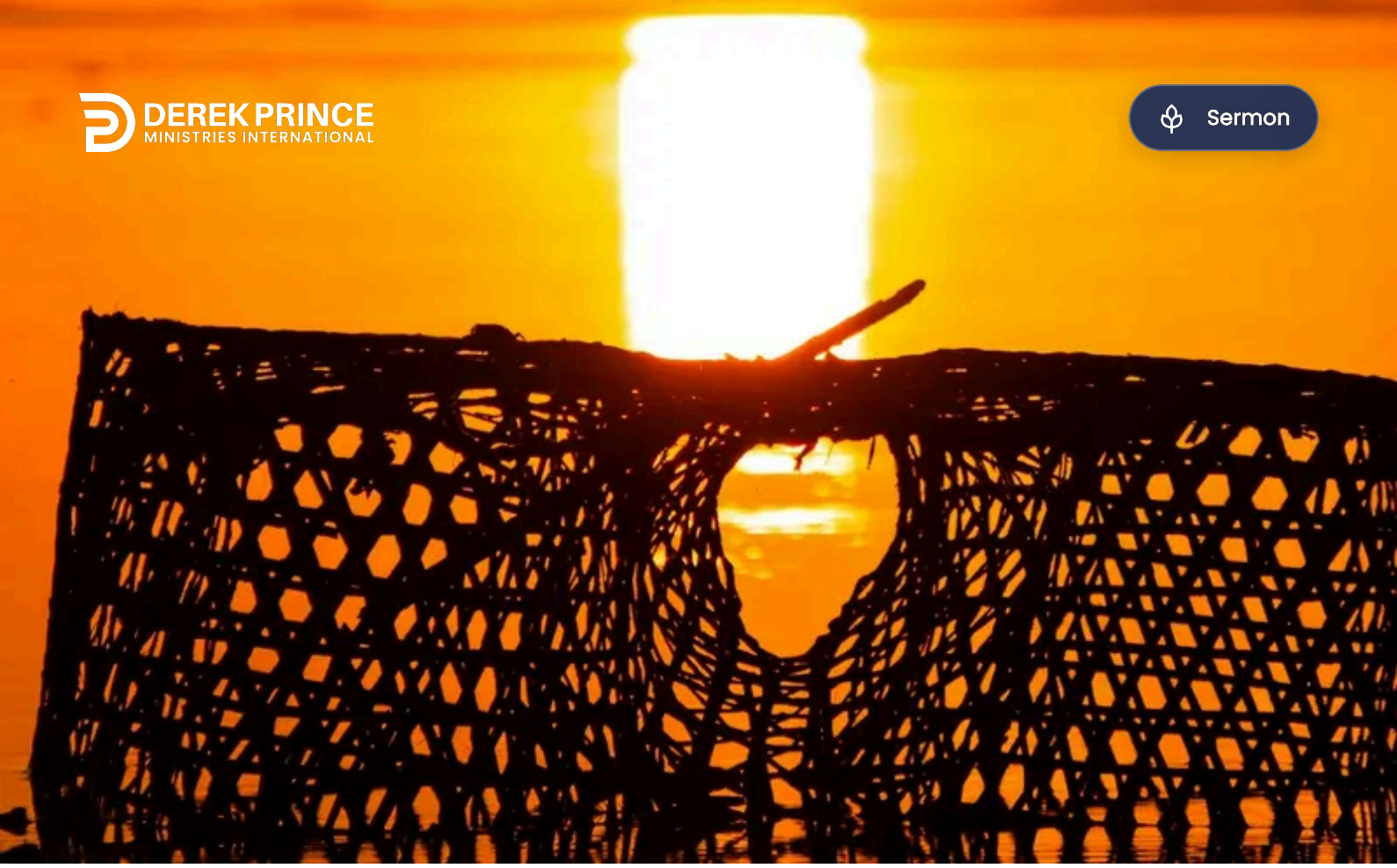


DEREK PRINCE
MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Analysis of Hebrews: Chapter 12 & 13



Part 22/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

We're beginning with new material, verse 25, which I'll read from the Greek and then we'll look at it.

> "See to it that you do not refuse [or ignore or reject] the one who is speaking. For if those did not escape on earth who rejected the one who spoke ..."

And the word means particularly "speak the Word of God." It's not an ordinary word, it's a word that means "to speak as God" or "speak as God's representative." It's a word to which we have no word that corresponds exactly in the English language. In secular Greek it was used of the answer given by an oracle. For instance, the famous oracle at Delphi. When the oracle came out with an answer, this was the word used. It's always used of a message that either does or purports to come from God. Then we go on in verse 25:

> "... much more shall not we who turn away from Him who speaks from heaven."

Now that's not good English. You can't say "much more shall not" so you say "much less shall we." But that's the difference between the two languages. Let me read that again because I rather interrupted myself.

> "See to it [or take heed] that you do not reject the one who is speaking, for if they did not escape who rejected the one who speaks for God [or as God] on earth, much more shall we not escape who turn away from the one who speaks from heaven."

So this is part of the total thrust of Hebrews, which is a series of solemn warnings. I don't know of any other book in the New Testament—maybe even in the Bible—that contains more solemn warnings to the people of God than this book. We have looked at a whole series of passages, five passages of solemn warning. This is simply a summary. If they did not obtain mercy who rejected the covenant made on earth, much less can we expect mercy if we

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refuse the covenant that's made from heaven. So the covenant from heaven offers us the greater blessings. But it also carries with it the possibility of the more severe judgment if we reject it. I think that's always true in life. The greater the good, the greater the penalty for rejecting the good.

