

To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever and ever.

¹² *Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.* ¹³ *Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.* ¹⁴ *For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.* ¹⁵ *Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.* ¹⁶ *But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.* ... ²⁰ *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,* ²¹ *make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Text: Hebrews 13:12-16, 20-21 A 2-26-17 Jonah 3:10-4:11 Matthew 16:23-26 Psalm 146
Hymns: 44, 764, 767, 396

HOLD ON TO WHAT WE'VE BEEN GIVEN IN CHRIST!

God of grace and God of glory, on Your people pour Your pow'r;
Crown Your ancient Church's story; bring its bud to glorious flow'r.
Grant us wisdom; grant us courage for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.
(WS #764: 1)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

The book of Hebrews, from which our text is taken, was originally written to Jews who had become Christians. They were facing serious persecution for their faith, to the point that some of them had property taken away (He. 10:34). So that they wouldn't be persecuted any more, they were tempted to give up their Christian faith and go back to the Jewish religion. Throughout the book of Hebrews the Lord urged them not to return to that religion that has no Jesus, but to keep holding on to Jesus and their eternal salvation in Him. That leads us to our theme: **HOLD ON TO WHAT WE'VE BEEN GIVEN IN CHRIST!**

The verse before our text speaks of the animals that were sacrificed on the Day of Atonement. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled their blood on the mercy seat. Afterwards the bodies of the animals that had been sacrificed were burned outside the city of Jerusalem (Lev. 16:27). This was a type, or picture of Jesus removing our sins.

In our text we're told that in order to "*sanctify the people with His own blood, [Jesus] suffered outside the gate.*" Jesus died on the cross on Calvary, just outside of Jerusalem, sanctifying us with His blood. "*Sanctify*" in the original text means, "separate from what is profane and dedicate to God; set apart as sacred to God; make holy." By nature, we're not holy, we're sinful (Ro. 3:23). Thankfully, the Bible assures us that "*Jesus ... loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood*" (Rev.1:5). Jesus cleansed us from our sins with His blood and "*made [us] holy*" in God's sight. Earlier in the book of Hebrews we're assured that "*the blood of Christ ... [cleanses] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*" 9:14 By His blood Jesus

“separated” us from living a life of sin and unbelief, and “dedicated us to God” and living our lives for Him.

The writer to the Hebrews reminded the people, and he reminds us, of what we have been given in Jesus. God brought us to faith in Jesus. Jesus has taken all of our sins away. Jesus rescued us from a life of unbelief and sin, and from eternal death in hell. Jesus has given us a whole new life dedicated to God, and eternal life in heaven! All this was at the terrible cost of Jesus’ suffering and death for our sins.

“Therefore,” we’re urged, “let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” The picture in the original text is persevering in our suffering for Jesus’ sake. As Jesus willingly suffered for us, so He calls upon us to willingly suffer for His sake. Jesus says, *“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”* (Mk. 8:34). As Christians, our “cross” is whatever we suffer for following Jesus. For the Hebrews, suffering for Jesus’ sake meant more of them possibly having property taken away. If things kept getting worse, it could even mean losing their lives. For us Christians today, suffering for Jesus’ sake means facing growing opposition and hostility. Some Christians in our country have lost their businesses for refusing to be a part of things that God says are wrong. Jesus has told us, *“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”* (Jn. 15:20). After Jesus fed the 5,000, who ended up rejecting Him, He asked His disciples, *“You do not want to go away also, do you?”* *“Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God’”* (Jn. 6:67-69, NASB). To that we say, “Amen!”

We’re reminded, *“We have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”* The original text makes a strong contrast between this life and the life to come. When we’re told, *“we seek the [life] to come”* the original text is literally, *“we keep seeking/desiring the [life] to come.”* Although we sometimes suffer in this life for following Jesus, with His help we can accept it and bear it knowing that one day He is taking us to heaven. Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Mt. 5:10-12). Paul says, *“For our momentary, light affliction is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

“Therefore,” we’re told, “by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” God wants us to “**continually** offer” Him our thanks and praise. Think of the Jewish Christians back then, hearing these words. Facing severe persecution, it was very easy for them to let themselves dwell on their fears, complain about God’s will for them, feel sorry for themselves, doubt God’s love and help for them, and be tempted to turn away from Him. But did they really want to go back to the Jewish religion and sacrifices that was all becoming obsolete, and was without salvation in Jesus? No, they should remain in their faith in Jesus and *“by Him continually offer the sacrifice of praise [and thanks] to God.”* *“By Him,”* that is, by Jesus, is emphasized in the original text. Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament sacrifices with His perfect life and His perfect sacrifice on the cross. All who

believe in Jesus “*continually offer the sacrifice of praise [and thanks] to God*” – the “*fruit*” of our faith in Jesus.

God not only wants us to praise Him when things are going well, but also when we’re suffering for His sake. Our heavenly Father deserves our thanks and praise. When Jesus calls upon you to suffer for His sake think of what Jesus did and suffered for you, and thank Him for it. We can praise our heavenly Father even when we’re suffering, knowing that He knows what’s best for us, that He has a purpose in the suffering He’s sending us, and that He is causing our suffering to serve our good (Ro. 8:28). Scripture urges us, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*” (Philip. 4:4-7). Keep praying to God and praising Him in words and hymns also when you’re suffering. As we pray to God and praise Him He lifts our spirits and makes us feel better, and gives us His peace.

We naturally tend to focus on ourselves: **my** hurts, **my** needs and wants, the way **I** think things should be, etc. This is especially true when we’re suffering: “Poor me.” “People should feel sorry for me.” “Why do **I** have to suffer like this?” In the middle of their suffering the Hebrews were urged, “*Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*” God wants us to think about others, even when we ourselves are hurting?! Absolutely. Even when we’re suffering, as we place our trust in Jesus we can reach out to others in kindness to help them with their needs. Such “*sacrifices*” – such fruits of faith – are well-pleasing to God. Helping others, especially when they’re suffering, helps to take our mind off of ourselves, especially when we’re suffering. Helping others makes them feel better, and that makes us feel better, too.

We’re told, “*Now may the God of peace*” (who gives us His peace in the face of our suffering for His sake) “*who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead*” (the Savior we trust in and serve is our living Savior) “*that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.*” The idea of “*make you complete*” in the original text is that in our suffering for His sake God mends us and restores us, making us complete, equipping us and preparing us to serve Him. **God** “*through Jesus Christ*” makes us complete, whole, mature Christians. **God** “*through Jesus Christ*” moves us out of love for Him to want to do what is pleasing to Him. **God** “*through Jesus Christ*” enables us by His strength to do what is pleasing to Him. As we keep looking to God, **He** enables us to persevere in our faith in Him while suffering for His sake. **God** “*through Jesus Christ*” helps us to keep looking forward to our heavenly home. **God** “*through Jesus Christ*” gives us joyful hearts, even in the face of our suffering. **God** “*through Jesus Christ*” enables us to keep trusting in Him and reaching out to others in kindness. “*To [God] be glory forever and ever.*”

Christian friends, **HOLD ON TO WHAT WE’VE BEEN GIVEN IN CHRIST!**

Lo, the hosts of evil round us – scorn the Christ, assail His ways.
 From our fears that long have bound us, free our hearts to faith and praise.
 Grant us wisdom; grant us courage for the living of these days, for the living of these days. Amen. (WS #764:2)