

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Heb. 13:1-18

"Discipleship Revisited: A Perspective from Hebrews"

A CONSISTENT MESSAGE

One of the marvelous things about God's Word is its consistency. It may be comprised of 66 books by 40 different writers over a period of 1500 years but there is a consistent message throughout. You will find the same themes and a similar focus throughout its pages. Of course, all roads in the Bible lead to the Lord Jesus Christ - the preparation and prophecies of His first coming found in the Old Testament, how to live in light of His Coming and preparing for His Return in the New Testament.

Now if all roads in God's Word lead to Christ, then each of those roads also include the way of discipleship. Jesus came not just to save but to make disciples. And to be a disciple of Christ, means that we think a certain way, act a certain way, live a certain way. It is a disciplined way of life that has a singular focus - to be like Christ.

And throughout the New Testament we find the way of discipleship repeated over and over again. We find the same call, the same admonitions, the same expectations. It is no different in the book of Hebrews, especially in this morning's second lesson taken from Hebrews 13. Hebrews is somewhat unique in the New Testament in that we don't know who wrote it. There was speculation in the early church that it was the Apostle Paul but we do not know for sure since the writer of Hebrews does not identify himself. In any event, the message of discipleship in Hebrews 13, parallels those in the other books. Therefore, it is important to look at this passage in detail as a reminder of what we are to be about as disciples of Christ.

LOVE IS THE FOUNDATION

The writer begins with these words: *"Let love of the brethren continue."* No surprise there. Love is the foundation of the Christian walk. *We love because God loved us*, the Apostle John writes in 1 John. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 that *faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love*. Jesus said in the Gospels that *the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul and to love your neighbor as yourself*.

And it is no different in Hebrews. But notice that we are told to *continue* to love. Love is something we do. Jesus said, *"Do to others as you would have others do to you."* It is primarily an action. It is more than a feeling. And it is something we must continue to do and that isn't easy is it? And yet, that is the life of discipleship.

Next, the writer of Hebrews begins a list of examples of love in action. He says in verse 2, *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."*

It is not an easy thing. We tend to be judgmental of others by their looks. We tend to be guarded, suspicious of people we don't know. And yet, here we are told to be hospitable. The word translated hospitable is from the root word, *phileo*, which in the Greek means the love between friends. We once were enemies to God but He through His

love has made us friends. We are to do likewise with those who we don't even know. In fact, Jesus commanded us to love our enemies!

But the real surprise here is that we may be dealing with angels without even knowing it! We are told "*...for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*" Some people like to talk about aliens among us. They are deluded. However, I believe one can make a case for angels among us.

I think the closest thing that I have come to having such a thing happen in my life is actually what happened to my wife Kathleen some 18 years ago. We were both students in graduate school at Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA. I worked in the library and that is where I met Kathleen. As we got to know each other we began to contemplate the possibility of marriage. She knew I was planning on going into the Episcopal Church as a priest but she felt called to overseas missions. It became a real struggle to determine really what was God's will for our lives. One day she was in the library studying at a desk near the front entrance doors. She couldn't study but rather found herself in deep prayer asking God to give her a sign of what she should do. At that moment of intense prayer, she heard the doors open and in walked a very tall well built man with shoulder length blond hair. He was wearing a tan trench coat and immediately turned to his right and walked down the aisle of one of the stacks (bookshelves). In fact, he went to the area where Kathleen and I had first met. Kathleen could see him through the aisles as if he was looking for someone. He then walked back down another aisle of stacks and when he came back out he saw Kathleen. At that point, he looked at her as if he recognized her. He then walked over to her table and got down on one knee and said "God wanted me to tell you that you are right where He wants you to be, and that He has great plans for your life." He then got up and walked out the exit doors. Kathleen never saw him again and in the four years that I worked in that library never once saw a person who fit that description. Was he an angel? I don't know. But I do know that God says that there are angels among us who do His will.

REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON AND THE PERSECUTED

"Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."