Now then, the writer goes on in the next two verses, 26 and 27, to speak about two shakings of the earth. The first one took place when the covenant of the Law was given on Mount Sinai, the whole mountain shook, there was an earthquake. But the second one is predicted and has not yet taken place. It's predicted in Haggai. In this passage the writer quotes Haggai. I'll read then verses 26–27.

> "Whose voice then shook the earth, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.'"

And then the writer comments on the significance of the phrase "yet once more." This is an example of many in which we see how important it is to see the real nuances of meaning which are in the Scripture. He takes the word once and amplifies its meaning.

> "This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of the things that are to be shaken as the things that are made, that the things that cannot be shaken may remain."

So what the writer is saying is that phrase "yet once more" indicates something final. When that happens, that's it. It has not yet happened but it's predicted in the prophet.

Now let's look at our outline and notice some of the points made. First of all, we need to turn to Exodus for a moment, if you wish to do so, and see in Exodus 19:18 the truth of what the writer of Hebrews says that the Mount Sinai was shaken, there was an earthquake.

> "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently."

So the whole mountain shook.

God's prophetic word looks forward to a climax in which both earth and heaven will be shaken. This is predicted in Haggai 2:6:

> "For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.'"

I'm going to shake everything. Once more, a little while—that's a little while by God's measurement of time.

I feel it's tremendously important for all of us as believers to realize that the present earth and all that's in it and all that we see is impermanent. It's one more reason for not being too deeply involved with the things of earth. They are impermanent. I think there are many passages of Scripture—we will look at only a few tonight—which indicate that of all the cataclysms and upheavals that have hitherto taken place, the most tremendous are yet ahead. I could easily believe not very far ahead. That's a personal attitude. I don't know how it is with some of you but I feel so strongly that the way things are in the world at the present is not going to last much longer. I don't think it can, I think it's falling apart anyhow. We go away, Ruth and I, spend more than half the year outside the United States. When we come back there's sort of a culture shock. You have to get adjusted, everything is so superficial. Everything changes so fast; you don't come back to the same nation that you left six months previously. Everything is so unstable and really, who knows where to find stability in the temporal, material world? I don't

believe it's there.

Let's look at some other Scriptures which speak about the impermanence of the heaven and the earth. First of all, we'll look in Psalm 102:26. Verse 25 speaks about the earth and the heavens. This is addressed to the Lord.

> "Of old Thou didst found the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands."

Speaking there about the earth and the heavens. Verse 26:

> "'Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed.' Isn't that vivid? One day the Lord is just going to take off the heavens,

> drop it and something else is going to come and take its place."

The only permanent thing is the Lord Himself and that which is associated with Him. Verse 27:

> "But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end."

Praise God for verse 28.

> "The children of Thy servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before Thee."

So only those who have a personal relationship with the Lord have the promise of permanency. And then in Isaiah 51:6:

> "Lift up your eyes to the sky, then look to the earth beneath; for the sky will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants will die in like manner. But [thank God for the but] My salvation shall be forever, and My righteousness shall not wane."

And then in the New Testament there are many clear warnings, we'll only look at a few. Matthew 24:29. Jesus is here describing the events and the trends that will mark the impending close of this present age. That's the theme of Matthew 24. And if you ever want to study what they call eschatology, which is a long complicated theological word for the study of the events at the close of the age or will close the age, you should begin with Matthew 24. This is a kind of "spine" of all eschatological prophecy. And then all the other prophecies should be fitted in with the spine. Matthew 24:29:

> "But immediately after the tribulation of those days ..."

And Jesus has spoken about a tribulation that is so intense that there never was anything like it before and there will never be anything like it again, it's unique. And we have not yet, as I understand it, seen that tribulation. Then He says: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

So there again is a clear prediction of the shaking of things on earth and in the heavens. Then the next thing that follows, and it's important to see this:

> "... then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

So there are three successive phases that follow one another apparently rapidly. First of all, this great tribulation. Second, the shaking of the sky and the earth. And third, the visible appearing of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

One other Scripture we'll look at in 2 Peter 3:7, first of all. Peter is contrasting what lies ahead with what happened in the flood in the time of Noah. And he says in verse 6:

> "... through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

You see, the earth itself is to go through a double baptism. A baptism of water, which it's already experienced, and a baptism of fire, which lies ahead.

Then going on at verse 10:

> "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up."

Without going into details, in the light of the original Greek, it's as clear a description of a kind of atomic fusion as would be possible in the language of those days. The words that are used are primarily scientific words.

Now Peter gives a personal application in verses 11 and 12.

> "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be

> in holy conduct and godliness..."

In other words, don't fix your affection on things on the earth because they're not permanent.

> "... looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!"

That really is nuclear explosion. I'm not saying there's going to be a nuclear explosion; I'm saying it's as close as you can come, in the language of New Testament times, to describe something in the nature of a nuclear explosion. I don't believe this explosion will be triggered by man, I think this is God's nuclear activity that we're foreseeing.

Now returning to your note outline, my personal comment on this is, we need to learn that the visible and material is impermanent. The invisible and spiritual is permanent. That's exact opposite of the way we think because our minds have been corrupted by man's fall. We do not see things as they really are. Our values are wrong.

