

HEBREWS 13

Hebrews 13 Final Words

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, June 16, 2024
PASSAGES	Hebrews 13; Matthew 25; Ephesians 5; Hebrews 11
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:58:28 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Hebrews closes the way a letter closes — not with another argument but with a list of ordinary things: show hospitality, honor your marriage, stop loving money, remember your leaders. Matt kept saying the quiet part out loud all morning: none of that is the gospel. All of it flows out of a Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Brotherly love is a response to the gospel, not the gospel. Confusing the two moves the person of Jesus out of the center, which is the one place he belongs.
- ◆ The early church was mocked for feeding and housing strangers. That is not a bad reputation to have.
- ◆ A reasonable faith is worth defending, but do not let it talk you out of your supernatural roots — the text says some of us have hosted angels without knowing it.
- ◆ You are not plugged into other believers directly; you are both plugged into the vine. Which means the only way to stop being connected to a brother who annoys you is for one of you to walk away from Christ.
- ◆ A Christian marriage is a theatrical staging of Christ and his church in your own house. Done properly it is a race to the bottom, not a contest for the top.
- ◆ Poor people can lust after money just as well as rich people. Loving what you do not have has a name: coveting.

- ◆ The pull toward strange, strict, elite religion is really a pull toward feeling a cut above. If you want intensity, Hebrews already handed you four assignments.
- ◆ Authority in the church is not owned by the community, the tradition, or even the documents. It belongs to the King who has it all, which is why submission to a leader can be offered as though to him.

► 0:58:28

This was the last message in Hope's walk through Hebrews, and Matt's hope for it was modest and practical: that the letter would end up more precious and more *approachable* than it was in January. People avoid Hebrews, he said, because they cannot find the structure or the main idea in a given chapter. Chapter 13 has no such problem. It is a list.

1. Let brotherly love continue

► 1:00:39

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

HEBREWS 13:1-2 ↗

► 1:02:24

The whole letter has been one long case that the gospel is trustworthy because the person at the center of it is — our perfect representative in heaven, tempted as we are, our great high priest, our mediator, the propitiation for his people. Now the author turns to response. Matt put two guardrails around it before going a step further. Brotherly love is not the *only* response to the gospel. And brotherly love is not the gospel; it is something that flows from it.

► 1:04:04

Travel in that world was expensive and dangerous and there were no motels, so believers hosted believers they had never met. The second-century satirist Lucian noticed and sneered: learn just enough Christianity to pass, and you can tour the empire on free dinners and free beds. What dupes. "In hindsight that's not that bad of an insult on us," Matt said, "because that's kind of a cool reputation to have — that we would put up brothers for no reason other than the fact that they are our brothers."

2. Don't lose your supernatural roots

► 1:04:43

Since the Enlightenment we have worked hard to show the world that our faith is reasonable — the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, William Lane Craig in front of a large crowd. Matt was careful to say he was not mocking any of it. But the author of Hebrews has just said something that ought to strike you as slightly crazy: some of you have had angels over for dinner and never knew it. The natural and the mundane are blended with the mystical and the hard to explain, and believers walking out practical love are sometimes playing host to powerful beings on assignment.

► 1:07:06

Then a step further, because Jesus goes further. In [Matthew 25:35–40](#) people are commended for visiting him in prison and feeding him when he was hungry, and they have no memory of it — whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me. That is the engine under the reputation Lucian laughed at. It also applies, Matt noted, to the person in front of you right now who is not the most interesting person in the room, and to the brother who is the wrong kind politically in an election year: treat them as you would treat the Lord, for the Lord's sake.

3. Remember the prisoners — you cannot unplug

► 1:08:44

[Hebrews 13:3](#) asks us to remember those in prison as though in prison with them, “since you also are in the body.” Matt pressed on that rationale with Jesus' own agricultural picture:

I am the vine, you are the branches. The branches are not plugged into each other. They are plugged into the vine — which makes the connection inescapable. “The only way to not be connected to them is for one of you to walk away from Christ himself.”

