

JOURNEY ON

HEBREWS 13



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Journey On: Hebrews 13

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Hebrews 13: Introduction

The book of Hebrews concludes with a series of exhortations and instructions designed to help those first drifting readers to get back on track with the Lord.

The writer addresses his readers individually and as a community to help them discern the next steps of their recovery. He has shown them the superiority of Jesus and the New Covenant, and now he urges them to get back on the path toward the City to Come. The concluding benediction is one of the most beautiful in all of Scripture.

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1 Continue in Love

Introduction

The writer previously commended his readers for the love they showed as evidence of true faith (Heb. 6.10). He encourages them to “continue” in love for one another, and for strangers and the needy. Devoting themselves to loving others would give them a “fresh start” in their race and unleash within them the grace and power needed to endure their trials.

Read Psalm 125.

Read Hebrews 13.1-3.

Think it through.

1. The writer wisely uses verse 1 to connect his readers to their early experience as believers (Heb. 6.10), and to call them to resume that path. How would their continuing in brotherly love help them to endure their trials? He includes as objects of our love not only those who are close and immediate, but strangers and prisoners – “those who are mistreated.” Why? In what way is this good and helpful advice to these first readers? Why is this good advice for us?

2. The writer also wants us to remember that we are not alone in our race for the Lord. We are surrounded by heavenly witnesses (Heb. 12.1) and may even be visited by angels. Really? Are angels still involved with us like they were with saints in the Old and New Testaments? In what ways? How can knowing that angels attend to help us to continue in love?

Meditate.

“See how he enjoins them to preserve what they had; he does not add other things. He did not say, ‘Be loving as brothers,’ but ‘Let brotherly love continue.’ And again, he did not say, ‘Be hospitable,’ as if they were not, but ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality,’ for this neglect was likely to happen, due to their afflictions.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 1 Peter 4.12, 13

The true measure of my faith, Lord, is the extent to which Your grace empowers me to love others. As I think about the day ahead, and opportunities for loving others, I...

Pray Psalm 125.

This psalm agrees with Hebrews 12 that those who believe in Jesus are the new Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the general assembly of His people. Give thanks as you pray for all the specific promises mentioned here.

Psalm 125.1-5 (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!
Like the hills surrounding safe Jerusalem,
Christ surrounds His Church and holds her in His mighty Hand!
Refrain, v. 1
All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!

Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Wickedness shall rest not on this holy land;
Sinfulness shall never come forth from their hand.
Trusting in the Savior, firm in His caress,
Ever shall His favor on this holy city rest.
Refrain

Lord, do good and care for those upright in heart.
All who turn to evil shall from You depart.
Sinful men may increase; send them, Lord, to hell!
Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!
Refrain

2 With the Lord's Help

Introduction

The writer focuses on some very practical ways his readers can get back on track with the Lord. By obeying the Lord in such matters as exercising hospitality, visiting the poor and needy, and being faithful in marriage, we will be strengthened in our souls to obey Him when trials come. The Lord is our helper in all facets of our lives, and we must learn to draw on His presence.

Read Psalm 142.

Read Hebrews 13.4-6.

Think it through.

1. The Lord promises to be with us always, wherever we are (cf. Matt. 28.20). Why is it important to know this? How can a psalm like Psalm 142 help us in drawing on the Lord's presence? Covetousness is the gateway to all sin (ask Eve, Gen. 3.1-6). How is contentment its antidote? If we can resist the tendency to covet, we will strengthen our souls for the larger issues of obedience. Strengthening our souls (cf. Acts 14.21, 22) is thus a bit like strengthening a muscle. The more we exercise, the stronger we become. Explain how that works in the soul.

2. How does knowing that the Lord is our helper enable us to overcome the fear of men? It was fear of men that was causing these first readers to drift from the Lord. They had lost sight of Jesus (hence the exhortations to see Jesus and consider Jesus which we saw in chapters 2, 3, and 12). What can cause us to lose sight of Jesus as we're going about our daily activities? What can we do to keep the Lord, our Helper, more continuously before our minds? How can believers help one another in this? Is there something strengthening to our souls about *saying* (v. 6) that we have confidence in the Lord? Explain.

Meditate.

"Listen to what God is saying, not to what your own prejudice is saying in favor of your sins, or to your friend, perhaps, chained with the same shackles of wickedness as yourself—though in fact he is more your enemy and his own." *Augustine (354-430 AD)*

"He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" Luke 16.10, 11

Lord, I know that obedience is an every-next-step proposition; and I know that You are with me always; so today, help me as I...

Pray Psalm 125.

Meditate on verse 4 as you pray. Think of the "upright in heart" people you will see today, then pray for the Lord's good to come to them. As you see them throughout the day, be sure to tell them you are praying for them.