Look for a moment at a Scripture which continually comes to me these days, 2 Corinthians 4:17–18.

> "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison..."

You need to notice the contrast in that verse between momentary and eternal.

> "... while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen..."

Notice affliction only does us good while we keep our eyes in the right direction. If we take our eyes off the unseen and the invisible, then we still endure affliction but it does us no good. But affliction does us good if we're children of God and He permits it, while we are looking not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen. Then this comment... for the things which are seen are temporal [or temporary], but the things which are not seen are eternal.

In other words, the real things are the things we don't see. The things that we see that we see with our eyes, that we touch with our hands, they're not truly real. They're impermanent, they're temporary.

Now that takes a tremendous revolution in the mind of every descendant of Adam to recognize because the essence of Adam's fall was transferring his confidence from the unseen to the seen. If you read the description of the temptation of Eve, when Eve saw that the tree had certain characteristics she discarded her faith in the word of God, which she knew well, and put her faith in what she saw. That's the essence of the fall.

The essence of redemption is reversing the process. Renouncing ultimate faith in the seen and placing ultimate faith in the unseen word of God.

Now there's not one person here tonight for whom that is not a revolution. I believe it's a revolution that's only possible by the grace of God. But it will only work when we keep our hearts and minds anchored in Scripture. We cannot afford to let this world make too deep an impact on us because if we do we'll lose our sense of proportion. That doesn't mean we're not in the world, we have to live a realistic life, we have to take note of the things that are going on in the world; but we cannot afford to allow ourselves ever to let that take precedence over the unseen things.

And remember, faith is in the realm of the unseen things. Faith comes by hearing. If you don't spend time with the unseen you will not have much faith. If you don't have much faith you won't have much blessing because faith is the channel of blessing.

I also want to comment on something else which is just another step further. Remember the universe is primarily spiritual, only secondarily material. That's the opposite of the way we think. You can look at the Scripture there, I don't think we'll turn to them. Genesis 1:1.

In the beginning God ... That's where it all started. God is not material, He's spiritual. Psalm 33:6.

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

The initial creative impulse was the unseen word of God and the unseen Spirit of God. Not material things but spiritual things.

And John 4:24.

> "God is a spirit."

Or "God is spirit." So remember that. The material, visible, temporal things are secondary. The invisible, eternal, spiritual things are primary. And as I said, I say again, that

takes a tremendous mental adjustment in any of us. It's contrary to our Adamic nature.

Going back to the text of Hebrews we notice that the next verse is the tenth "let us" passage. That's verse 28. We've seen already nine and the tenth is the one we're looking at now and the "let us" is show gratitude or have grace. I just point that out to you. We look at the two closing verses of this chapter, verses 28 and 29. I'll read them first from the Greek, then we'll look at the commentary.

> "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us literally have grace ..."

And that's the King James translation. But in Greek, to "have grace" is the standard phrase for to say thank you or to be thankful. And I think I've pointed it out, I can't remember where I said this. In most of the Romance languages—that's French, Italian, Spanish and others—that still exists. For instance, those of you that know Italian, the word for thank you is grazie, which is directly from the word grace. I cannot pronounce the Spanish word for thank you but you all know it's similar. And the French word is ?gras? which is exactly the English word. grâce á Dieu is "thanks to God."

But let me tell you this, it takes grace to be thankful. Did you know that? When I was in East Africa—and many of you know I have an adopted African daughter—I discovered in the language of her tribe they don't have a word for "thank you." How can you imagine not being able to say thank you? And then I realized it's really only where the Bible has come that people have learned to say "thank you." It's part of the grace of God.

Now we'll continue with the translation.

> "... let us have grace [let us show gratitude], by which [or through which] we may serve [or worship, the word includes both meanings] God in a way that pleases Him with reverence and fear."

Most of the modern translations, when it comes to having fear of God they change the word and most of them use "awe," which is all right, but the fact remains God needs to be feared. Let's be frank about it. Most of us, if we were brought face to face with God—even if we were soundly saved—our first reaction would be fear. I have a study on the fear of the Lord, which I thank God I gave. If you have never investigated that, I suggest you take a concordance and see what it has to say about the fear of the Lord. I do not know of any single attribute of the spiritual life which carries greater blessings with it than the fear of the Lord.

I received salvation through the testimony of a godly couple who invited me to their home in 1941 after I had been to a service. I thank God for them because if they hadn't invited me I probably never would have met the Lord. In many ways they were an example to me but this man had the idea that once you become a Christian there's no more room for fear. Not even fear of the Lord. And when I went back to their home later after World War II, we discussed this. It was difficult for me to stand against him because he was something like a spiritual father to me, but I said, "No, that's not true." Without going into details, his latter end was somewhat tragic. I'm sure he's with the Lord, but he didn't end his life in the kind of victory that was possible. I really believe it was because of his unfortunate idea he had that you could dispense with the fear of the Lord. Believe me, you cannot. You cannot serve God acceptably without reverence and fear. If you want to say "awe," that's all right, except that it doesn't exactly make the same impact.

I remember he asked me, "What is the fear of the Lord?" I didn't have an answer ready but I just impromptu said this. "It's like standing on a very, very high cliff and looking down hundreds of feet at a rocky beach and the surf. You know you're not going to throw yourself over, but you know what would happen to you if you did throw yourself over." That's the best sort of simple everyday description I can give of what the fear of the Lord is. If I have any fear in the blessing of the Lord, and I thank God for that which I do have, I think one of the main causes is I have sought to cultivate the fear of the Lord in my life.

