



Hebrews 13:1-25 -- Jesus Taught Us to Change

- Commentator Alexander Maclaren said – **“The world takes its notion of God most of all from those who say they belong to God’s family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible. They see us; they only hear about Jesus Christ.”**
 - do you think he’s right about that?... (the world takes its notion of God most of all from those who say they belong to God’s family?...)
 - I think most , if not all of us would say “yes”...
 - and not only that, I think most of us would say that that’s reasonable...
 - if we say that Jesus Christ can make dramatic changes in a person’s life, we shouldn’t be surprised when those around us want to examine the evidence of that claim...
 - that is why we would read a verse like **Matthew 5:16 - Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**
 - or, **Philippians 2:14-15 -- ...prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,**
- now, you might say, the problem with that is that sometimes men and women in the world don’t play that game fairly...some people I know in my office or my extended family or my neighbors or my unsaved friends try to magnify my faults, or exaggerate them...there’s no winning with some people...
- that may be true...and it was certainly the case in Bible times for the early NT church...but the message of the Scripture is that God’s ability to change your life is so powerful and so profound that sometimes even those who would love to cuss you can’t help by being amazed by what God has done and is doing...
 - **Titus 2:7-8 - in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.**
 - that’s why it is good to avoid political cynicism if some of the things occurring in our country are not quite up to your liking...it’s not that you can’t have/voice your opinions about things, but if you do so with a proud or angry or hateful or bombastic tone, then the change Jesus wanted to make in your life has become obscured...you’re just another member of one of the many political action committees...
 - the apostle Peter said... **1 Peter 2:13-17 - Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.**

- the significance of the change that God seeks to make in your life could actually “put your opponents to shame because they have nothing bad to say about you/us”...or “silence the ignorance of foolish men”...and that’s not Pastor Viars talking, that’s the Word of God talking...so what Alexander Maclaren (the first person we quoted) what he said was very consistent with Scripture...
- now, let’s bring that around to you...
 - if the world takes its notion of God most of all from those who say they belong to God’s family...then what notion/view of God are they receiving from you?...
 - if they read a great deal more of us than they do the Bible...then what are they reading from you?...
 - if they see us and only hear about Jesus, what are they seeing in you?...
- now I realize that you might say – well, that’s a pretty general series of questions...it’s fairly vague...what specific areas are we talking about?..
- that is a great question...and I have some equally great news...
- we’re heading for a passage of Scripture this morning that teaches about several specific areas in which followers of Christ can/should give practical evidence that they are growing in Him...
 - with that in mind, please open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 13...
 - the writer has been addressing a group of Jewish individuals who have formed a small church some 30-35 years after the last days of Christ on earth...
 - some in this group had not yet truly trusted Christ as Savior and Lord...so they were part of the group physically but not spiritually...which in and of itself ought to give us pause...because if possible that close to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that some men and women inside the church were not even truly regenerate (they had never trusted Christ)...think about more true it is that that possibility could accurately describe men and women in the church today...
 - there were also people in this baby church who had trusted Christ but barely so...their relationship with Him as not characterized the genuineness and intimacy that God desired...
 - both groups needed an exhortation about the superiority of Jesus Christ...and that’s what this book is all about...Jesus Christ is better...He’s better than the **prophets**, and He’s better than the **angels**, and He’s better than the **OT sacrificial system**, He’s better than **Moses**, and He’s better than **the Levitical priests in the temple**...
- and every person then, and every person now has to decide whether we agree, and whether our lifestyle would give evidence that we agree...
- now as I said, we’re seeking to land the plane on this study today...
 - which means, generally speaking...whenever you come down to the end of a book of the Bible...the emphasis is going to be intensely practical...
 - many of the books of the NT start with doctrine and end with duty...or start with position and end with practice...(indicative/imperative, exposition/exhortation, creed/conduct)...
 - and that is certainly the case here...what we learn in chapter 13 is that **Jesus Taught Us to Change**...
- let’s read the chapter to see the specific areas in which that’s true...read Hebrews 13:1-25
- in the time we have remaining, let’s think about **Six specific areas in which God wants His children to change**.

- now, if you've been around our church, you probably know that I am not a big fan of illiterated outlines...but with as much material as we're trying to organize today, we're going to use one to try to tie this together in a package that is easier to remember and apply...

I. Selflessness – Brotherly Love.

- you don't have to read very far into the chapter to see that this is going to be intensely practical...

- Hebrews 13:1 - Let love of the brethren continue.

- we should probably start by thinking about...

