From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
March 16, 2025

A City on a Hill
Hebrews 13:7-14

Introduction

When I was a child, I remember the sense of security I had while Ronald Reagan served as our president. I also remember his farewell address to our nation and the great sense of loss that I felt knowing that he would no longer be serving as our nation's president. John Winthrop preached in 1630 upon arriving in Massachusetts; in his sermon Winthrop declared his fellow pilgrims: "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us." He also said of their future in Massachusetts:

> Beloved there is now set before us life and good, Death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his Ordinance and his laws, and the articles of our Covenant with him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land we go to possess.

John Winthrop's sermon had a profound impact upon President Reagan for he placed that line about Winthrop's hope and expectation that one day that land he and the pilgrims discovered, "...will be as a city upon a hill." I still remember President Reagan's farewell address to our nation; I was in eighth grade at Neshaminy Junior High when I heard it. Reagan's address is just over 20 minutes long, and although we do not have the time to listen to it, I would like to share with you his concluding remarks that I believe have affected our nation more than some of you may realize:

> I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.
>
> And how stands the city on this winter night? More prosperous, more secure, and happier than it was eight years ago. But more than that: After 200 years, two centuries, she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm. And she's still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.
>
> We've done our part. And as I walk off into the city streets, a final word to the men and women of the Reagan revolution, the men and women across America who for eight years did the work that brought America back. My friends: We did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference. We made the city stronger, we made the city freer, and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad, not bad at all.

There is a phrase introduced to our nation from another campaign that I was going to use for the title of this sermon... a phrase I have heard many Christians say or embrace that I have chosen not to use. I know that when some use the phrase, it has been and continues to be used out of a hope and desire for America's good. However, I have instead chosen the phrase: "America is a shining city on hill" used by a president I still admire and respect.

Jesus is Eternally the Same (vv. 7-9)

What I dislike about a sermon series like "Christians Say the Darndest Things" is that today you will receive an exposition on Hebrews 13:7-14 without the benefit of seeing the wounder of chapters 1:1-13:6. We are skipping right to the end without gazing at the Christ who is, "**the heir of all things, through whom God also made the world.**" Right out of the gate in the book of Hebrews, we discover a Jesus who is, "**the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of His nature.**" In Hebrews we discover a Jesus who, "**upholds all things by the word of His power**." The Jesus of Hebrews 13:8 is the same Jesus who, "**When he had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**" (Heb. 1:1-3).

Because Jesus is, "**the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of His nature**" (1:3), He is the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9). Jesus is the great "I AM" (John 8:48-59) because He is equal with the Father as the eternal Son (John 5:15-23). Jesus is He who was and is "**the Light of mankind**" because He is the Word who was in the beginning with God through Whom "**All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being**" (John 1:1-4). This same Jesus became flesh through the miraculous conception in Mary's womb while still a virgin, He was born and lived among mankind yet without sin, and He lived for the purpose of dying for sinners like you and me on a cross. This same Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb, and on the third day... He defeated sin and death by rising from the grave. For this reason, this same Jesus is highly exalted and upon Him is, "**the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father**" (Phil. 2:8-11).

Jesus is the same yesterday in that when God the Father spoke creation into existence, it was Jesus the Son who completed it: "**for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him**" (Col. 1:15-16). The reason why the earth remains in orbit and every atom and molecule remains in place is because the One who is also the same today is responsible for holding, "**all things together**" (Col. 1:17).

Jesus is the same yesterday in that He was the One before Whom Abraham bowed (see Gen. 18:1-22). Jesus is the same yesterday in that He is the One who wrestled with Jacob (see Gen. 32:22-33). Jesus is the same yesterday in that He appeared before Joshua as the captain of the Lord's army, and it was before Him that Joshua removed his sandals and worshiped (Josh. 5:13-15). Jesus is the same yesterday in that He was the One who was seen by King Nebuchadnezzar in the furnace as He kept Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from perishing in blazing fire of the furnace (see Dan. 3:8-30). Jesus is the same yesterday.

Listen, the same Jesus who provided Peter, John, and James the miraculous catch of fish that compelled Peter to fall to his knees and respond: "**Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man**" (Luke 5:8), is still the same today! The same Jesus cured lepers, made the lame walk, the blind see, and the dead rise... is still the same today! The same Jesus who died for sinners and rose from the grave is still the same today! The same Jesus who commanded us to make disciples (Matt. 18:19-20) and promised, "**you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judah, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth**" (Acts 1:8), is still the same today! And listen, the same Jesus who promised that He would come back in the same way that He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9), is the same Jesus yesterday, today, and forever!

The point is that if you get Jesus wrong, or if you miss Him, or if you choose any person, thing, or ideology over Him... you will get everything else wrong! The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is a treasure that no other treasure can compare. This is why we are told in verse 8 to, "**Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their way of life, imitate their faith**." Those who truly spoke the word of God to you are those who did not get Jesus wrong!

Jesus is the same yesterday.

Everything in this World is Consistently Unsatisfactory (vv. 10-11)

Because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever... His life, death, and resurrection provide for us a more permanent solution to our sin problem. What this means is that Jesus' cross is a better altar unlike ones used under the Old Covenant. The carcasses of the animals slaughtered on the Day of Atonement during Passover were taken out of the city to be burned; if they were thrown into a pile with the city and burned, they would have defiled the city. Not so with Jesus, for while living, he was led outside of the city to become a curse for us on the cross we deserved (Gal. 3:10-14), and by dying for our sins outside the gate, His blood is what makes us holy.