Here is another tough one. Keep up with those in prison. I am so glad that we have a few of our members involved in the *Kairos Prison* ministry. The men and women behind bars are not much different from us. The only difference is that they have acted on their thoughts and have gotten caught. They are sinners like us and need Jesus. I came across a recent shocking statistic: 1 out of every 31 Americans has served jail time, is currently in prison, or is on parole. Sadly, we have the highest incarceration rate in the world!

When speaking of remembering those in prison, I can't help but think about the ministry called Prison Fellowship, started and overseen by Chuck Colson. Mr. Colson was a member of the Nixon Administration and did prison time for his role in the Watergate scandal. While in prison he came to Christ and ever since that time has served the Lord calling on the Church not to forget the incarcerated. We can also be thankful of men like Pastor Terry King and Saving Grace ministries for helping men here in the Buffalo area who are r But these passage also deals with those who are persecuted and today that means speaking up and praying for Christians in other lands who suffer for the faith. We are our brother's keeper. That is why I am so glad we have the PPC ministry - Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Keeping abreast of what is going on in other parts of the world

SEXUAL PURITY AND FIDELITY

“Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

God established marriage in creation, Jesus upheld it, and sexual relations are always to be limited to marriage between a husband and wife. This has been the standard from the beginning of time. So no matter what society says or approves, no matter what Churches teach, this truth remains. Sex is good. It is a blessing from God. It is for enjoyment, companionship, to strengthen the marriage bond, and for children. But it is not something that is to be engaged in for simple personal benefit and pleasure. It is reserved for marriage, plain and simple.

Now notice the subject turns to another major concern among folks – money!

THE LOVE OF MONEY

“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,” so that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”

Jesus taught that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. **Ecclesiastes 10:19** reflects on the attitude of the world when it says that ***“money is the answer for everything.”*** Many people not only believe this but live like it is true. Certainly our government thinks so. But money is to be a servant, not a master. It is to be used to glorify God and that means honoring the Lord by giving to His Body, the Church and to those in need, as well as investing in pursuits that are both godly and edifying to the family and community.

In fact, God knows what we need even before we ask. It is why Jesus said, ***“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (life’s needs) will be added unto you.”***

THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

v. 7: *“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”*

That is to say, don’ forget those who brought you to faith in Christ and are true followers of the Lord. Keep pressing on and follow their example of faith.

THE CERTAINTY AND CONSISTENCY OF THE FAITH

No right in the middle of this passage we come to an important truth: ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*** Isn’t that great? Jesus does not change. He is always true, always loving, always the same in character and person. That means we don’t have to worry about our salvation, or that His promises are not going to come to pass. It also means that we need to be aware that there will be many false teachers out there. There are many counterfeits but only one Jesus Christ. That’s why we are told next:

"Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited."

"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."

Jesus death was once and for all. It is because of His sacrifice that we can have the assurance of eternal life. And because of what He has done we respond to Him in worship!

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

v. 15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. v. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Here we find the call to worship. In the ancient church four things were always present when Christians gathered for worship: The Word of God, Prayer, Holy Communion, and taking up a collection for those in need. We are to sacrifice for the benefit of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

SUBMISSION AND PRAYER

We then hear in **v. 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."*

In America today, such language runs counter to our independent and individualism. And with so many different churches with different flavors and ways of doing things, most people just leave. But faithfulness means loyalty and that means following the direction of your church leadership. Unless is it a false teaching or neglecting the essentials of the faith, we should seek to be in agreement and unity. We can see this example of obedience and unity in how the vast majority of our members were willing to leave the Episcopal Church and continue as a Bible-believing Christ-centered Anglican Church. The leadership here, both clergy and lay, after much prayer, made the decision, and our folks submitted to that decision and followed even though it was not easy.

And if we began with love, we end with prayer. **v. 18**: *"Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things."* Prayer is simply communication with God. We need to be in daily prayer - listening to the Holy Spirit and lifting up what is in our heart in word. That is why we have a prayer room: A place for people to come and spend an hour with the Lord in their second home - St. Bart's. It is a special place and thank God for the folks who spent multiple hours praying so that we could have a continuous 24/7 week of prayer.

My friends this is the way of discipleship. It is grounded in love, it is expressed in self-less action and it is immersed in prayer! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!