4. Marriage, and the race to the bottom

► 1:09:57

[Hebrews 13:4](#) — let marriage be held in honor, let the marriage bed be undefiled. Christians get a reputation, from the world and from each other, for being fixated here. Matt's answer was blunt: it was not our idea. As in [Hebrews 12:16](#), we are on assignment. Shift the complaint back to Christ, where it belongs.

► 1:11:58

And it is not arbitrary. In [Ephesians 5:25–32](#) Paul grounds the whole thing in Christ and his bride, which means, Matt said, that “we have the honor and the privilege of, in our own homes, playing out theatrically the gospel.” You can stage it badly. One way is the husband as Boss Hog: I have the size and the gun, so in exchange for protection you submit — reasoning Matt compared, wincing at his own illustration, to a mafia boss offering a restaurant a deal. The test is simple. Who got more out of the original than they put in, Jesus or his followers? The church, by an infinite margin. So in the reenactment, if it is done right, the wife should be the one who benefits far beyond anything she could repay.

► 1:14:29

“I like to refer to this as the race to the bottom,” he said. Around us it is usually a race to the top — a girl boss and an alpha male duking it out for best position in the household. Not here.

5. Money, and the coveting nobody admits to

► 1:14:59

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”

HEBREWS 13:5–6 ↗

► 1:16:07

Notice the verse does not single out the rich, and Matt would not let anyone hand it off to the wealthy person one row over. “We poor people who worry about bills can also lust after money. We just don’t happen to have it.” You can love a thing you do not possess; that is called coveting. He granted what Ecclesiastes 10:19 grants — money does answer things, and a little more of it really would make some problems easier. That is true, and it is not permission.

These four practices have an inherent good and a protective function. Walking faithfully in the will of Christ leaves you less exposed to distraction from the enemy, which is why the passage can arrive at verse 6 and say *confidently*.

6. Leaders who are gone, and a Christ who is not

► 1:17:55

Hebrews 13:7 looks backward: remember your leaders, consider the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith. They sound departed — martyrs, or people faithful to the end. And the thing to copy is not their deeds but their faith, which puts this verse in a straight line with the long list of witnesses in Hebrews 11, all testifying to the same thing: it is right to trust him.

► 1:19:43

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.”

HEBREWS 13:8-9 ↗

Whatever the food controversy was, it is lost to us; the logic is not. The central character of the faith does not change over time, so the message about him was never designed to evolve. Worship styles and prayer habits carry cultural application. The core does not.

7. The temptation to be an elite Christian

► 1:20:49

New and shiny teachings are fun and tempting and they do not lead to life, because only Christ does. So stay nourished by grace — which sounds obvious until you notice how bored we get with it. “I’m bored with grace. I want to do something strict with food.” The appeal was never dietary; it was religious. “There’s always a temptation to be like, all right, y’all are cool, but I’m going to be an elite Christian — and I’m going to do that by weird, bizarre, hard to understand rules that I’ll never fully explain to you.” It puffs up an ego that is usually discouraged and confused and looking for a shot of adrenaline.

► 1:22:34

If you genuinely have extra energy and want to go radical, Matt pointed out, the chapter has already given you four options: devote yourself to hospitality, avoid sexual immorality all the more intensely, be content with what you have, and proclaim the gospel with your words and your deeds.

8. Outside the camp — and a sacrifice that was never about sin

► 1:23:37

The chapter answers the hunger for specialness by pointing away from us. We have an altar. The bodies of the sacrificial animals were burned outside the camp, and so Jesus suffered outside the gate

to sanctify his people through his own blood ([Hebrews 13:10–12](#)). You want to feel pure and holy? Recall your Lord and what he has done.

“Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

HEBREWS 13:13–14 ↗

► 1:25:37

Then a detail worth keeping. Most Old Testament sacrifices had nothing to do with sin. They were honor, respect, joy, generosity — a way of saying *I love you, I’m loyal to you, I’m with you*. That is the category [Hebrews 13:15–16](#) puts us in when it asks for a continual sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name, and for doing good and sharing what we have. Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is not a sin offering. It is an honor offering. And Matt made a point of the two words verse 15 opens with — *through him*.

