

Hebrews



**Promises
Faithfully
Kept**

Hebrews 13.7-17 (CSB)

Let's Go!



Intro: Let's Go

Have you seen any of the Hertz commercials with Tom Brady? It's not really great acting. I didn't really expect Tom Brady to be a great actor. But it works well because it combines a form of Tom Brady's pump up phrase with Hertz's motto: Let's Go.

One of the more recent commercials makes fun of Tom Brady's temporary retirement this spring. It has Tom and an actress sitting next to him, both of them have an electric vehicle charger plugged into their chest. The actress expresses concern for Tom, and it seems that they both just needed a recharge so they could keep going. Now, toward the end of this letter, after we have received this great sermon that is Hebrews, the author is telling us that we as a particular church: Let's Go!

**7 Remember your leaders who
have spoken God's word to you.
As you carefully observe the
outcome of their lives, imitate
their faith.**

**8 Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday, today, and forever.**

**9 Don't be led astray by various
kinds of strange teachings;**

for it is good for the heart to be established by grace and not by food regulations, since those who observe them have not benefited.

**10 We have an altar from which
those who worship at the
tabernacle do not have a right
to eat.**

11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp.

**12 Therefore, Jesus also
suffered outside the gate, so
that he might sanctify the
people by his own blood.**

**13 Let us, then, go to him
outside the camp, bearing his
disgrace.**

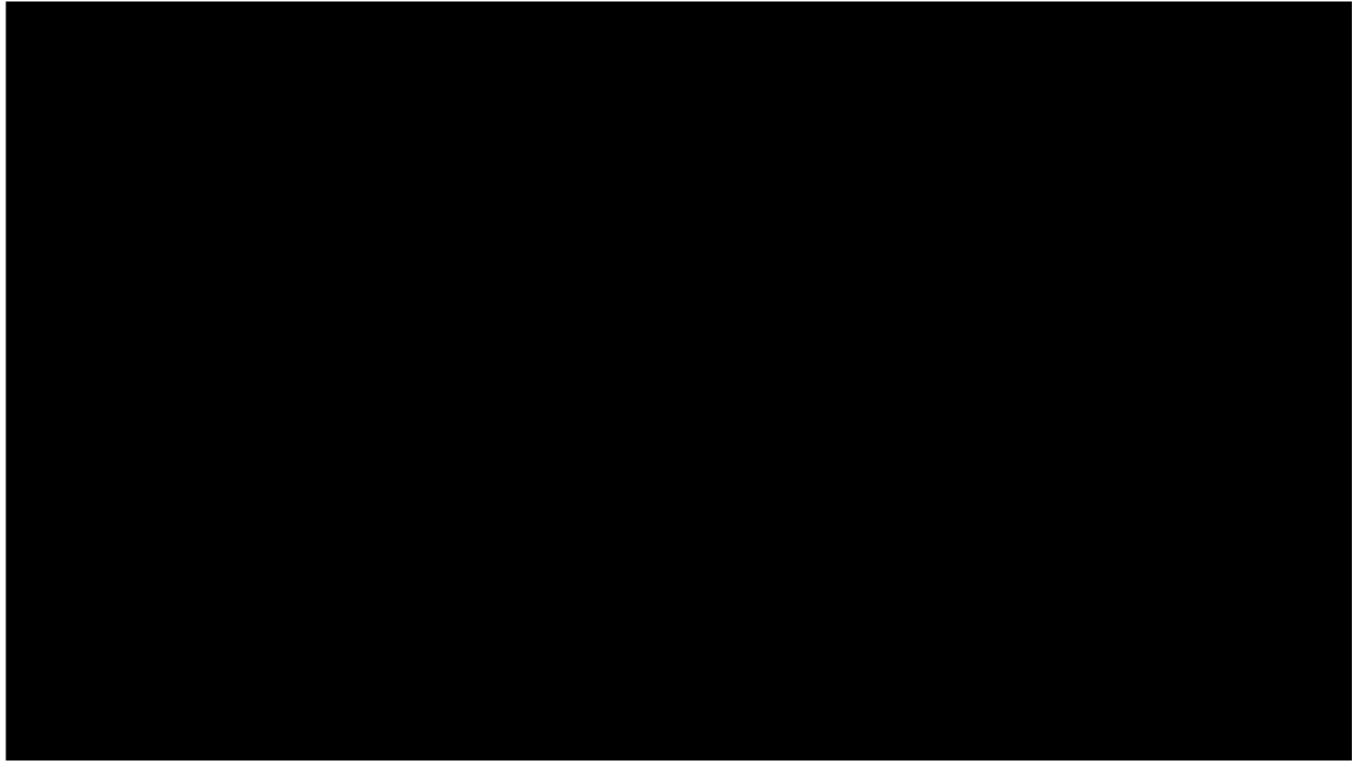
**14 For we do not have an
enduring city here; instead, we
seek the one to come.**

15 Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

16 Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account,

**so that they can do this with joy
and not with grief, for that
would be unprofitable for you.**



Pray

**Let's go forward with the same
gospel message that has been
faithfully proclaimed to us.
(Vv. 7-8)**

- Let's go forward with the same gospel message that has been faithfully proclaimed to us.

