

23.1.08 Hebrews 13 midweekchurch Hebrews-pm13

In one scene from the movie “Chariots of Fire,” the character of Harold Abrahams is pouting after his first defeat in a race. His girlfriend Sybil Gordon is trying to talk sense to him, and she says, “Well if you can’t take a beating, perhaps losing is for the best.” Abrahams then replies, “I don’t run to take beatings! I run to win. If I can’t win, I won’t run,” to which Sybil says, ““If you don’t run, you can’t win.”

“If you don’t run, you can’t win“. If we don’t fix our eyes upon Jesus, we will never get to the finishing line. If we don’t get rid of the sin that entangles us, then we will never have the strength to reach God’s victory podium. If we don’t endure God’s discipline then we will never hear God’s “Well done, you good and faithful servant.“

That’s why the last chapter of Hebrews told us, “*So let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*” But that raises another issue, how do we know the route to travel. How do we know which way is the finishing line. How do we know where God wants us to run and how God wants us to live. This is where tonight’s chapter of Hebrews comes in. For it will give us four signposts that show us the way we should run, the way that we should live, as we run with perseverance the life of faith.

For faith is not just something in our heads, it has everyday implications as well. So as the writer ends with some of these everyday implications its like he is saying to us that if you have grasped the earlier teaching you will live this way. But if you don’t live this way, you are still far away from God and still in need of Jesus’ wonderful work.

So what are the four signposts that point us in the right direction? Well the first one tells us that the Christian life is a life full of love.

1. Love. Look with at v 1, “*Keep on loving each other as brothers.*” Love. If we are going to be go down the path of being Christians then our lives have to be characterised by love, radical love, costly love. Now the New Testament says this again and again and again but it still is a hard concept to live out, isn’t it?

So as we run the race of faith, we have to ensure that love for others leads us down the right paths. Not an airy, fairy type of love, but a practical, putting oneself out type of love. So the writer spells out what this sort of love looks like in verse 2, “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*”

Love involves hospitality. In those days, hotels were filled with fleas, cockroaches, spiders as well as being the heart of the prostitution

business. They were not good places to stay in. And so if there were Christians visiting, it was more appropriate to open your home and let them stay there than exposing them to such places. But people in the OT did not just show hospitality to those of a similar faith they opened their homes up to anyone passing through.

And when they did that people like Abraham, Manoah, and Gideon found that they were blessed by having God's holy angels stay with them in the guise of these travellers. Hospitality may mean that you end up having God's servants in your very own home.

Now hospitality involves a risk doesn't it? Who knows whom you are inviting into your homes. Today as in the past there are tricksters, con men who are seeking dishonest gain and you wouldn't want them inside your house would you? But despite the perils, the writer is calling us to be hospitable.

To find a way, out of love to share what God has given you with others. To allow a missionary couple passing through to stay for a night or two. To invite that new couple at midweek church over for dinner one night. To help those in need (who have been suitable screened) to get back on their feet. To put on a cup of tea and get someone over for a chat when they are having a rough time. Hospitality is an important part of showing love.

For that is what love looks like, but according to verse 3 it also means visiting those in prison. Remember them. Care for them as you would like to be cared for if you were in their place. Did you know there are 1,00s of people if not millions of Christians who are in gaol right now for their faith in Jesus. They need your encouragement and prayer. They need to know that the Christian Church will not forget them.

But there are many, many more who are there for crimes that should be punished. And so to support a chaplaincy ministry or to find a way of sending them a gift or writing them a letter or even if we know someone, of visiting them, is a powerful way of saying *I love you* despite what you have done.

Love is also shown by honouring marriage and by keeping the wedding bed pure. Those who are adulterers or sexually immoral, that is those who have sex outside of marriage are not showing true love, for true love according to God is shown by the one who waits. For love is not the same as lust. Sexual love is to be kept for marriage. And so for the Christian proceeding down the life of faith, love and sexual purity go hand in hand.

Similarly we are to be content with what God has given us in terms of money. We should not always desire more. We should not become slaves to our jobs so that we can gain more. We should not live beyond our means and end up being controlled by our debts or our

credit cards. Love means doing things for others instead of doing things for money.

