

September 5, 2010  
Pentecost 15

*"Remember How Jesus Helped Your Leaders"*

---

### HEBREWS 13:1-8

---

**K**eepon loving each other as brothers. <sup>2</sup> Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. <sup>4</sup> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. <sup>5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." <sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" <sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

This past week while making a visit to the Santa Maria Care Center, I noticed a bumper stick on the back of a car that read, "I believe in life before death." Was that intended to be an in your face statement against Christians who believe in life after death, who boldly confess in the Apostles' Creed "I believe in the resurrection of the body?"

While life after death is extremely important to all of us, life before death is also especially valuable to us. Did our Lord Jesus not tell us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Our purpose in life is to live for Jesus. Paul summarized our purpose in life with the words, "For me to live is Christ" and then he went on to say, "And to die is gain." Imagine waking up every morning and thinking, "This may be the day the Lord returns and takes me home to heaven. And if he does not come to take me home I am privileged to spend another day on this earth to glorify Jesus in all that I think, say and do."

Where will we get the strength to live each day for Jesus as if it were the first day of the rest of our lives? The words just read to you from Hebrews 13 encourage us to remember our leaders and then recall how they found their strength in Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

### **Our leaders faced challenges similar to ours**

How foolish it would be for me to think that people I admire as leaders or examples had it easier when it comes to living our lives for Jesus. Leaders of the past had to struggle to consistently love other believers just as I do. We are told, "Keep on loving each other as brothers." It does not say, "Start loving each other as brothers." It says, "Keep on loving." Jesus' love for you bubbles up in your life like a powerful spring. It flows within you and leads you to have love and compassion for other believers similar to what Jesus had for his followers. Every morning when I wake up to a new day my sinful nature and the devil will try to get me to worry and think so much about myself that I ignore the needs of that beautiful circle of Christians around me, especially in my own family and my congregation.

Think of all the dear Christians who have been used by the Lord to help you in your Christian life. Do you think they made through life without being severely tempted to become centered too much in themselves? No they needed Jesus daily strength and help just as much as you and I do.

Here is another area that challenges us every day that we live here on this earth. "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." Do you not think of Abraham inviting strangers into his tent to share in a sumptuous meal? He looks across the desert in the heat of the day and sees three strangers passing by. He runs out to meet them and even bows low to the ground. He invites them to sit beneath a tree, drink some water and wash their feet. He has Sarah knead and bake the bread. He offers them cheese and milk, and even prepared a choice calf from herd. Later he discovers this was the Lord and two angels who to him in human form, telling him he would have the long awaited son in less than a year.

As I venture beyond my circle of Christian brothers and sisters in my family and friends and congregation, I have opportunity to show hospitality to people I do not know. Let's go beyond thinking about offering a ride to hitchhiker, or giving money to a beggar on the street looking for his next bottle of cheap wine. Look at your neighbors up and down the street. Look at the girl working as checker in Wal Mart. Look at the server who is having a hard time getting the meal to your table. Look at the person standing in line at the post office. Opportunities abound every day to show basic hospitality, kindness and compassion to people who are total strangers to you. Will this be easy? Was it easy for great leaders in the past? Oh, how often we are so eager to get from point A to point B so efficiently that we ignore the opportunities the Lord places in our path every day.

Here is another area where we have the privilege of living for Jesus and it may not always be easy for us to do. "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." We need to remember our dear Christians who are battling each day against the forces of evil in their lives. At the time these words were written some of the brothers and sisters in the Lord were put into prison, others were forced to move out of their homes because of persecution for their faith. Think of how many Christians you know who are facing a hostile environment in their place of work, at school or even in their own family. It is time for us to start living less for ourselves and be more tuned in to their needs and challenges as they carry their crosses for Jesus. The Lord lets me have another week of life on this earth so I can be there for my fellow Christians who are bearing heavy loads for their faith in Jesus.

Are you ready to hear about another area that challenges us just as it challenged great leaders in the past? Let's listen to what the writer to the Hebrews says about marriage. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral." The other day I heard it reported that Tiger Woods has feelings of remorse for his indiscretions. Indiscretions? What ever happened to calling adultery for what it is, sin in the eyes of God? With all the twisted thinking about marriage and morality, there is huge need for Christians to keep the marriage bed pure and avoid sexual immorality. It has been said that there are no perfect marriages, but only successful marriages. A Christian woman recently told me that she is realizing for the first time how important it is for her to respect her husband as the Bible asks her to do in Ephesians 5. Every week, every day, and every hour Christians husbands, have

the big, huge, colossal, wonderful job of loving their wives as much as Christ loved the church. Our great leaders from the past have put their hope in Jesus to help them invest in their marriages.

How about another challenge that faces us this week? "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" It is amazing how much Jesus talked about money and told stories about money. It was Jesus who said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." It was Jesus who told us to look at the birds of the air and trust that our heavenly Father would take care of us just as he takes care of the birds. How many times are you challenged in one week to make good decisions on how you spend your money? How many times are you challenged to not worry too much about money? What is the greatest challenge facing us this morning in this matter of money? Is it not having enough to pay the bills and thinking too much about money, or having enough and still thinking too much about money.

Recently a young man told me of the struggles he was having with the IRS over inadequate record keeping for his small business. He is doing his best to set the record straight, but they keep asking for more and more. Now he realizes he needs to record every single expense and receipt. After his initial outburst of anger, he told me that he still had his greatest treasure in Jesus his Savior and then he quoted this verse from Hebrews 13, "The Lord is my helper: I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Our great leaders from the past were tempted to lose their peace and contentment over money. Over and over again, Jesus was able to convince them he was their greatest treasure just as he did with this person with IRS problems.

### **Our leaders had a Savior the same as ours**

What a huge blessing it is to know that amid all the challenges we face in life to live for Christ, Jesus never changes. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever." Remember your leaders. Remember how their lives ended. Remember who led them through the difficult challenges of life. It was the same Jesus who leads us today. He never changes. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

This morning I would like to have you join me in thanking the Lord for all these people the Lord gave to us to influence and shape our lives. Think of parents the Lord has given you. Think of friends. Think of leaders in the church who have helped you get close to Jesus and his Word. All of them have one thing in common that we share with them. They had Jesus who is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

I think of how my life was influenced my Grandmother Schroeder who lived with us on and off again when we were growing up as children. Every night before she went to bed, she would sit in her rocking chair and read her Bible. My bedroom was next to her bedroom in the large farm house in which we lived. I would watch her read her Bible through the partially opened door. I had just been given my first Bible. I turned on the "Ducky" light

next my bed, shaped in the form a blue duck, and in the dim light I read my Bible just as my grandmother was doing. And now I know what my grandmother found in the Bible that made her want to read it every day. She found Jesus, Jesus the same yesterday, today and forever.

Another week of your life on this earth has come to pass. We feel so inadequate, and so ashamed, and so worthless in the eyes of God because of the sin we see present in everything we do. But then we see Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever. The blood he shed for us on the cross was there for us in the past, and it is here for us in the present and will be there for us in the future when our last hour comes. The strength he gave us during our lowest moments in the past will be there for us in the present as well as the future. The words Jesus spoke to Paul also apply to us, "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength will be made perfect in your weakness." The Lord Jesus who reached into Job's life at the lowest moment will also be there for you to enable you to say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Remember your leaders. Remember the Savior who led them. Join me in saying, "Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever." Amen.