

Hebrews 13:7,17,24

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 July 2016

Preacher: Dick Lucas

[0 : 00] Thank you.

We shall be in Hebrews chapter 13 this evening, and if you turn there, it will help me a little later on. But first let me tell you of the assignment that I was given at the Evangelical Ministry Assembly just the week before last.

I was asked to speak at the last session. There were three evenings, and that was three evening sessions. And I can tell you that I was very reluctant, partly because I'm old and I've spoken at the Ministry Assembly many times, and I thought it was quite time for the younger men to be on the platform, but partly because I was being invited to be a kind of exhibit.

On the first evening, a young minister was meant to speak and explain why he'd been able to persevere. On the second evening, a sort of middle-aged man was asked to speak on how he had persevered, and how the Lord had kept him.

And then on the third, an ancient relic like myself was meant to come onto the platform and explain the same thing. Well, I'm very reluctant to be an exhibit. You know, it's rather like these London marathons when they wait at the end for the last people to arrive.

[1 : 37] You know, there's some aged man who arrives at last, and the commentator is so excited and says, at last he's come, it's taken him eight days and four hours and three seconds or whatever it is, let's give him a clap and all the rest of it.

Well, I decided not to be an exhibit, but I felt I must speak on perseverance, and these texts in Hebrews 13 have meant a great deal to me in the last fortnight as I worked on them.

I was speaking, of course, in the Barbican to hundreds of Christian leaders, and as you saw or heard in the reading, this chapter has three verses about leaders.

Quite an unusual title, of course. Not the title of pastor or steward or minister, but the title of leader. And so I'm going to read the three verses, if I may, and then we'll get to work on them.

Verses 7, verse 17, and verse 24. Verse 7. Remember, your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.

[2 : 47] Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Verse 17.

So that was a look into the past. Now we go to the present. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no benefit to you. And then finally, verse 24, which we will spend time on this evening.

Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people. At any rate, what verse 24 shows is that the Lord's people need leaders.

Of course they do. All groups need leaders, all institutions need leaders, and we know, all too painfully at the moment, countries need leaders too. And I guess you're praying about that, at least I hope you are.

[3 : 53] We were speaking in the car. It is very remarkable, isn't it, of the five or six whose names are in the hat. At least three or four seem to be churchgoers or God-fearers, and one of them a real Christian.

That's something to be very thankful for in these days, isn't it? And we need to pray for them, and especially for the one on whom the lot falls. So, what are the leaders' responsibilities?

This is what I gave my mind to as I prepared for the ministry assembly, and what I've been giving to my mind ever since. I think the person who learns most from speaking, of course, is the speaker.

Well, in verse 7, the work of the church or Christian leader is to speak the word of God. He's to be a preacher. And in verse 17, the work of the church or Christian leader is to be a shepherd.

That is a pastor. It's a very succinct and clear pattern, isn't it? He's not a politician. He's not a social activist. He's not an ecclesiastical functionary. He's a speaker, a shepherd, a preacher, and a pastor.

[5 : 10] But who, and I'm talking to people, I guess, who know their Bibles quite well, indeed very well, who is the speaker par excellence in the letter, the sermon, whatever you like to call it, of Hebrews?

As you turn back to chapter 1, you'll soon find out who the real speaker is. Chapter 1, verse 1, In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.

So the great speaker, according to Hebrews, is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. And the importance of that is really quite terrifying, I think, at the end of the letter, chapter 12, verse 25, we get this exhortation that shows how important it is to listen to the one who speaks.

See that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven. And incidentally, to show you how severe the New Testament can be, look at that last phrase in verse 29, Our God is a consuming fire. That is the verdict on those who won't listen.

[6 : 32] So in this sermon letter of Hebrews, the speaker is our Lord Jesus Christ. Question number two, Who is the great shepherd of Hebrews?

Well, you read it just now. It's a wonderful verse. We need only look at one verse, verse 20, of the 13th chapter. Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant fall back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep.

So here's a remarkable background to the leader's work. The great speaker that God has sent into the world is none other than Jesus Christ.

