

# Loving the Stranger

Hebrews 13:2

*Halifax: 21 April 2024*

## **Introduction:**

Today we are continuing our sermon series in Hebrews.

- We will be looking at Hebrews 13:2.
- Hebrews 13 is the last chapter in this epistle or letter to the Hebrews.

This epistle began by showing us that we have a most excellent High Priest, Jesus, the very Son of God, who brings us, though ruined sinners, to God.

- Our whole human race has rebelled against God and our sin cannot be left unpunished. That would leave a lie in the world that sin is not that bad—and it is much worse than we think it is because God is so much more holy and good than we think He is.
- Hebrews goes into great detail in the first ten chapters showing us how Jesus was the only one who was worthy to be our priest and how He offered the only sacrifice that can take away our sin. That sacrifice was Him. He, the Son of God, had to be punished for our sins.

Hebrews 10 and 11 urged us to trust in Him so that we might be forgiven and come to God.

Hebrews 12 describes our coming to God as running a race, looking unto Jesus the whole way, as the one who is the way and made the way, the one who is our example, and the one who strengthens us and gives us grace to go on.

- It shows us that when we trust in Jesus and His saving work, we are on our way to our heavenly Father's house in glory.
  - Already, we are forgiven. Already, we are born again—changed so that we want to be restored to God and to please Him. Already, we are identified with Him as our God and made to be His sons and so are counted as His people, part of His church.
  - We are on the road to our Father, growing, leaving what we were, being refined and sanctified, growing in our knowledge of Him and in our love and obedience.
- But the way can be difficult. Our sin clings to us and it is painful, though wonderful to have it exposed and shaken loose from us. The Bible speaks of it as being refined, threshed, pruned—and other such painful processes.
  - Some of the Hebrews to whom this letter was first written had grown discouraged.
  - Some of them were not even sure if they wanted to go on—they were thinking about turning back.

So having spent much time telling them about the excellence of Jesus and His saving work as our King and our Priest, the writer urges them to go on!

- This message was first written to these believing Jews in the first century, but it is just what we also need to hear because we too can grow weary and discouraged.
- Go on with Jesus and His people!
  - If you do not, you can dry up in your faith and in your communion with God.
  - We are meant to go to the Father with others who believe. If we are with Jesus, we are with His people.

- So in chapter 13, we are told how to go on with His people. We are told how to conduct ourselves with His people.

Last time, we saw the general admonition that summarises this whole chapter—

- Hebrews 13:1: “Let brotherly love continue.”
  - God is, in a marvellously transcendent divine way, a social being—three persons, one God. He is love. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, and the Father and the Son love God the Holy Spirit and He loves them.
  - He made us in His image. We are rightly social beings.
  - We are made to care about others—to love them.
- But as long as we are in this world, we must work at going on in brotherly love.
  - We are told to continue in it because we often don’t. We need to be told.
  - This love has two aspects.
    - It is a love that tenderly cares for others and their wellbeing.
    - It is a love that is shaped by God’s commandments.
    - That means it is a holy love that is oriented toward God in that we want to glorify Him (honour Him) and enjoy Him together with others.
- “Let brotherly love continue.” That is the overall mandate!
  - But now we get into some particulars.
  - The first particular is in verse 2. It says, and this is the holy word of God,
    - **Hebrews 13:2: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”**
  - That is our scripture reading for today.

### I. What does “entertaining strangers” entail?

- A. It involves reaching out to people you do not know—strangers.
  1. It is to show hospitality to them and spend time with them.
    - It involves meeting their needs, say, for food and shelter, but also showing kindness to them—caring about them—simply doing things to make them happy and whole.
    - Again, it is simply to love them.
  2. This means a lot to a stranger.
    - You draw them in and show them that they have someone they can count on—someone who cares about them and is willing to help them.
    - It is a heartwarming component of brotherly love.
- B. There is a great need for this.
  1. When this was written, many of the Hebrews had been driven from their homes by persecution. Maybe a young person who was driven from their home or someone whose property was seized on account of their faith.
    - They needed a place to stay—they might need food and clothing.
    - This should certainly not be neglected. They are our brothers!
    - We could have a situation like that in our day.

2. There were also famines at this time, and of course there are always things like fires or floods that can drive people from their homes.
  - Such times are times to show the love of Christ to strangers—especially to fellow believers, but also to unbelievers. They are times that a renewed heart is moved to help.
3. Then there are missionaries or teachers who come to town.
  - Some of you have hosted them. We are having a missions’ conference this September, DV. What a great time to entertain a missionary or a minister.
  - Some of you have helped to feed the men of the Presbytery when we host meetings, or you have opened your homes to them.
4. But do you know what one of the greatest needs is today that this speaks to?
  - I would say that we have more lonely people today than almost ever before.
  - The truth is, there are lots of people who don’t have anyone who cares for them and perhaps have never had anyone to love them.
    - You might know their name and see them a lot, but they are strangers in that you have never really reached out to them to love them and care for them.
  - There are new believers that come into church, or people who have come to learn about the Lord.
    - Or those who have been around for a while, but to whom nobody has reached out.
    - Many of you excel in this—and that is wonderful—that is what is being spoken about here.

