

Introduction:

- A. It is the great privilege of Christians that we are receiving God's kingdom, here and now. Right now, we *"have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."* That is where we live right now, by faith, and where we will live forever, by sight.
- B. This kingdom which we are receiving cannot be shaken. No matter what ISIS does. No matter who wins the elections. No matter whether the news from the Dr., or the boss, or the kids is good news or bad news. Believers fleeing from Syria are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Believers in Beirut or Paris or Mali are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Believers who have to step into terribly messy families this week are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. June Griffin received a *kingdom that cannot be shaken.*
- C. Heb. 12:28-29 says, *"Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'."* There is the best reason to celebrate Thanksgiving. In the phrase, *"and so worship God acceptably,"* you could make it *worship/serve*, the way priests both worship and serve. So two responses to God's great gift of a kingdom that cannot be shaken: thankfulness and worshipful service.
- D. So what does that look like? What should we do? Maybe have an extra worship service on Thanksgiving? Interestingly, the very next verses answer that question with a challenge to very basic Christian behavior. Turn to **Heb. 13:1-6.... Christians who are thankful for God's**

unshakeable kingdom worship and serve God through grace-filled relationships.

Read v.1 with me again...

I. IF YOU'RE THANKFUL TO GOD, KEEP LOVING YOUR CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS (13:1)

- A. We cannot overstate the importance of loving one another in the church. No command, apart from holding to right doctrine, is more important. We are family—brothers and sisters. The fact that this command is repeated often in the New Testament indicates that it isn't so easy to do, or we wouldn't need to hear the command so often. It is the nature of a smaller church that we can't hide from one another very well. So here are the challenges:
1. To love one another we can't lay low or be anonymous, or just come when there's nothing better to do. We can't love people we don't know.
 2. To love one another we have to handle our frustrations, irritations and disagreements without gossip, without silent treatment, without doing damage to this body.
 3. To love one another we pray for each other, we make time for fellowship, we allow love to cover a multitude of sins, we speak the truth *in love*. We become family.
- B. We must "keep on" loving one another. We don't drop out, or just escape to another church. The Christlikeness of Christian love doesn't really show its face till loving is costly—till we give of ourselves for one another, and keep at it.
- C. So where would your frontier be with this command? I'll give you a minute to think about it with the Lord.

Let's read v.2...

II. IF YOU'RE THANKFUL TO GOD, DON'T FORGET TO LOVE STRANGERS (13:2)

- A. The word in v.1 is *phil-adelphia*—love of brothers. The word here is *phil-azenia*—love of strangers, commonly translated, *to show hospitality*. I grew up in a church that almost never had visitors unless someone's family came

from out of town. I looked at a list of all the attenders in 1992 and only about a dozen of those people are still here. Almost all of us immigrated to this church. At one point or another, we were all *strangers* here. We stayed because, one way or another, those here before us loved us.

- B. This book of Hebrews calls Christians to holy living. Here we discover that holy living is hospitable. Godly people make a place at the table for those they don't know. We take the risk of stepping into a new relationship. We give without thought of getting back. Hospitality is grace with its hand outstretched. Hospitality is grace wearing an apron, or picking up the check, or arranging a play date with the kids, or risking inviting someone new into your Growth Group.
- C. Then there's that wonderful teaser: "*for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*" Like Abraham and Sarah who were visited by three strangers with a profound promise of God's blessing. Whether you entertain an actual angel or not (which is something you're not likely to know), the point is that God's grace may well come back to you through hospitality. God, who sent out the Good Shepherd to look for the lost sheep, has a special kinship with those who make strangers feel at home.
- D. This is a ministry especially important at Village Church. We have new people here all the time. We don't have a team of people who make sure everyone is welcomed. *You're* the welcome wagon! And I'm determined that we will use our building and our fellowship in every way we can. We make our building available to other believers without cost.
- E. In a recent blog post, Addie Zierman wrote about when she and her husband began to look for a church:
- Every week, we'd get up and go to church. We'd commit to a single place for months—sometimes years—idling in the pews, shaking hands during Welcome time in the service, joining Sunday school classes, volunteering for ministries. And yet still, it felt like we were a little bit*

invisible, that our very existence was drowned out by the white noise of small talk around us.

What did me in, finally, were all those church foyers. All those empty smiles. It was the same people introducing themselves over and over again because they couldn't be bothered to remember us. It was the Sundays when we idled near the coffee urns, shifting from one foot to another, hoping someone would stop and talk. It was watching the people turn like the beads of a kaleidoscope into a hundred different circles and configurations, none of which expanded out to include us.

When I eventually went off the deep end of my life, there was no one to catch me. Because no one even realized I was gone.

By the grace of God, Addie found help and she and Andrew found a church, but in this post she asks fellow believers,

And what can we do? What is there to do?

The first or second week we were at our current church, a couple we barely knew invited us to lunch.

In many ways, it was an odd fit. Their kids were well into elementary school while our boys were just tiny—ages three and one. To me, the distance between our kids' ages felt as giant and insurmountable as any ocean. She was an accountant, and I break out into hives whenever I have to do any type of math; he was a realtor and had his face on city benches all over town.

But still, they invited us to lunch. And we said yes.