Let's look at the outline now. Jesus grants us a place in His kingdom, which is unshakable. Let's look at the Scripture reference there, Luke 22:29–30. We'll begin at verse 28:

> "You are those that have stood by Me in My trials..."

Sometimes when I look out on my students after three years I feel slightly like saying the same to you. I wish I could go on and say the rest.

> "... and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

So Jesus offers to those who follow Him a place of honor in His kingdom. He isn't going to be the only one with a throne. The twelve apostles are going to have their thrones, each one. They're going to have the privilege of judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now returning to our outline. This kingdom is spiritual but not amorphous. Do you know what the word amorphous is? It's a pity, because it's a good word. The Greek word for "form," visible form, is ?morphe? and the prefix a just means it's the opposite. So amorphous is "without form." I'm sure those of you who've got any background in science—which I don't have—know there's a science of morphology, which is the study of form.

Now what I'm saying is that the kingdom of God is spiritual, it's invisible to the human eye but it's not amorphous. I think there's a lot of people that have a problem with that. It's not just a kind of vague mist. I mean, when you pass out of this life into eternity, I just hope there's something more waiting for us than this. That's my sincere hope and it's my confidence, too.

Then I point out that God Himself has a specific form. John 5:37. Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and religious leaders. He says this:

> "And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form."

So God has a voice that can be heard, and I heard the voice of God once in my life. I heard God speak audibly. God has a form that can be seen—not with these natural eyes, but it can be seen. There would be no meaning to the statement "You haven't seen His form" if it couldn't be seen. Jesus said by implication, "I have seen His form and I have heard His voice." I hope I haven't confused you by that but, in a sense, if I have, it may do you good in the long run. See, I have to say I feel sorry for people who think about heaven as a kind of mist. It's much more real than earth, that's what I said before. The unseen, the spiritual, the eternal are the real things. These things are going to pass away.

This kingdom is based on righteousness accompanied by peace and joy supplied by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:17:

> "... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

The order is important. Righteousness has to come first. Without righteousness there is no peace and there is no joy. The Bible says there is no peace to the wicked.

True righteousness is found only where God reigns. As long as you are not under the reign of God you're a rebel, there is no righteousness. You may be very religious, you may keep the Golden Rule, you may do all sorts of good things, but you are still a rebel until you're under the rule of God. Only in the kingdom of God are you under the rule of God. So only in the kingdom of God can you have true righteousness because apart from that you're a rebel. You may be a religious rebel, you may be a respectable rebel, but you're a rebel. You're refusing the government of the Creator and King of the universe.

At this present time the kingdom of God is here. Jesus said in His day, "The kingdom of God is among you." But it's not yet manifested in a form that can be apprehended by the sense of unbelievers. One day I believe it will. But it's still here. Everywhere that Jesus is truly Lord, there the kingdom of God is. And there is righteousness and joy and peace.

If by any chance you're lacking in joy and peace, let me suggest you check on righteousness. I meet many Christians who are pursuing joy and peace. I tell them, "You're really wasting a lot of effort. Concentrate on righteousness and the rest will follow."

This kingdom is the central theme of the gospel. We'll look at some Scriptures. This is very important; it's a fact which has been long overlooked by most Christians. The gospel, or "the good news," is the good news of the kingdom. In other words, it's the good news that one day God is going to reign. It's the good news that God is willing to reign now over those who believe in Jesus and submit their lives to Him. See, without God reigning, the earth is doomed to chaos, misery, frustration. The only solution to earth's problems is the establishment of God's kingdom. The good news is God is willing to take the job over. If I'd been God I'd have thought twice about it. Maybe He thought twice! Anyhow, thank God He came up with the decision. Mark 1:14–15.

> "And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God..."

Notice the gospel of God. THE gospel of God.

> "... saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...'"

That's the good news. God is ready to set up His kingdom. "... repent and believe in the gospel."

I personally believe that at that time the kingdom of God wasn't near. Had the Jewish nation met the requirements, repented and believed, the kingdom of God would have been established. I believe the kingdom of God has been near ever since but is not going to be established till people meet the conditions. I don't believe the kingdom of God is remote and distant. I believe that if the church woke up and did its job and repented, the kingdom of God could be here in a matter of decades. The people who are holding back the kingdom of God are not the unbelieving world, they're God's people.

In the passage we read in 2 Peter it says "looking for and hastening the coming of the kingdom of God." How do we hasten it? By obedience, by doing the things that are required to bring the kingdom in.

Let's look at Matthew 4:23.

> "And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people."

You see, where God reigns there's no further room for sickness. There'll be no sickness in heaven. God has banished sickness from His presence forever. It's never going to get back into God's presence. And you'll find almost everywhere in the New Testament it speaks about proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom it's attested by healings and miracles and the driving out of demons.

Let's look on in Matthew a little bit, Matthew 6:10. This is part of what we call The Lord's Prayer.

Verse 9 is the introduction.

> "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name."

That's reverence. That's approaching God with the right attitude and acknowledging who He is. Then the next part of the prayer is identifying with God's purpose. We have no right to pray unless we're identified with God's purpose. So: "'Thy kingdom come ...'"

