

Hebrews 13:1-16

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[0 : 00] To sit and open your Bibles to Hebrews 13. Hebrews 13, we've finished up a series in Philippians. So we'll get into a new series then.

And so I was preparing this evening a sermon, which let me give you a little trailer for it. It's going to be on verse 17 about obeying your leaders, about what is the duty of a church family to the church elders, to their leaders.

And as I was looking at earlier on in the week, I just saw really afresh the promise of verse 5. Is it? I'm halfway through verse 5 and start at verse 6.

They're really wonderful words, aren't they? For he has said, or literally he himself has said, speaking about God, I will never leave you or forsake you.

So we can confidently say this morning as to people of God, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. And what can man do to me? They are the kind of verses, aren't they, that you can build your life on.

[1 : 32] They are the kind of verses that can get you through the darkest of days. In many ways, those verses are the foundation of how you live out the Christian life.

Certainly how you serve his church. We should build our lives, we should build our church on this fact that God is pledged to be with his people.

And he covenants with them. He makes a solemn vow that he will never leave them, nor will he forsake them. There are times in our lives, aren't there, when God, I think, delights to come to us. And it's as if he pledges himself to us all over again. And during those times, we need to respond freshly and confidently to God.

And we need to say to him those words in verse 6. The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? I will not be afraid. It's an anchor, isn't it, this verse, that gives you hope this morning.

[2 : 44] For all your days, no matter how many God may give you. There's two backgrounds that you need to know. One is the general background in the epistle to the Hebrews.

These Christians, these Hebrew Christians, you might know the book, and you might realize they were discouraged people. They were people under pressure.

They were going through difficult and hard times. They'd been assaulted by the devil in all sorts of ways. And the danger was that they drifted from God.

And they drifted from righteousness, right living, and they drifted from truth. You can see that in verse 7, can't you? Sorry, in verse 9.

He says to them, do not be led away. Do not drift away by diverse and strange teachings. They were tending to drift away from righteousness.

[3 : 43] And so he has to say to them, God will judge, won't he? He will deal with the immoral and adulterous person. Keep your life free from the love of money. And so there's the general background.

This sense of weakness and incapacity and insufficiency that these people had. They're in the middle of a period where it was so tempting to drift away from God.

And the particular background is the immediate warning you find surrounding these verses. Can you see it? It's this warning against ambitions and striving and affections being set on the wrong things.

So he says to them, he says, keep your life free from the love of money. He appeals to them, don't love money.

It's a warning against covetousness, that tenth commandment. It's a broader warning than that, isn't it? About our ambitions and our affections. Don't set them on the wrong thing.

[4 : 45] Don't put your confidence and hope for security in things or people other than God. And there are times, aren't there, when you and I need to be freshly warned against that kind of thing.

Where we need to be armed against the ever-present tendency to put our ambitions and our affections in the wrong places. To put our confidence and our ambitions somewhere else than in God.

And to do that secretly. So that on the surface, our real confidence and our real ambition and our real affection is centered on him.

But beneath the surface, how easy it is to find that we're drifting. Drifting never begins publicly, does it?

And drifting spiritually always begins privately. And secretly. In the hidden areas of our lives. And so as we come to these verses, I hope that we're encouraged and exhorted from God.

[5 : 58] From this particular word. Can you see it again? I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

And because of that, we can confidently say, the Lord is my help, but I'll not be afraid. I want to ask three questions.

The longest section is the answer to the first one. The first question is, what is it that God is pledging to us? Us, his people. And secondly, how can we be sure of what he's pledging? And the third thing is, what difference it will make in our lives? So the first point, what is God pledging to his people? What is God guaranteeing in this verse? When he says, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

It's almost too obvious, isn't it? It's too obvious. What's he promising? He's promising his presence. He is guaranteeing his abiding presence with his people.

That's precisely where God wants us to focus our attention upon. Because if God's people were to realize that, that is the key to everything in the Christian life.

[7 : 03] That's why this promise is repeated again and again and again in the Bible. I don't know if you picked that up. He says, doesn't it, where I have said, where he has said it.

And so as you read this verse, you think, well, where has he said it? Where has he said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you? And the answer is, he said it again and again and again in the Bible. Because it's the secret of everything for God's people at every stage of their lives. I will not leave you, nor forsake you. And so therefore, we may confidently say, the Lord is my helper.

