

"Holy City, Batman!: How to BE New Jerusalem While Waiting FOR New Jerusalem"- Hebrews 13

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Series Slide

A couple of weeks ago, I told you about the song "Gotham City" from the Batman & Robin movie soundtrack in 1997. That was Pt 1 of this message.

The song was written from the perspective of Batman.

Remember the chorus?

**A city of justice, a city of love,
a city of peace
For everyone of us
We all need it,
can't live without it
A Gotham City**

It's a nice lyric- but pretty standard until you listen to the rest of song- or just think about Batman's experience with Gotham City- and you find that all over the City, Batman- like no one else- feels the futility of his own fight against crime and injustice.

Remember the line about the "Mist of Crime" that hangs over Gotham?

Even when the City appears peaceful, in Gotham's underbelly its villains are plotting- evil never leaves Gotham- and nobody knows that...and feels it- more than the Batman.

Remember the line that reveals the heart of that song- where he sings "We need a place where we can go, A land where everyone will have a hero (even me)". That lyric shows how deeply in need- how overwhelming and impossible evil can feel- even for the strongest superhero. Sort of makes your crime-fighting seem almost pointless.

Like trying to hold back a tsunami with an umbrella- and the Penguin is holding all the umbrellas.

And yet- Batman has hope- a vision for Gotham City. One that he is striving towards and believing is possible. In fact he sings, in an overwhelmingly positive song- "We all need it and we can't live without it."

Title Slide-

"Holy City, Batman!: How to BE New Jerusalem While Waiting FOR New Jerusalem"- Hebrews 13

Today, we have come to the conclusion of the book of Hebrews. A baker's dozen worth of encouragement and warning to a suffering church. And the last couple of chapters have included this vision of a Holy City that all the saints of their Jewish past have been waiting for...and that as followers of Jesus we're all waiting for.

And understandably so. This church he's writing to has endured some pretty intense suffering. Persecution. Feelings of isolation and loneliness.

When they left their Jewish faith to follow Jesus, their old community abandoned them. They thought they were blasphemous heretics when they embraced Jesus as the Messiah. But they were living in a Greco-Roman culture that really didn't have room for a monotheistic culture that didn't indulge every sensual instinct about money, power, and sex.

This church felt homeless. Too progressive for their old Hebrew community... and too conservative for the Greco-Roman culture they lived in.

So the author of Hebrews has been doing 3 things in this letter.

First, He's been convincing them that actually following Jesus is more true to their Hebrew faith than NOT following Jesus. He basically tells them that all their respected Jewish heroes were all looking for and hoping for Jesus to come. So to reject him in order to be "MORE JEWISH" was a huge mistake.

Likewise, he's been encouraging them to be Holy in their culture. That means set apart. Different. Noticeable in a beautiful way. A way that invites people into this dangerous (you have to die to yourself) but beautiful (it yields flourishing and resurrection) sort of life with Jesus.

And 3rd, He has given them comfort by focusing on this idea of . this idea of a Holy City...

11:16 & 12:22 a (end at "Jerusalem")

in chapter 12 he called it Heavenly Jerusalem. It means "City of Peace". And like Gotham City under Roman occupation- Jerusalem was anything but a city of peace for them. So he gives them a vision for this City- this New Jerusalem- A city of justice, a city of love, a city of peace for every one of us. Its not a city that they will escape to when they die...It's a city that will come to them. It's a city that Jesus will bring when he returns.

And he tells them- you can live right now as if you are citizens of New Jerusalem...even before New Jerusalem comes to you. And you can take up residence in the Gotham-like city you are in now in such a way that you bring the justice, love, and peace of New Jerusalem right in the middle of the Mist of Evil...before Jesus brings the whole thing.

Here's John describing the Holy City from the book of Revelation.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

2 I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

So that's Batman's dream for Gotham...and it's the reality that Jesus is bringing. When the unseen becomes seen...and everything that we've been waiting for in our suffering comes to pass.

But in the meantime- CITY CHURCH- this is the City that we are called and equipped to be in Murfreesboro. A City of witness- A city of wiping away tears. Of hope. Peace, Justice- love.

Citizens of New Jerusalem...ambassadors getting the world ready for what Jesus has authored...and will finish.

Which is all very nice. But what EXACTLY should we be doing.

