mimic or imitate the faith we see in someone else, and by way of implication, He wants us to avoid imitating or following the influences in our lives that lead us away from

that example. I want us to notice 3 things about the example we are supposed to follow:

1. We are to follow an example of the faithfulness of Christ (v. 8).

When we think about whose faith we should follow, Hebrews gives us the examples of a lot of faithful men and women of God (chapter 11). But in the end, it is Christ Himself who is the author and finisher of that kind of faith (Heb. 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"). Because the faithfulness of Christ is consistently the same, we follow the faith we see in Him only when we are the same and faithful.

Think of the ways in which Jesus Christ is the same as the author and finisher of the faith. Yesterday, Christ dedicated Himself to endure the cross as the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, in the plan of God to save sinners. He died on Calvary yesterday, obedient unto the death of the cross. Today, Christ yet intercedes faithfully for us as our advocate with the Father and as the propitiation through His blood for our sins (1 John 2:1). That blood still cleanses us as we walk in the light (1:7). Forever, Christ shall be praised still as the Lamb of God slain for His people, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

As the author and finisher of the faith, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. How can we betray Him by failing to be the same ourselves in our profession of the faith and our faithfulness to Him?

2. We are to follow an example that is illustrated by our God-called leaders (v. 7).

The command *remember* here is a different word than the command we have in v. 3, “*Remember* them that are in bonds.” The word in verse 3 is the opposite of the forgetfulness of verse 2, and it means something like, *remember so as not to neglect through forgetfulness*. The word we have here in v. 7 was used by Christ when he told a crowd of listeners to *remember* Lot’s wife (Luke 17:32). The Lord’s point there was not that we should not neglect Lot’s wife, but rather that we should take the time to ponder the meaning of the way Lot’s wife lived. We should *remember so as not to miss the lesson*. God has a lesson to teach us through the leaders He has called to lead us, and we need to take the time to ponder what that lesson of faithfulness is all about.

The word for *leader* here translated as *them that have the rule over you* is used 3 times in this chapter (see vv. 17, 24). It is a word that sometimes simply means *to consider* or *to be led to a conclusion through consideration*, so the word speaks of a leadership that has more to do with the kind of convincing a shepherd would do with his sheep, rather than the authoritarian rule that a king might impose by force on his subjects. Our text tells us that this leadership prioritizes two responsibilities:

(1) These leaders speak unto God’s people the Word of God (v. 7). It is actually the Word of God that has the rule over every one of us, so a pastor or a deacon or a Sunday School teacher leads God’s people with authority only when they are speaking the Word of God to His people. We are to ponder our leaders as they speak God’s Word to us. That is impossible to do if you are neglecting those times designated for them to speak God’s Word to His people.

(2) These leaders live lives that God's people can see (v. 7). The word *considering* means literally *to see over and over again*. We are to see over and over again the end of the conversation or way of life of our leaders. You cannot do that listening to a radio broadcast.

The word *end* there is a word that means *way out* or *way of escape*. It is the word Paul uses in 1 Cor. 10:13 in God's promise that we will have *a way of escape* when we face temptation and trial. God's people need to see God's leaders find that escape from temptation and trial over and over again as they live their lives. For this reason, we are instructed to be very careful about whom we allow and do not allow to be designated our church's leaders. At New Boston Baptist Church, our leadership is the pastor, the deacon, and the Sunday School teachers. As such, we need your prayers that we might be leaders who speak God's Word to His people and who live lives of victory over temptation, which God's people can see.

3. We are to follow an example that Satan seeks to undermine (v. 9). Very literally the command here is, "Stop being carried away." The damage was being done as the author was writing this letter. These believers were leaving a life dominated by God's grace to take up again a life dominated by apostate Judaism. They were leaving their new life in Christ to live again like they did before they came to Christ. They had paid a price to follow Christ, but now they wanted a refund.

Transition: What about us? Is Christ still the example for our life? Or have we begun to ponder how it might be to go back to living the way we were before we came to him? The Lord commands us this morning to ponder the teaching and example of our leaders, and to mimic the faithfulness

of our Lord, who is our same loving Savior yesterday, today, and forever.

II. Christ is the altar for my life (vv. 10-12).

III: Last Labor Day Kent and I heard a wonderful message at Camp Northfield on the glory of the cross. The theme verse for the weekend was 1 Cor. 1:18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." As we sat together in that chapel and heard that message, we were doing what our author speaks of here – eating at an altar from which the Levitical priests of first-century Jerusalem never ate.

Appl: It is in this sense that Christ is the altar for my life. His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary can nourish my spirit by His grace. That is true only because the Lord of Glory was willing to be like one of those animals – He shed His blood for our sins and He suffered outside the gate. Our text says He did that to sanctify us with His own blood. The plan was not merely a fire escape from hell. He did what he did to make us holy, to give us an altar from which our spirits can be nourished and fortified in our battle against sin. We have a right that the leaders of first-century Judaism did not possess. We have a right no one from our former life of sin possesses. Why would we want to go back to them? Why would we want to live like that again, without the nourishment of the cross?

III. Christ is the destination for my life (vv. 13-14).

Appl: We are to go to Christ outside the camp. For the Hebrew believer in the first century, this would have meant leaving behind Judaism with its temple and sacrifices and food rituals once and for all. For you and I it means that we

leave the secular paganism we see all around us with its pleasures, its selfishness, its possessions, and its pride. It may mean we leave Roman Catholicism with all its popularity among our family members. Whatever it means specifically for us, pursuing Christ as the destination for our lives will always mean two things for each of us:

1. Going to Him always means leaving the camp behind and bearing His reproach (v. 13). The Hebrew believers had once been willing to do this (10:33), but now they needed the example of Moses to remind them again of what it means to go to Christ (Heb. 11:26). It means choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (v. 25).

2. Going to Him always means seeking the city He is preparing for us (v. 14). We are told that this city is not here, i. e., in this place. We are not called to establish God's city on this earth. Instead, Christ has prepared a place for us, and that city, the New Jerusalem, is coming. The person who goes to Christ outside the gate will probably never be elected president of the United States. That's ok. Here we have no continuing city. We seek one to come.

Conclusion: And so we end where we began. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jam. 4:14). Here we have no continuing city. Will you say with the apostle Paul, "For me, to live is Christ"? Will you say, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ"? Is He your example, your altar, and

your daily quest and destination outside the gate? If so, go forward. Never go back.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*