And so you find God saying it in Genesis 28. He goes to Jacob. And he says to Jacob, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. Or you go to Matthew 28. Where the risen Jesus speaks to his disciples.

And he says, do you remember? I am with you to the end of the age. And throughout the whole of the Bible, God is constantly affirming to his people. I am with you. That's one of the most famous occasions.

[8 : 09] It's when Moses is afraid. And he's apprehensive about what God is calling him to do. And God says to him in Exodus 33. He says, my presence will go with you.

And Moses responds. He's begun to understand what this means. And he says, if your presence will not go with us, God, we will not go. And what Moses is saying, and what God is teaching his people here, and all the way through the Bible, is that everything that you as a believer in God need is found in God.

And in what God is to him. And it's because we've either not grasped that, or because deep down in our hearts we've not believed it.

We act. And we find ourselves with our ambitions elsewhere. Our help and our security elsewhere, somewhere else.

And our whole life taking a different shape from the shape that God intends it to. I say to you this morning, God knows how little we've really taken it in.

[9 : 21] That everything the believer needs in this world is found in God. And all that God is to him. And that's what God is pressing upon you this morning.

It's not, you'll notice, in his gifts. It's not in his blessings. That you find all that you need.

It's in God. It's in God you are able to call upon the things that you need. And he will provide you with them. The believer's sufficiency is in God.

And in what he is in himself to us. And that's why true contentment and true fulfillment always escape the Christian who's secretly living with something else at the center of their life other than God.

And you could give examples of that in your own life and I could in mine. We've been created and we've been redeemed in such a way that underscores this truth that there is fullness that precisely matches the empty human heart.

[10:32] In God. There's a fullness in God that precisely answers every ache and every cry that's in your heart. The answer to your issues and your concerns and your anxieties is found in him.

And the reason why contentment and fulfillment escape us so often and frustration and a kind of spirit of grumbling and discontentment fill our hearts is that we've put our affections somewhere else other than in God.

You know the hymn, O Jesus, joy of loving hearts, thou faint of life, thou light of men. From fullest bliss that earth imparts we turn unfilled to you again.

We turn unfilled to you again. It's the presence of God which God pledges to the believer. You get it in the Psalms.

Do you remember David is in the wilderness? He's in an awful condition but it doesn't matter to him. He says, O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

[11:46] My flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there's no water. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food. And my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

When I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night. For you have been my help. And in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

You see what's happened in that Psalm is God has become everything to him. Now what are the implications for that? What is it that God is pledging to his people when he pledges them his presence?

I think we can get to it when we look at how he deals with different people in the Old Testament. So look with me at Genesis 28 in verse 15 when he comes to Jacob.

And God meets with Jacob at Bethel. And Jacob is in the midst of such distress and need. And God says to him, Genesis 28, 15, Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land.

[12:53] For I will not leave you until I've done what I promised you. There is, there isn't there? There's the guarantee of God's perseverance and persistence with his people.

And the purpose of Jacob's dream there at Bethel was to assure him that God would stick with him. That God would never give up on him.

And that's a remarkable thing, isn't it? Because God is saying to Jacob, who was the most difficult of characters, who wasn't a particularly lovable man, Jacob was a guy who was twisted in his own personality.

He was ambitious for himself. He was pretty dishonest in the way that he lived. And he really was a very frightened man as he considered the future. He's been trying to set his path in life himself. He'd been guiding his own steps. His own kind of future. And Jacob finds the past catching up with him. In the person of Esau.

[13:56] And he's a frightened man in Genesis 28. And God meets with him and God says to him, I will not leave you. My presence is going to be with you. Why? He says, I will not let you go until that which I've committed to you.

He's going to persist with Jacob. He's going to go on dealing with him. And through his own disobedience and twisting, God will bring him to the place where wounded and limping Jacob goes into a new beginning.

He's a prince with God. And God is there persisting with him. That is what God is guaranteeing. When he guarantees his presence.

We saw it in Philippians, didn't we? That he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And if you're anything like me, that's something that you greatly need to be assured of in your heart and life.

There are many of us here who are God's difficult people. We recognize, don't we, that God has got a thousand times right to give up on us.

[15:06] We know, if we're honest with ourselves, just how disobedient we've been, how fractious we are, how awkward we can be. And yet God comes to us this morning and what he says to you as you repent and trust in his son again, he says, I will not leave you.