If I just think in terms of "go out- do justice, and be at peace, and love people"- well- that could just use a little more specificity. So today- we're gonna be SpecificITY Church. As the author of Hebrews tells us HOW to be NEW JERUSALEM while we wait for NEW JERUSALEM.

Hebrews 13

Let brotherly love continue.

2 Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily. 4 Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. 5 Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you. 6 Therefore, we may boldly say,

The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me?

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. 18 Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything. 19 And I urge you all the more to pray that I may be restored to you very soon.

20 Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus — the great Shepherd of the sheep — through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 equip you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to receive this message of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. 23 Be aware that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon enough, he will be with me when I see you. 24 Greet all your leaders and all the

saints. Those who are from Italy send you greetings. 25 Grace be with you all.

Transition: I figured since some of you might all be sitting here after Thanksgiving dinner arguments- I'd just make things real comfortable for all of us.

1) New Jerusalem isn't Conservative/Progressive, Republican/Democrat, or Right/Left- Its Holy.

- The church isn't a place we come to pretend like there isn't conflict in the world, in our families, or inside of us.
- Church is a family we belong to where we all acknowledge that Jesus is Lord- not ourselves. So we listen to each other and all submit ourselves to the Word of God, and take logs out of our own eyes before we go removing specks from others...and we do it all in love.
- So, please hear this point in love. (and to note- I'm not going to say everything about everything today. Which means I have to generalize. Which means YES- you will be able to say "I'm a republican and I don't think that. Or I'm a democrat and I don't think that." And you will probably be right. But I'm talking about overall direction and movement of our political parties today...And Jeremy Young is ready to debate you on this directly following the service.
- The root of the word "Politics" is the Greek word Polis- which means City. That's the word used in Hebrews when it talks about a heavenly City.
- Which means- despite some thoughts to the contrary- Christians SHOULD care and be involved to some degree with POLITICS- how and to what end our city our governed and structure.
- We should be using New Jerusalem as a template for how we vote, and what we hope for and fight for in our City. By the way- voting is the LOW BAR for politics. Hebrews 13 sets the HIGH BAR.

- A problem is that many Christians- and whole churches- have exchanged caring about POLITICS- what happens to our City- with devoting themselves to PARTISIANSHIP. An undying commitment to a POLITICAL PARTY.
- Such that often- our POLITICAL PARTY determines for us what we should believe about GOD instead of What GOD SAYS determining how we act politically.
- Politics- at their root- is having a vision for the kind of city we want to live in.
- Politics- when working the way they should- bring cooperation, compromise, and a spirit of community as we sacrifice for each other to bring about peace and justice- especially for those who are weak and vulnerable among us.
- So we have these visions of Utopia offered up by political groups- and they all have a map to how we get there.
- Capitalism and a Free Market will bring the City we all want and need.
- Socialism will bring it.
- We need more respect for authority.
- We need to speak truth to power.
- We need to have tighter borders.
- We need to welcome more immigrants.
- We need government to stay out of everybody's business. Except sexuality.
- We need government to stay out of everybody's business. Except economics!
- All these visions of how to bring utopia...how to bring about our VISION for Gotham City...but they all keep failing. They always have a shadow to their shininess. A group of people they ignore or exploit or marginalize.

- But over and over, Hebrews has called us not to a partisan vision of utopia- rather its called us holiness.
- To be Holy means to be set apart. Distinct. Different.
- Strange since the call is to be set apart- in a beautiful kind of way- how hard our churches sometimes try to be defined by one Party or the other.

- **12:28-29**

- Look at the lead in to Chapter 13.
- Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (that's new Jerusalem)- lets be thankful.
- By the vision we have of the Holy City- we can serve God in reverence and awe...God is a consuming fire.
- God described with the metaphor of fire is perfect for his holiness.
- Beautiful- warm- life giving...but to be respected, you have to revere fire...or you will get burned.
- Fire is a wonderfully beautiful source of light....yet it cannot be taken lightly. It can't be put in a drawer. You can't sleep in fire. You can't be flippant around fire without getting burned.
- There is an otherness to fire. It gives out warmth, gets rid of impurities in our food when we use it to cook- Fire gives light- but it can't be taken lightly.
- Fire is life-saving...but ...disrespected...ignored... and it will take your life.
- Sounds a lot like the back and forth encouragement paired with warning that the Hebrews has delivered to us chapter after chapter.
- So if we are children of the consuming fire that God is...holy....set apart...well...when we represent New Jerusalem...we don't let an American Party system, FoxNews or MSNBC....we don't let Sean Hannity or Rachel Maddow determine how we act as the New Jerusalem. We are yielded to the HOLY FIRE of the HOLY SPIRIT of this God that hovered over the chaotic darkness in Genesis 1 and hovered over the Son of God at his baptism, and hovered over the

