

# 141<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Service

*<sup>7</sup>Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup>Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings  
(Hebrews 13:7-9. ESV)*

*<sup>17</sup>Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. (Philippians 3:17. ESV)*

**Victory At Last**  
**November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014**  
**Hebrews 13:7-9**  
**Rev. Paul Carter**

## **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Hebrews 13:7-9; that's on page 1009 in your pew Bibles. We are taking a brief break from our series on the Corinthian Correspondence. This is our 141<sup>st</sup> Anniversary as a church and so it is appropriate that we spend some time looking back so as to look forward. Last year we began what I hope and God willing, will become something of a tradition. We took a look at a remarkable leader from our family tree in order to learn some things about God, about ourselves and about the Christian walk of faith. We're going to do that again but before we do I want to ground our conversation in Holy Scripture. We want to be sure that we are doing the right thing the right way and so I want to turn your attention first to Hebrews 13:7-9. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

*<sup>7</sup>Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup>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 13:7-9. ESV)*

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The first thing I want you to notice about this passage is the larger context in which it occurs.

## **The Context: Ethical Exhortation**

Chapter 13 is the last chapter in the Book of Hebrews. The Apostle has spent the bulk of the letter demonstrating the superiority of Jesus and the New Covenant. Now, as is the general pattern in the New Testament, he turns from Gospel explication to Gospel application – he says in essence, “Because you believe this way, you must live this way”. Chapter 13:1 begins the ethical conclusion to the letter. The Apostle says: “Live right, follow the example of godly leaders and do not be led astray by novel presentations of the faith.” From the larger context then we are able to discern the motivation for Christian biography; it is quite simply, **religious continuity**.

I’ve used the word “religious” there despite the fact that in many Christian circles it has become something of a dirty word. Granted that there are bad ways of being religious, there are also GOOD ways of being religious and the author of Hebrews wants his people to be RIGHTLY religious in line with those who have gone before. Remember that it is in Hebrews that we have the chapter sometimes known as “The Faith Hall of Fame” – Hebrews chapter 11, where the author reminds them of faith hero after faith hero and urges his people to walk in that way as they follow Christ. The word “religion” properly means “a way of living out one’s beliefs”. Quite frankly, the world needs more religious Christ followers, not fewer. We need more people who believe in Jesus and who FOLLOW HIM APPROPRIATELY. To achieve that end, we are greatly helped by the study of Christian biography.

Secondly I want you to notice the presuppositions that undergird this text.

### **The Presuppositions Undergirding The Text:**

Look at verse 8:

<sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

That, by the way is a quotation from Psalm 102:27, using words that in the Old Testament were addressed to God and applying them without hesitation to Jesus Christ. Jesus is God and GOD DOESN’T CHANGE! God is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow and you can’t pit Jesus against God as though Jesus represents some great change in God! God doesn’t change, Jesus

doesn't change, Jesus is God. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever! Praise the Lord! That's good news and that means something for us this morning – it means that the biggest thing in the universe is constant and reliable. That assumption is what makes science possible – the universe exhibits fixed laws because it reflects an unchanging Creator. That assumption also makes prophesy possible. Much of Biblical prophesy is the application of history, with the help of the Holy Spirit to the outcome of all things. God is who he is, therefore he will act as he has done. That's an important assumption.

The second presupposition of the text is that there are fixed patterns for ministerial effectiveness. Look at verse 7:

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Scholars generally agree that the Apostle is here referring to leaders who have lived and died – he says consider the OUTCOME of their way of life. Look at the end product. If doing this and sacrificing that and praying for such and such resulted in so great a harvest, well then, God being the same and human nature being the same and history being somewhat predictive of the future, we will be wise to imitate their way of life. Doing the same things under the watch of the same God as we minister to people sharing a common human nature OUGHT TO PRODUCE SIMILAR RESULTS, should God be willing. That's the assumption of the text and we need to be reminded of that. We tend to overestimate the differences between our times and Bible times. People have cell phones now and cars, we travel on airplanes and use credit cards – we are so much more enlightened than those folks therefore we will need to do things in very different ways. Nonsense. People are still at root the same. They want the same things. They struggle with the same fallen nature. They have the same fears. They are subject to the same God. A great many things in this universe are stable and unchanging and therein lies the utility of Christian biography. If God is the same, and people haven't changed, then imitating fruitful Christian men and women should result in more effective ministry. We're taking both of those presuppositions on faith this morning and so we will spend the remainder of our time applying the counsel of verse 7. We're going to consider the life of Adoniram Judson in order to imitate his godly and fruitful example.

