



Remember Your Leaders

Hebrews 13:7-14

1. Remember Your Leaders (verse 7-8)

2. Remember Their Teaching (verses 9-14)

Once upon a time, on the banks of a great river in the north of Germany lay a town called Hamelin. The citizens of Hamelin were honest folk who lived contentedly in their Grey stone houses. The years went by, and the town grew very rich. Then one day, an extraordinary thing happened to disturb the peace.

Hamelin had always had rats, and a lot too. But they had never been a danger, for the cats had always solved the rat problem in the usual way- by killing them. All at once, however, the rats began to multiply. In the end, a black sea of rats swarmed over the whole town. First, they attacked the barns and storehouses, then, for lack of anything better, they gnawed the wood, cloth or anything at all. The one thing they didn't eat was metal. The terrified citizens flocked to plead with the town counselors to free them from the plague of rats. But the council had, for a long time, been sitting in the Mayor's room, trying to think of a plan.

"What we need is an army of cats!" But all the cats were dead. "We'll put down poisoned food then . . ." But most of the food was already gone and even poison did not stop the rats. "It just can't be done without help!" said the Mayor sadly.

Just then, while the citizens milled around outside, there was a loud knock at the door. "Who can that be?" the city fathers wondered uneasily, mindful of the angry crowds. They gingerly opened the door. And to their surprise, there stood a tall thin man dressed in brightly colored clothes, with a long feather in his hat, and waving a gold pipe at them. "I've freed other towns of beetles and bats," the stranger announced, "and for a thousand florins, I'll rid you of your rats!"

"A thousand florins!" exclaimed the Mayor. "We'll give you fifty thousand if you succeed!" At once the stranger hurried away, saying: "It's late now, but at dawn tomorrow, there won't be a rat left in Hamelin!"

The sun was still below the horizon, when the sound of a pipe wafted through the streets of Hamelin. The pied piper slowly made his way through the houses and behind him flocked the rats. Out they scampered from doors, windows and gutters, rats of every size, all after the piper. And as he played, the stranger marched down to the river and straight into the water, up to his middle. Behind him swarmed the rats and everyone was drowned and swept away by the current. By the time the sun was high in the sky, there was not a single rat in the town. There was even greater delight at the town hall, until the piper tried to claim his payment.

"Fifty thousand florins?" exclaimed the councilors, "Never..." "A thousand florins at least!" cried the pied piper angrily. But the Mayor broke in. "The rats are all dead now and they can never come back. So be grateful for fifty florins, or you'll not get even that . . ." His eyes flashing with rage, the pied piper pointed a threatening finger at the Mayor. "You'll bitterly regret ever breaking your promise," he said, and vanished.

A shiver of fear ran through the councilors, but the Mayor shrugged and said excitedly: "We've saved fifty thousand florins!"

That night, freed from the nightmare of the rats, the citizens of Hamelin slept more soundly than ever. And when the strange sound of piping wafted through the streets at dawn, only the children heard it. Drawn as by magic, they hurried out of their homes. Again, the pied piper paced through the town, this time, it was children of all sizes that flocked at his heels to the sound of his strange piping. The long procession soon left the town and made its way through the wood and across the forest till it reached the foot of a huge mountain. When the piper came to the dark rock, he played his pipe even louder still and a great door creaked open. Beyond lay a cave. In trooped the children behind the pied piper, and when the last child had gone into the darkness, the door creaked shut.

A great landslide came down the mountain blocking the entrance to the cave forever. Only one little lame boy escaped this fate. It was he who told the anxious citizens, searching for their children, what had happened. And no matter what people did, the mountain never gave up its victims. Many years were to pass before the merry voices of other children would ring through the streets of Hamelin but the memory of the harsh lesson lingered in everyone's heart and was passed down from father to son through the centuries. [\[1\]](#)

That well-known story is called, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin". Primarily, the story deals with the importance of being faithful to those who labor for you. Pay them their due. But, among other things, and perhaps what we remember most, it demonstrates the power of an influential leader. He can lead many away and astray. The Pied Piper tells us that some can follow leaders to our death.

Down through the centuries, people have always followed false leaders, even to their death. In the days of Moses, Korah, Dathan and Abiram

rose up against Moses, and many followed them, even to their death, as the earth opened up and swallowed them whole (Numbers 16). In the days of Jehoshaphat, Aram, king of Israel, followed the counsel of his false prophets, even unto his death in battle (1 Kings 22). In the days of Jeremiah, people refused to believe him, but rather followed the counsel of the false prophets who were saying, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace (Jeremiah 6:14). Many, who followed these false prophets, died at the hands of the Babylonians.