apostles heads at Pentecost...and then ignited the church to go to the world proclaiming the gospel to every tribe, tongue and nation.

- We are the people that Batman longs for when he sings Gotham City. We are citizens of the New Jerusalem, before Jesus brings New Jerusalem. We are ambassadors for our heavenly country. WE ARE NOT getting our vision for a Holy City from REPUBLICANS OR DEMOCRATS.
- City Church- We are a Holy City waiting for a Holy City...no political party will ever determine for us what it means to be citizens of New Jerusalem. We will not be judged by political parties...rather by the Holy Fire of a God we serve... we will judge political parties. Regarding what sort of Politics we have as a church- we'll take our instructions from Hebrews 13.

Transition: So I want to show you 4 things we're called to as citizens of the Holy City- that for today's American Political parties- well is just going to make everyone uncomfortable with these seemingly contradictory ideas.

2) Citizens of New Jerusalem are tight-knit, and welcome outsiders.

- Often Conservatives think of themselves as a party of Family Values. And they seek to protect tight-knit nature of family.
- Which- is a good thing- I am for close tight-knit families.
- But in that, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not- conservatives end up leaving people out in the cold- immigrants...or people that don't behave like they do.
- On the other hand, progressives often emphasize inclusion and welcoming outsiders. But the method of doing it is to dismantle any existing structures that are tight-knit- especially if they are tight-knit because of their faith in Jesus.
- Think about universities where Xian organizations have been forced to allow non-Xians to serve in various offices.

- Basically, conservatives tend to highly value the positives of exclusion, but ignore its dark shadow.
- And progressives tend to value the positives of inclusion, but miss its ugly shadow.
- But Citizens of New Jerusalem- of the Holy City...are called to be both TIGHT KNIT- exclusive...but incredibly inclusive- open to outsiders.

- **13:1-2**

- First, he says "let brotherly love continue"
- This is Philadelphia- that's the Greek word. Which- if you've ever been to a Philadelphia sporting event- you know- its DEFINITELY not open to outsiders!
- In other words- church- you are each others' most fundamental family. Even above biological or adoptive ties- you're primary family is the people of God. All other identities will fade as eternity continues- but the bond we have as God's people only deepens into eternity future.
- I love that this church values this. We have a high value on treating each other as brothers and sisters- BECAUSE WE ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
- And yet- the very next command is to hospitality.
- That word is Philoxenia.
- Love for the outsider.
- The bit there about welcoming angels unaware is a reference to the Hebrew patriarch Abraham.
- Where he welcomed this strange trio of guests into his home, and fed them Cheeseburgers and milkshakes (I'm serious, read about in Genesis 18). And it was from caring for those outsiders- that God created the exclusive family of the Jews. And the whole point of the exclusive Jewish family was to bless the GENTILES- the whole world.

- So loving outsiders led to loving insiders whose purpose is to love outsiders.
- God, that's beautifully mind-blowing...and holy. Please meditate on that- CITY CHURCH- That's us. Holy City. Lets keep going.

3) Citizens of New Jerusalem share their money, not their beds.

- Here's another one that can confound our political affiliations.
- Often- the position of progressives is to re-distribute wealth in an effort to be fair to folks who don't have some of the advantages that others have.
- But conservatives tend to focus on everyone earning their right to be wealthy. Often look down on social programs that allow people to receive benefits without working for it.
- Additionally, often progressives care only about consent as it regards sexuality. Your sexual practices are your own, and as long as the other person or people agree to it- its your own right to do whatever you want.
- But conservatives say, "Actually, what you do with your sexuality affects our society. It matters that Moms and Dads stay together in marriage. It matters to our society that our homes are stable places (nobody knew that more than Mary and Joseph, AMIRITE? GET IT STABLE PLACES...GET IT? CHRISTMAS STORY. MANGER.)
- Also I've heard that Elizabeth was always insisting that Jesus cousin was born in the assistant regional manger...while actually he was born in the assistant TO the regional manger.
- (Just be thankful our Christmas series isn't going to be called Manger Things...YET!)