Love. Everyone agrees it is what the world needs more of. But here the writer of the Hebrews is saying that love is to be the signpost showing you how to live the life of faith. So when we get to a fork in the road of life and one sign says the way of love and the other says forget others, you know which way to travel. When one sign says be hospitable and the other says let them find their own place to stay, you know which way God wants you to go. When one says just do it and the other says wait for marriage, you know which way is right. When you are faced with the choice between more money and contentment, you know now which one is God's will for you.

For if you take the risky path of hospitality, then you know that you don't go down that path alone, God promises to be with you. If you are scared while visiting a prison you know that God will not forsake you. If you wait for marriage or turn down the subtle call from money, you will realise that God is your helper, he will ensure that you make it all the way to the finishing line.

Remember that Jesus just before he left this world told his disciples the parable of the sheep and the goats. The people of the world were divided into just two camps, one who were being rewarded and one being punished. But remember the ones being rewarded were the ones who had visited Jesus in prison, and fed Jesus when he was hungry, who had clothed him when he was naked. For whenever they had done this to the least of one of Jesus' brothers they had done it for him.

By being indifferent to others, we are showing Jesus our lack of love to Him. But in treating others with love, we are showing our love for Jesus. And we are opening ourselves up to his presence in our everyday lives. And it is his presence and strength that will get us to the end of the life of faith. So the first signpost is that of love, while the next signpost is that of

2. Loyalty, loyalty to our leaders. That's what v 7-8 and then 17 are all about, being loyal. I suspect that most of us, when we were kids, played the game, "Follow the Leader." Do you remember how it works? Very simple. One kid assumes leadership and begins to go places and do things, and all the others are expected to follow right along. The leader can make things boring and easy, or he can make them exciting and challenging. The kids who follow have to decide whether they are up to the challenge as the leader takes them to more and more places they might not ordinarily go.

And that is what God is calling us to do in this Hebrews 13. We are called to remember our leaders, those who have taught us the word of God. We are to remember their teaching and to remember to follow them when they practise what they preach. Consider the outcome of

their way of life. Imitate their faith. Obey them, when they rightly point you to Jesus. Submit to their authority. Make sure the work, (and it is hard work being a leader), make sure their work is a joy not a drag.

So the next signpost points us along the way of loyalty to our leaders. They are accountable to God for what they do in front of you. They will lose many hours of sleep and many dollars from their pockets and many hours from their busy schedules because you are important and your faith means something to them. They want you to grow closer to Jesus. They want you to hang on in there. They want you to know the way of love. They have headed out of the trenches themselves and they want you to follow them as they head across the battle field.

In fact you are called to follow them as they follow Jesus. And he is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. His leadership is stable, its constant, its reliable. Other leaders will have their strengths and their weaknesses, but his way is always perfect. Other leaders are there off and on, he is always available, yesterday, today and forever.

Now don't mishear me when I say this, you don't give your human leaders unquestioning loyalty. That's what happens in the cults and that can be a health hazard both in this life and in eternity. But seek to follow them as they follow Jesus.

Can I just say on a personal basis, there is nothing more discouraging for me, than to pray about something, to survey your opinion, to encourage you in your gifts, to together make a decision that we will go in this direction, to head out into the unknown future and to see that almost no-one has followed you there. I know that in some way your growth in Jesus is my responsibility and the responsibility of the leaders in this Church. And that scares me like anything. I need to submit to the leadership that is over me and likewise you need to submit to the leadership of this Church.

So when you come to a signpost that talks about loyalty to your leaders and another that speaks of just doing your own thing, you know which way is the way to Jesus. When you come to the fork in the road that makes you choose between submission or complaining, being committed to the work of the Church or remaining on the outside, joining with others or just sitting back and seeing what happens, we now know which way that God would have us go.

3. Liturgy Follow the signposts of love, of loyalty as well as the one pointing to liturgy. Now liturgy is a word that describes what you do in God's presence, in worship. And it's a word that I have used because the next section, verses 9 to 16 uses the language of worship under the OT. It talks about ceremonial foods, about tabernacles, about high priests and sacrifices and blood and removing of the carcass outside the city. It uses OT liturgical language but fills it with

a completely different meaning.

