

Outside the Camp with Jesus

2/9/25 NCF Teaching by Associate Pastor Melissa Logsdon

Personal Health Update: For those of you who have been, or would like to be praying for me, I want to give you a brief update. This week I met with specialists at Barnes Jewish Hospital in St. Louis. We discussed my latest diagnosis of Sjogren's disease with small fiber neuropathy. They affirmed continuing my current treatment plan of getting IVIG infusions one week a month for the foreseeable future. Of interest, my cluster of symptoms is rare enough that I've been placed in a cohort of 50 people for research. The team is hopeful that in the coming years the research will produce better treatment options.

In the meantime, ongoing prayer is appreciated. For strength of body and spirit for me to continue this constant cycle of treatments each month and that my body will continue to respond as well as possible to the treatments I am receiving. So that I can continue to have as much strength and mobility as possible to live out each day whatever God has for me to do.

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of all these medical appointments and disabling symptoms, I find myself needing God's word even more in my life. Going without just doesn't do anymore. Ok, maybe going without spending intimate time in God's presence wasn't ever a great plan. But, when life is busy or going well, it seems to be easier to set it aside for later. For me, I find a hunger for more of God, more of God's presence, more of God's word, more of God's hope in each day.

So, it might not come as a surprise to you then, that in January when faced with an increase in disabling conditions, I found an increase in focus in my scripture reading. As I read through Hebrews I just couldn't help but read it through in 3 different translations. It brought a richness to the reading and to my days.

There's a lot of concepts that really rang out to me, but of particular interest is the verse I'm sharing with you today from Hebrews 13:13.

HEBREWS 13:13

*"Let us then go to [Jesus] **outside the camp** and bear the abuse he endured." - Hebrews 13:13
NRSVUE*

To give you a little context to this verse, ok, a lot of context to this verse (maybe it's just me but I needed a lot more context). I'll share a brief overview of the book of Hebrews and the historical Biblical significance around "outside the camp".

HEBREWS OVERVIEW

The **author** of Hebrews is unknown, but probably someone that was running in the same circles as the Apostle Paul.

It was written to help steer Christ followers back to the **good news** Jesus taught. There were many religious people trying to pull Christ followers back into thinking that somehow working really hard at following all the laws would set them right with God (which never ever worked for anyone, ever).

So the author sets out to remind the hearer that **Jesus is superior** to the angels, Moses, the old sacrifice system, and the priests.

Rather, the hearer is to be reminded of how great this salvation is that Jesus made possible: we get to enter into **rest** from all our striving now and for eternity. We get to enjoy God's rest and we get to **come into God's presence with boldness** because Jesus made the path for us.

In Hebrews 6:17-20 CEB we read

[17] When God wanted to further demonstrate to the heirs of the promise that his purpose doesn't change, he guaranteed it with a solemn pledge. [18] So these are two things that don't change, because it's impossible for God to lie. He did this so that we, who have taken refuge in him, can be encouraged to grasp the hope that is lying in front of us. [19] This hope, which is a safe and secure anchor for our whole being, enters the sanctuary behind the curtain. [20] That's where Jesus went in advance and entered for us, since he became a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 10:19-22 NRSVUE

[19] Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This is the audacious good news that the followers of Jesus were risking losing sight of. This good news that Jesus made it possible for us to just waltz right up to God anytime now.

We will circle back around to this, because...*it is really good news!*

OUTSIDE THE CAMP

Background

So turning our attention to the phrase “outside the camp” found in Hebrews 13:13, let’s consider what the hearers of that day would have thought of and what might come to our minds as well.

Usually when you think of the Biblical texts referencing being sent outside the camp, you think of those that had sinned in some way or become **unclean**: people with leprosy, anyone who had a discharge flowing from their body, anyone who had touched a dead body.

Not only the people that were unclean in some way, but also we find that outside the camp was the place for **latrines** to be placed and the place for animal **carcasses** from the sacrifices to be burned up.

Although most sacrifices took place at the altar at the tabernacle, there was a sacrifice that would take place outside the camp of a **red heifer**. It was sacrificed and the blood was sprinkled toward the tabernacle and then also the ash was collected and mixed with water and given to those that were unclean to make them clean again. I’m in no way giving this important sacrifice adequate scope in this teaching, This was a very important sacrifice for the Jewish faith. (There’s a LOT more about this that might be interesting for some to read more about, but I’ll stop here in order to continue on).

The important point of this sacrifice is the importance of this sacrifice—it was made outside the camp and brought the people back into right relationship with God and back into the community.

MY EXPERIENCE

Sometimes, I too, feel very much “outside the camp”. If I’m being honest with myself, and with you, my health is one of those ways. **My health** puts me in a place where often I am not able to participate in an activity or event. Whether I opt out, or others choose not to invite me, the disease and disability my body bears creates a barrier to community at times.

THE OTHER

What about you? Can you relate to feeling “outside the camp” at times?

What are those circumstances?

Or does a group of people come to your mind that you may have placed outside the camp?

Or that you feel others have relegated that person or group of persons to outside the camp?