A. What it is.

- “**philadelphia**” – [you can break that one down] **pileo – tender affection, adelphos – brother**

- “**caring for fellow Christians more than we care for ourselves...**”

- there is no question that this is one of the most powerful evidences that we are followers of Christ...in fact, that's exactly what Jesus Himself taught...

B. Reveals to the Lord that we belong to Christ.

John 13:35 - “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- now, if you say, well, am I supposed to conjure that up on my own?...no, that's part of the beauty of all of this...this approach to life is...

C. Initiated by God Himself.

- 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 - Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,

- that's part of the point of the word “continue” in Hebrews 13:1 – you don't initiate this, you don't have to figure it out on own...you just have to keep it going...

- it's like unity in the church... **Ephesians 4:3 - being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

- see, you don't have to manufacture it...you just preserve it...

- the same is true with love – if you say that my life gives no evidence for fellow Christians at all---what you've just said is that you don't know the Lord...because according to I John 4:9, God teaches His children to love one another...

D. In practical ways.

- 1 John 3:17 - But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

- the next verse goes on to say... **1 John 3:18 - Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.**

- but that screams a powerful message to the world around us...

- please keep this in mind though...this...

E. Must be a constant emphasis.

- 13:1 – Continue in brotherly love...

- what that means is, this characteristic has a shelf life...

- either you're working at it...or it could be getting stale...

- that's why Peter taught...

1 Peter 1:22 - Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

- see, this isn't something you do superficially...it's not an act, or a piece of wax fruit you paste on from the outside...

- the world around us ought to be able to see a growing love for brothers and sisters in Christ...
- [of course that leads to an obvious question, doesn't it...develop – how are you doing?...]

- now, here's another piece of the puzzle...

F. In spite of our differences.

- the church, literally from day one, was intentionally made up of a diverse body of people...
- because God loves bringing radically different people together and teaching them how to grow in biblical love for each other...
 - **Romans 12:10 - Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;**
 - **Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**
- George Whitefield and Charles Wesley were both important leaders in the church in the early days of our country, but they had some rather significant theological differences...but here's a portion of a letter Whitefield sent Charles Wesley...
 - **My honored friend and brother...hearken to a child who is willing to wash your feet. I beseech you, by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, if you would have my love confirmed toward you...Why should we dispute, when there is no possibility of convincing? Will it not, in the end, destroy brotherly love, and insensibly take from us that cordial union and sweetness of soul, which I pray God may always subsist between us? How glad would the enemies of our Lord be to see us divided...Honored sir, let us offer salvation freely to all by the blood of Jesus, and whatever light God has communicated to us, let us freely communicate to others.**

- the beauty of this is...when this is happening, it...

G. Is a delight to God.

Psalm 133:1 - Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

- one of the things I'm very thankful for is the significant percentage of people in our church family who are committed to this principle...it is amazing what can be accomplished for God when His people are simply seeking to love one another and therefore put their energy into serving Him together – on the other hand it is incredible how much time and energy can be wasted and how little actually gets done in churches where these principles are not in place...
- but...we have to continue – I would encourage you to think right now about how you're doing in this particular area is which Christ wants to grow you and what would need to happen in the days ahead to get to even a better place...

- a second area in which God wants His children to change is...

II. Sacrifice for Strangers – Hospitality

Hebrews 13:2 - Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

A. Cultural reason.

- this was important in Bible times because the inns were notorious for being dangerous, and often wicked places...
- many were no different than brothels...
- so when people in the church would be willing to show hospitality to people they did not even know, or did not know well, that communicated a huge message to a watching world...
- and that's just a...

B. Natural extension of our love.

- it's one thing for the world to see that we love one another, it's something else entirely for them to see that we love...them...
 - **Galatians 6:10 - So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.**
 - so there are degrees here – otherwise the word “especially” would be meaningless, but when followers of Christ reach out to show love to those they don't know in any way, shape, or form, that often stands out...
 - and that has always been part of God's economy...
 - **Leviticus 19:34 - The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.**
- now, let me just ask you before we go any further – how are you doing at the matter of hospitality?...how many people have to had in your home in the last month, in the last year...it's not hard to evaluate ourselves in this one...math is math...
- now, if you'd say – well, this is pretty hard...then let's throw this on the heap...