That's the first thing we have to pray. We have to set aside our own whims and desires and ambitions and fancies and get identified with what God is busy with. Thy kingdom come. Then:

> "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

That's the purpose of the coming of God's kingdom, that God's will may be done on earth just as it is in heaven. I personally believe where a believer is truly surrendered to Jesus Christ in His Lordship, the will of God is being done on earth at that juncture just as perfectly as it's done in heaven. It's not an impossibility. But bear in mind what is the thrust of God's purposes.

And then Matthew 6:33. These are directions for disciples.

> "But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

There's a question of priorities. What's priority number one in your life? Jesus says it should be the kingdom of God. If you'll make that your priority number one, God'll take care of the needs in your life.

I'm not going to ask for a personal response, but I think every one of you here needs to ask yourself, Is the kingdom of God priority number one in my life? If not, a) you're disobedient, or b) you're missing out on something, because that's the way to live and have life. And if you are truly identified with what you know to be God's purposes in the earth, it's not difficult to believe that God will take care of you. After all, He is in control. I honestly believe the securest way to conduct your life is to seek first the kingdom of God. I don't take this as just nice religious language, it's very practical advice. If you want to do it, then pray God will show you what's involved in your life and situation in doing that.

Then Matthew 24:14 speaking about the close of the age, the things that will lead up to the close. Jesus was asked at the beginning of that chapter, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" Here He answers. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come."

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Notice right at the end the gospel message is still the same. It's "this gospel of the kingdom." We have to tell the world the kingdom of God is at hand. I believe that's possibly priority number one for the church at this time. Go out and tell people "the kingdom of God is right at hand."

Then there's another Scripture, Colossians 1:13–14:

> "For He [God] delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

When we are redeemed and our sins are forgiven, we belong in the kingdom of God. As long as our sins are not forgiven we cannot be in the kingdom of God. God delivered us from the tyranny of darkness. That word domain suggests tyranny, dominion, domination. "He transferred us": moved us across. "Translated us," the King James says, "into the kingdom of the Son of His love."

In Psalm 103 it says:

> "God's kingdom rules over all."

So that's where we belong. In the kingdom that rules over all. Not in the future but right now in the present.

Going back to the outline we have been reminded by the writer of Hebrews that we are privileged to share in the kingdom of God. We are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, unlike all the kingdoms of this world which can be shaken and most of which are being shaken. Then the writer tells us there near the bottom, our appropriate response is to be thankful or to show gratitude.

Then, in that closing verse, which I've just translated, he states two requirements for serving in this kingdom. Reverence and awe or fear. We discussed the significance of fear in relationship to the Lord. Then he gives a reason why we should serve God with reverence and fear. The reason is that our God is a consuming fire. We're not dealing with a little statue in a church. We're not dealing with a theological concept. We're not even dealing with a doctrine. We're dealing with a very powerful and just and terrible person, the person of God.

My comment there, the fire of God's being will consume all hypocrisy and carnality. Let's look at just two verses referred to there. Isaiah 33:14, a very remarkable verse. I read it a good many years ago and was gripped by it and I never cease to be impressed by this particular verse. We'll not go into the background, it'll take too long.

> "Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless."

Then we have quoted the words of these people who are shocked, they've made a sudden discovery.

The discovery is that our God is a consuming fire. This is what they say.

> "Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?"

It's indicative I think that there are a lot of people who have taken God for granted. They have a kind of buddy-buddy relationship with the Lord and they don't realize that they're dealing with fire. Apparently at a certain point in God's dealings, these people are going to be terribly shocked. They're going to say, "Who among us can dwell with perpetual burning, with the consuming fire?" We need to take that warning to heed ourselves.

Then in the New Testament in Matthew 3:11–12. These are part of the words with which John the Baptist introduced the ministry of Jesus.

> "As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Notice the element of fire there. Personally I don't see that as two distinct baptisms. Some people have taught that, one baptism with the Holy Spirit and another with fire. I see that as the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a baptism in fire because when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost He came in the form of tongues of fire.

You notice the contrast with Jesus. He came as a dove. There was no fire needed. But with the church He came first of all in tongues of fire. One thing that tongues of fire does is purify our tongues. And most tongues of God's people are in urgent need of purification.

Then he goes on in verse 12:

> "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor..."

This is a picture of a man threshing grain that has been gathered. They still have threshing floors in Israel today. We used to live right back to back with a threshing floor in the city of Ramallah years back. The way they do it—I'm sure you know it—is this, the grain is piled up. They have these fans and they pick up the grain and toss it in the air, beat it and the wind carries the chaff away, but the heavy grain falls back in its place. And ultimately in this way the grain is cleansed of its chaff. So John the Baptist says that's what Jesus is going to be like. He's going to come to His threshing floor and He's going to start to throw up the grain and the wind will carry the chaff away but the grain will remain purged on the floor. Maybe there are some of you right now, you're being tossed up and down. The wind is blowing on you. Bear in mind, it's the Lord at work and He's getting rid of the chaff.

Now, as I understand it, I'm no expert on agriculture. Chaff is an inevitable accompaniment of grain. You can't have grain without chaff. So chaff is not sin, but it's the carnal nature, it's the husk in which the grain is contained. So one of the processes of the Lord in dealing with His people is to retain the grain but just get rid of the husk, the carnal nature.

