

A Superior Look from Heaven

Week 33 – Hebrews 13:1-7

Review:

Throughout his letter, our author has shown the Jerusalem Christians how Christ is superior to absolutely every aspect of the Jewish religion. Superior to angels, superior to the Priest Hood, superior to any sacrifices that were made, superior to Moses and even the Law handed down by him.

The point was that as they prepared to face the tremendous persecution about to unfold, their only hope was to remain strong in their faith and obedience to the One who reigns supreme and even now sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for them.

Throughout the letter he has also warned them repeatedly about the consequences of neglecting or losing their faith. His warnings have grown stronger and stronger culminating in **Chapter 12** with the final exhortation that *“since we are a part a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire”*.

The final chapter in this great Epistle is a collection of some of the *“acceptable services”* he spoke about at the end of **chapter 12**. It also contains some final thoughts as he brings the letter to a close and a benediction meant to inspire and lift the brethren up in preparation for what is about to occur in their lives.

Hebrews 13:1

- **What is the first and perhaps foremost “service” that is acceptable to God?**
 - That love among all brethren must continue even in the harshest of times.
 - Jesus first taught, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”*. **Matthew 22:37** He knew that without this true love of God, there could be no love of anyone else.
 - And then towards the end of His life He taught, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you”*. **John 15:12**
 - The Apostles clearly understood His teaching. John in his 1st Epistle wrote, *“we love because He first loved us”* **I John 4:19**.

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- One author wrote, *“True love is first concerned about a person’s soul, secondly about his earthly happiness”*.
- It is only logical, then, that the love of God would now begin to flow through us in our concern for others.
- Perhaps the key to helping one another to maintaining their faith through the hard times ahead was to maintain their love for one another.

Hebrews 13:2

- **What other dimension of “service” does the writer of Hebrews now encourage the brethren not to neglect?**
 - Showing hospitality to strangers. Sometimes showing hospitality to strangers may require extending ourselves financially and in countless other ways.
 - It’s one thing to be hospitable to friends and relatives; it is another to be hospitable to strangers. And each one of us is aware of that. But what he says next is incredible.
 - *“For by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”* One of the most familiar stories that comes to mind is when Abraham entertained the Lord and two angels. They appeared as three men, and showed up in the heat of the day for lunch. Both Abraham and Sarah were involved in fixing the finest for these guests, and sure enough were honored with the birth of Isaac a year later.
 - One author wrote, *“The plan of the ages and the gospel of God, move on the wheels of hospitality”*. The Apostle John wrote, *“Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God”*
III John 5,6
 - Yes, extra people can mean extra hassle. Extra people can mean extra expense. Extra people can mean extra sacrifice. But one day we may learn that our willingness to make the extra sacrifice to strangers, may turn out to be one of the most incredible events we have ever experienced in our lives.

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Hebrews 13:3

- What's the next type of "service" the Hebrew writer considers "acceptable" to God?
 - "Remembering the prisoners and those who are ill-treated"!
- Who all might the writer be referring to here when he mentions "prisoners"?
 - (1) Prisoners in the spiritual sense – In I John 5:19, the Apostle writes, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one". Time and time again in the scriptures we read the pitiful descriptions of the state of mankind as they live out their lives in sin.
 - II Tim 2:26 – "That they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been captive by him to do his will".
 - Without Christ men and women in this world are in essence prisoners, held captive in sin. They are described as being in "bondage", "enslaved" and kept in chains, all references to men held captive.
 - (2) Prisoners in sin who have committed unlawful acts -
 - It is essential we remember that some of those who are prisoners of sin have also, because of their sin, experienced literal incarceration for the decision they have made.
 - (3) Those imprisoned for the gospel - The apostle Paul repeatedly refers to himself and his associates as being in prison. In his letter to **Philemon**, the apostle opens with these words: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus".
 - In the same epistle, he speaks of, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus". **Philemon 1:23**
 - Many of those early proclaimers spent a lot of time in prison for the sake of the gospel. The writer of **Hebrews** then encourages his readers to "Remember the prisoners" because as **John** has already written, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one".
 - Such prisoners need to be remembered in prayer, in visitation, in assisting in caring for their families, and whatever other needs they have that they cannot carry out because of the bars around them.
 - And their plight was to be a constant reminder to us not an occasional one.

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I say that because we are encouraged to remember them here, “*As though in prison with them*”. Trust me if we were actually in that cell with them, we would remember them every day, would we not?