Oh, we know that, don't we? He's the word. He's the teaching. He comes to preach the gospel. The soldiers who are sent to arrest him said, No man spoke like this man. Well, we know that, don't we? The teaching of Jesus Christ is the wonder of the world. Still is. Would that we obeyed it and listened to it. And who is the great shepherd of the sermon letter?

[7 : 37] Well, it's our Lord Jesus Christ, there's no doubt about that. He himself said so, did he not? He said, I am the good shepherd. The one who really pastors the universal church and all the churches in the universal church.

So in this remarkable letter to the Hebrews, quite different, isn't it, from almost anything else in the New Testament. The Lord is the speaker and the Lord is the shepherd.

But, as you sometimes see written on the holy table in Protestant churches, he is not here, he is risen. He's returned to the Father's throne.

He is not with us, in that sense, bodily. He is bodily raised from the dead. So the question arises, who is to do the speaking now and who is to do the shepherding?

Who is to preach the word? Who is to speak the word of God? And who is to pastor, verse 17, the flock of God? And the answer, are you ready for it?

[8 : 45] Frail, weak, mortals. Described by Paul in one of his letters as jars of clay. You don't even turn to look at it. I was speaking at the ordination of a Presbyterian church in Scotland, in Glasgow, two Sunday nights ago.

and in preaching, I said to Paul, the young man who was being ordained, talking about speaking the word of God and shepherding the flock of God, I said, I hope that in view of this, you are more than a little terrified.

I don't think anybody was expecting that, you know. I think they thought I was going to say, it's a wonderful responsibility and it's a great work you're going to do. And all these rather flattering things, but I really do believe that, don't you?

He ought to be feeling on the evening in which he's set apart from this work of leadership, he ought to be terrified. Not least, because of that 17, you must give an account.

God, well, that's enough to make me tremble. And might not the members of the church tremble too to think that your pastor, your youth leader, your Sunday school teachers are in this position of doing what actually is the work of Christ.

[10 : 06] You have this heavy, of course it's a great privilege, but a very, very heavy responsibility of actually speaking the word of God and looking out to the flock of God.

You know, the work of a, I thought of this young man a fortnight ago, very able young man actually, but quite brave, I think, to venture into this work because the minister today in our society is a very marginalized character, isn't he?

He's regarded as somebody who can't do any other job, really. And here was a young man committing himself to that. What did his great namesake say, Paul the Apostle?

He asked a great question, which expects the answer, who is equal to this task? So that's the first truth that seems to me to emerge from this.

That Christian leadership is an enormous responsibility. It is actually the work of Christ which is delegated to us and we might well tremble, we who speak, we who shepherd, whether in a church or whatever.

[11:25] The second truth that I think emerged, there are many truths that emerge, and the more I look at this, the more truths that seem to come out and hit me and make me think. The second truth that emerges is that Christian leadership demands a reliable teaching ministry.

Look back, if you will now, to the past in verse 7. Remember your leaders who speak the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

And so it would be good, wouldn't it, just for a moment as we sit here, to do just that. Will you just for a moment cast your mind back to the people who first told you the word of God, the gospel, it's a debt you can't repay, isn't it?

Maybe a pastor, maybe a parent, maybe a class leader, maybe a friend. Let's just think for a moment. Remember those who spoke the word of God to you.

An enormous debt is what we owe to them. I'm thinking of two men at least and a crusader leader in whose class I simply misbehaved.

[12:39] Well, I suppose I learned something. Now, I don't think we can get the full import of verse 7 without verse 8, which is why I read it.

What does verse 8 mean? It's a glorious verse, isn't it? It's one everybody knows. Christ the same yesterday and forever. And I'll tell you what I don't think it means. I don't think it means something fairly conventional, that whereas verse 8, the Christian leader comes and goes, those men that I think of who led me to Christ to preach the gospel to me long ago, gone to be with Christ, long, long ago.

I don't think it means that the human leaders come and go, but the Lord is still with us, whether in the past generation today and in the future. I don't think that's the point at all.

I think verse 8 is summing up the essential Christian message as taught by the writer of the Hebrews. And that is the same gospel message, of course, as all the writers are talking about, but it's very distinctive, isn't it, in Hebrews.