• 13:4-5a (end at "What you have") & 16

- Anyway- the writer of Hebrews comes in saying that citizens of New Jerusalem are to keep marriage honored and Holy. In other words- it matters on a cosmic NEW JERUSALEM level who you have sex with...Not only that- marriage matters to New Jerusalem. It's a

picture to all of us (single, married, gay, heterosexual) the picture of Christ and the Church given in marriage matters. Its holy...and should be treated as such.

- Additionally- we should not be controlled by our money. We should seek to share what we have. To be content with what we have, and care for others, inside and outside the church who have needs.

- **13:3**

- Specifically- these Hebrews are told to “remember those in prison” as if you are suffering the physical pain they are suffering. Being starved and beaten.
- Our money can often cause us to insulate ourselves from the pain and suffering of the world. We can just scroll through social media posts about suffering in the world, or change our profile pic to something that raises awareness...but not do the hard work of empathizing- or listening to understand...or getting to know those who are in deep suffering.
- The admonition here is to resist that. Don’t use your money to make your world all fluffly mattresses and pillows that give you a nice place to lay down and muffle out the cries of your brothers and sisters around the world. Instead, be familiar with their pain.
- Why? Because that causes us to cry out to God on their behalf. It causes us to speak up, to do something.
- Church- injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
- Like Batman- it can get overwhelming looking at the mist of evil in the city, BUT- we don’t get our hope from justice happening NOW- we get our hope from Jesus bringing a Holy City later.
- SO our aim in the meantime, is to take a preview of the Holy CITY to those cries..to that brokenness.

- Let me ask you this- What are the needs of our City? Do you know? And when you find out- are you dulling those cries- or sacrificing your own comfort to bring the ministry of Jesus to those cries?
- City Church- if we are to be a Holy City- set apart- we need to take our marriage and sex seriously. Its important.
- And we need to have open hands- and content hearts- not seeking more material things or making life about climbing the corporate ladders- but about having open eyes to see needs and respond to them- financially or otherwise.

Back to 3)

- This was one of the most distinguishing marks of the church in the Greco-Roman culture- that was stingy with their money and promiscuous with their sex.- The church stood out, because they were stingy with their sex (only one partner in marriage) but promiscuous with their money (they provided for the poor).

Transition: Finally...

4) Citizens of New Jerusalem respect authority, and hold authority accountable.

- Often- the sterotype is that conservatives are all about respecting and submitting to authority (which honestly, tends to just depend on who the authority is and what that authority is saying...which I would say is NOT submitting to authority, but rather being the authority yourself that determines who are the REAL AUTHORITIES)- this is behind every conspiracy theory.
- On the otherside- the stereotype for progressives is that they are always dismantling and deconstructing authority (even though it seems blatantly obvious today that there is fundamentalist authority on both sides of the aisle...just think about the nature of cancel culture, groupthink, and the mob mentality.)

- The French Revolution and Soviet Russia taught us that wherever there is a cry that “the people will rise up and take control”- when the guillotines are rolled out in the street to kill the aristocracy- well- a Napoleon or a Stalin- is right there ready to step in to a super-authoritarian dictator role that ends up with the deaths of millions.
- As human beings- we are created to have authority over us. Not to be our own gods, but to submit to ONE GOD.
- ...and that becomes really difficult for a lot of us, who have seen authority abused.
- Parents, pastors, government officials that abuse physically, sexually, spiritually, and emotionally- they undercut our trust in authority.
- And understandably so.
- But, we are not called to a blind following. We are also called to hold authority accountable.

- **13:7**

- Think about the position of the this early Hebrew church.
- They have been burned by their religious authority. Their old rabbis and leaders in their community have led the community to reject them- because of their belief that Jesus is the Son of God.
- And the Roman government persecutes and ostracizes them for their unwillingness to bow to Caesar as the Son of God.
- It would be REALLLY hard to trust anyone in authority when you’ve felt so betrayed by your leaders.
- But the admonition of the representatives of the Holy City that is yet to come is to Remember your leaders.
- But watch. not because of their charisma, their charm, or their natural abilities (which is often where the church goes wrong)- rather- because they have spoken God’s word to you.