Psalm 125.1-5 (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

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Journey On: Hebrews 13

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Refrain

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Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!
Refrain

3 Live in Grace

Introduction

At all times, we need grace. Grace enables us to live decently and in order as communities of believers. Grace keeps us in the faith and gives us the ability to discern true teaching from false. And grace can help us to overcome the temptations of the world, so that we remain firmly established in the path of the Lord. By His grace, the Lord gives us shepherds to tend to the needs of our soul and enables us to follow as they lead.

Read Jeremiah 23.1-6.

Read Hebrews 13.7-9.

Think it through.

1. We are the Lord's sheep, and sheep need leaders. God has appointed pastors and teachers as shepherds in His Church, for the building-up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4.11, 12). Here we note three defining marks of true shepherds. How would you explain each of the following?

- speaking the Word of God:
- men of true faith:
- men whose lives the Lord's sheep should follow:

The word *rule* here (NKJV) is more accurately *lead*. Where should the Lord's shepherds lead His people?

2. Why do you suppose the writer inserted verse 8 right here, right after he called his readers to "remember" ("pay careful attention to") their leaders? What does this suggest about what a leader's conduct ought to be, and where leaders should be leading us? What kind of "food" is the writer warning against in verse 9 (compare the last part of that verse with the first part)? Where would we expect to encounter such "food"? When our hearts are "established by grace," we will not desire the food of the world but the food of sound teaching. Explain.

Meditate.

"Who ... can preserve grace by prideful conduct? How then will grace, that is, good pleasure or the energy of the spirit, be with you, unless you embrace it by good deeds? Indeed, the very cause of all good things is our constant abiding in the grace of the Spirit, for he guides us to everything." *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ... Ephesians 4.14, 15

Give me grace to hear Your Word, O Lord, and to live in Your grace in all my ways. And I pray for the shepherds of our church, that they, too, might...

Pray Psalm 125.

Pray for the leaders of your church. God "surrounds" His people and watches over them in part by the shepherds He appoints over them. Pray that your leaders will be true shepherds, and not hirelings.

Psalm 125.1-5 (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

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Refrain

4 Bear His Reproach

Introduction

An easy to overlook aspect of ancient Israelite sacrifices is that they were eaten by the people who brought them and the priests and Levites who offered them. As the sweet savor of the sacrifices rose upwards to God, the people ate their portion, thus symbolizing their being reconciled to God by “having a meal” with Him. The refuse from those sacrifices was carried outside the camp and dumped, symbolizing the putting away of our sins. For a while. How much better and more satisfying is the altar where we feed on the body and blood of Christ.

Read 1 Samuel 2.12-17.

Read Hebrews 13.10-13.

Think it through.

1. To what “altar” is the writer referring in verse 10? Why is it that those who insist on continuing in the old faith “have no right” to this altar? In what ways is the Lord’s Supper like the sacrifices of ancient Israel? In what ways is it different and better? What does this suggest about the frame of mind and heart we should nurture as we come to the Lord’s table?
2. In the old offerings, the burned and wasted parts of the sacrifice were carried outside the camp to the garbage dump. They were “despised” because they symbolized the sins of the people, which were being taken away. How did Jesus fulfill this image in His own sacrifice? By crucifying Jesus “outside the camp” the people who crucified Him heaped reproach on Him. They insinuated that He was like the garbage that was thrown out from the sacrifices. And they were right. Explain. Why is it a good thing He was? Why should we be willing to bear “His reproach” from the world?

Meditate.

The body of the beasts was an example for our Lord, and our Lord is an example for us, so that ‘we may go forth outside the camp,’ that is, go out and become evangelists of his preaching, ‘and bear the abuse he endured.’” *Ephrem the Syrian (306-373AD)*

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
2 Corinthians 5.20, 21

Lord Jesus, thank You for bearing my sins away forever. Help me to bear Your reproach as often as I must, so that...

Pray Psalm 125.

Thank the Lord for breaking the rule of wickedness in your life, and seek His help to keep you from reaching out your hands to iniquity or turning aside to crooked ways.

Psalm 125.1-5 (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

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5 Journeying to the City to Come

Introduction

We have come outside the camp (v. 13); we have departed the earthly city (v. 14); and we are, through Jesus, on a journey toward the City to Come (Ps. 84). We should expect our conduct *en route* to be different from what we were like in that old earthly city, when we appealed to sacrifices that could bring us no rest. Now, resting in the Lord and His promises, we are embarked on a journey that requires a different manner of life. The Psalms of Ascent – Psalms 120-134 – were sung by pilgrims as they journeyed to Jerusalem. They can guide us in our path and keep us focused on the City to Come.

Read Psalm 124.

Read Hebrews 13.14-19.

Think it through.