In a parable in Matthew 13 Jesus speaks about the tares or the weeds. They are not grain, but they're a counterfeit and they are thrown complete into the oven of God's wrath and judgment. But the grain, which is what God is after, that's dealt with with the winnowing fan so that the grain is retained but the chaff is dealt with. And all that is included in the presentation of Jesus as the baptizer in the Holy Spirit. When He comes as the baptizer, those are some of the things He's going to be doing. I'm sure many of you here have already come to realize that. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not always to make life easy, but it's to accomplish God's purposes in our lives.

We'll move on to chapter 13 and in your outline it says of the first 25 verses in that chapter: This is the seventh passage of practical application. That indicates there have been six before, this is the last one. In regard to each passage I've stated in simple outline what is the practical application. We could look at them just very briefly, I think it will do us good to refresh our minds.

The first was confident access to God.

The second was to go on to maturity or perfection. The third was the need for zeal, faith and patience.

The fourth was to draw near to God, hold fast, assemble and encourage one another. The fifth was to remember and endure.

The sixth was to press on, endure discipline, be strong, pursue peace and holiness.

Now we come to the last. The practical application in these 25 verses as I've summarized it very briefly is love, holiness, submissiveness and prayer. You could be much more extensive but that's just a brief picture.

Now we'll take chapter 13:1. It's a very short verse. In fact, in Greek its only got three words.

> "Let love of the brothers continue."

Somebody said simply once, "When did it ever start?" At any rate, in the early church it had started; it was there and the writer says let it continue.

We'll look at the comments in your outline on verse 1. This is the primary practical application of all New Testament truth. We need to bear that in mind continually. The first requirement of all Christians is to love our fellow believers. And if we ever let that become secondary, we're out of line with God's purposes. I'll just give you two Scriptures to look at in that connection. John 13:34–35. Jesus says:

> "A new commandment I give to you..."

Moses gave the children of Israel Ten Commandments, Judaism has 613 commandments; Jesus says, "I'll make it easier, I'll just give you one new commandment."

> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you also have love one for another."

It's vain to talk about discipleship or preach elaborate sermons on it if we miss out this first elementary requirement. And anybody who sees Christians not loving one another has an absolute right given them by the Lord Himself to say they are not His disciples. We're not going to dwell on this, but this is primary and you notice in this final passage of application it's the first application.

The other passage that I suggest you look at for a moment is 1 Timothy 1:5. I particularly like the

New American Standard translation of this particular verse. I think it's caught the real essence of it.

> "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

That's very important. The goal, the goal of our instruction is love. The thing we're really aiming at in all our teaching and preaching and ministry is summed up in one word: love. If we don't achieve that, basically all our teaching and preaching is wasted effort. It's so important that those who lead congregations or have positions of responsibility in the body of Christ check their results by this standard. Am I producing loving people? Do I love the people, do they love me? Do they love one another? If not, I'm wasting my time.

Paul states three requirements for this kind of love. In verse 5 of 1 Timothy 1. A pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith. Elsewhere in that epistle he speaks about two false teachers who taught error about the resurrection and had made shipwreck of their faith because they hadn't retained a good conscience. See, your inner being, if you don't keep a good conscience, develops a crack. Out of that crack leaks the spiritual content of your life. So the three requirements for maintaining love are a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith.

Then Paul goes on to point out that those who stray from those objectives are just wasting their time, they're just making a lot of noise and accomplishing nothing significant. If all of us—and not least myself—really grasped that, the church would change overnight, believe me. A lot of religious activity would cease as of midnight tonight—to the great benefit of God's people. I don't think I'm being cynical, I think anybody who is familiar with the church as it is in the world today would have to admit that basically that's the problem.

Because it's only three words, let's not ignore it. Some of the most important things are said in short sentences.

We go on now to verse 2. Hebrews 13:2:

> "Do not forget hospitality [or to entertain strangers], for in this way [or through this] some entertained angels without knowing it."

There's a possible prize in the sweepstakes. You don't know if you go on being hospitable, one day maybe an angel you'll be entertaining. I can't stop tonight but I believe I've known believers who have entertained angels.

Let me make a few comments on hospitality. Hospitality is a vital Charismatic ministry. I put Charismatic in quotes because in 1 Peter 4:8–10 Peter actually uses the word charisma. I think a lot of people who call themselves Charismatic haven't realized this is part of what's involved in being charismatic. First Peter 4:8–10:

> "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Notice, the emphasis of this is love. Then one expression of love is in the next verse, verse 9:

> "Be hospitable to one another without complaining [or without grumbling, I think is a little better. And then verse 10:] As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

That word "gift" is charisma. It's referring specifically to showing hospitality. That is a charisma, it's a particular gift that God gives to some people. It's a very important gift. I'd like to give brief personal testimony. If somebody hadn't demonstrated that gift I think I would have never have come to know the Lord. The first time I ever went to a service where I heard the gospel preached, it was a Pentecostal service. I didn't know it; I didn't even know there were such people. I was age 24 at the time. I didn't even know there were Baptists! It was totally strange to me. I had grown up in the Anglican Church and I didn't know any other type of service. They did all sorts of things which offended my sensibilities. They had red hymnbooks, they clapped their hands, people read out verses and they sang them twice over. I think you've heard me tell this story, but when the preacher started to preach, he was one of these preachers who believes in demonstrating everything. He was conducting an imaginary dialogue between King Saul and the shepherd boy David. He pointed out, very scripturally, that King Saul was head and shoulders taller than the rest so in this dialogue when he was King Saul he stood on a bench at the end of the platform and looked down at where he'd been when he was David. Then he got down to be David and looked up at where he'd been on the bench. Well, I was following this carefully but when he was in the middle of an impassioned address as King Saul, the bench he was standing on collapsed and he fell to the platform with a loud thud!

