

**Reading:** Hebrews 13v1-9

**Theme:** Delighting in the grace of our awesome God.

Again, we are looking at the passage we read to help us mark the church's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we will look at v7-9. Bible scholars consider that a new paragraph begins at v7 to v17 - as it begins and ends with references to the church leaders and they say that all in that paragraph is related to the idea of the relationship of believers to the leaders of their congregation. They say such things, but do not develop such or show its links. I'm not going to open up on such, except to say these hurting believers were to recognise the value of their leaders, so both would be encouraged and not just coldly listen to them. This highlights the need of the love and prayers of the congregation for those in positions of leadership and authority amongst them. In the trying and testing times the church was facing, the most natural targets would be the church leaders to be put under pressure by authorities and probably those in the congregation to launch personal attacks against them. Thankfully the anonymous writer holds these ones up as those to be imitated.

Pray for the church officers here at DEC or your church, so that they would not only be people of the word, but always examples of how to live and even how to suffer - so they would be courageous, faithful in leading and caring for the Lord's flock. From v7-9 I want us to note 3 things:

### **1. Remember your leaders. (v7)**

This could well be a request and prayer from not only the church officers here, but of every church! These Hebrew Christians are told to continually remember their leaders, those who have the oversight for them. These leaders are mentioned again in v17 but the tenses in these 2 verses are different and the NASB picks up on the force of the tense in v7 "*Remember those who **led** you, who spoke the word of God to you*"; while in v17 it is a present leading. They were to look back, as well as look at the present as they went

into the uncertain future. These believers were reminded of the ongoing outworking of their worship in their lives and, in the context of help and encouragement from the Lord, they are called on to remember those who **had** led them and then later (v17) those who **are** leading them at that time. Here is right lesson for ourselves as we celebrate the church's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we are going through uncertain times within our nation.

A church is not a free for all. Yes, all believers are equal in worth, value and honour. We are to regard each other highly, even better than ourselves, but God has given to some the honour, privilege, responsibility and gifts to lead, shepherd and care for a local group of Christians. At any time in the life of any established church, there will be those who **have led** and cared for us; those who **are** leading and caring for us and those who the Lord **will be** equipping to lead and care for us in the future. The writer seems to be drawing attention to those who had led these believers, who first spoke and taught the word of God to them. Possibly these ones had come and gone geographically, may have died or even been martyred. The writer may be presenting recent and known examples of faith and faithful ones to these Hebrew believers.

Such ones are held up as examples - not the final or only examples, for no man or woman is perfect. Our ultimate example is Jesus and we are to fix our eyes on Him (12:1-3). Yet these overseers are presented as good ones to imitate because they served, followed Christ and their faith is held up as that which these Hebrew Christians were to imitate (the Greek = mimic, copy).

In our own lives, as well as throughout the 40 years DEC has been in existence, we can think of men and women of God – leaders or not, who have been examples and great helps to us. While we do not venerate them, we should greatly appreciate and value them

and are to imitate, mimic their faithful ways and lives as they served our Saviour and Lord.

Those of us who have the privilege being teachers, or will become leaders and teachers in the church, or any church, are not only to teach of God clearly, relevantly and faithfully, but we are to be, as Peter says in 1 Peter 5:3 “*examples to the flock*”. We are to be hearers, teachers and **doers** of God’s word. We are to be mentors, and not tormentors to those we serve. This is to be done out of love for our Saviour and love for our brothers and sisters.

Remembering former leaders, their teaching and example, was to enable these hurting and struggling Hebrew Christians to keep on going on as those leaders faithfully did. Edgar Andrews in his book on Hebrews (in the Welwyn Series) says “*Sadly, many of us fail this challenge to imitate our leaders. We expect **them** to be consistent, dependable, patient, faithful and spiritual men. But we do not see any need to match this behaviour ourselves. A small but all-too-common example is this - as church members will be shocked if our pastor failed to turn up to lead a service, but think nothing of absenting ourselves without notice for less-than-convincing reasons. What is the problem? It arises when we see ourselves as mere adherents rather than organic members of the body of Christ. Lacking the gifts and calling of ministers and elders, we fail to see that perhaps our appointed function in the body include simply being there when the church gathers, to encourage our leaders and our brethren (c.f. 10:25).*” Are we just takers from our church’s life or are we willing to be givers of our time and energy in serving others?

If anyone feels got at, or think it was aimed at them (*though it was not*), then in love and gentleness I say “*Good!*” Come and encourage your leaders, your brothers and sisters and make use of the precious times of meeting together - on Zoom in this present

crisis, but in the church building when we are able to get back there and restrictions be eased. For the time being, online meetings are proving a great source of blessing to so many in the church. I would encourage us all to come and feed on God's word and share fellowship as often as we can in these meetings. As we use the means of grace online, or physically when possible, so the Lord may see you can be trusted to serve Him in being an example or a leader in some sphere of service. Now see:

## **2. Remember your Saviour. (v8)**

Here is one of the better-known verses from this letter and it is often quoted, but usually out of context! It is usually quoted to show the unchanging nature and character of the Lord Jesus, but the exact context here is not a teaching section on the immutability of Christ, but of remembering past leaders and mimicking, imitating, copying them. Yes, the verse does focus us on the fact that the Lord Jesus is unchanging, but it is linked to the outcome (v7) or end of their leaders lives i.e. manner of life.

The word end or outcome is used only twice in NT - it means "*going up out of*" - like getting out of a boat onto a harbourside. The outcome of the lives of such leaders as they went out of life is that they faithfully declared the wonder of their Saviour and declared v8. These leaders had fixed their eyes on Jesus and run their race with their eyes fixed upon Him alone. He is unchangeable and so their example was to cause these Hebrew Christians to do the same, remembering it was not new ideas, notions, changing fads or styles, but that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. He is the author and finisher of their and our faith. This standard and object of faith has not changed, faded or become out-of-date - so we are to keep on following Him who is unchanging and will never let us down.