There might be some of us who are here this morning in church and there have been times in our lives where we might have wished that God would stop with us. That he would finish with us. I was

preaching in Northern Ireland yesterday and I had spoken over the tea.

There was a guy who came up to me, lean, not an ounce of fat on him, covered in tattoos. He'd been a paratrooper. And when he spoke about the past, I thought this would be great.

He said to me that when he got into the army, he said, I never expected it to be so hard. The pressure I was under. He spoke about the times that he had fallen.

He says, I have shamed the name of my saviour. He said, I've been to places that I blush even to remember. He'd been brought up in a church in Northern Ireland and he'd gone far away from God.

[16:26] He said, I cried out that God would get off my back. And then he said, I'm here to tell you that I bless God that he pursued me into every corner of the world and he would not let me go.

Eight years ago, whenever that was, that God had begun something in him when he was far away and God had pursued him to the end. Second place these words occur is in the book of Joshua.

Joshua is a book, isn't it, of new beginnings and new challenges. Moses' mighty ministry is ended and Joshua is receiving a new challenge from God. And God comes to him and says, no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life.

Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. That's what he's assuring Joshua. He's saying this was the secret of Moses' ministry.

The secret of Moses, all his mighty works that God did through Moses, it wasn't about Moses. But God was with him.

[17:40] That's the secret. And God says to Joshua, you might feel yourself really weak and really inexperienced. And you might recognize all your insufficiencies and insecurities.

But I will be with you. Nothing else matters. And so you can be the poorest, neediest soul that other people might look at and write off.

But if God is with you, you can say with the apostle, can't you? If God be for us, who can be against us? And so what is our hope here in this church of serving God?

Our hope is that as we gather together in this place to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, to call on God's name, our hope is not in men. It's not in the gifts of people or different personalities.

Our hope is in God. That God is with us. That as we gather Sunday by Sunday, the morning and the evening to worship, that we would know his presence.

[18:41] And that if people are drawn in, if you invite people, if you're new here today, our prayer is that you will realize that God is amongst us. That's our desire. Don't they all, they've got a preacher here.

The thing that matters most is that God is in this place. And that they will bow down and worship. And so do you see the importance of this message?

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. He's covenanting his presence. The third place this verse occurs is in Nehemiah. And in Nehemiah 9, there's this remarkable prayer by Ezra.

And Ezra prays and he speaks about the unfaithfulness of God's people again and again. But he also speaks about the faithfulness of God. He tells us, he says, God, you did this for them.

You fulfilled this promise. You are righteous. You saw the affliction of our fathers. And you came down. But God's people, they turned against you. They murmured against you.

[19:43] They went away from you. They went after other gods. But you did not leave them. You did not forsake them. And even in the disciplining of God's people, God was pursuing them.

The point of the whole story is that when God pledges his presence, he pledges us a grace that is so amazing that our minds cannot contain it.

A grace that comes to us and says, even when we have forsaken him, he says to us, I will not forsake you. So God is pledging his presence.

How can you be sure about this? How can you be sure of this? That's the second question. There's two guarantees, I think. The first guarantee is that of God's words.

As it always is. But here more especially. Since I, for he had said, I will never leave you. I is expressed in the strongest negative.

[20:48] You'll kind of find it anywhere in the Bible. I don't know if you've thought about this. There's five negatives in verse five. That are in those verses.

No, I will never leave you. No, I will never, never forsake you. One of our hymns, how firm a foundation you saints of the Lord tries to put it in that verse, doesn't it?

It says, that soul or all hell should endeavor to shake. I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake. But can you see the significance of it?

So if I say to Claire, tomorrow night I'll be home at five. She may accept my word, my own cheek. But if I come to her and I say to her in the morning, now nothing, nothing will prevent me from being home at five o'clock.

No circumstance will stop me being home at five. No obstacle, no change of mind. There is nothing in heaven and on earth, darling, that will prevent me from being home at five o'clock.

[21 : 56] She'll think I've lost my mind. But can you see the negative underlines that? This is a sense that God is speaking.

He undergirds it by this negative that's repeated five times. I will never, never, never, never, never forsake you by any means.

And God piles up a language in this verse because he wants you to have reassurance. And he gives it to us. Our word, however emphasized, is unreliable, isn't it?