Well, by the end of this I was personally somewhat confused, I have to say. I was also scared. I was afraid of what I was getting myself in for. And then they made what we would know as "the appeal." I'd never been in a church where anybody did an appeal. I was extremely embarrassed and indignant that anybody would ask me to put my hand up in front of a lot of people. I knew it was me he was talking to! I sat there in this stony silence, there was no background music, nothing but silence. The minutes were ticking away and I said, "Something's got to happen." There were two voices speaking to me inaudibly. One voice in my left ear said, "Now, if you put your hand up in front of all these old ladies and you're a soldier in uniform, you're going to look very silly." At the same time the other voice was saying in the other ear, "If this is something good, why shouldn't you have it?" I could not respond; I was like a paralyzed person.

Then the most amazing and unexpected thing happened. I saw my own right arm go right up in the air and I knew I had not raised it. I was really scared! I thought, What has happened to me? The moment I put my arm up, that was all they were waiting for! They heaved a sigh of relief and continued with the rest of the service. Well, nobody counseled me, nobody spoke to me. All they did was get my arm up in the air. I would have probably walked out of that place and never gone back again but an elderly couple who kept a boarding house near the church invited these two soldiers, my friend and myself, back for supper. Because of that, the Lord was able to get a grip on me. So, there's a very simple, personal example of the importance in the ministry of exercising this gift of hospitality.

Let's just point out the writer of Hebrews says some entertained angels without knowing it. You can find examples both in Genesis 18 and 19. In chapter 18 Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent one day and three men appeared. With characteristic Middle East hospitality, he immediately invited them in and gave them the best that he had. And it turned out, subsequently, one of those men was the Lord Himself, the other two were angels.

In Genesis 19 it's in Sodom and Lot has the two angels come. He doesn't have the Lord. The Lord didn't honor Sodom with His presence. Because Lot entertained the angels thinking they were strangers in need of hospitality, he was delivered from Sodom. So, it's a very practical lesson.

I think I'll tell you about one person who did, I believe, not exactly entertain an angel but had a contact with an angel. This very family that had invited me in, they had a daughter named Mary who was about 30 years old at the time and slightly simple. Not in any way embarrassingly so but just a little. As I fellowshipped with them over the course of some weeks, they would tell me some of their amazing stories of their experience with God. There was a time when the man of the house had a nervous breakdown and he was out of work for weeks. There was very little of Social Security in Britain in those days and they really had nothing to eat. They told me they lived on cocoa for days and even that ran out. Then Mary went out in the backyard in the back of the house and there was a very well-dressed man. This is before World War I, you understand, or 'round about that time. He was in a very good suit with a watch chain on his vest and as Mary walked out of the door he said, "Here is ..." and he gave her a certain amount of money. Say, five shillings, which in those days was a lot of money. "Take that." She went back and they bought food and lived on it for quite awhile.

Another day the man was there again, met her, gave her some more money. Then maybe this went on for quite a period. One day the man was there again and he said, "Here's some more money for you and after this you won't be needing any more from me." That was the last time she ever saw him. My personal conviction is that was an angel. It just interests me that he was rather well dressed. I think it was a gold watch chain across his vest. After all, angels have to be dressed in something, don't they?

We're going on to 13:3. I don't know whether you've noticed already in these chapters how many times it says "remember" or "don't forget." One of the big problems is forgetfulness. Now it said in verse 2, "don't forget" and in verse 3 it says "remember."

> "Remember the prisoners, or those in bonds, as being bound with them, and those who are ill-treated, as being yourselves also still in the body."

That's another important application of the teaching that's gone ahead. I'll read my comments. We must identify with those who are imprisoned and persecuted—especially our fellow believers. And particularly today in the world where our fellow believers are under Marxist and Muslim governments. There are probably millions of such. I've given you there some Scriptures. Matthew 25:36–43. As I understand it, this, which is the last prophetic parable or utterance of Jesus before He went to His passion, last public one, relates to the period of the close of this age. He says to the ones whom He invited to share His kingdom, the

sheep nations—I'm not going to relate the parable. He says in verse 34:

> "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world."

Then He gives a number of reasons. He says:

> "I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me."

Then the people He's addressing said, "Lord, when did we ever do that to You?" And He said, "When you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me." There's an example.

Then verse 43 are the people who were rejected. The grounds of their rejection is they failed to do these things.

> "I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit."

So there's really no neutrality there, there's no room for indifference. Jesus said in another place, "He that is not with Me is against Me. He that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." Gathering is doing these things, scattering is not doing them.

Now, we can't do all of these things but as God indicates to each of us where He would have us follow these patterns, then we need to do them. There really is no shortage of that kind of people in the world today, believe me. If you're looking for an opportunity, you'll find it.

Let's look also in Hebrews. We've already read this, but just let's look at it again. Hebrews 10:32–34, speaking about Jewish believers.

> "Remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated."

Sometimes it doesn't fall to our lot but we are to share with those who are so treated.

> "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you had for yourself a better possession and an abiding one."