**Considering Judson:**

I'm not going to have time this morning to tell you everything you should know about Adoniram Judson. What you should do is get your hands on his biography and read it. I will tell you this, this copy of Judson's biography is one of the best books I have ever read. I keep a reading log every year and I want to share with you what I wrote in my reading log this past summer when I read this book:

One of the most impacting books I've ever read. Wept at the end. Were all my sufferings multiplied 100 fold they would make a poor comparison.

I promise you, reading this book will ruin your life – in a good way. Sell your shirt to buy this book. Let me give you just the very basic highlights of his life and then we'll consider four things in particular. In terms of general biography, Adoniram Judson was born on August 9<sup>th</sup> in 1788. He died on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1850 at the age of 61. His life roughly overlapped that of William Carey the English Baptist Missionary to India. Judson's death occurred at around the time Spurgeon began his preaching ministry. Those were the days in which Judson lived. He was the first Protestant missionary sent out from North America and he left North America originally as a Congregationalist and he landed in India as a Baptist, having come to the conviction of credo-baptism on the boat ride over. There is lots of time to think when you are locked in your cabin on a boat for 6 months – things can change in that time and for Judson they did. He continued to receive support from the Congregationalists but he has become known as the first North American Baptist missionary and he received the bulk of his prayer and financial support from that corner of the Evangelical world.

He ministered in Burma, which is across the Bay of Bengal from India. He left North America as a young man, newly married and he ministered the remainder of his life to the Burmese people. He died alone, on a boat in the Bay of Bengal. When he died they put his body into a box with some sand to weight it down and they dumped him over the side into the sea. No prayers were said over him. His wife Emily learned of his death 4 months later. She had stayed on land because she was pregnant. 10 days after Judson's death, she gave birth to a son. She named him Charles. He was stillborn making him the 9<sup>th</sup> child of Judson to die on the field.

At his death he left an excellent translation of the whole Bible in the Burmese language, which continues in service to this day. He left 100 Baptist churches and approximately 8000 believers in Jesus Christ. There are over 650,000 Baptists in Myanmar according to recent statistics, giving it the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest population of Baptists anywhere in the world today. Those are the basic biographical facts associated with the life and legacy of Adoniram Judson, but in the time we have left and in the spirit of Hebrews 13:7 I want you to consider 4 things in particular.

First of all, I want you to consider:

### **1. The price he was willing to pay to serve the Lord and to obey the Great Commission**

I mentioned that Judson lost 9 children on the field. 9. He had several children live to adulthood. George, Abby, Adoniram, Elnathan, Henry, Edward and Emily. It took three wives to produce all those children. Judson was not a polygamist, he was only married to one woman at a time but he lost two wives on the mission field. The wife of his youth, Ann Hasseltine had three children and all of them died. The loss of each of his wives and each of his children weighed enormously on Judson but he resolved to face it in faith. After the death of his first child Roger his wife Ann wrote home to tell her parents the sad news. She said:

Eight months we enjoyed the precious little gift, in which he had so completely entwined himself around his parents' hearts, that his existence seemed necessary to their own. But God has taught us by afflictions, what we would not learn by mercies – that our hearts are his exclusive property, and whatever rival intrudes, he will tear it away... O may it not be in vain that he has done it. May we so improve it, that he will stay his hand and say, "it is enough"<sup>1</sup>.

Judson, wrote more briefly to his friends asking for prayer, saying:

O may we not suffer in vain! May this bereavement be sanctified to our souls! And for this I hope we have your prayers.<sup>2</sup>

He finished the letter by quoting from Job 1: "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Judson knew what he was getting into when he became a missionary. He knew that he was leaving behind the doctors and the hospitals and the help of family and friends. He knew there

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<sup>1</sup> Vance Christie, Adoniram Judson: Devoted For Life (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; 112.

would be a terrible cost to him if he went, but he also knew there would be a terrible cost to the people of Burma if he stayed. That's hard Christian math. 2 wives dead, 9 children dead and 8000 saved. When you consider the life of Adoniram Judson you are fatally struck by how much it costs to really follow Jesus.

Secondly, I want you to consider:

## **2. The value he placed on Holy Scripture**

Most of what Judson actually did in Burma revolved around Bible ministry. He spent most of his time learning the Burmese language and translating the Bible into it. He also wrote numerous short Bible tracts in the Burmese language containing a Bible story and an explanation and application of it. He built a zayat on the side of a well travelled road to host Bible study and Gospel conversation. He travelled up and down the main rivers distributing literature and Bible translations and he disciplined converts in the right handling of God's Word. Quite simply, Judson's strategy was to get the Word into the ears, hands and hearts of as many people as possible by as many means as he could imagine. His was a Word ministry. He didn't dig any wells, he didn't build any hospitals – not that he was opposed to wells and hospitals – but he understood his job as being to bring the Word. If you give someone a cup of water but don't give them the Bible then they will go to hell with water in their bellies. If you bandage a wound but you do not apply the Scriptures then all you do is send healthy people to hell. Judson brought the Word and the Word did everything.