The lure of false teaching can be very strong. Seventy-five people died following David Koresh. More than 900 people joined Jim Jones to their death in Jonestown, Guyana. Even those who have been demonstrated to be false are still followed. Despite Harold Camping's failed predictions of the end of the world (twice), there are still those who are following his teaching, believing that the end of the world will be on October 21st. This has always been the reality. This will always be the reality.

Our text this morning, has to do with spiritual leaders. It has to do with those who are good, and those who are bad. So, I invite you to open your Bibles to Hebrews, chapter 13. Our text this morning begins in verse 7 and continues through verse 14. They have to deal with religious leaders. Who should you follow? Who should you not follow? Let me read these verses for you now.

Hebrews 13:7-14

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

My first point comes directly from verse 7, ...

1. Remember Your Leaders (verse 7)

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

This is a call to remember those faithful men, who lived before you, who led you in spiritual matters, who taught the word of God to you, who modeled a life of faith, who lived with integrity. And as you remember them, imitate them.

Now, when it comes to false teachers, the most important matter is to look at their lives. When Jesus was speaking about the false prophets who would come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15), he said, "you will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). In other words, you will be able to identify a false teacher by the way that he lives. Is the fruit of the spirit evident in his life? What comes out of his mouth? What sorts of attitudes does he have, especially when challenged and confronted by others. How does he handle finances? How is his marriage? How does he manage his family?

If his family is a wreck, and he has little patience with others, and he lashes out in anger when confronted, and claims to be a spiritual leader of others, then you may very well have a false teacher before you. Hold in question the things that he says. But, if his marriage is solid, and his children are well-behaved, and his finances are under control, and you see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in his life, then you know that you see good fruit in his life. And there is a pretty good assumption that you know that the spiritual leader is genuine. And this was the case with the men who first led these Hebrews, to which this letter was written.

In verse 7, the call is to "consider the result of their conduct." Think about their life. In other words, consider how they lived. And perhaps, consider how they died. Look at what happened to your spiritual leaders. Look at how it ended with them. Did it end well? Then imitate their faith.

Remember, the days when these words were written were days of persecution. Look back in chapter 10, verse 32, ...

Hebrews 10:32-34

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

In other words, remember when you first heard the truth about Jesus the Messiah. Remember when you finally saw that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant. They weren't easy days. They were hard days. They were days of persecution. They were days of great sufferings. Those who embraced Jesus were ridiculed. Believers were pressed to deny the faith. Enemies came and took away your property. What happened to you also happened to your spiritual leaders. But that's OK, because you know that your future is in heaven.

Do you remember what happened to your leaders? In Jerusalem, Peter and John were taken into custody and "flogged ... and ordered ... not to speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40). A bit later, Stephen was stoned for preaching the gospel (Acts 7). In Psidian Antioch, a persecution was instigated against Paul and Barnabas and they were promptly driven out of the district (Acts 13:50). In Lystra, Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). In Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten publicly and thrown into the inner prison, with their feet in stocks

(Acts 16:24). In Thessalonica, the mob attacked the house of Jason, and brought him before the city authorities, saying, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7). In Berea, again, enemies of the gospel agitated and stirred up the crowds against the gospel (Act 17:13). Paul was driven out of the city. In Corinth, the influence of the gospel was enough to bring the leaders before Gallio, the proconsul of the city, accusing the disciples of worshipping God contrary to the law (Acts 18:13).

This sort of thing happened in many cities where the gospel came. And when it came, who bore the brunt of the persecution? The leaders did. That's how it always is. In days of persecution, the government will always, always, always go after the leaders.

And here in verse 7, I do believe that this is what the writer to the Hebrews is getting at. Things are hard. The Jews are trying to pull you back to their Judaism. But, remember those who led you. Through faith, they remained faithful until the end. So imitate their faith and press on in your faith. If what they taught was able to sustain them through the greatest of trials, it's able to sustain you through the trials of your life.

What's the key to it all? How were they able to endure? Verse 8 says, ...

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

This is the core of what your leaders believed. This is the core of what your leaders taught. They taught Jesus Christ -- the fulfillment of the promises, the way to God, a better leader than Moses, a better priest than Aaron. Jesus who is One who gives a better rest than Joshua, who gives a better covenant based upon a better sacrifice which leads you to a better tabernacle: the heavenly one.

The leaders of these people taught Jesus Christ as the way to God, One who atoned for our sins, who ever lives to make intercession for us on our behalf, who sat down at the right hand of God, who will bring us safely into His heavenly kingdom. They taught Jesus Christ.

Now, the emphasis here in verse 8 is upon Jesus Christ, the unchangeable one. This is how chapter 1 began. Speaking of Jesus, we read, ...

Hebrews 1:10-12

You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; and they all will become old like a garment, and like a mantle you will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not come to an end.

