

INTRODUCTION

Our Scripture reading for this morning is the **thirteenth chapter of Hebrews. Hebrews 13**, and we'll begin reading in **verse 1**. Let us now hear God's Word. **(READ)**

THE BRIDGE

Today, in returning to our studies in **Hebrews**, we're actually coming to the end...to the end of **Hebrews** itself as well as to the end of our corporate studies of this rich portion of Holy Scripture. And **Hebrews** is indeed rich. It's full of inexhaustible treasure, the inexhaustible treasure of God as it's found in the person and work of Jesus, who is none other than God's Eternal, Incarnate, Once-suffering, but now Exalted and Enthroned Son. For as **Hebrews** has made clear, it's in Jesus that we encounter the Prophet, for he is the Full and Final Revelation of God. In Jesus, we encounter the Apostle, for he's the One who is been sent by God to, and for the world. In Jesus, we encounter the King, for he has conquered sin and death and now sits at the right hand of God. In Jesus, we encounter the Priest, for he's the One who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice that purges us of our sins. And in Jesus, we encounter our Elder Brother, the One who is not ashamed of us, his little brothers and sisters, but who loves and helps us even at great cost to himself. For in **Hebrews**, Jesus is presented as our everything...as our complete salvation, our true satisfaction, and our eternal security. He is the entry point to our gaining full access to God...to God's eternal love and life. For on every page of **Hebrews**, we're given a grand and glorious vision of Jesus, a vision meant to show us that he alone is worthy of our complete and continual trust.

And this vision is so profound that there's no way we can exhaust it, which means that after six months of studying this letter together, we've barely scratched the surface. There's still more to see, more to celebrate, more to be challenged by. And that's why, even though we're concluding our studies, I'd encourage you not to see this as the end, but as an opportunity to dive into **Hebrews** more deeply. Continue to read and reflect upon it. Continue to ponder and pray through it, asking God to give you ever-greater glimpses of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. For at a time such as this, a time of disease and death, a time of economic and social uncertainty, in a time of anxiety and isolation, we need to be reminded again and again that only Jesus is capable of being our all in all. For in this changing climate, amidst shakable circumstances, living in a temporary and transient world, one-thing remains constant...**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever**. His grace is unchanging. His eternal power abides, his faithfulness endures, and his love remains. He alone is solid and stable, and it's in him that we've received, as we're told at the end of **chapter 12**, an unshakable Kingdom, a Kingdom that danger, disease and death can never touch. And because we've received this in Jesus, we are now to offer up to God, lives that are filled with grateful and reverent worship. And what does this look like? Well, it looks like what we're told here in **chapter 13**.

In coming to this chapter we have to admit that it looks different from the previous chapters. For in **chapters 1-12** what we're primarily given is exposition, but in **chapter 13** what we're primarily given is a series of exhortations, that is commands, commands that come at us in a rapid fire fashion. It's as if the writer piles imperative upon imperative, for by my count there are at least twenty imperatives, twenty commands in this final chapter. And the question is: Why this change from sustained exposition to a sudden flurry of exhortation?

BEGINNING AT THE END

Well, to answer that we need to...**Begin at the End**.

And by that I mean, we need to begin at **verse 22** where the author writes...**I appeal to you, my dear family, bear with my word of exhortation**. And notice, it's in the singular, for he's not saying...**bear with**

my words of exhortations, meaning all the exhortations of **chapter 13**. Rather, bear with my entire word of exhortation, which is **Hebrews** itself, meaning **Hebrews** is a one sermon that exhorts or encourages us to do one primary thing, and that is...**In faith, consider and keep on considering Jesus**. That's the central message of **Hebrews**. See who Jesus is. See what Jesus has done. See what Jesus will do in the future. Fix and feast your eyes on Jesus. And for **twelve chapters** we've been shown what this looks like, but now in this final chapter it's not as if things change all together. No, the exhortation is still there...**See Jesus**, but now it's...*See Jesus so as to show Jesus with your lips and lives*. And that's really what all these commands are about.

Now when it comes to Scriptural commands, what we have to realize is that they always flow out of and follow God's grace. For our ability to believe in Jesus and our ability to live for Jesus are the product of God's grace. Grace at the beginning. Grace at the end and grace everywhere in between. For who we are and what we do is a gift of God's grace...a gift given by the Father, accomplished by the Son and applied to our lives by the Spirit. That's why the preacher of **Hebrews** says in **verse 9** that...**it's good for the heart to be strengthened by grace**. For we're not strengthened by arbitrary morals or manners, rules or regulations. No, we're only strengthened and nourished by grace...grace that draws us to Jesus and grace that equips us to live for Jesus.

And what this means is that God's grace and God's commands aren't antithetical, for God's grace doesn't nullify God's commands. Rather, God's grace empowers us to do his commands, and to do them not as a mere duty, but as a marvelous delight. And that's what we see here in **Hebrews 13**. For the grace that gave us Jesus is the same grace that gives us these commands and that enables us to live them out. For at no point in the Christian life does God ever say...you're on your own, for God never leaves us to ourselves. For at every point in the Christian life the two promises mentioned in **verses 5-6** remain true...**that God will never leave us or forsake us** and **that the Lord is and will always be our helper**. Helping us to look to Jesus so that we might live for Jesus.

