**Hebrews 13:1-17**

Let brotherly love continue. **2**  Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3**  Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. **4**  Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” **6** So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” **7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **9** Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. **10** We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. **11** For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. **12** So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. **13** Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. **14** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. **15**  Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. **17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

**“The City Of God”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. We heard today from Hebrews, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Of course, this extends especially to those that now rest from their labors and are asleep in Christ. August 28th marks the commemoration of St. Augustine. He helped to influence much of Western Christianity, probably 2nd to that of St. Paul. This pastor or bishop lived in Northern Africa of the Roman Empire during the 4th and early 5th century. Even Marin Luther before the reformation chose his training as a monk according to the Augustinian order.

In light of the words from Hebrews, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” Augustine understood this well, since in 410A.D. the great city of Rome fell. This immense shockwave to the empire led many Roman citizens to blame such punishment on leaving the pagan gods and becoming Christians. In response to such accusations and as comfort to Christians Augustine wrote, The City of God. This book depicts two different cities alongside each other, the city of man and the city of God, but only one would last and has the victory. Augustine says it this way, “…the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord.”[[1]](#footnote-1) We can humbly serve the city of man, since the grace given by Jesus’ sacrifice has exalted us to the city of God.

1. **The city of man needs much sacrifice for it easily falls short in the hands of sinners.**
2. Everyone is born into a city regardless the size.

* The letter of Hebrews was written primarily to those who were born Jews as they struggled with being Christians.
* Augustine was born into a Roman world where his mother was a devout Christian and his father a pagan or unbeliever.
* We did not choose the time of our birth or the parents, city, or nation we live.

1. The sacrifices needed for the city of man fall to pride.

* For Jewish Christians this meant following Israel OT law as true glory above Christ. “Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.”
* Augustine felt pride prey on him in a deteriorating Roman world and a divided family. He rejected the Christian faith at youth, obtained a concubine for several years, and even had a kid out of wedlock.
* How has pride swayed us among the city of man today? Do we abuse our status or position over others? Has humility become a disguise for greed like Judas? Is sacrifice mostly on terms of what I get out of it?
* Augustine later wrote, “The earthly [city] has made for herself, according to her heart's desire, false gods out of any sources at all, even out of human beings, that she might adore them with sacrifices.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. **The city of God needs only one sacrifice for the humility of Christ is sufficient.**
2. His life worked all good among the city of man.

* Born a Jew God’s Son claimed the Law fulfilled by Him. No rest on the Sabbath, since He comes not to be served, but to serve.
* Born to redeem the Gentiles for His altar was the cross! This sacrifice had no restrictions like the temple.
* Born to save prideful humanity by His perfect love proclaimed for sinners. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

1. His death has opened the city of God by faith in Jesus.

* His blood shutdown the sacrificial system with animals and put away what any person can offer. Faith can only receive the gift God gives for Jesus was, “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:25)
* His blood is the glory of holiness God has poured out for sinners. “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”
* His blood flows out from the city of God not for the strong, but the weak. Jesus says, “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”
* After Augustin converted to Christianity he explains the true value of the city of God against the city of man. He said, “the true mediator delivered man from the false mediators – the demons; Christ superseded Moses, who was greater than any pagan;”[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. **The city of man needs the sacrificial work of those that humbly belong to the city of God**.
2. Since there is no lasting city of man, confessing Christ is the sign of confidence. “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”

* It is to say, “Amen” to forgiveness given by the Word of Jesus. It is to sing of the life made whole for us in Him. It is to confess the creed where the baptized belong to the city of God that has no end.

1. Since there is no lasting city of man, there is a need for acts of love. “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

* In relation to the Louisiana flooding the LCMS southern district president noted, “There are always three things that are necessary [after a disaster]: prayer…that by far is the most precious thing we can receive from people; volunteers will be necessary; and always gifts that are available are important…”[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Since there is no lasting city of man, suffering has become the mark of the heavenly city. “Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.”

* Augustine felt, what we still experience today, “So it falls out that in this world, in evil days like these, the Church walks onward like a wayfarer stricken by the world's hostility, but comforted by the mercy of God.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

After the letter of Hebrews, Jewish Christians would later understand the fading glory of Israel as it fell to the Romans in 70AD. Likewise, shortly after Augustine’s death in 430AD, the failing Roman Empire spread to his own land. Yet, not all was lost when the Germanic Vandals brought their wrath. Augustine's cathedral and library were left untouched.[[6]](#footnote-6) How do these words strike us today? “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” Pride keeps bringing the fall, but with the fall a living hope remains once-for-all in the cross. We can humbly serve the city of man, since the grace given by Jesus’ sacrifice has exalted us to the city of God. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/5814-de-civitate-dei?page=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/5814-de-civitate-dei?page=2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/5814-de-civitate-dei?page=4 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://blogs.lcms.org/2016/louisiana-flood-california-fires [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/5814-de-civitate-dei?page=2 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine\_of\_Hippo#cite\_note-63 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)