Jesus is the creator of the world. He is before all time. And though the earth and the heavens will all be rolled up like a scroll, and changed like a garment (when we see the new heavens and the new earth), still Jesus Christ "is the same," and His years "will not come to an end." Jesus Christ existed before the creation of the world. Jesus Christ will be here long after this creation passes away. And, throughout the entire time, He will be the same. He won't diminish in strength. He won't diminish in power. He won't diminish in influence or authority. He won't lose His love for us. He won't stop praying for us.

As verse 8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." "Yesterday" has visions back to before the beginning of time. But, it may refer to His life upon the earth, when He took on flesh and blood, when He lived a perfect life, when He died for our sins to bring us to God.

"Today" probably refers to His present duty of intercession. Jesus is our great high priest, who offered up His life for us. As the great high priest, He is bringing us to God. He is continually doing this. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus "always lives to make intercession for [us]."

"Forever" probably refers to His role in eternity, as the reigning King in His kingdom when everything is under His feet and the host of heaven are worshipping the Lamb upon the throne. Those who went before you, who led you, who spoke the word of God to you, were looking to Jesus Christ. And since he never changes, we are called to do the same. The same Jesus that helped them remain faithful until the end is the same Jesus that will help us remain faithful until the end. Imitate their faith.

Let's turn now to my second point, ...

2. Remember Their Teaching (verses 9-14)

That is, remember the teaching of those who led you. Don't be carried away when others come along with something other than Jesus. When someone comes along and says, "You want to get to God? Do these things." "You want to be close with God? Say these things." "You want to really please God? Eat only these things", or behave in this way; when someone comes along and says something other than "trust in Jesus" as the true leaders of the first century said, then know that it's not of the truth. And don't follow it. Don't be carried away with it.

Indeed, this is exactly what we see in verse 9, ...

Hebrews 13:9

Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.

If you have been here for the exposition of the book of Hebrews, you know that the big pressure that the original readers were facing was from the Jews, they were trying to pull these people back into the law. They were trying to pull them away from Christ.

In this case, we have mentioned the eating of foods. As the NIV says, "ceremonial foods." That is, the foods prescribed in the law. You can read about the foods in Leviticus 11. They were some in the first century, who were arguing that you need to keep the ceremonial diet. And in so doing, you will please the Lord.

But, followers of Jesus are no longer bound to such a law. In speaking to the disciples, Jesus said, "Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Mark 7:18-19). In so doing, Jesus "declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19). But, the law dies hard. And some were saying that eating the right foods did matter.

And I love the way that the rebuttal comes in verse 9: "It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited." Do you really want to strengthen your heart? Not by foods. They are of no benefit. Then strengthen it by grace. Titus 2:11-12 says, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age."

It's the grace of God that instructs us in the way of holiness. It's the gospel that spurs us on to love and obedience.

A couple days ago on my blog, I put forth two sentences. One is the way of Judaism and legalism and most world religions. The other is the way of Christ. I want to read them for you. Then, I want for you to think about which one rings as true in your ears for your life. "I obey; therefore, I'm accepted." "I'm accepted; therefore, I obey."

The first sentence is the way that the false teachers would have you to go. Obey God, and He will accept you. If you don't obey, you won't be accepted. Or, in verse 9, eat the ceremonial foods, and God's favor will shine upon you. If you don't eat the foods, watch out! He'll be angry with you.

The second sentence is the way of the gospel. We are accepted in Christ through faith. As a result, we willingly obey His commands. We are thankful followers. And food doesn't have anything to do with it. Rather, it's grace. God has given us the greatest gift of all: His Son. Better than any angel. Better than any other Old Testament figure. And He came and died for our sins. He became our high priest. He brings us to God. We simply need to believe in Jesus -- believe that He accomplished the work of redemption, believe that He has forgiven us "all our transgressions" (Col 2:13).

And belief in the grace of God will strengthen your heart much more than any obedience will do and much more than any eating of food will do. They were not benefited. So, church family, don't be pulled away from the gospel. "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings" (Heb 13:9). Do not be carried away by those who would teach these things, by those who consume themselves with laws and regulations and rituals and foods, by those who will not be benefitted.

In fact, they have no part in Christ. This is what verse 10 says, ...

Hebrews 13:10

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

In other words, if you are serving the Old Covenant, you have no right to the New Covenant. When this letter was written, (it appears), the temple had not yet been destroyed by the Romans (which took place in 70 A. D.). The central portion of the Jewish faith was still in high gear. As people sinned, they would bring sacrifices to the temple and give them to the priests. The priests would, in turn, offer them up in smoke to God on the altar. The feasts and festivals were still going on, like Passover and Yom Kippur.

And the author here says that you can't have a part of the Jewish system and still have a part of Christ, because the two are diametrically opposed. Jesus came as a fulfillment to the Old Covenant. When the Old Covenant was fulfilled, it was no longer needed. It became obsolete. It's like an expired coupon, like an old computer, like things of "old times".