What is the point? Here is the point: There is no person, there is no religion outside of Christianity, and there is no government that can do (if you are not a Christian) or has done (if you are a Christian) what Jesus alone can do. Paul Washer put it this way in his sermon preached to pastors some time ago answering the question as to how Jesus' death on a cross for a few hours on a tree to save a multitude of men from an eternity in hell:

> "Because that one Man is worth more of them put together. You take mountains and mole hills, crickets and clouds. You take everything. Every planet, every star, every form of beauty. Everything that sings, everything that brings delight, and you put it all on the scale, and you put Christ on the other side and HE outweighs them all, HE outweighs them ALL! Brethren, this is the one we chase after!"[1]

Compared to Christ, everything in this world is not only temporary but unsatisfactory. Jesus is the living water, and all the promises of this world together cannot compare. They are all broken and cannot deliver what they promise to deliver! The Old Covenant only provided a temporary solution to the sin problem of the Hebrew people; the work of the priests required them to remain

[1] Shepherds' Conference 2016 | General Session 9 - Paul Washer (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkqVZm9-7jc)

standing for the need of a sin covering was ongoing. This is why just three chapters prior, we are reminded in Hebrews 10:1 of the following: "**For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the form of those things itself, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually every year, make those who approach perfect.**" Then in Hebrews 10:11-13, we are told of the only one qualified to address our sin problem: "**Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet**." (Heb. 10:11–13)

So, why is it that we are chasing after the shiny things of this world that cannot deliver what only Jesus is able to provide? Christian, if you have the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, why are you looking for something different? Why would you long for anything else when you have He who is the "Bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16)?

Jesus is the same today.

If You Have Jesus, You are Waiting for Something Greater (vv. 12-14)

These next verses serve as the crescendo of the entire epistle, and they begin with the word "Therefore" and if the author of Hebrews was texting you Hebrews 13:7-14, you would see "THEREFORE" in all caps because it is a very big THEREFORE! In other words, in light of all that has been said from the very first sentence of this epistle to verse 11, "**Jesus also suffered outside the gate, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood**" (v. 12). What was accomplished on His cross for our sins outside the gate on Golgotha's hill has done infinitely more than anything else you have chased after thinking that person, or thing, or ideology would bring you purpose, peace of mind, or pleasure. They cannot give you what only God is able to deliver!

Dear Christian, Jesus sanctified you by dying for you, his corpse was in that tomb for three days, and the proof that Jesus sanctified you is in the fact that He marched out of that tomb three days later! Who or what can give you what Jesus has provided? If you are a Christian, Ephesians 1:7-8 is about you: "**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.**"

What Jesus provided on the altar of the cross is only available for those who receive it, and those who receive it will never be the same because of Him. The evidence that you have received what Jesus has made available to you is a desire to follow Him. To any and all who wish to know Him, must follow Him, for Jesus said: "**If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul**" (Matt. 16:24–26)?

What we read in Hebrews 13:13 is no different: "**So then**..." So what? In light of the fact that Jesus is, "**the same yesterday and today, and forever**" (v. 7), and what has been provided on the altar of His cross for our sins (v. 10)... "**let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His**

reproach" (v. 13). The only reason anyone would do that is if they understood Jesus to be infinitely more precious and valuable than any person, any thing, any ideology, any city, or nation of this world.

We chase after Jesus because in Him is life is and because He is life, He alone is the "**Light of mankind**" (John 1:4). We chase after Jesus because He is, "**the Light of the world**" and the one who chases after Him, "**will not walk in the darkness but will have the Light of life**" (John 8:12). Because we chase after Him and not the shiny trinkets of this world, He said of His Church: "**You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.... Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven**" (Matt. 5:14, 16).

If you are a Christian, you are the light of the world because you have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God! He is the Alpha and Omega and He is the first and the last (Rev. 1:8, 17). It is before Him that the nations will stand in judgment and a day is coming when it will be from Him that earth and heaven will recoil in response to His holy and majestic presence! If you are a Christian, you belong to Him and because you belong to Him, you have no reason to fear Him who the tribes of the earth will mourn when He comes again (see Matt. 24:30).

This may shock some of you and it may offend others of you, but you really need to hear this: America is not a shinning city on a hill! Here is what the Bible says about America and the nations that surround her: "**Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales**" (Isa. 40:15).

Because we follow Jesus, we chase after another shinning city, we chase after His city... a city, "**which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God**" (Heb. 11:10). Because Jesus is the same yesterday and today, and forever, we live as foreigners, aliens, and strangers even in the United States of America. America cannot be our shinning city on a hill because we are promised something infinitely greater: "**For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking a city which is to come**" (Heb. 13:14). Here is what Revelation 21:23-27 says about the city we really belong to:

> **And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.**

If America is a shinning city on a hill, it is nothing more than a tiny piece of glitter in comparison to the city we really belong to, and what makes the city we are seeking, that is to come, infinitely more beautiful is the Jesus who outweighs them all. He is the same yesterday and today, and forever!