There are promises that you have made that you've not kept, the same as me. But God's promise has never, never been known to fail. He goes on, and you'll notice, not only to tell us that his word is our guarantee, but his very honor is bound up with his guarantee.

Look at halfway through verse five. There's kind of a little interesting phrase. It says, for he has said. Literally, it's he himself has said.

[23 : 07] And if we've read through the book of Hebrews, we will know Hebrews six tells us that God can swear by no one higher than himself.

And so when we want to swear in an acceptable way, we invoke something that is higher than ourselves. So we swear on God's name.

I swear on the Bible. People say, I swear on my children's life. They're seeking to swear by something that is higher than they are.

But Hebrews six is telling you that God can swear by nothing higher than he is. No one higher than him. His name is his oath because his honor is bound up by what he's saying.

He by himself hath sworn. I on his oath depend. Now the point is this. God has tied his honor to his covenant promises.

[24 : 13] And so behind this promise of I will never leave you nor forsake you is the character and the covenant of God. Find out what difference does this make.

There are two answers I think that come out of verses five and six of Hebrews 30. One is contentment in the present. So can you see it? Look at verse five. Keep your life from the love of money. And be content with what you have.

Because, why? For he has said, he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. That contentment there is particularly related to covetousness, grasping.

And false ambition and false affections. And the apostle is saying to you and I, he's saying, find your contentment in God. Make him your chief joy.

John of Philipians 3, two weeks ago, I have learned in whatever state I am to be content, he says. And it's an important confession, isn't it? Because we saw that it needs to be learned.

[25 : 18] And it's often a difficult school to go through. But to recognize that the one place we are going to find true contentment is when we have our heart set on God.

And so it's one of the basic lessons in life, isn't it? Be content with the things that you have.

Because he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

The other fruit of God's promise and God's presence will be confidence. Confidence about the future. And let me point out that this is a confidence that's based on faith and not on sight.

Because as I've talked this morning about the presence of God, the presence of God isn't visible.

The world doesn't see it.

Other people don't look on and see the presence of God. Like they did with the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. We don't have that.

[26 : 26] God's presence is an invisible presence. And Moses recognized that, didn't he? In Hebrews 11 he tells us that Moses endured. He kept on going.

How did Moses endure with the anger of Pharaoh breathing down his neck? The problems of leading miserable Israel. How did Moses endure? It tells us that he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

And that confidence is the confidence of faith. It's the confidence of faith. It's the confidence of faith. It's the confidence of faith. It's the confidence of faith. It's the confidence which says, even though everything in my life seems to be collapsing around me, yet God has said, I will never leave you.

And I will never forsake you. And we endure as seeing him who is invisible. And you might be tempted to think, isn't that placing your confidence in what is unreal?
Pretending to yourself that things are really other than they are. Are other than they really are. But of course what faith does is faith doesn't lead us out of the world of reality into the world of unreality.
[27 : 37] Faith opens up to you and I the real world. And so that when a person is trusting in something else other than the living God, it's he or she who is living in the world of unreality.
Because the world of reality is the world where God is at the center. It's why Elisha cries, doesn't he, for his young servant.
Do you remember Elisha had a young servant who was afraid. And Elisha prayed, Lord, open the young man's eyes. And the Lord opened the young man's eyes and he saw the hosts and the armies of God.
Round about him. And he said, he who is with us is greater than he who is against us. And that is the confidence that God means you to have.
As we go into this week, the confidence that enables us to say, because the Lord is with us, the Lord is my helper. Of whom shall I be afraid?
[28 : 46] So let me talk to the children for a moment. As you kind of go into this week, and maybe you've got to go to school, maybe you've got things this week that you find really difficult. Do you realize that as you trust God, God is with you.
And he will not leave you. He will not forsake you. And because of that, you can say, well, the Lord is my helper. I won't be afraid. What can man do to me?
To the man here facing temptation. Struggling and battling with it. To practice the presence of God. To say today, I'm doing this week.
God will never leave me. He'll never forsake me. He is my helper. And so, I don't need fear. What can man do to me?
To the moment bound up with frustration and discontentment. To recognize that the greatest thing you need, you already have.
[29 : 56] He is with you. He can be your helper. He is your helper. And so, you need not fear. And so, if God be for us, and if God be with us, who can stand against us?
May God give us this great confidence this week. Let's pray together. Amen.