Religiously? Geopolitically?

Where are they? What services, comfort, belonging, are they not receiving?

GOD SPEAKS

Interestingly, there's a second part to this wilderness experience.

It seems that this very place—outside the camp, in the wilderness, in the desert— is a place where we find God showing up to speak with individuals, and to lead and care for the displaced nation of Israel.

A few stories come to mind.

One story I'm thinking of is **God speaking to Hagar** (the slave of Abraham and Sarah). They had mistreated her and finally sent her away. In her despair in the wilderness, God speaks to her and provides for her. She names God, El Roi, the God who Sees, for God saw her desperate situation and cared for her.

And then just to lay a big obvious story out there, when **God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God led them through the wilderness (a whole nation)**. Although this people group did not have land to call home, God continued to care for them, guiding them, keeping them safe. By day, God's presence was seen in a cloud that would have given them relief from the blazing sun, and by night a pillar of fire (that I'm guessing not only provided light, but perhaps comfort in that dark, unknown territory, and maybe warmth as well).

There are countless more examples recorded in the scriptures of God speaking to and caring for people found outside the camp for one reason or another.

And if you'll allow me to chime in, in those times when I too feel outside the camp—when I feel very frustrated, very lonely—I do find God meeting me, speaking truth and comfort to me, **every time**.

HEBREW WORD

What I'm about to tell you may or may not surprise you in light of what I just shared.

The Hebrew word MDBR means both desert and speaks.

In my theological studies, I didn't take any courses on Hebrew or Greek. I might want to sometime! Especially after hearing Ron Simkins in depth teaching last week on the 4 consonants YHWH that spell out God's name in Hebrew, that we often pronounce as Yahweh.

So, I won't try to go into much detail here. However I want to share with you the little bit I learned about this 4 consonant Hebrew word, MDBR.

This word can be read Medbar and mean desert or Midaber and mean speak. It's the same word though: MDBR.

So interestingly there is a connection in the Hebrew language/faith to God speaking to us in the desert. So the place that can feel the most isolating, is the very place that God often speaks to us.

Which makes sense then why I was feeling like there was all these verses around the desert/wilderness/being outside the camp as a place to avoid AND the very real reality that it was not a place that God shys away from at all, but rather really regularly shows up.

ISAIAH 40

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

*A voice cries out: “**In the wilderness** prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

A voice says, “Cry out!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

*Get you up to a high mountain, **O Zion, herald of good news**; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”*

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep.” -Isaiah 40:1,3-6, 9-11 NRSVUE

It seems like if we were to prepare for our great God, maybe we would be called to sweep the city streets and fluff the cushions in the places of honor, to prepare a banquet in the great hall and Polish the silver. Not, out in the wilderness.

But instead God prepares a way in the desert.

When God says to speak comfort to God's people he has the voice out in the wilderness. To take all the places that are uneven and rough and make a clear path so God's glory can be revealed and that all flesh shall see it together.

To say here is your God.

OUTSIDE THE CAMP WITH JESUS

So when you think of this, I guess it's no surprise that Jesus frequently ministered in out of the way places. And that his death was outside the camp. And that the faith community made the Connection of Jesus' sacrifice to the red heifer sacrifice. The red heifer offered a temporary fix for bringing needed purification. Jesus brought the permanent fix.

So when the author of Hebrews wrote to the followers of Jesus, who were dealing with religious folks trying to get them to go back to their old works/rule following system, instead of being told to just deal with it, the author encouraged them to go outside the camp to identify with Jesus (and any shame, mistreatment that that attachment brought).

No more trying to be perfect.

In Psalm 119:96: *"I have seen a limit to all perfection,"*

Can you relate to that? That even our best, very best efforts seem like not enough.

The verse concludes, *"but your commandment is exceedingly broad."*

God's way is accessible for all of us.

There is a highway prepared in the wilderness for us to see God's glory revealed and receive God's tender loving care.

And it's from that place that the author of Hebrews encourages us to continue in good works as an act of worship to God.

CONCLUSION

The invitation of Hebrews to join Jesus outside the camp is still relevant today. To choose to identify, not as one that is part of the city, part of the dominate ruling powers of the political or religious systems around us, but rather as one with Jesus. To bear with any shame and abuse we may encounter in identifying with Jesus. And to join with Jesus' ministry to others outside the camp.

And there in the desert God speaks to us.

We get to enter the holy of holies to speak with God. We don't have to be a priest and be limited to only once a year entrance. We don't have to make sacrifices for our sins before we can talk to God. Jesus made the way and keeps the way open for us. So when God sees us, we are pure

before God. **So that anytime, we just get to run right up into God's loving arms and chat. This seems audacious! This sounds like good news. Like really good news, for us all! And it is good news!**

God, thank you for how you comfort us, hold us, invite us into your presence. Thank you that even when we feel like we are in a desert/wilderness time, when we feel pushed outside the camp that we thought we were part of, that even then you are with us. Speaking to us. Guiding us. Loving us. Thank you Jesus for making it so we can approach God confidently anytime, for all time. Amen.