Without the Camp, the Anointing Oil, and Occupied with the Father's Business

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Him — The Center of Hebrews 13:13

Hebrews 13:13 reads: Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. The center of that verse is him. His name is not even mentioned there — you have to look back to verse 12 to find it: Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. He was not crucified within the city limits of Jerusalem. He was led outside the gate, outside the present order of things, and there he suffered and died.

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ was not set up in the city plaza, not at the center of the religious and civic life of Jerusalem. It was outside — and that has a moral effect upon us. We who are his have been crucified to the world and the world to us. There ought to be a moral separation between the world and our souls.

But notice the word the Spirit uses. Not thou shalt go forth — which is how Moses would have written it, the legislator giving commands. It is let us go forth. That is a Christian word. It is an invitation from one who goes alongside, not a command imposed from outside. And the one who draws us is him. Go forth — unto him. Without him at the center, without the person of the Lord Jesus himself as the object and the draw, everything loses its sweetness and its glory. It is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ that gives this verse all its attraction.

> *Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,*

that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. — Hebrews 13:13–15

Worship First, Then Service

Verse 14 is a verse about faith, though the word faith does not appear in it. How? Because Hebrews 11 has already told us about those who looked for a city whose builder and maker is God, who were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seeking a better country. Hebrews 13:14 carries the same spirit: here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. The heart that has set its hope on what is above is living by faith — not because a label says so, but because that is what faith looks like.

Verse 15 follows: by him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. Praise. Thanks. One syllable each, and yet sometimes as difficult to produce as anything. The currents of the world — the news, the noise, the politics, the endless stream of opinion and anxiety — rush through the mind and carry away what ought to be most natural to a redeemed heart. Praise and thanksgiving ought to be like breathing to us. They should not require effort to remember.

Then verse 16: but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. There it is — worship first, and then service. The character of the service depends in part on what produced it, what its origin was. To do good flows from a heart that has already given thanks, that has already been with him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. This order is not accidental; it runs through the whole of Scripture. Worship comes first, and then the service that flows from it is genuine rather than manufactured.

The Anointing Oil and the Incense — Nothing of Christ for the Flesh

Exodus 30 describes two things that were to be made for the tabernacle: a holy anointing oil and a sacred incense. Both were compounded precisely according to God's direction. The anointing oil was to be used to sanctify the tent of meeting, the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altar, and Aaron and his sons as priests — everything and everyone connected with the service of God was to be anointed with it, set apart by it, given a common fragrance that spoke of Christ.

The incense was to be beaten fine and placed before the testimony in the tent of meeting, where God would meet with Moses. It too was a fragrance for God's pleasure — unique to that place, inimitable, belonging entirely to the Lord.

The prohibition attached to both was severe. Anyone who compounded the anointing oil for any purpose other than its appointed one was to be cut off from his people. Anyone who made incense like it to smell it for his own pleasure was to be cut off. The things of Christ are for God. Yes, we benefit from them — we are saved by his sacrifice, and we will give thanks for that through all eternity. But first and foremost, these things are for God. Nothing that speaks of Christ is to be appropriated by the flesh, used for the flesh's pleasure, deployed for any purpose other than the worship of God and the service connected with that worship.

The anointing oil and the incense together evoke worship, because they are unique to that place and speak of Christ. But there is service too — the service of the perfumer compounding the oil, the service of the priests anointed by it. Service flows from worship, shaped and sanctified by what the worship has produced. The two cannot be separated, and the order cannot be reversed.

Occupied in My Father's Business — and in These Things

Luke 2:40–52 records almost everything we know of the Lord Jesus between his birth and the beginning of his public ministry. He was twelve years old when his parents took him to Jerusalem for the Passover, and when they left he remained

behind. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, hearing them and asking questions — and all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers.

His mother's question was natural: Child, why hast thou dealt thus with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee distressed. And his answer: Why is it that ye have sought me? Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business? There are intrinsic glories in the Lord Jesus that set him apart from us entirely. He was the Son of God, and even as a twelve-year-old boy that came out — the teachers of Israel astonished at what they heard from him. Those glories are his alone.

But the exhortation of 1 Timothy 4:15 takes the same word and gives it to us: occupy thyself with these things — be wholly in them. The Lord Jesus was occupied with his Father's business. I am to be occupied with these things — the things of God, the things of Scripture, the things connected with him. That is the example he left, so that I might walk in his footsteps, not in his intrinsic glory but in the spirit of his occupation. Be wholly in them, as he was wholly in his Father's business.

> *Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business? — Luke 2:49*

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