C. Even for our enemies.

- **Matthew 5:43-44 - You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**
 - Only a person who had been impacted by the gospel could possibly function this way...
 - Clark and Amy Peddicord, who are Campus Crusade missionaries in Germany, included this story in their prayer letter several years ago..
- “Last week the former communist dictator, Erich Honecher, was released from the hospital where he had been undergoing treatment for cancer. There is probably no single person in all of East Germany that is more despised and hated than he. He has been stripped of all his offices and even his own communist party has kicked him out. He was booted out of the villa he was living in; the new government refused to provide him and his wife with accommodation. They stood, in essence, homeless on the street... It was Christians who stepped in. Pastor Uwe Holmer, who is in charge of a Christian help-center north of Berlin, was asked by Church leaders if he would be willing to take them in. Pastor Holmer and his family decided that it would be wrong to give away a room in the center that would be used for needy people, or an apartment that their staff needed; instead, they took the former dictator and his wife into their own home. It must have been a strange scene when the old couple arrived. The former absolute ruler of the country was being sheltered by one of the Christians whom he and his wife had despised and persecuted. In East Germany there is a great deal of hate toward the former regime and especially toward Honecher and his wife, Margot, who had ruled the educational system there for 26 years with an iron hand. She had made sure that very few Christian children were able to go on for higher education. There are ten children in the Holmer family and eight of them had applied for further education in the course of the past years:**

all had been refused a place at college because they were Christians, in spite of the fact that they had good or excellent grades in school. Pastor Holmer was asked why he and his family would open their door to such detestable people... Pastor Holmer spoke very clearly, 'Our Lord challenged us to follow him and to take in all who are weary and heavy laden – both in soul and in body...'"

- it's actions like these that scream the message that Christ has changed and is changing their lives...how else could you explain such behavior?...
- did you notice something else in verse 2....

D. You never know.

1. An angel may be involved.

- **Hebrews 13:2** - ...for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.
- you say – why would that be?...
- it's not because Motel 6 was full – it was a test...

2. Jesus is certainly involved.

- **Matthew 25:40** - ...Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'
- now let me ask you – have you allowed the Lord to take you out of comfort zone and develop the art of showing hospitality?...

III. Sympathy for Prisoners.

Hebrews 13:3 - Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

A. In their context.

- this is probably speaking about people who were Christians who had been imprisoned for their faith...
- but there is a statement here that is a...

B. Key mindset (for everything we're studying this morning...)

- "as though in prison with them"...
- what a beautiful way of saying – try to put yourself in their shoes...

- perhaps this unusual verse from the OT will help us at this point -- **Proverbs 30:15** - **The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give."**
- some Bible teachers believe this is describing a ugly animal that with a fanged tongue that latches on to its victim and starts sucking its blood and just gets bigger and bigger and bigger and sometimes its sucks so much out of the other person it literally explodes...
- that's what selfishness is like...give, give, give...to me...I want more for myself
- the polar opposite of that is biblical Christianity...which says, empty yourself and give to others...
- and when the world sees the church treating people inside the church that way, and treating people outside the church that way – it screams a powerful message about how Jesus Christ really can help His people change...

IV. Sexual Purity

- **Hebrews 13:4** - Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage bed is to be undefiled*; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.
- "marriage bed" – Koita – coitus – sexual intercourse

- our world could not be any more confused on this topic from dozens of different perspectives...that is why the Christian sexual ethic is chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage because...

A. Sexual relations within marriage are honorable and holy.

- if you're married here today, the Scripture would say that one of the ways you show your love for Christ is by wholeheartedly, passionately, and aggressively seeking to meet the sexual needs of your spouse...
- if you are a married person and you use sex as a bargaining tool, or you're frigid or too busy to be interested (and I've learned in counseling that can be just as true of men as it can be with women)...you're not living like a Christian...
 - and if you say, well, I don't like my spouse...that's not really the question, is it...
 - the question is, do you love your Lord?...
 - and do you desire to please and satisfy your spouse sexually in such a godly and complete way that the thought of sexual sin would be sickening to them?...
- **1 Corinthians 7:4-5 - The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another...**

B. Sexual relations outside of marriage are displeasing to God and will be judged by Him.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 - For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the avenger* in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.***
- when God's people are willing to let Him change them in this powerful way, this can be an incredibly effective testimony of His power to change us...

V. Satisfaction and Contentment

- **Hebrews 13:5 – Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have...**
- the problem is not money, it's the love of money...
- **1 Timothy 6:9-10 - But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**
- the Lord has helped us the last several months take a hard look at what we really love...and where we're finding our security...
- that's the real issue, which is why the text the text goes on to say... **Hebrews 13:5- Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you"**
- we've had a great opportunity, if we've taken it, to show the watching world that money isn't our god...

VI. Submission to Authority in the Church.

A. Remember your leaders – v. 7

Hebrews 13:7 - Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

B. Submit to them.

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