9. Obey your leaders — and where authority actually comes from

► 1:26:48

[Hebrews 13:17](#) is awkward to read from the front and Matt said so. If it helps, hold the board in mind instead of him: at Hope Chapel the buck stops with the board, who in unanimous agreement can hire and fire the senior pastor and direct the church. He has to walk this verse out from both sides. For a fuller treatment he pointed to [1 Peter 5:1–4](#), and, for a jolt from another world entirely, Pope Gregory I’s *Book of Pastoral Rule*, written before 604 and startling in the deference it demands.

► 1:28:59

Some locate authority in the community that holds texts sacred; some in the antiquity of the tradition; some in the documents themselves. Matt was not persuaded by any of them, “because it is God himself who has all authority.” Jesus is the head of the church, and that is what makes submission to middle management survivable: you can offer it for his sake, because he may well have put that person there on purpose, and may use them to challenge or even anger you for your own good.

► 1:30:46

It is no easy ride on the other side either. The verse describes someone keeping watch over souls, carrying an extra burden, and giving an account. And the arrangement is symbiotic — the request to pray for the leaders in [Hebrews 13:18–19](#) is the same relationship running the other direction. A body that produces groaning and contention benefits nobody in it.

10. The God of peace

► 1:31:59

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

HEBREWS 13:20-21 ↗

Matt lingered on the honorific — the God of peace — and hoped the room knew him that way. Then on the mechanism: his will works in you by the power of Jesus. “It is a grace when we labor in our strength for him. It is a grace when we labor in our weakness for him.”

11. Read it like a letter

► 1:33:47

The author signs off in Hebrews 13:22–25 by apologizing for writing at such length — briefly, he calls it. “I don’t know if you’ve ever read Hebrews out loud,” Matt said. “Takes about an hour. So if that’s brief, I could probably get out with preaching longer.”

His closing counsel was to read the Bible in several ways, not one. Study it microscopically if you like — word studies, whole books on a single chapter. But also ignore the chapter titles and the verse numbers and read it the way you would read any other literature, straight through, because that is how it was written and how its first audience received it. He admitted that preaching a chapter at a time interrupts the flow. Hope once had a small group that did nothing but read a book of the Bible aloud, beginning to end, no discussion — and books he had read five or six times without retaining a thing finally opened up. “I didn’t need a PhD for that.” Not an irreverent familiarity with scripture, he said, but an approachable one, where you sit and read and enjoy it and ask the Lord how to walk in what you find. Next up is a tour through the tiny letters, read that same way, before the church starts the Gospel of John in August.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Hebrews 13:1–2](#)
- [Matthew 25:35–40](#)
- [Hebrews 13:3](#)
- [John 15:5](#)
- [Hebrews 13:4](#)
- [Hebrews 12:16](#)
- [Ephesians 5:25–32](#)
- [Hebrews 13:5–6](#)
- [Ecclesiastes 10:19](#)
- [Hebrews 13:7](#)
- [Hebrews 11](#)
- [Hebrews 13:8–9](#)
- [Hebrews 13:10–12](#)
- [Hebrews 13:13–14](#)
- [Hebrews 13:15–16](#)
- [Romans 12:1](#)
- [Hebrews 13:17](#)
- [1 Peter 5:1–4](#)
- [Hebrews 13:18–19](#)
- [Hebrews 13:20–21](#)
- [Hebrews 13:22–25](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Hospitality in Hebrews is aimed at strangers who cannot repay you. Who has been that person for you, and who could you open your home to this season?
2. Matt said the only way to stop being connected to a brother who annoys you is to walk away from Christ. Where is that costing you something right now?
3. If a Christian marriage stages Christ and his church, what is your household actually performing — a race to the bottom, or a contest for position?
4. Where does the coveting show up in you: in what you have, or in what you keep imagining you would do with a little more?
5. Of the four assignments in this chapter — hospitality, purity, contentment, honoring leaders — which one are you going to take up this week, and how will anyone know?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5WYeGRYbzo&t=3508s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.