THE BENEDICTION

And nowhere does this come out more clearly than in **verses 20-21**, which in most translations entitle...**The Benediction**.

Now what's a benediction? Well, it's a blessing. It is God's blessing to and upon his people. And most New Testament letters end with a benediction, but there are some that end with a doxology, doxology being our blessing or praise to God. But what's unique here in **Hebrews** is that the preacher ends with a benediction that turns into a doxology. God's blessing leading to our praise. God's grace to us leading to our glory of God. Benediction to doxology.

Now in looking at these two verses, you'll notice that they form one long sentence, and it's a rather complex sentence. But central to it is simply this...**May the God of peace equip you and work in you so that you might live to the pleasure and glory of God**. And as we consider this sentence for a moment, what we need to realize is that this *equipping* and *working* involves the whole activity of the Holy Trinity, for God's fully involved in equipping and empowering us to live for him. Look at what the preacher says...

May the God of peace, that's God the Father, equip you with everything good, and the good here is referring to God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus is God's greatest good to us...the good of his

sacrificial blood that forgives all our sins and brings us into a covenant relationship with God. It's the good of his resurrection that assures us that our future is one of life and not death, and it's the good of his present ministry of shepherding us. May God the Father equip you with all the resources that are found in Jesus, so that in looking to Jesus and leaning on Jesus...**you may learn to do his will.** But even that's not enough, for we also need God to work these resources into us, and how does God do this? Well, by God the Spirit, the Spirit who dwells in us and works in us in such a way that we don't become passive, but in such a way that we begin to find our pleasure in doing God's pleasure.

So the benediction here, the blessing here is a blessing given to us by the Holy Trinity. God the Father giving us the good and inexhaustible resources of his Son that are, in turn, worked in us by the Spirit so that we might learn to do God's will, so that we do what is pleasing in his sight, and that we might do it all to the glory of God. What an amazing thing to ponder, that it takes the whole activity of the Holy Trinity to bring us to the place where God's glory is our chief passion and where pleasing God is our greatest pleasure. For it takes the full operation of the Holy Trinity to transform us into a people, who with our lips and lives, sing boldly and gratefully the doxology...**To him be the glory forever and forever.**

For you see, God's glory is always goal. It's the goal of creation and it is goal of New Creation. For we were made and redeemed by grace so as to find our joy in God's glory. For our joy and God's glory always go together. Do you believe that? Well, if we're honest we have to admit that we struggle to believe it. For sin is so deceptive that it makes us believe that living to the glory of God will actually rob us of our joy. That living for God pleasure will steal our pleasure. But no says, the preacher, the only way we'll ever know solid joy and lasting pleasure is in living to the glory of God. Isn't that what our catechism teaches, that the chief end of humanity is...**to glorify God and enjoy him forever.** For the way to solid joy and lasting pleasure is to offer whole selves to God, the God who's first offered his whole self to us – the Father giving his Son to us. The Son giving himself up for us, and the Spirit at work in us, working in us the reality for which we were made and redeemed, and that is to find our pleasure in God's pleasure. For we've been blessed by God's grace to become the human beings God always had in mind – humans who live for the glory of God and who find their ultimate joy in him, in living for him in every area of our lives. For the God of peace has given us his peace in and through Son that we might live out that peace by his Spirit who empowers us to live to his pleasure.

But that raises the question: What's really pleasing to God? Well, what's pleasing to him is **a sacrificial shaped life**, a life that manifests the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus. That's why the preacher says in **verses 15-16...Through Jesus, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that acknowledge his name. Don't neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.** They're pleasing to him because they're a reflection of what's most pleasing to him, and what's most pleasing to God is the willing sacrifice of Jesus, and this is pleasing to him because it's the perfect expression of the very heart of God, which is a heart of infinite and inexhaustible love. Love for the lost. Love for the broken. Love for the wayward. Love for the stranger. Love for the sinner, you and me. For how do we know God loves us? Well, it's not by our circumstances. It's not by things going well for us. No, the way we know God loves us is by what he did for us through the sacrifice of Jesus...the sacrifice that seeks the lost, that heals the broken, that restores the wayward, that welcomes the stranger and that forgives the sinner. The sacrifice of Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God's glorious love, his love that gives and gives and gives.

And by God's grace we've embraced this loving sacrifice in faith, so as to be transformed by it, so that our naturally self-centered lives would be transformed into a sacrificial life of praise and service. For in belonging to Jesus we're now to live through Jesus so as to show Jesus...to show the beauty of his loving

sacrifice that manifests the love and life of God in the world. And what does this look like? Well, it looks like living according to the beautiful commands given to us here in **Hebrews 13**.

THE BEAUTIFUL COMMANDS

Now there's no way for us to unpack in one sermon each of these beautiful commands, and that's okay. For notice the preacher doesn't unpack them either. Instead, he simply states them, and he does so with the expectation that his hearers will continue to study them so as to apply them to their lives. For again, even though this is the end of **Hebrews**, it's not really the end. For what's said here is to continue. It's to continue to be lived out day by day.

