

Thought for Sunday 25th July 2021
Pastor Gordon Hamilton

Hebrews 13:1-25

'Concluding Exhortations' that is how my N.I.V. Bible heads up this passage, the final chapter of Hebrews, and with the vast majority of the Covid restrictions in the UK being lifted tomorrow and churches back open again, I feel it is time to bring my posted 'Thought for Sunday' to an end. Over the past couple of months I have been preaching, somewhere or another, and my thoughts have been the basis of my preaching but I pray you will all be able to join with your local fellowship on a Sunday once again. What a great verse to start our final thought; *'Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.'* Jesus told us in John 15:17; *'This is my command: Love each other.'* This is not an idle comment, Jesus says; *'This is my command.'* Not a request, a command, and the writer to the Hebrews tells us to; *'Keep on loving each other.'* And in fact the first 3 words of the next chapter could be added to verse 1; *'Do not forget.'* When Jesus gave the command in John 17, he was just talking to the disciples who were gathered celebrating the Passover, the night before Jesus was to suffer and die. That doesn't mean he wasn't talking to us who are living 2,000 later, and the writer here emphasises we are not to exclude others, v2; *'Do not forget to entertain strangers.'* Some people feel that hospitality is not their gifting, and maybe cooking a dinner is not your field of expertise but a cup of tea and a biscuit is showing love, even just a listening ear is sometimes all that is needed. The writer explains why; *'some people have entertained angels without knowing it'* and I have heard many stories who talk of meetings with people they believe were angels. As we looked at the life of Abraham earlier this year, several times Abram was joined by angels, Geneses 18 being just one example. I remember hearing an ex prisoner speaking about 30 years ago. He was in prison for about 10 years, on the Isle of Wight, and he said that one night an angel visited his cell and told him the Lord had a job for him. He turned his life around, giving his life to the Lord's service. There have been many people who have had 'Damascus Road experiences,' as I said last week, it all begins with the first step. The next two verses have left some people with guilty feelings; *'Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have,'* I have had people come to me really concerned, they have given their lives to Jesus, but in the past they had done things which these two verses are condemning them for. Come to Jesus, ask his forgiveness, and see what God can do. Any queries then read Acts 7:54-9:19. Saul was as good as a murderer and yet became Paul the apostle. Moses was a murderer, but God used him, King David was an adulterer, God used him, and as I said last week, Rahab was a prostitute and yet God included her in His son's genealogy in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. God said; *'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'* People tell me I have changed since I became a Christian, and I really hope that is true, we are called to put on the armour of God, Ephesians 6, and if we do that then our lives should be different to what they were before we came to faith. I pray that verse 7 can be said of me; *'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.'* One thing I have learned since being a Christian, is that it is 24/7, no days off, no holidays from being a Christian. You will remember what I said last Sunday; *'since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles.'* The great cloud of witnesses, is not only the people we see round and about us, family, friends, neighbours, people we work with, people we see when we go shopping. It is also the

angels that we don't see, that see everything we do. That surely has to be an encouragement to walk the walk with Jesus. *'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever.'* One thing I have always tried to do, is to check out, using your bible, what I am saying. Verse 9 is always a challenge to me; *'Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.'* I have to be focussed on the bible, I may look at a commentary every now and then just to see if I am not deviating from the truth, but will then go back and make sure it tallies with what God's Word is saying. Let me leave you with a thought as you go back to your own churches and your own pastors. Verse 17; *'Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.'* As I say that, let me add that we need to confirm what our preachers are preaching. I include your pastors and your teachers in verse 18; *'Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in every way.'* Please, pray for me, pray for your pastor, pray for those who endeavour to teach and preach, that the words they use are God's words, and that the Lord will speak through them and will also speak to them. I am going to conclude with verses 20 & 21; *'Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 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.'*

O God beyond all praising,
We worship You today,
And sing the love amazing
That songs cannot repay;
For we can only wonder
At every gift you send,
At blessings without number
And mercies without end:
We lift our hearts before You
And wait upon Your word,
We honour and adore You,
Our great and mighty Lord.

Then hear, O gracious Saviour,
Accept the love we bring,
That we who know Your favour
May serve You as our King;
And whether our tomorrows
Be filled with good or ill,
We'll triumph through our sorrows
And rise to bless You still:
To marvel at Your beauty
And glory in Your ways,
And make a joyful duty
Our sacrifice of praise!