We sat around a table, eating Papa Murphy's pizza and talking, and I don't remember anything particularly profound about our conversation. But I remember the way the sunshine streamed through the windows that fall day. I remember it lighting warm on my face. I remember feeling seen.

That was all it took. One lunch. One family. One invitation.

[Off the Page, 10/14/15]

V.3...

III. IF YOU'RE THANKFUL TO GOD, REMEMBER THOSE WHO SUFFER FOR CHRIST (13:3)

- A. *Illus.*: Last spring one of the brothers here said to me, “*I keep thinking about the orange jumpsuits*” - the 21 Egyptian believers beheaded by ISIS last spring for being what their murderers called “the people of the cross.”
- B. The Christians who first read this letter of Hebrews knew people personally who were in prison for the gospel. Indeed some of them had also suffered, from what we read earlier in the book. For us, of course, it is rare that we know personally those who suffer, but part of our brotherly love is that we remember—especially in prayer—those who suffer for the name of Jesus.
- C. This is a command we must obey. You can't pray for all the needs—for all who suffer—so perhaps choose one country to focus on. Why not get the email letters from Voice of the Martyrs or Open Doors.

V.4... Talk about a counter-cultural stand!

IV. IF YOU'RE THANKFUL TO GOD, HONOR MARRIAGE (13:4)

- A. Do you remember when we gathered on June 28, a day after hearing of the Supreme Court's ruling on gay marriage? We were shaken. Sad. Angry. We have to regroup and find ways to demonstrate our own Christian holiness “*in these days of confused situations.*”
- B. Marriage matters. Sexual purity matters. Sex belongs only in marriage between a man and a woman. Marriage matters because it is a covenant of love, modeling God's covenant of love with his people. Marriage matters because children are to be the fruit of marriage. Marriage matters because people learn the hard work of committed loving, of self-control and perseverance, of wisdom and humility. Marriage matters because sex outside of marriage tears at people's souls, shredding a person's spiritual identity.
- C. God doesn't judge sexual sin because he's a prude or a killjoy. He judges sexual sin because it does so much

damage, because contrary to the way we think, it is so profoundly selfish and unloving. That said, we're so glad God shows forgiveness for those who repent of sexual immorality and adultery. As Paul writes, "Such were some of you." We're so glad God gives help and defense for those whose homes have been torn apart. We're grateful for those among us who remain single and chaste for Christ's sake.

- D. The hard part of our stand for marriage is not speaking out to the culture around us. The hard part is staying married. Keeping pure. The hard part is practicing what we preach; honoring *our* marriages.

Time doesn't allow me to develop this point but, especially at this frenzied season, let me read **vv.5-6...**

V. IF YOU'RE THANKFUL TO GOD, BE CONTENT IN HIS CARE

In his kindness, God brings even prosperous people to some kind of poverty now and then so that we might see our own latent discontent, but also so that we might learn to trust God.

Illus.: I remember reading about a pastor down in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina who said, "*We always say, Jesus is all we need. Well now, Jesus is all we have.*" It is a mercy from the Lord when believers have times like that so we might discover the riches we overlook in the Lord.

Now, as a conclusion, let me take you to **vv.20-21**, the benediction of this book, and the source of a benediction I give to you many Sundays... *Illus.:* I noticed in Pastor Paul Engle's notes for the dedication service of this building on Sept 26, 1982, that he ended with this blessing.

This book challenges believers to persevere in our faith and expects from us holy living—godly behavior—and warns us soberly of the risks of abandoning our walk with Christ. But then, when all is said and done, there is this blessing heavy with hope.

VI. GOD BLESSES US WITH THE CAPACITY, THROUGH CHRIST OUR GREAT SHEPHERD, TO BE HOLY PEOPLE (13:20-21)

- A. **V.20** tells us that God has positioned us for his care through Christ.

1. **God has brought his peace to our lives through the blood of Christ shed to bring us into an everlasting covenant with the Lord.** It is the peace that comes from knowing God’s love in Christ will never leave us.
 2. **God has brought his peace to our lives by raising Christ from the dead,** so that now we face death with a confident certainty of life forever with the Lord.
 3. **God has brought us peace by giving us Jesus, “that great Shepherd of the sheep,”** to guide us safely through this life and home to the next, where *“the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, [and] lead us to springs of living water.”*
- B. That God of peace does two things for those who trust him:
1. **He “equips us with everything good for doing his will.”** When we put our faith in Jesus we are recreated; we are new creations. And the evidence of our new identity is that we are remade like Christ. **Eph 2:10** says, *“We are God’s handiwork [his masterpiece], created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* And one of my favorite verses, **2 Cor 9:8**, says, *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you might abound in every good work.”* Holiness is not so hard when you know that!
 2. **The other thing God does for us is in the phrase, “and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ...”** That means that God is sculpting our inward holiness—through his fatherly discipline in hardship, through the promises he gives us, through his welcome that we come boldly to his throne to find mercy and grace in our times of need. No father or mother was ever more invested in raising godly children than our heavenly Father is with us.
- C. The book ends in v.23 with the simple, timeless, universal Christian blessing, “Grace be with you all.” Grace—the gifts of God we could never deserve or earn—all the privileges of our life in Christ. These words are not a

Hallmark card; a good wish, a kind thought. **They are a bestowal.** Those words are made flesh in you, through Christ. Grace and peace are your birthright and the secret to our holiness.