7 Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Sometimes we look to this verse to speak of God's immutability, that He does not change. But it appears that the focus is more so on the salvation that Christ brings and the message of the gospel. A literal translation of the verse is "Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same and forever." The time focus seems to be audience's reception of the gospel as a church, or at least since the events of the gospel. Since the incarnation and the atoning sacrifice of Christ, salvation has been through faith alone in Christ alone. The point is connected to the previous verse.

The church had former leaders who faithfully proclaimed the gospel according to the scriptures.

The term leader here seems to be another term for elder. "Leaders" here is not generic but refers to the recognized leaders entrusted with authority by the church. Their authority was tied explicitly to the gospel. They were given leadership by means of the gospel and were entrusted with this leadership as long as they remained faithful to the gospel. Christ Jesus is the chief shepherd who raises up undershepherds from within local churches. Undershepherds are not to act as hirelings, doing the job of shepherding only for money or prestige or only when it is easy.

These leaders referenced in v. 7 are no longer on the scene for this church. They appear to be separated from the church now, either by death or imprisonment or banishment. For whatever reason, these leaders are no longer present. But their influence still is. These were leaders who showed themselves faithful unto the end of

their ministry with the church. They showed themselves faithful first by adherence to Christ and proclaiming Him. They showed their faithfulness through their care for the church. They showed their faithfulness to God by not turning from the faith whenever persecution came. They modeled the message.

All who have placed their faith in Christ have someone to be thankful for, someone who shared the good news of grace with us. Consider the outcome of how faithful leaders lived. They are the ones who did not seek to give glory to themselves. They are the ones who did not throw off accountability. They are the ones who accepted the sacrifices of Christian leadership.

Augustine of Hippo struggled with the concept that God was calling him into Christian leadership. He wrote to a mentor that he was intimidated by the idea of church leadership. He said that there is nothing easier in the world than to do church leadership the wrong way, making it about yourself or for your own benefit. Doing it the right way is perhaps the most difficult activity under heaven.

Consider the teaching, practice, and outcome of those who have shown themselves faithful to Christ in the past so we move forward in like manner. Let's Go!

**Let's go to God by Christ to be strengthened by grace and go away from false assurances.
(Vv. 9-10)**

Let's go to God by Christ to be strengthened by grace and go away from false assurances.

9 Don't be led astray by various kinds of strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be established by grace and not by food regulations, since those who observe them have not benefited. 10 We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat.

Remember the context of the original audience. They were a church mostly comprised of Jewish Christians. Most of them had come out of the non-Christian Jewish community. Some of them may have traveled to Jerusalem to participate in festivals and bring animal offerings to be sacrificed at the Temple. Others had tried to uphold their distinction as Jews through certain practices. There appears to be a connection here by the author between offerings made in Jerusalem and certain dinners available to those living away from Jerusalem. These meals were distinctively Israelite and had meaning filled with the Mosaic covenant, somehow relating the eating of certain foods with the sacrificial system.

So when the author warns against trying to have your heart strengthened by foods, he's not saying to stop eating or delighting in flavors. He's telling them to stop trying to find their hope in the old system that disregarded the sacrifice of Christ. These Christian believers were tempted to syncretize their new Christian beliefs with old forms that explicitly excluded Christ. These contrary meals forms and practices were like security blankets. Did they actually accomplish what the participants were hoping now that Christ had come? No. But those thinking about going back to the old practices were thinking maybe they could have the Christ and the good feelings of self-assurance that their old practices gave them.

Jesus plus anything equals nothing. Jesus plus nothing is everything.

You and I need our hearts to be strengthened and enlivened. We in our very essential core need nourishment and fuel in order to live for God in daily life. We need regular and constant dependence on God by prayer. We need the provision of fellow believers speaking the truth of the gospel into our lives. We need fresh reminders daily of the grace of God according to the Word. We need the encouragement of noted growth in our lives through obedience. These reassure us.