It takes him two-thirds of the letter to describe in chapters 3 to chapters 10. Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 are all taken up with one thing, and that is Christ the High Priest.

[14:08] In fact, it's all taken up with one day in the Jewish year in the Old Testament times. It's taken up with that great day of atonement when the High Priest, I hardly tell you this, took the blood of the sacrifice.

He would go trembling through the curtain into the Holy Polis. The blood would be sprinkled there.

He would stand there for a few minutes, and then he would return, having ratified the covenant between God and his people for one more year.

In a year's time, he'd have to do the same. And then the next year, and the next year. And at very great length, it's an incredible detail.

And I'm not sure how many Bible readers take trouble to go through all the detail. He points out how Christ has fulfilled that once and for all, in virtue of his own sacrifice, going through the Holy of Holies into the presence of God.

Opening that way once and for all, so that the covenant between God and his people is firm forever. Just an amazing passage and an amazing description.

[15:26] It's very interesting to me. I'd like you, if you will, it'll mean that you're still with me if I hear the pages turned. Just turn to Mark 15 for a moment.

The earliest gospel, and when you come to the critical passage on the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, all that he tells you is that Christ laid down his life and sacrificed bearing the sins of the world, verse 34, that he cried, a loud cry in verse 37, grieved his last, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

So there we go to the very earliest strata of the Christian gospel in the New Testament. You can't go earlier than that. So the very essential gospel that they were preaching was the gospel of a Savior who takes, by virtue of his sacrifice, takes himself as a representative into the presence of God and opens that way forever.

So coming back to Hebrews, when we get at last to the application of those many chapters, look at chapter 10, verse 19, I'm sure you know it well, and if you don't, you ought, because this is the climax of the whole letter, and it's so wonderful, really.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart, and so on.

[17:07] Let us draw near. And you've got that same drawing here, don't you, in chapter 12. Just turn over the page. I love the contrast, don't you, in chapter 12, verse 18.

You have not drawn near to the mountain that can be touched that is burning with fire and darkness. That is, in the Old Testament, terrifying. No animal allowed near, gloom, storm, trumpet blast.

But, verse 22, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands of angels. We really ought to say that at the beginning of our meeting. It's all great. When we started, when Paul stood here, he might easily have said to us these words, because they're true. Because of that sacrifice, we have come to thousands of angels in Joyful Assembly.

You can't see them, but they're there. We've come to the church of the firstborn. We've come to God, the judge of all. We've come to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[18:14] Now, why do you think that he spends so much time on this in this letter? You don't find it anywhere else in the New Testament, though, of course, the message of the Gospel is the same.

Well, I think that verse 8 has the clue within it. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and for ever. And once you see those words for ever, the Bible student knows exactly what he's talking about.

Because that is the theme of those great chapters in the middle of Hebrews about the high priest who is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek forever. Chapter 7, seven times, six, seven times, the same phrase is used.

So, why does he tell us that our priest is a priest for ever? Well, of course, he's telling us because we don't need any more priests. Now, there's some controversy as to what verse 9 means.

I want to tell you what I think it may mean and possibly does mean. Hebrews was not written to Jews. It was written to Christians and has been read by Christians for 2,000 years.

[19:22] But, in the first century there were many Jewish Christians. And I think that many of these Jews towards the third quarter of the first century when people are getting discouraged were finding it so difficult to live by faith in an invisible Lord and an unknown future.

It was also apparently empty and you just had to believe. But how many supports they had, hadn't they, in their time as Jews?

They had endless supports. The priest, the sacrifice, the temple, the altar, and so on. And I think probably these Jewish Christians were saying we need something that we can see, something to support us, something to give us confidence about these great truths.

Why I think that is because throughout this letter to the Hebrews you have a constant word being almost shouted out.

We have a great high priest. Again and again and again. You follow it through. It's worth reading right through the letter once in half an hour and counting the number of times he says, he almost shouts it out.

[20:38] We have a great high priest. And there you have it in verse 10, don't you? We have an altar. Why is he saying this?