In fact, that's exactly what the writer to the Hebrews says. Hebrews 8:13, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." With these words, he is anticipating the day when the Old Covenant would disappear entirely. and in A. D. 70, God (through the hands of the Romans), saw fit to terminate the sacrifices. And they have remained silent through today.

That's by design, because the Old Covenant is obsolete. There is no more need for the sacrifices. There is no more need for the feasts. There is no more need for the festivals. They were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They were fulfilled at the altar of Christ. They were fulfilled at the cross of Christ. They were fulfilled when Jesus became a sin offering for us. To participate in the Old system is to disqualify you for the New.

There is a movement of evangelicals who are pushing for sacrifices to begin again in the temples. Have no part in this. This is an attempt to resurrect the Old Covenant. But, the Old Covenant is obsolete. We now have a new, better Covenant in Jesus.

Verse 10 is very definitive, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" (verse 10). In other words, you can't have your cake and eat it too. You either embrace the cross of Christ and cling to it alone, or you embrace any other way to God that you think is best. But, you can't have both.

In Paul's day, the major discussion was circumcision. Some were saying, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). With the circumcision, of course, came observance of the law of Moses (Acts 15:5). Circumcision was the indicator. To take circumcision meant that you were embracing the whole law; and to embrace the whole law is to be lost.

Thus writes Paul to the Galatians, ...

Galatians 5:2-4

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

I hope that you see the contrast here. You are either justified before God by grace alone, through faith alone, plus nothing. Or, you are severed from Christ. Such is the teaching of verse 10: "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat" (verse 10).

The explanation continues in verse 11, taking the imagery a bit further.

Hebrews 13:11-13

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

Not all sacrifices were burned outside the camp. The burnt offering (as described in Leviticus 1) was to be totally consumed on the altar (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17). Regarding the other sacrifices, they were to be offered up to the Lord and various portions of the sacrifice would be food for the priests. But, two sorts of offerings were to be burned outside the camp. The sin offering (Lev. 4:12, 21) and the offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:27). Some of the sacrifice was burned inside the tabernacle, on the altar. Some of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the holy seat. But, the rest of the sacrifice was burned outside the camp, in a clean place (Lev. 4:12). There was no eating from the sacrifices.

The writer to the book of Hebrews runs with this imagery. The place of the skull, where Jesus was sacrificed, was outside the city wall of Jerusalem (Matt. 27:32-33). And in this way, He becomes like these sin-atonement sacrifices. And I believe that the significance here is that the sacrifices here mentioned weren't consumed by the priest. They weren't eaten.

Therefore, there is no need to trust in the things that we eat. Because, even in the Old Covenant, when sins were forgiven, eating didn't take place. Rather, our forgiveness comes through the shed blood of Jesus, not through things we eat or don't eat.

Notice how verse 12 puts it: "Jesus, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate." Right here, it's as clear as can be. We are cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ. His death upon the cross is what cleanses us from our sins. As we trust in Him, we are made clean and pure and righteous before Him.

This has been the message of Hebrews over and over and over again. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (9:22). "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4). We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (10:10). "Therefore ... we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (10:19).

Then, the cry of application comes in verses 13 and 14, ...

Hebrews 13:13-14

So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

This ties back to verse 7, in which we were called to remember our leaders. We are to remember how their lives turned out. We are to imitate their faith. When applied to Jesus, how did His life turn out? Not very well. He died as a criminal, between two robbers, shamed by those of the nation of Israel, the very ones He came to save. He came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and they turned on Him.

The call for us as well is to go out of the camp. Let us bear His reproach. Let us stand for Jesus. Let us live like our Master. "He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

When the Jews would arise and call them back to the sacrifices, calling them names, telling them that we are forsaking the ways of their ancestors, saying that they are foolish, they were to press on in Jesus, knowing that He is better than any of these things.

Isn't this how Jesus went to the cross? He knew fully that He was right in His unjust trial. He could have fought. He could have stayed off that cross. He could have appealed to His heavenly Father, and had twelve legions of angels dispatched to rescue Him (Matt. 26:53). But how would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? (Matt. 26:54). How would He have atoned for our sins? But, as He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36). As a result, Jesus willingly went to the cross so that "He would see His offspring ... and be satisfied, ... justifying the many ... and bearing their iniquities" (Is. 53:10-11).

And that's what we are to do. Our kingdom is not of this world. We ought not to live for the here and now. Rather, let us live for the "city which is to come" (verse 14). "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (Heb 10:34). Let us cling to our heavenly kingdom in Christ, who gives the very strength to persevere through the hardships of life.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 26, 2011 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] http://www.yankeeweb.com/library/storytime/grimmbros/grimmbros_41.html