C. The driving force of this love for strangers if our heavenly Father.

1. The Bible teaches that He loves the stranger.
  - We estranged ourselves from Him by our sin and rebellion.
    - We made ourselves unfit for communion with Him—and our rebellion makes us push Him away. We were fit only for punishment in hell.
  - If anyone ever loved the stranger, it was God in Christ.
    - He came to us to bring us into His Father’s house.
    - He came, as I reminded you in the introduction, to be our High Priest and to pay for our sins so that we could come and live in His house forever.
    - Everlasting life is not just existing forever—it is living in happy, loving communion with God forever in His overflowing grace and generous provision.
      - He provided for us, and His provision is forever!
2. When we have been loved and cared for with so great a love as this, His grace enables us to love and care like this for others.
  - We are able to reach out in love and service—to extend care and simple social interaction with strangers—we are able to reach out to them in love.
    - He is our model and He is our enabler. That is part of His bountiful grace.
    - What a beautiful thing!
    - God’s love to us is the driving force of our love for others.

TRANS> This is the response that you would expect. We were loved and now we love.

- But look at the concern of our text.

## II. We are told that we should stop neglecting the entertainment of strangers.

- In our translation, it says, **“Do not forget to entertain strangers.”**
  - In the original, it could be understood as **“Stop forgetting to entertain strangers.”**

A. It is said like this for a reason. It is stated like that because it is *so* easy to neglect this.

1. Many of you want to reach out and you envision doing and think about doing it—you don’t mean to neglect it, but you do.
  - Sometimes, you are busy, and you just never get around to it.
    - The intention is there, but you keep putting it off.
  - The best solution to this is to be deliberate about it. You have to learn what works best for you—
    - For example, if it is not happening spontaneously, set a time that works for you to reach out to others and put it on your schedule.
    - Or set a goal and have a friend check up on you to seeing if you are doing it.

➤ But there are other reasons for neglecting this love of strangers that cares enough to reach out.
2. Maybe you’d say, “I don’t have a suitable place to invite people over,” or, “I can barely pay my rent and provide food for myself or my family. What can I do?”
  - You have to see if this is really so—maybe you need to control your spending and budget for outreach—or take on an additional job.
    - But even if you don’t have the means to have people over, that’s not the only way to show hospitality and love to people who are strangers.
  - Jesus did not have people over to His house for meals because He did not have a house at all.
    - Loving strangers can include simply going up to talk with them, taking a walk with them, finding ways to help them.
      - Praying with them, encouraging them in the word.
      - Or in practical ways—go over and offer to vacuum, do some chores, or run errands for an elderly person—help someone with their computer or help them move heavy items or do their income taxes for them.
3. But let’s get honest. Sometimes, you neglect loving strangers because, if you would be honest, simply because you don’t want to do it—not really.
  - Our society tends to make an idol of privacy. We say, “I’m just a private person.”
    - It is a wonderful thing that God did not make us all the same.
      - Some peoples’ batteries definitely get drained by a lot of social engagement, but these same people are sometimes more understanding and compassionate than those who are more social.
      - You don’t have to have a crowd over, but you can do one on one time.
  - A desire for privacy can be because you are not walking in the light—letting God’s word and spirit shine the light of His truth into your life.
    - You don’t want people around because you don’t want to be exposed.

- If you really love God and are truly walking with Him, you want to be exposed.
    - You can handle it because you know that you have full forgiveness.
    - And you want to be exposed because you love God and want to see ways that you can please Him better and glorify Him better.
    - Your prayer is Ps 139:23-24: **Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; <sup>24</sup> and see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**
  - Maybe it's an altogether different issue that keeps you from wanting to reach out to strangers.
    - Maybe you know that people have a lot of issues and you don't want to get tangled up in their drama.
    - That is selfish. Jesus got tangled up in our lives to the extent that He even went to the cross for us.
      - It will often do you a lot of good with your own issues if you reach out to others. Many Christians would solve their own problems if they reached out to help other people with theirs.
4. But of course there are legitimate concerns and wise precautions in this whole matter—though I'd say it's better to be reckless than to do nothing.
- Some of you are crippled because you are overly cautious, and others are too reckless—and again, it is not that we all must be exactly the same.
    - But here are some areas of legitimate concern.
  - a. You must not let reaching out be a way of avoiding dealing with issues in your own life and your own family. That can be the most challenging place to serve.
  - b. Likewise, you must not neglect seeking God in regular prayer and communion in His word (reading the Bible so as to hear His voice, be convicted or sin, and warmed by His promises and sweet excellence).
    - We see Jesus often slipping away from the crowds to pray and commune with His Father.
  - c. You don't want to put yourself in a place of unnecessary danger or temptation.
    - If you are a single woman, it is not wise to invite a suspicious man over.
    - If you are a young man struggling with lust, don't reach out to loose women.
  - d. In his second letter, John warned about extending hospitality to false teachers. If they are teachers or missionaries, they ought to be recognised by the church before you support them.
    - If you are sharp in the scriptures, you might reach out to someone with a view to instructing them more fully in the way of the Lord—like Pricilla and Aquila did, but if they are false teachers, you don't want to provide support or encouragement to them.
- B. The main thing about reaching out to strangers is to just do it. Many of you are!
1. If you are newer around here, I hope you have had people reach out to you.
    - If they have not, let me ask your forgiveness in behalf of our congregation.
    - We have not been behaving as Christians if we have not reached out to you.