Lets see what I mean. V.9 says we don't have ceremonial foods in more. We don't have certain types of bread or meat that we now eat in God's presence to strengthen us for the task ahead, instead God gives us grace, his free gift of forgiveness. Grace, amazing grace now needs to fill our insides and fuel our lifestyle. There will be teachers that will lead you back to rules and regulations and to ceremonies, but we need to ask is this a picture of God's grace? And if it isn't avoid it like the plague!

For we are not made holy through the offering of a perfect lamb, we are made holy through the offering of the lamb of God who takes away both our sin and the sin of the world. And so our worship is not full of physical sacrifices, or going without or acts of penance to show God our sorrow and our dedication, the only sacrifices we make now are those of thankful praise, of confessing his name with our lips, of serving others and doing good.

So true worship, true liturgy is not what we do on our day of worship, it is what we do everyday in worship. It is not done for us by a human priest, it is done for us by our high priest Jesus. We don't just enter God's presence on a Sabbath day, or on a Wednesday, we live in God's presence in everything we do. So all of our lives need to be our spiritual acts of worship.

So when we come to the sign point to liturgy we don't just take that path one hour in the week, we follow that route every second of every day.

4. Life Lastly we need to take the signpost leading to life, life itself. For the letter ends with two prayers, one for the writer and one from the writer. In verse 18, he asks his readers "*to pray for us, that we might have a clear conscience and desire to live honourable in every way*". The way to God's finish line is about living an honourable life. Its about following the teaching that God has put into our heads with a clear conscience. Its about going in His direction in every thing that we do and say.

And yet the other prayer adds something more to this statement. The writer prays that "*the God of peace, ...that great Shepherd of the sheep (may) equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*"

Getting to the finish line of life is about being equipped by our great shepherd Jesus for every good work. Its about knowing what his will is and then getting up and doing it. It about pleasing Him in all that we do. Its about Him working through us, in us , with us. Its about running the race together and doing everything for his glory and his

glory alone.

Dwight L Moody once said “The world is yet to see what God can do through a few people who are totally sold out to him.” Let me change that. The Tweed Coast is yet to see what God can do through a few people who are totally sold out to him. Terranora is yet to see what God can do through a few people who are totally sold out to him.

Well what if they saw in us a love, a loyalty, a worship, a life that was like Heb 13 described? They would be confronted with a choice? Will I follow these guys down the path they are going or go my own way? Well friends that what God is calling us to do, and as we do that lets see whether others will follow us as we follow Christ.

4. Life Lastly we need to take the signpost leading to life, life itself. For the letter ends with two prayers, one for the writer and one from the writer. In verse 18, he asks his readers “*to pray for us, that we might have a clear conscience and desire to live honourable in every way*“. The way to God’s finish line is about living an honourable life. Its about following the teaching that God has put into our heads with a clear conscience. Its about going in His direction in every thing that we do and say.

And yet the other prayer adds something more to this statement. The writer prays that “*the God of peace, ...that great Shepherd of the sheep (may) equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*”

Getting to the finish line of life is about being equipped by our great shepherd Jesus for every good work. Its about knowing what his will is and then getting up and doing it. It about pleasing Him in all that we do. Its about Him working through us, in us , with us. Its about running the race together and doing everything for his glory and his glory alone.

Dwight L Moody tells the story of two heavily intoxicated men who on one night went down to their boat to return to their homes across the bay. They got in and began to row. They rowed hard all night, wondering why it was taking them so long to get to the other side of the bay. When the sun came up, and as the two became more sober, they discovered that their rope had never been loosened, and that their anchor had not been raised .

Moody went on to conclude, many people are trying to [live by faith] in similar fashion. They cannot believe because they are tied to this world. (So) Cut the cord! Set yourself free from the clogging weight of earthly things, and you will soon go on.” Friends look to Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith. Persevere with Him and in the words of Winston Churchill “*Never, never, never, never, never give up.*”