- That's the standard.
- Further- he says to the church- watch their lives...make sure they practice what they preach.....your leaders should be worthy of imitation. If they aren't- they are leaders- and they aren't believing the Word of God.
- Do you see the accountability? Church leaders- me included- must be accountable to you. Which means- you need to see my life.
- Now- HOW does this happen? Well- this is a tough one. But- let me start here- even though I think more work needs to be done in this area.
- First- you can start with people that see me in a pastoral role. Our staff that I work with day in and day out.
- Additionally our elders.
- Or- people that we as elders directly pastor.
- Then- you can ask people that see me in a role as husband and father- my family. They observe me.
- You can ask people that see me as friend- I have a group of people that come to my house every Sunday night- many of whom knew me before I was a pastor.
- Then you can ask my community group- the members and leaders.
- Obviously- all of our leaders lives can't be on display for every member of the church up close and personal.
- But they should not be closed off.
- Additionally- our elders meetings are open for anyone who ever has a concern or wants to bring something up to our elders. Email us. We meet once per month...and we LOVE when church members come in and talk with us...even (maybe especially) when it challenges us to think better or differently.
- **13:17**
- But don't forget the other side of this.
- Have empathy for us.

- It's a hard job. Spiritual care is not easy. And we have a higher accountability than you. We give an account to the chief shepherd, Jesus, for the way we care for you. So even the things that NO ONE can observe- Jesus cares about and we have to give an account for how we were shepherds to you.
- That's a BIG DEAL to us.
- Its another reason we are so explicit about covenant membership here. Because we want to know EXACTLY who has entrusted themselves to our care.
- We don't do it perfectly...and I know there is grace for that- from you and God. But that doesn't mean we don't strive to do it in a way that honors God and you.
- Please- help us do this with joy. Like this verse says- its for your good that we do.
- And hold us accountable to live out our calling with joy.
- Don't just try to be that one that holds us accountable to not messing up...hold us accountable to joy!

- **V 18**

- One of the best ways- Pray for us. We strive to keep a clear conscience and conduct ourselves honorably in everything. Pray for us to do so.

- **V 20-21**

- How are we going to do all this? Well, the same way this suffering 1st century church did.
- Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus- not the oval office- or any other office.
- He's the real leader. The great shepherd of the sheep.
- He's the one who went outside the camp.

- Jesus was crucified by Jews and the Romans. The right and the left conspired together- because he wasn't conservative enough religiously for the unqualified Jewish leaders whose aim was often pride and money- and Jesus wouldn't bow to the governmental powers of his day, who were mainly interested in pandering to the religious demands of the conservative Jews just to get re-elected, as it were.
- Additionally, Jesus was a celibate single man. Stewarding his sexuality for the sake of the Kingdom of God...not his own urges.... So that he would set himself apart for the Holy Union with his true bride- the church.
- He was unafraid to be associated with the unclean outsider...and ultimately died as one...in order to make the most inclusive exclusive group in the history of the world. A group that says, "Only through Jesus are you adopted as a son or daughter into the Kingdom...but ANYONE...I mean ANYONE can come to Jesus."
- And for a moment- it looked like Jesus lost. Like he was powerless. He was crucified. Both a symbol of the State's power over him..and heaping the shame of religious uncleanness on him.
- But he, like a good Chief Shepherd, looked past the shame, past the temporary loss- and for the joy set before him- Doing the Father's will- a submission of its own- and reuniting the people of God- to their God....that was his joy. A shepherd that lays his life down for the sheep.
- And Then Resurrection. To enact an eternal and indestructible promise that will never expire. Us with God and each other...forever.
- No government, and no religion can threaten that.
- Signed. Sealed. Delivered.
- Permanent residents of the Holy City. And that starts now.
- Inside of you, by the holy spirit is the Spirit of New Gotham, New Jerusalem.

- And he equips us to live out the vision of the New Jerusalem that Jesus is bringing.

- **A city of justice, a city of love,**
- **a city of peace**
- **For everyone of us**
- **We all need it,**
- **can't live without it**
- **A Gotham City Church**