This amazing statement in v8 is not so much a reference to His eternal sonship, as to His saving and keeping work and ministry. The reformer John Calvin wrote *“It is clear that the apostle is not discussing the eternal being of Christ but the knowledge of Him which flourished among believers in every age and which was the lasting foundation of the church.”* In other words, **their** Lord and Saviour is **our** Lord and Saviour. As He was able to keep and help them, so to He is able to keep and help us, you and me now in the situations of life we are in. Matthew Henry wrote a good section on this and says that because Jesus *“ever lives, and is ever the same, - they should be steadfast and immovable... and should remember that Christ ever lives to observe and reward their faithful adherence to His truths... Christ is the same in the OT day, in the gospel day, and will be so to His people forever.”*

Jesus Christ is the same **yesterday** - yes in OT times, early gospel era, He was the Saviour and Sustainer of His people in OT through the OT covenant and its means. It is Jesus who gave the OT sacrifices and means of grace their effective power - they all looked forward, anticipated, pictured and drew down their efficacy, their effectiveness from Him.

Jesus Christ is the same **today**. It is only by Him that anyone can be saved and go to heaven. There is no other name given among mankind whereby we must be saved. He is the exclusive Saviour and He is able to save any and all who call on Him as their only hope of salvation. Have you done that and have trusted Jesus as your Saviour? It is only Christ alone who can save us and keep us. When we trust Him, His work of accomplished salvation is applied to us and it is a wonderful, wonderful day in our eternal well-being when that happens as we trust Jesus as our Saviour. Yet even now today He is ever living as our Saviour and is making intercession for and keeping us. We are to live conscious of His love, care and work for us which is ours even **today**.

If you are a Christian, have you spent time with the Lord Jesus and been aware of His love and care today? Or told Him of your love for Him today? We are aware of and show love to those we love; but shouldn't we delight in, know and show love to Him who is **THE Lover** of our souls and is altogether lovely? He is even today, the God-man, the Saviour, the Intercessor, our great High Priest, our Prophet and our King. Do you know and love Him?

Yet, as He is and was, so He will ever be - He is the **same forever**. He will never die, age, grow tired, fail even once to care for all His people, will always pray and watch over us. He will never ever cease to safely bring all the Father has given Him to glory. Christ's work and Person is not only sufficient for time, but for eternity. If a million, billion eternities were to come and go (!), He would not change or diminish in His power to save and keep His people. He fills our view as to His faithfulness, love and sufficiency - whether we look back, forward or around us now! He has not changed one bit in the 40 years this church has been in existence and He has always been faithful to Himself and to His people. He will not let us down - ever.

This is the one the Hebrew leaders had been fixed on and kept faithful to. This is the one they and we are urged to fix our eyes upon and to realise He is worth going after, serving and even hurting and losing out on things for.

### **3. Remember stabilising grace. (v9)**

The writer sounded a warning to this group of believers - they and we had to watch out, else they and we could be caught out and our view of Christ and His sufficiency be lost. They were and we still are attacked and influenced by wrong teachings. In their case it seemed to involve some notions of ceremonial foods – eat this or that, or do not eat this or that - for such was said to give you an

added edge or success or standing in spiritual things. They were told such things as these were needed and it was not a case of Jesus only, but a case of Jesus plus foods, ceremonies etc.

Those teaching were called “*diverse and strange*”. Sadly, diverse, all kinds, varied and strange teachings and doctrines still occur. Now they’re sensationalised, glamorised, pushed and published as the latest discovery of some research by someone, as the latest fix for our spiritual life, or for our church growth. All these are packed and marketed with great media appeal and to as big an audience as possible. It may be about continuous or continuing revelation - the Bible is not enough and so modern prophets, inspired words are needed, given and decreed! Others take great biblical terms and reinvent them and invest them with meanings they never had.

The safest way for us all, is to go back to the word of God and check anything and everything out according to its clear teaching. We are to build our lives on the firm foundation of His word and then will be unshakeable as these teachings blow across our lives. We use the term “evangelical” for our church in the historical sense of it - meaning based on the Bible - we accept and believe the Bible is the word of God through and through.

We are to beware of anything that will say, be it ever so subtly or openly that we need “*Christ plus...*” or “*the word of God plus...*” We are to realise that with such an unchangeable Saviour, that He and His grace are totally still and ever sufficient.

God’s grace speaks of a sufficiency that is all of God. It means our Christian life is inward and spiritual and not dependent upon outward rituals, observances, foods etc. It is an internal matter of the heart and soul. Yes, evidences of that are shown in our living to please God, but we do not ever depend on these works as of any

merit, but only as an outworking and evidence of God's grace in us.

Grace is to strengthen, establish our hearts. The struggling, doubting, hurting, faithful Hebrew Christians are told not to look at things such as foods or ceremonies, but to God's grace to establish, strengthen and stabilise their hearts. We are not only saved by grace, but we are kept and strengthened by grace and grace focuses us on our unchangeable Saviour Jesus (v8).

God's grace is an amazing thing and it will strengthen, establish and stabilise our hearts and our lives and bring us to all Jesus is and has done. He is the eternally unchanging One and is and will be sufficient for us and for everyone who trust in Him. This is the Saviour we live for in our confusing times and we want to point men and women, boys and girls to Him as individuals and as a church. We do so even in this Covid crisis time, as well as when the time will come when we can get back to something like normal.

It is great to know that with this One as our Saviour and Lord, we are safe for all time and we and our church are in His hands and plans. I pray we would all know His nearness and keeping in our lives in all that He leads us through and we declare His glory in all things.