Well he's saying be assured we have a high priest, we have an altar. You cannot see these things but the cross of Christ was the altar and the high priest in heaven is caring for you.

The God man. Once a year the churches in the city have an open Sunday and it's amazing the number of tourists who come in to see the churches and we're encouraged to tell them what goes on in the churches.

And there's a I mustn't call him a lad because I think he's probably getting on to 45. A young man on the staff called Charlie who is absolutely brilliant at doing this.

And one of the first questions that's asked in question time what Charlie does is to take them around the building and preach the gospel through the various parts of the building. And after he's finished his talk the first question is nearly always this where's the altar?

[21 : 53] And what a wonderful opportunity for explaining Hebrews 13. We have an altar. The way is open. It's a majestic statement isn't it?

So these are words of enormous confidence to these young Jewish Christians that in Christ we have a high priest who has made that permanent and full and perfect sacrifice and is still today with us and we won't read those wonderful chapters at the beginning of Hebrews where we're told that he cares for us and has mercy upon us and draws near to us.

We don't often hear that do we? We hear Christ as a friend a saviour a lord but it's so important to see him too as a priest. So leadership demands a ministry of truth that enables us to walk by faith in an invisible lord and a far distant future.

Well I think that's enough probably for this evening. I'll finish by telling you what my last point was in the Barberkin ten days ago.

This leadership was committed to me at St. Helen's Church in Bishopsgate 38 well for no not 38 years ago in 1961 and I can't do the mathematics but some of you can do it it's a long time ago isn't it?

[23 : 39] And it seems to me that I was given the responsibility of doing these two things week by week and if I was not to be a humbug it meant that first if I was to speak the word of God I'd got to listen and I think that's one of the great privileges of the pastor or the teacher the leader in any part of the church that they cannot speak until they have listened and it's one of the ways in which God keeps us I think and secondly if I was not to be a humbug I had to watch myself verse 17 if I was to watch over others so that actually being a church leader is a very great privilege because you are bound to listen and bound to watch over yourself if you're to do your job and so in the Bible can I finish by giving three of the great warnings of Hebrews which I think the

Christian leader has to take apart just as much as anybody else first not to be ashamed many many times in this letter we're told of the disgrace there is in believing the words of Christ and I can only speak for the Church of England in saying that many gifted young men who were evangelical in their origins who were thoroughly converted people who knew the word of God before very long were tempted to be ashamed of where they stood over against the liberalism and the worldliness of the Church and so I tried to make an appeal in the Bible and do pray about this to those who are particularly gifted I thought to myself there are 1500 Church leaders and amongst them there will be some peculiarly gifted in mind personality gift and they who will be tempted to be ashamed they whom

Satan will try to move away in order that they might find popularity preferment promotion influence whatever you like to call it it's a warning for all of us of course but it's especially a warning for Christian leaders the second warning that I chose to give to those men ancient leaders who are there is not to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness it's a strong strong message in Hebrews it applies to all of you of course but in a very powerful way it applies to the minister because on those very basic things like marriage verse 4 money verse 5 well I'm bound to say because of my age that I look back and I can see quite a number of men who lost their ministry because of sin in marriage and money matters and the the importance of this as I tried to say to them that evening was that for the minister you only need one strike and you're out a man can lose his ministry if he's hardened by sin's deceitfulness in these matters and the third warning

I gave them that evening was not only to be unashamed but not only to be careful about sin's deceitfulness but to be careful in the face of increasing persecution not to shrink back if you read Hebrews 10 and we haven't time to do that now it's very very strong about not throwing everything away because of the bitter opposition you face I think those three applications apply to you they apply to all our church leaders in this country today I think there's a tremendous pressure on our leaders especially perhaps in the established church to be ashamed of the gospel to be ashamed of the standards of sex and marriage to shrink back from the constant secular sniping that goes on today so this letter has a great deal to say to us the work of the leaders is of unique importance isn't it to speak the word of God and to look after the flock of God but the warnings are equally great and I pray that many of those leaders there and leaders perhaps that you know and pray for and ought

to pray for may be kept from shame and sin and shrinking back in the light of so much opposition
let's pray