The third thing I want you to consider is:

## **3. The patience he displayed in ministry**

Judson worked in Burma at enormous cost and saw not a single convert for 6 years. 6 years. According to a recent study done by Thom Rainer at Lifeway Christian Resources the average North American pastor stays at a church for between 3-4 years<sup>3</sup>. Judson worked the soil in Burma for 6 years without seeing any fruit at all. What is interesting is that even though Judson

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.christianpost.com/news/the-dangerous-third-year-of-pastoral-tenure-121984/>

had worked for 6 years to generate a single profession of faith he did not rush to welcome him into membership. He made him wait 4 weeks – he made him write out his testimony and submit a written request for baptism for Judson and the other missionaries to scrutinize and then finally on Sunday June 6<sup>th</sup> 1819 Maung Nau was baptized and welcomed into official church membership upon his public profession of faith. Everything about Judson’s life and ministry commends extraordinary patience. It takes time to build something that will last. It takes time to sow seeds and to see them finally bear fruit. It takes time to talk to people and answer questions and nurture belief into public profession. It takes time to scrutinize faith to distinguish it from false faith and it takes time to disciple believers so as to plant an enduring work. Judson understood that. We need to consider that afresh in our day.

Fourthly I would like you to consider:

#### **4. The grace with which he embraced his own death**

Judson’s death was not a pretty one. He died hard. There were no hospitals that he could go to, if you got sick the best thing you could do was get on a ship and try to get away from the germs and viruses in hopes that the sea air would do you some good. If your wife was sick or pregnant than you got on that ship alone. Judson died without anyone from his family at his side. When he died he was put in a box with some sand and dumped without ceremony or occasion into the sea. There was no eulogy. No one spoke of him or remembered his accomplishments. There was no glory in his passing, only pain.

He died of a serious lung disease. His last several hours on earth were spent in constant acute vomiting and near suffocation. It was the end of a long and difficult illness and yet it was one he faced with extraordinary grace and courage. He welcomed his illness because it opened to him precious views of the Saviour’s love. Shortly before he embarked upon the ship he said to his wife:

O, the love of Christ! The love of Christ! We cannot understand it now, but what a beautiful study for eternity!<sup>4</sup>

He went on to say to her:

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<sup>4</sup> Christie, Judson, 362.

Lying here on my bed, when I could not talk, I have had such views of the loving condescension of Christ, and the glories of heaven, as I believe are seldom granted to mortal man. It is not because I shrink from death that I wish to live. Neither is it because the ties that bind me here, though some of them are sweet, bear any comparison with the drawings I at times feel toward heaven. But a few years would not be missed from my eternity of bliss, and I can well afford to spare them, both for your sake and for the sake of the poor Burmans. I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world. . . . Perhaps I feel something like the young bride, when she contemplates resigning the pleasant associations of childhood for a yet dearer home – though only a very little like her, for there is no doubt resting on my future.<sup>5</sup>

On the ship just before he died, he was asked: ‘do you feel that Christ is near and sustaining you?’ He replied:

O, yes, it is all right there. I believe He gives me just so much pain and suffering as is necessary to fit me to die – to make me submissive to His will.<sup>6</sup>

Moments later he was gone. That is the life and death of Adoniram Judson. Consider the outcome of his way of life and imitate his faith.

It is to that final concern, the imitation of Adoniram Judson that we turn our attention to at last.

### **Imitating Judson:**

Obviously there are aspects of his life that we may not all be called to imitate. We may not all be called to leave North America and to minister the Gospel in Burma. Some of you may be called. I pray that more of you will be. We need our people – raised in this church – to serve as cultural translators if we are to do all that we seem positioned to do in foreign missions. Of course the bulk of the front lines work in missions is done by nationals – rightly so, but if the last 20 year has taught us anything it is that we still need our people on the field as cultural translators between our church and the churches over there. I pray that one of the outcomes of this message will be that a family from this church will hear the call to full time, permanent foreign missions on our behalf in a field that we are called to.

But for most of you, you probably will not imitate Judson’s life in that exact way. But for all of us there are at least 3 ways that we can and should imitate his example. Let me share them with you quickly.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; 365-366.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; 368.

