

Prayer

We praise You, great and mighty Lord, because Your strength far exceeds anything we can envisage here on earth. You have the ability not just to change things, move things or do the impossible, but also make those small adjustments to our lives and circumstances which will significantly help us in our path of faith. Thank You Lord; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Personal Decisions

Pray for yourself, and ask the Lord to sustain you through the years ahead so that the major life decisions you take are according to His will, and the everyday life decisions you take become part of your walk with your Lord. Pray and give glory to God for the way that He has led You in the past, because nothing is outside of His interest or of His redeeming love. AMEN

Meditation

If you see someone who is in tears and distress,
In the name of Jesus, give help!

If you listen to someone who has been misled,
In the name of Jesus, tell the truth!

If you talk with someone who boasts of what they know,
In the name of Jesus, don't believe them!

If you work alongside those who swear using God's name,
In the name of Jesus, object!

If you come across someone who is searching their soul,
In the name of Jesus, explain the faith!

If you give time to a friend who has lost their way,
In the name of Jesus, show them where to go!

Bible Study - Hebrews 13:1-6

¹ Now, let love for one another continue. ² Do not forget to show hospitality, for by doing this, some have unknowingly entertained angels. ³ Be mindful of those who are in prison as if you were in prison with them; and those who are being tortured as though you were physically with them. ⁴ Marriage should be held in high honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept pure, for God will judge adulterers and the sexually immoral. ⁵ Be content with what you have and remain free from the love of money, for God has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'⁶ So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'

Review

Now, in the last chapter of Hebrews, the writer encourages his readers to take full advantage of their relationship with Christ, who has done everything for their salvation. This part of the letter reads rather like some of Paul's letters which also conclude with advice about different aspects of Christian living, and here, the advice is about hospitality, concern for others (in prison), sexual immorality and financial matters. In all of these matters, faith must be applied.

The first piece of advice contains what has become a well known saying; 'Do not forget to show hospitality, for by doing this, some have unknowingly entertained angels.' In reading this today, you may consider it to be a simple reminder to hospitable to all people, whatever our circumstances, because those we entertain may be visitors from God who have some special word or gift for us. This may be true, but there are many examples from the Old Testament in which people are visited by God's angels (e.g. Gen 18:1f. Ex. 23:20, Numbers 22:22 etc.) during

quite critical situations. Often, it is in the midst of difficult or critical circumstances that we throw hospitality away as if it was a mere luxury of life for when things go well. However, as with the opening words of the passage, 'Now, let your love for one another continue ...' (13:1), this advice is best heeded when life is tough. The letter to the Hebrews began with references to angels as important to God, but less important than the Son of God, and it ends by hinting at the way they still play an important part in God's order of things, assisting in the help of people as necessary, and especially when God's special help is required.

Hebrews then urges God's people to 'be mindful of those who are in prison.' It is good advice, and in our own day it raises all kinds of questions about concerns for individuals in prisons whose troubled lives have become profoundly dysfunctional. However good it is to pursue these issues, this passage probably refers more specifically to those Christians who were put into prisons for no other reason than the fact that they were Christians. They were in desperate need, and Hebrews expresses the concern that such people needed to know that others were aware of their existence in prison, for the conditions there were so bad that they hardly bear thinking about. Hebrews therefore urges Jesus' followers to think of other Christians in prison or tortured 'as though you were physically with them.' Now, the concern of the letter is for the fellowship of people in the Church, but we can also use this powerful concept and apply it to any situation of humanitarian concern, not least those in prison today.

Next, God's people are urged to keep themselves sexually pure, and it is crystal clear what is meant; the sanctity of marriage. The command 'let the marriage bed be kept pure' is a graphic word picture which calls us today to make sure we are not affected by the sexual immorality we constantly see in most films, television and entertainment. When God comes to judge the 'adulterers and sexually immoral' (13:4), what will He make of the continual drip-feed of immorality into the minds of all people which is a major characteristic of our society? The church needs to be more bold in what it says about this today.

The last advice in this passage is also very important for Christians of every generation. Contentment with what you have is an essential aspect of spiritual liberty, because if a person constantly desires more money, then their trust in God's provision is compromised. Each one of us needs money in order to live, and this passage does not tell us to live without it; but we are called to make our priorities clear; the care and protection of our Lord is more important than money. As Paul says in his letter to Timothy; 'the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). The real test is the last phrase of our passage; 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?' Those who can say this in all honesty are most blessed.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Can you give examples of when you have 'unknowingly entertained angels'? In what ways has God helped you or blessed you through this?
2. How can Christians become more involved in social matters such as prison visiting without being accused of being 'do-gooders'?
3. Should a church fellowship work to ensure that all its members are able to live without significant financial worries? What are the pitfalls?

Discipleship

When faced by a long list such as this, it is hard to know where to start, because each challenge is powerful and significant. If we work on the basis that the Lord understands we can only address one issue at a time, which issue in this text is most significant for you; hospitality, social care of others (prisoners); sexual immorality; financial security and security in Christ? Pray and assess which one is God speaking to you about, and consider how you might address the issue.

Final Prayer

Almighty God and Father, may nothing that has happened today so overwhelm me that I lose sight of Your guidance and grace, and may nothing prevent me from coming into Your presence and finding peace; through Jesus Christ my Lord, AMEN.