1. Our passage contains several verbs in the imperative mood. How many can you identify? How does each of these serve to help us make progress toward the City to Come? We note that, at the head of these imperative verbs, is the command to worship by the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Meditate on Romans 12.1. How is it a “reasonable service” to bring worship into every aspect of our lives? How does worship help us to keep focused in our journey? How might you bring more worship into your walk with and work for the Lord?

2. Why do believers need someone to “rule over” them (vv. 7, 17)? How do these “rulers” “watch out” for our souls? Should every Christian have someone watching over their souls? To what end? What does it require of us to be so ruled? How can we make this a work done “with joy and not with grief” on the part of those who watch over our souls? How should we expect to profit from this work? Why is this an important part of our journey toward the City to Come?

Meditate.

“He brought out the sacrifice of praise that is pleasing to God. To it he linked also that of doing good, which he was right to refer to as sharing.” *Theodoreet of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Peter 5.2-4

Today on my journey with You, Lord, help me to...

Pray Psalm 125.

As you pray this Psalm of Ascent, think of the City to Come and of that part of the journey thereunto which you will complete today. Pray accordingly. Would it help you on your journey to pray or sing parts of this psalm throughout the day?

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6 Benediction

Introduction

The book of Hebrews ends with one of the most beautiful benedictions in the Bible, followed by an exhortation to endure, a promise of presence, and a prayer for grace. As Jeremiah and all the prophets understood, God's last word to His people is always a word of grace and benediction.

Meditate on Jeremiah 32.36-44.

Read Hebrews 13.20-25.

Think it through.

1. How would you summarize “the everlasting covenant” of God? What is it? What makes it so important? What kind of power to protect and save is suggested by the description of God in verse 20? Why would that have been an important reminder for the first readers of this book? Why is it an important reminder for us? How do you need to know that power today?
2. The writer wants his readers to be “complete in every good work to do His will.” What does this involve? How do we grow to become more complete in Christ? For us to be complete in Christ, God must be “working in” us according to His pleasure and will (cf. Phil. 2.12, 13). How do we get into the place where God can work within us? Does that mean that we too have to “bear with” the Word of God amid the trials of our daily lives? Explain. The writer's last word to these suffering believers is grace. Is that the word or experience you leave with people? Should it be?

Meditate.

“He appended the usual conclusion, invoking on them a share in grace. As for us, let us sing the praises of the giver of old laws and new. And let us pray to receive grace from him so that by observing the divine laws we may attain the promised goods, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom with the Father and the all-holy Spirit be glory, now and forever, for ages of ages.” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466AD)*

... Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1.27, 28

Let me be an agent of grace and truth today, O Lord. Show me how and help me to be Jesus to...

Pray Psalm 125.

This psalm ends with a wish of peace for the people of God. That peace comes from the grace of God (vv. 1-4). Thank God for the many ways He shows you His grace, and call upon Him to keep you in His peace as you go out to work your Personal Mission Field today.

Psalm 125.1-5 (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

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Journey On: Hebrews 13

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Ever shall His favor on this holy city rest.
Refrain

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Refrain

7 Journey On

Introduction

Priorities for the life of faith fill up this concluding chapter of Hebrews. Having overwhelmed his first readers with the superiority and excellence of Jesus and the New Covenant, the writer now calls them to journey on with all the saints toward the City to Come, and he highlights the priorities to keep in mind and practice as we run our race together.

Read and meditate on Psalm 125.

Read Hebrews 13.

Think it through.

1. Make a list of all the cohortatives (“let us”) and imperatives in this chapter. How much of your daily life do these encompass? In which of these do you need to improve? How can looking to and considering Jesus (Heb. 2.9; 3.1; 12.2, 3) for each of these areas help to “make you complete in every good work to do His will”?
2. Are your understanding and vision of the City to Come (v. 14) as clear and compelling as they should be? Where would you look in Scripture to flesh that vision out more completely? How can focusing on the City to Come help you keep moving forward in the face of trials, temptations, and other obstacles?

Meditate.

“So let us despise things of this life and look forward to those that are stable and permanent.” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466AD)*

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. Revelation 22.17

Heavenly Father, help me to set my mind on the things that are above, where Jesus is seated in the heavenly place, so that I...

Pray Psalm 125.

Pray for all believers today, all who are citizens and ambassadors with you in the City to Come. Let the psalm guide your thanks, praise, and intercessions.

Psalm 125.1-5 (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What does the book of Hebrews teach us about persevering in faith in the face of trials?
2. Hebrews 13 contains many cohortatives (“let us”) and imperatives. What do these suggest about what it means to follow Jesus? How do these relate to the charge to be made “perfect in every good work”?
3. We have work to do, but the writer reminds us that God is “working in you what is pleasing in His sight”. How does the Lord work within us to make us perfect and pleasing? What do we need to do in making sure this happens?
4. What is the role of shepherds (“rulers”) in the church, and why is their work necessary? What is our responsibility toward them?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.