- **We are also to remember those who are ill-treated** - Not only are those who promote the gospel imprisoned, they often suffer physical punishment as well. Those who have endured persecution at the hands of the world need to be remembered in prayer, in being cared for until they are recovered, and in being encouraged.
- Finally, the wording in verse 3, “*you yourselves also are in the body,*” should bring every Christian to a consciousness of how important it is to assist such suffering brethren; the free and untouched saint may be next!

Hebrews 12:28

“*Let us show gratitude,*” is the overall exhortation, “*by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.*” Remembering the prisoners and being conscious of those who are ill-treated is part of this service to God. It is true: To the extent to which we serve one of these brothers of Jesus, we serve Him!

Hebrews 13:4

- **On a scale of 1 to 10, what degree of importance does God put on the sanctity of marriage?**
 - According to this verse, I’d say **15**, wouldn’t you?
 - Some day we will need to explore all that the scriptures say about “*marriage*”. Today, Satan has of course, corrupted and distorted this blessed institution taking that which is natural and good between male and female, and turning it into that which is unrecognizable. One author wrote, “*Love has been twisted into lust, and commitment has distorted into convenience*”.
- **What 3 things does the author of Hebrews teach us here about marriage?**
 - **(1) To be held in “*Honor among all*” or “*by all*”.** As we all know, marriage can have its difficult moments. When Jesus brought up the point that a man is not to divorce his wife except

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for immorality, the disciples' comment was, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry" (**Matthew 19:10**).

- They understood, by what is universally experienced, that a marriage relationship might be really rocky, and if it is going to be that difficult to get out of it, it might be better not to marry at all.
- Well, Jesus' comment was that **not** all men could really remain single. The implication is that most people are going to be better off in a marriage and working through their difficulties toward a happy and fulfilling relationship.
- Because of the pressure continually exerted on marriage bonds, as decaying societies regard marriage as being more and more passé, the word of God wants marriage to be elevated.
- Marriage is to be regarded as highly valuable among Christians. A civil marriage ceremony is recognized by God in all cultures, going back to the time of Adam and Eve.
- Hence in the days of Abraham, the man brought the woman into his tent as a formal but simple declaration to his fellow nomads. In Jesus' day, there was the ceremony of the marriage supper, somewhat akin to our marriage ceremony in Western Civilization.
- Ultimately, there will be the final ceremony: the marriage supper of the Lamb!

- **(2) "Marriage bed undefiled"** - God's intention is very clear here. There is to be fidelity in the marriage. Because men and women are spirit beings, there is a strong connection between faithfulness in marriage and faithfulness to God. God wants the physical union of man and wife to be holy in His eyes, and provide for bonding between the two as well as procreation.

- **(3) God will Judge those who break the sacredness of marriage in any way.**
 - **If I understand the scriptures there are 2 judgements that we will face.**
 - **1. The Ultimate Judgement for all men** – described in **Revelation 20** as "*the Great White Throne*". This is the separation of the sheep from the goats as Jesus taught in **Matthew 25:31- 46**.

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- **2. But for believers, there will be a 2nd judgment, described as “*the judgement seat of Christ*”: (2 Corth 5:10) – where we will each, “*give an account for deeds done in the body, according to what each has done, whether good or bad*”.**

 - This may be what the Paul is describing where he says, “*each man’s work will be made evident, because it will be revealed by fire*”. **1Corth 3:12-17**
 - He describes our works as different types of building materials. He says some will use things materials such as gold, silver and precious stones, where others will use wood, hay and straw.
 - It’s pretty obvious whose works will stand the test and whose will not.

- Whatever the judgement is going to be like, one thing is clear. The sanctity of marriage is a priority to God. The record of the scripture shows that when any nation begins to trash the sacred sexual union between man and wife, and adultery and fornication are rampant, God executes His judgment on that nation.
- He also makes it clear here that He will act on the individual violators as well:
 - “*Fornicators*” = any type of illicit and unlawful sexual contact. That covers a multitude of sexual sins.
 - “*Adulterers*”- immorality specifically among married folks.
- With all the trash that currently emanates from Hollywood and from television pervading our homes, marriage is not being held in honor. There is a serious propaganda campaign aimed at the next generation to come along. This section on holding marriage up in honor is part of our “*showing gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.*”