And there's another passage that's not quoted in your outline but it came to me this evening in 2 Timothy 1:16–18. Here Paul is in prison awaiting probable execution and many of his old friends and associates have forsaken him. But, he kind of breaks off in the middle of the letter to remember one man who stuck with him named Onesiphorus. Verse 16:

> "The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains ..."

He wasn't ashamed of me when I was in prison.

> "... but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me, and found me ..."

I like those words, "and found me." He could have gone through the motions of searching and said, "Well, it's no good, I don't know where Paul is." But he searched until he found him. This is Paul's comment:

> "... the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus."

I've said many times, "The Lord usually does not step off His throne and confront us in person. He comes into our lives in various disguises." It may be in the disguise of a suffering prisoner or a sick child or who knows. But the way we respond to that needy person is reckoned as the way we respond to Him.

Let me just read the closing comment on verse 3. As long as we are in the body, we may find ourselves in the same situation. The point of phrase as being "yourselves also in the body." You may be the next one to need mercy. In the world today I think that could be true of anybody anywhere.

Hebrews 13:4. Now it comes to the subject of marriage.

> "Marriage is honorable in all, and the marriage bed undefiled ..."

Or, more probably it's an injunction.

> "Let marriage be held honorable in all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers."

The application here is to the sanctity of marriage. We notice two words that are used and they can be translated differently but they have a specific basic meaning. Fornicator or fornication is immorality that does not involve the violation of the marriage covenant. Adultery is immorality that includes the violation of the marriage covenant. Therefore, God judges adultery more seriously than fornication. But, He judges all sexual immorality. That's a message we need to keep sounding because there's many, many people in the world today—and some in the church—who really believe that God smiles on sexual immorality. Traveling around as I do in many churches, you'd be amazed at the number of instances of immorality in the church that I'm confronted with when I come to people and pray for them. It's a message that has to be continually sounded. God will judge immorality. There's no possibility that He will not do so.

Now we go on to another important subject in verses 5 and 6, the subject of money. I'll translate them. How many of you believe money is unimportant? Well, generally speaking, people only say that in church. As soon as they get outside of church they act as though money was very important. Maybe people here attach no serious importance to money but it's the exception, it is not the rule. Personally, I believe money is important. First of all, I believe it's useful; we need it for a lot of things. Secondly, I think the attitude that we have toward money is very critical of determining what kind of people we are. See, the Scripture says covetousness is idolatry. We can make an idol out of money. Many people, I think, do. Some of them, I think, are in the church. Not speaking about this church but "the church."

So, we're going to read verses 5 and 6. It's very succinct in Greek, there's no verb "to be" here. I can't translate it to you that way, it doesn't make sense.

> "Let your conduct be without covetousness [or without the love of money], being satisfied with what is available; for he himself has said, I will never leave you, nor will I ever abandon you, so we can boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'"

So, once we have the assurance from the Lord that He will never leave us, nor abandon us, that's sufficient ground for being satisfied. We're somewhat insulting the Lord if we say, "Lord, I'm glad You're with me, but I want the assurance about this or that." God says, "My presence, in the last resort, is sufficient." If you have that, that's what you need.

I'd like you to look at a few Scriptures there. The first one is in 1 Timothy 6:10.

> "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some, by longing for it, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many a pang."

The love of money is a root of all evils. Once we allow that into our lives, out of it will come all sorts of evils and temptations and pain.

The remedy really is what I've already said. Seek first God's kingdom and all these things will be added to you. Get your priorities right. God knows we need those things, it's just a question of priorities.

Then let's look at some assurance of the presence of the Lord. Genesis 15:1.

> "After these things ..."

And "these things" was a battle in which Abraham had to go out and deliver Lot. So he was probably in a condition where he was questioning where his security was. It says:

> "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, saying, Do not fear, Abraham. I am a shield to you, and your very great reward."

I prefer the alternative translation which is the one in the King James. "I am your shield and your great reward." In other words, when you have Me, you have protection, you have all you need.

And then Joshua 1:5 which is the verse quoted in Hebrews.

> "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you."

Again, the essential guarantee is the presence of the Lord in our lives.

Then we could look at Psalm 23:1 for a moment, which is very familiar to most of us.

> "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want [or lack]."

No other guarantee is needed except that I have the Lord. If I have the Lord, He takes care of all my needs.

Then the one that's quoted from Psalm 118:6.

> "The LORD is for me, I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

So that's the one thing we really need to know: the Lord is for us. There's no reason to fear. What can man do if God is for us? In Romans 8 Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Now we come to the next theme, which is verses 7 and 8, our attitude to our God-given leaders. I'll translate and then we'll make some comments.

> "Remember those who lead you ..."

I do not know why the New American Standard says "those who led you" because it's present tense. I think it might be just a typographical error, I don't know.

> "Remember those who lead you, who have spoken to you the word of God; and beholding the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same, and forever."

The essence of this exhortation is our attitude to our God-given leaders. This, too, must be right. It is stated in two verbs: remember and imitate. What's included in remembering our leaders? I suggest three things: respect, prayer, financial support. Then imitate, follow their examples.

But, we cannot ignore the next verse which is, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever." Their example, the outcome of their faith is Jesus Christ. That's why we're told to imitate them.

In my next study I'll be looking at the requirements of leaders, the kind of leaders we are exhorted to follow. We are not exhorted to follow all pastors or clergymen or Christian workers. The Bible is very specific about the type of people that we are exhorted to follow. Their lives should point us to Jesus. We'll close this session here and continue, God willing.

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Sermon

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