You know what offers us false assurances? Big emotional moments offer us false assurance. I bungee jumped one time when I was a teenager. I was scared when I was dropping. But as the cord pulled me upward, I felt confident I was fine. But all my confidence disappeared as soon as I started dropping again. It is the same for us when

we base our confidence in emotional moments. The practices referenced by the author could have made the believers feel good about themselves because they would have participated in a community that told them it was required to be good, but if the gospel is contrary to that practice, the practice provides you with false hope. Speaking of self-assurance, we must be careful to be sure that our righteousness does not come from our own sense and perspective. Remember Jesus's parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector who came into the Temple. The Pharisee boasted out loud in front of everyone, saying, "Thank you God that I am not like these sinners, including this tax collector. I do good things and am a good person." He was self-assured. The tax collector, though, recognized his sinfulness and cried out, "God have mercy on me, THE sinner!" According to Jesus, the tax collector went home right with God.

Our self-assurance is not enough and may be deceptively diabolic. We need the faithful community of Christians in our local church to see and share with us. Are we confessing Christ? Are we demonstrating a life characterized by the Spirit? Are we people of faith, truth, and love?

As we strengthened by grace through daily seeking Christ and regularly seeking Him together in our worship and practice, we will see God at work. As we continue faithfully to proclaim the gospel according to the scriptures, we will be able to move forward in real confidence together.

Let's go out of the city of man to Jesus, looking to our heavenly city. (Vv. 11-14)

Let's go out of the city of man to Jesus, looking for our heavenly city.

11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing his disgrace. 14 For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come.

On the Day of Atonement in the Mosaic sacrificial system, goats and bulls were to be offered as sacrifice. The carcasses of the animals were to be taken outside of the congregation of Israel and burned. So the ones sacrificed were expected to be outside of the city after the sacrifice had been made. The author made this connection and is telling us, we need to go out to Jesus because the one sacrificed for sins is out there waiting for us. Instead of trying to justify ourselves by our best works or trying offer enough of our own sacrifices to make God happy, we need to accept that only Jesus could ever be enough to satisfy God's wrath toward our sin.

Remember, Jesus plus nothing is everything. We don't want to try to add extra regulations to faith for salvation. We're saved by faith not by our works. We're saved by faith so that we will do good works. We already have God's pleasure in Christ, so we live accordingly. We do not need to try to earn it, because we never could. So, stop trying to find hope in anything other than Jesus and be willing to be explicitly identified with Jesus on His terms.

The author has two intended references to being outside of the city. In the Old Testament system, life was understood to be in the presence of God. If you were in the proximity of the Tabernacle or Temple, you could know that you were near to God's presence. If you had leprosy or were cast away from the people for a wrongdoing, you were considered to be going into the realm of death. So there was great shame associated with going outside of the congregation of Israel.

But Christ has reversed that expectation. John tells us that "Jesus is the true light, who gives light to everyone. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him." To those who have refused to believe in Him, Jesus has been treated as a shameful person to be banished from thought and decent conversation. He has been treated unclean. But as God Jesus has the power to make that which is unclean to be made clean. Life is not found in man's judgments but in God. So if God goes outside of the camp, life is no longer in the camp but wherever God is.

John continues, "But to all who did receive Him, He gave the right to become children of God."

Just like it was then, so it is now. Some in the world around us think that it is embarrassing to claim faith in Jesus and live for Him consistently. Some think it is unloving to do so. Some even think it is hateful or foolish. I know of one nationwide community organization that is now starting to reject certain Christian beliefs, even though it has the word Christian in their title, because Jesus's beliefs are not inclusive enough for them.

Will you identify with as a Jesus follower even as the world considers it taboo?

One day God will make clear to all that Jesus is Lord. The city of man is in shambles. It is inconsistent in its direction. It's filled with false promises and hinged on the finite, sinful individual person who cannot fulfill man's hopes. The city of God is built on the indestructible life of Christ Jesus. It is consistent with the reign of God who is over all. The only cost for entrance is denial of yourself and the acknowledgement by faith that Christ is Lord.

But for those of us who have come to faith in Him, we know that His glory is our good, and so we should gladly identify with Him, even if it means the citizens of man mock us. It is Christ who stands for us. God is the judge and the savior. It is His judgment and love that should determine matters for us.

To Christ let's go!

**We get to praise God, do good,
and be generous. Let's go!
(Vv. 15-16)**

- Let's go in praising God, doing good, and being generous.

15 Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.

We are to worship God with all of our areas and moments of life. As Romans 12:1 tells us, in view of God's mercy, we are to offer our bodies as sacrifices, living holy, and pleasing.

Because of God's gracious salvation, we should live as a response of worship.

But you know we need to use words and actions to express love appropriately.

As Ephesians 2:10 tells us in light of our gracious salvation, we are to do good works that God prepared in advance for us to do.