Now in looking at all these commands, I think we could sum them up under three main headings.

And **the first** is this **(verse 1)...***Let brotherly love continue*. Let our sacrificial life be seen in the way we continue in love for one another within church. For more than anything else, the church is a family – God's family, where God is our Father, where Jesus is our Elder Brother, and where the Spirit binds us together as one. And because we're a family, love is to characterize us. Love that's hospitable, that's welcoming. For as God has welcomed us in Christ we're now to welcome one another into our lives. But notice this sort of love is so big that it also welcomes the stranger. And friends, we need to be reminded of this and get ready for this, for once this time of isolation ends we're going to need fellowship more than ever, and strangers are going to need it as well. And therefore, we must be ready to welcome them into the life of our community in love.

But not only is this love to be hospitable, it's also to be caring, in that it cares for those who suffer for the name of Jesus. And during this time when we're primarily stuck at home, I'd encourage you to take time to pray for the persecuted church, to pray for them as if you were actually with them in their mistreatment...**since (verse 3) we all belong to the same body of Jesus**.

So this family love is to be hospitable and caring, but it's also to be faithful, and in particular it's to be sexually faithful in marriage and in singleness. For our sexual faithfulness, of not allowing the marriage bed to be defiled through lust of any sort, is one of the ways we show forth Jesus' faithfulness to us. For he's the Bridegroom who's committed himself to one bride, a broken and messy bride, the church, and this bride is to be so committed to him that she loves him above all. And that's the central point of marriage, for it's not first and foremost about romance or self-determined happiness. No, it's about being a signpost to the faithfulness of Jesus who's so committed to us that he sacrificed everything for us.

So brotherly love as hospitality, as caring, as faithful, and then as contentment...contentment in poverty as well as plenty. Content because you're growing in the belief that God has given you everything you truly need in Jesus. For Jesus didn't die for you so that you might love money. No, he died for you so that you might love him with your money, with your all. For money and possessions are gifts to be stewarded, but how easily they can enslave when we begin to think that our ultimate worth and security are founded on them. They're not, for our ultimate worth and security is founded on the God who will never leave us, and who promises to help us in all situations, even the situation of economic uncertainty.

So the beautiful command of brotherly, family love...

But then **secondly**, the beautiful command to...**Remember and respect your God-given leaders**. For God gives his people leaders, past and present leaders. There's the past leaders of **verse 7**, which here I think the writer's referring back to the people he mentioned in **chapter 11**, those who made up the so-called 'Hall of Faith.' For there we encounter men and women who embodied and expressed an enduring faith in God and his promises in very difficult times, and in doing so, they continue to speak God's Word to us. And that's why we're to...**Consider the outcome of their way of life, and to imitate their faith**.

But at the same time, God gives us present leaders, and for us that means pastors and elders - men such as myself who are weak and who don't have it all together - and it's to these that you are to offer (**verse 17**) obedience and submission. Why? Well, because as your leaders it's our God-given charge to shepherd you to the Great Shepherd, and it's to this Shepherd that we, your pastors and elders, must give an account for the way we've cared for you and fed you with the Word of God. We're called to shepherd and you're called to submit, not blindly, but in obedience to God's Word. And you're to do this not because your leaders themselves are worthy of it, but because Jesus is worthy of it. And I'm so thankful that I can say that the end of **verse 17** is true for me, that it's my joy to pastor you, and I can confidently say the same is true for your other elders.

Well, there's **one more** beautiful command I want to highlight, and it's there in **verse 14...Keep on looking to the city to come**. For in belonging to Jesus we've been given a future, and it's the future of entering fully into God's unshakable Kingdom, and even now in the present we taste of that Kingdom. And as we taste of it we're to cultivate a longing for it. We're to cultivate a longing that says this world isn't the city we're seeking, for this world as it currently is transient and temporary. For no matter how powerful or beautiful the city of man may be, it won't last. For it's easily shaken, and we're seeing that reality now in the midst of this present crisis. We're witnessing how the city of man is always in a steep decline toward decay and death. And that's why we're to put our hope and trust not in the city of man, but in the city of God that alone is stable and secure. For at the heart of this city is our King, the Lord Jesus Christ who himself was rejected in this world, so that through his rejection he might establish God's New World, his New Creation, which is the restoration of this creation. And you see, that's why we're to go out to him in order to identify ourselves with him, refusing the temptation to live as if the city of man is our lasting city. It's not and it can't be, and that's why we're to give ourselves to Christ. For again, he alone is sure and constant...**the same yesterday, today and forever**. His life-giving and life-stabilizing love never changes. For the same love that bled and died for you in the past, the same love that will fully renew you in the future, is the very love by which Jesus is now shepherding you even through the Valley of the Shadow of death.

Therefore, look to him. Love him. Lean into him, and by his grace...live for him by offering yourself to God as a sacrifice of praise. For God has pronounced his benediction upon you that your life might become a doxology to him.