## 1. We can count the cost of following Jesus

That's not something only foreign missionaries should do. Jesus said that it was universally required. In Matthew 10 he said:

<sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:38 ESV)

You have to be willing to die in order to be my disciple. You have to love me more than you love your own life. He said that after saying something even harder. You notice how verse 38 begins with the word "and". That means he said something else first. He said:

<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and **whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** (Matthew 10:37. ESV)

That isn't the extraordinary cost of being a missionary – that is the **NORMATIVE COST OF BEING A CHRISTIAN**. Every Christian has to love Jesus more than their own life, every Christian has to love Jesus more than their children. Following Jesus cost Adoniram Judson 2 wives and 9 children and ultimately his very life. Listen to me friends, God is the same, the world is the same and the Gospel is the same and so there is therefore no guarantee that your faith will not cost you everything you hold dear. Now, it may not. I've said to my wife a dozen times, I am amazed at how little we've been asked to pay for following Jesus. I am amazed. I expected to pay much more, I told Jesus in Bible School that I would pay ANYTHING. I told Shauna Lee when we got married that we should expect to be poor, sick and far away from friends and family as a result of following Jesus. None of that has happened. We are well cared for. Well supported. Surrounded by the best friends we've ever had. We haven't paid as much as we told God we were willing. But we were willing. And we still are. It terrifies me to say those words because I've read Job chapter 1. I know that it is possible that our faith and commitment will be tested one day so that God can receive greater glory from it. I've counted that cost. God help me pay it should ever it be required. Count the cost. Better not to start than to start and fall away when things get expensive. And if we are right in reading the times then well might they be expected to. It may soon be more universally expensive to follow Jesus in this country. Count the cost before that day.

## **2. We can put the Word of God at the centre of our life and ministry**

Judson built his life and his ministry around the power of God's Word! He read it, he translated it, he spoke it, taught it and wrote it for as many people as he could come in contact with. He didn't assume any power in his own personality, he didn't put stock in modern methods or techniques, he just BELIEVED that the Word of God was living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, able to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow and to discern the thoughts and attitudes of the hearts of men. (Heb. 4:12) He would do anything he could to get the Bible before the eyes and into the ears of Burmese men and women. Make that your goal. Invite people into your home or to join your Small Group or to come to your church to hear the Word of God. If you are a visitor this morning, we should tell you that this isn't the sort of message you are usually to hear. We go verse by verse through the Bible. Come next week and we'll be teaching on 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. Come the week after that and we'll be reading 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. That's what happens here. That's trusting the Word of God to do the work of God and we do that in this place because we want to see in this place the same kind of fruit that he saw in that place.

Thirdly, and lastly,

## **3. We can prepare to die well**

John Piper said that one of his goals as a pastor was to prepare his people to die well. I think that's a good goal. From the life and death of Adoniram Judson let me suggest 3 things you can do to prepare for a good death.

### **i. Serve HARD**

I don't want to be lying on my deathbed thinking of all the things I didn't do for Jesus. I want to know that I left it all on the field. I want to know that I poured out my life to the dregs. I don't want to die on the 16<sup>th</sup> hole of some God-forsaken golf course in Myrtle Beach. I want to die in the harness. I want to die and fall leaning against the plow. Make that your goal and you will die well.

ii. Pursue assurance of salvation

Judson died assured of his salvation. In the quote that we read he said:

there is no doubt resting on my future.<sup>7</sup>

He knew he was saved; he had assurance of salvation. I read you a quote last week on how to develop assurance of salvation:

assurance of salvation depends in part on ethical progress<sup>8</sup>

Judson at the end of his life surveyed his growth as a Christian and was able to say to his wife – who would know if he was lying:

I have gained the victory at last. I love every one of Christ's redeemed, as I believe He would have me love them – in the same manner, though not probably to the same degree as we shall love one another in heaven. And gladly would I prefer the meanest of His creatures, who bears His name, before myself.<sup>9</sup>

Those two statements are not unrelated. Judson had no doubt where he was going because he could observe the progress of his own Christian life. If you want to die well, cultivate assurance of salvation by means of progressive sanctification.

iii. Cultivate your love of Christ

If you love Jesus more than you love the things of this earth then dying is gain. Death becomes a doorway to better things by far.

O, the love of Christ! We cannot understand it now, but what a beautiful study for all eternity it shall be. That was Judson's heart cry and final hope. Remember your leaders, those who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.; 365-366.

<sup>8</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 209.

<sup>9</sup> Christie, Judson, 362.