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Hebrews 13:5-6

- **What character issue does the Hebrew writer address in his list of those things described as “acceptable service” to God?**
 - **Being content with what you have.** He is referring to financial stewardship. Financial stewardship is very much a spiritual character issue.
 - Money, or "*unrighteous mammon*," as the Lord Himself called it, has a powerful tug on the individual. Money is necessary for survival, and more money gives a person greater flexibility. But the challenge of keeping money inside those boundaries is very great, and the desire for more money has ruined many a man or woman.
 - The words of the apostle Paul are still just as relevant today as they were back then, perhaps even more: "*For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil*". **I Timothy 6:10**
- **Free from love of money** - Money in our house, like in yours, is always in short supply. I can remember my Mom saying, "*There's always too much month left at the end of the money*".
 - People can get twisted around in their thinking about money and become crooked or miserly with their finances. The Hebrews author directive is simply, "*be content with what you have*". **That's the key!**
 - Contentment flows from within; it flows from being at peace with God and walking in the knowledge of His love. If a person is not content with what he has now, he will not be content at the next level of money either.
 - Money is not the source of happiness or fulfillment and neither is **more** money. In **Luke 12:15**, Jesus made this very clear. He said that we were to, "*Beware, and be on our guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance, does his life consist of his possessions*".
- **What's our author's reasoning behind his exhortation for us to be content with what we have?**
 - **Contentment comes down to trust.** Trusting in God. Trusting in a simple promise! A promise of security. A promise so wonderful, so comforting that when fully understood and embraced, ought to squelch any desire on our part to see money as a dependable source of security for us or our families.

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- **A promise from the Supreme Divine Creator or all living things.** One that simply says, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you”.

Part of our offering of “*acceptable service to God, with gratitude*” involves demonstrating our trust in the Almighty in the area of finances. When we sink to the level of depending for money for our security, one author compares it to Israel’s wanting to turn back to Egypt for help instead of turning to the Lord.

Hebrews 13:7

- **What’s another important thing that will help these Hebrew Christians successfully face the turmoil and troubles ahead?**
 - **Remembering those who led them up to this point.**
 - Jay Wilson in his study of Hebrews wrote, “*The greatest men to ever walk the face of the earth graced the gravels and cobblestones of Jerusalem*”.
 - The Lord Jesus Himself walked through her dusty streets, preached in her temple, rode into town on the donkey, hid from stoning in her alleyways, and wept over her from the Mount of Olives.
 - John the Immerser, greatest ever born of woman.
 - Then there were the apostles, the best of the best who watched the Lord die outside Jerusalem’s walls but who first preached the message of deliverance to the world.
 - They were the ones around whom the early church gathered, who trained its future leaders and impressed the doctrines of Jesus Christ upon all disciples.
 - They faithfully proclaimed the gospel amidst arrests, floggings, and even death to James by the sword. The apostles set things in order in Jerusalem before scattering to the four winds to take the message of salvation to the Gentiles in the remotest parts of the earth. These were the greatest men to ever walk the face of the earth, and they were the early leaders for the church in Jerusalem.

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- The author's words then are simply, "**Remember them**".
 - The believers were admonished to remember these great men, the early mentors for the Hebrew brethren in Jerusalem.
 - They were to remember, how they had led them
 - They were to remember how they first spoke the word of God to them. Words the Apostles themselves had confirmed and bore witness with various signs and wonders.
 - And finally the believers there in Jerusalem were to remember "*the results*" or the outcome of their lives and to "*imitate their faith*".
- **What were the results or outcome of the Apostles lives?**
 - **1st of all** not only did they begin the congregation in Jerusalem, but they carried the message of Christ to the remotest parts of the earth. The love and compassion they had for Jesus shined through them. And their zeal and passion turned their world upside down, and the base for the church of the Lord was established across the globe.
 - **2ndly** the results or outcome of their lives is also a reference to ends of the lives of the Apostles. Their uncompromising faithfulness to Christ would cost almost every one of them their lives.

It is for these reasons that the author encouraged the brethren to "*imitate their faith*." Believers in Christ are not necessarily all encouraged to accomplish the same things the apostles did. However, their faith is to be imitated, then as well as now. In this way the plan of the Lord gets accomplished all over the world in all times.

Then there's **verse 8**.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever!"

We'll talk next week about whether the author intended this verse to be the conclusion to what he has just said, or the introduction to what is to follow.