If you belong to Christ, you will live for Christ in the details of your life. You will line your life up with Christ's life and live accordingly.

That includes gathering together with fellow believers in the church to sing praise to God. We are designed by God to enjoy and express beauty.

Let's Reflect the Creator's glory through our creativity, doing so in line with His Word and wisdom.

You are better equipped to speak the name of Christ in the world if you sing His name in worship with the church.

And worship then extends into generous care for others. As we seek to grow as disciples in community, we will have opportunity to serve one another. We will have opportunities to provide for needs outside of our congregation. We should prioritize giving of our time, talents, and treasure as a great delight in imitating Christ.

**Let's go forward together as we
currently are with confidence
and joy. (Vv. 17)**

Let's go forward together with confidence and joy.

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

I know that text comes off very strong at first. Let me share another translation with you. "Be persuaded by the character of your leaders to trust them and submit to their leadership." God is not commanding you to follow another mere human blindly. He is calling you to use discernment, biblical discernment. To the extent that your leaders are leading according to Scripture, follow them. If they are getting out of line with Scripture, respectfully speak to them about the need to line up with Scripture again from the Scriptures. It might be that we need to come to a better understanding of the Scriptures together. But at some point, you have to let new leaders have the opportunity to pass the test of your scrutiny.

The elders from v. 7 have passed off of the scene. The elders in v. 17 are newer. They maybe don't look like the former elders. They maybe don't have the same haircut or listen to the same genre of music. They may all have the gift of teaching but have different gifts in other areas of ministry than the former leaders.

For some people, that noted difference may be a different way of leading. For others, that meant a different style of preaching. For others, it was a different style of counseling. But consistently for everybody, it meant getting used to a different leader, a different person. It was different. But you know what is not different? Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. This church belongs to Christ. What is not different is the emphasis that we have a commission to make disciples who make disciples.

One of my jobs as a pastor is to constantly prepare others to either join me in leading or be my replacement.

A healthy church raises up elders gifted and able to teach the church from the Scriptures. This is a constant, ongoing need for church health.

I'll have completed 5 years of pastoring here on Sept. 16. I was the still new pastor for the first 3-4 years. Some have actually done studies on relating how long a pastor has been with a church by how the church references him: the new pastor—>our church's pastor—>my pastor—>then it's your first name.

One of the reasons such transitions take years is because it is abnormal to the NT pattern. In the NT churches were supposed to appoint elders whose testimony and lives have been witnessed over time by the church, preferably witnessed over years. Even if we currently have the practice of looking outside our church for some leaders, we should not depend on outside help but on Christ's help, who gifts us with men able to teach and lead faithfully.

We must develop disciples whose character meets the criteria of the NT writings on elders and overseers. We must develop leaders who look and act like Jesus (clothed in Christ.)

Once an elder is established as one, we should extend trust to the extent that we are able.

Yes, it is important that elders be tested for our belief and practice beforehand. It is important to have regular check ups for spiritual health with each other. We should have reason to be confident that the leaders for the church are trustworthy.

But what about after they have passed that test? What about when they keep passing the regular check ups?

We have to be willing to let new leaders actually pass our scrutiny tests so that we trust them with shepherding our souls. If we start with the presumption that leaders can't be trusted because they are leaders, we never let them pass our trust test. If we never let them pass our trust test, then we will never move forward together.

Friendship cannot bear the burden of constant scrutiny.

The trust you should have in an elder is not one of complete reliance or total dependence. It is as Paul said, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." As elders are jogging ahead of you in the marathon of Christianity, follow their lead. If they start to veer off the path or off the track completely, don't follow. As a Baptist church, we have checks and balances for leadership, including having the congregation at large as having greater authority than the elders. The elders are given authority by the congregation.

If the elders are following Christ and you are part of the same church, help make their role as an elder enjoyable. It is of great benefit to you that those who watch over you actually enjoy doing so.

There is an audible difference between having leaders who are trustworthy and trusted and those who are trustworthy but not trusted. The audible difference is either friendly laughter or groaning grunts. It is a difference between conversation and sighing over controversy. It is either praying with you in the midst of joy or loss or praying that he does not lose his joy from leading.

I gotta tell you again, one of my favorite responsibilities is meeting with the elders. We pray, we laugh, we plan, we serve. We fight for one another and keep from fighting with each other. You help make those times joyful. Through your prayer, your encouragements, your presence, your participation, you help us experience great joy as leaders.

You also help make the experience of being part of Grace Community a joy for everyone else. As you help make it a joy to be part of this family of God, others outside of our faith family see our joy. People want to be part of joyful churches.

Help keep it that way through your glad following and glad participation in this race we run together.

Let's Go.