2. And some of you who may have been here for a while.
  - You may have seen more of this initially, but then it dropped off.
  - That could well be a signal for you to realise that you need to reach out to others so you can get to know them.
  - There are a lot of new people and visitors among us—it can be hard to get around to everyone.
    - I love to see many of you approaching our visitors and reaching out to them.
      - If you are doing that, keep it up. If you are not, it's time to get started. It is a sign that God is working in you when this happens spontaneously.
3. Let me tell you something that might be useful for you.
  - I have known of people who have moved to a new area and found a church that has sound worship and preaching, but is weak in reaching out.
    - These people, instead of going to a church that was compromised, decided to reach out this whole congregation.
      - They took the initiative and started inviting people over and reaching out to those who had been there for years. They got to know people that way, and some of the people in the church began to follow their example.
    - When you are new in a church, you have a whole field of strangers to reach out to.
      - Likewise, if you complain that you don't know people, why not take the initiative? You can be an instrument to bring in what is lacking.

### **III. The rewards of loving strangers are great.**

- A. In our text we are told that you might unwittingly entertain angels.
  1. That's what happened to Abraham and his nephew Lot.
    - Some strangers came by where Abraham was staying—he lived in tents and moved about—and he offered them a meal when he saw them.
    - They took him up on that and it turned out that one of them was the LORD Himself, along with two angels, appearing in human form.
    - What a great blessing this was to Abraham! He was very glad that he had not neglected hospitality!
  2. Lot reached out to two men who came to his city, Sodom.
    - These men had no place to stay, so Lot opened his home to them.
    - They turned out to be angels who told Lot that Sodom was going to be destroyed because of its wickedness, and they rescued Lot and his family.
  3. This is what the Hebrews would have thought of when they read this.
    - We might include the account when Paul and a bunch of other prisoners were shipwrecked on Malta and people showed unusual kindness to them.
    - Paul ended up healing one of the leading citizens and Malta became the first Christian nation!
    - In God's providence, their hospitality was used to reach them with the gospel!
- B. The lesson we are being shown here by this mention of angels is that when you reach out to strangers, you can be the one who receives the greatest blessing.

1. What benefit some of you have had in having ministers or elders to your home who brought great encouragement to you in your walk!
    - Or you had people over, having no idea at the time, that they would bring things to you that would strengthen your walk with the Lord and change your life forever.
  2. But even when you reach out to those who are very needy...
    - You know that it gives you great joy—often more joy to be the one who is helping than to be the one who is being helped.
      - Many times, in the process of sharing God’s truth with others, you end up being enriched in that truth more than ever before in extraordinary ways.
    - I think I learned more about the LORD and His precious truth when I was in campus ministry, reaching out to students, than I did from going to seminary.
      - I was asked questions that I could not answer and that forced me to search the scriptures and come to a fuller understanding.
- C. Another reward is the joy that comes from knowing that what you have done pleases the Lord.
1. He has made it very clear that He wants us to love strangers.
    - Jesus told us that when we see a stranger and take him in that He considers that we have done this for Him.
      - It pleases Him and shows that we have new life in the gospel.
  2. As believers, we are those who see the glory, goodness, beauty, holiness, and majesty of our Lord and who, like loving children, want to please Him.
    - It gives us great pleasure whenever we do things that please Him.
    - If that is not true of you, ask the Lord to make it true—to forgive you and change you. Maybe you need to be converted.
- D. Best of all, when we love the stranger, it strengthens our communion with the Lord.
1. We draw upon His grace in whatever service we do.
    - We look to Him in prayer, and experience His work in our lives by His Spirit.
    - This causes us to love Him all the more.
  2. We come to know Him better through service to Him.
    - There is a certain kind of fellowship that we have with Him—a fellowship that deepens our awareness and appreciation of all that He has done for us.
    - By acting for Him, we are not just recognising what pleases Him, but embracing what pleases Him—embracing the love that He has for all our brothers, and delighting in His goodness and mercy—wanting His beauty to be on us.
- E. On top of all of this, He promises us great reward in heaven.
- In Matthew 10:42, He said, **“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”**

TRANS> The rewards are indeed very great.

**Conclusion:**

So I happily exhort you, brothers and sisters,

- **Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels.**