

Living for the Kingdom

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- [0 : 0 0] I wonder whether you've come across books with long titles. They're not very common, are they? Because no one remembers them. But from time to time, you do see the odd one.
- Normally they're done for comic effect. So there's this children's book, some of you might know, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.
- Lauren, do you know this book? Yes? Yeah. Okay. And then there's this one. This one is an adult book. It's The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of a Window and Disappeared. Anyone read that one?
- Ah, very good. I need to ask you what it's about after this. But sometimes titles are long, and over time people shorten them so that they become memorable.
- So here's a little trivia question for some of you. Who knows the full title of Charles Darwin's book, The Origin of the Species? Anyone? Put up your hand.
- [1 : 0 7] Really? No one? Okay. I thought I'd be giving away free chocolate. Anyway, the answer is The Origin of Species by Natural Selection or the Preservation of the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.
- It sort of summarizes his thesis, I think, from that book. Not that whether you agree with it or not, that's beside the point. But I was tempted to do a Charles Darwin tonight with my title.
- I ended up having Living for the Kingdom, so it would fit on the slides and the sermon outline and all that. But if you look at the first point or the first sentence in the sermon outline, you'll see the title, I Really Wanted.
- If I had a choice, the title would have been Practical Ways to Live for the Unshakeable Kingdom as God's Pilgrim People or Learning to Worship God Acceptably as We Head to God's Final Rest with Jesus as Our Great Shepherd.
- That would have been my title because that's really just the summary of the main idea of the sermon. But I had to settle for Living for the Kingdom.
- [2 : 1 6] But what we've seen so far from the letter is that the writer has been persuading his readers not to give up the Christian faith.
- And having done that, he now spends the last chapter showing them practical ways to live for the Unshakeable Kingdom as God's Pilgrim People or to learn to worship God acceptably as we head to God's final rest with Jesus as Our Great Shepherd.
- So last week in verse 28, they were told that they were receiving God's Unshakeable Kingdom, right? If you just have a quick look there. Now this week, he explains to them how to live in this kingdom.
- Last week in that same verse, verse 28, he said that the right response is to be thankful and worship God with reverence and awe. And so now he teaches them how in practical ways to do that.

And so the emphasis tonight is really on application. And that's why I've given you the pens. And I'm going to give you some time to think of and write down some application that come up from the passage.

[3 : 19] And remember that as we do that, we're not simply doing that as individuals, but we want to do that as God's people as well, corporately helping one another to finish this race, to enter God's final rest.

So let's begin then in verse 1, where we are exalted to live for the kingdom, firstly by loving others. So verse 1 says, keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

Now, this is a very general command. And I think that's done on purpose because it's encouraging us not to limit loving to say a specific checklist, and then you've done that, you've loved others.

Rather, it wants us to make love or the act of loving as broad as possible. It's like some of the other general commands we have in the Bible, like Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 18, which I've got on the screen, love your neighbor as yourself.

Or Jesus' own command in Luke chapter 6 and verse 31, do unto others what you would have them do to you. Each of these prompts us to have an expansive view of love, not to limit who we love, and not to narrowly think about only specific things to do to others.

[4 : 41] Rather, we are to love everyone as much as possible, as much as we would love ourselves. Now, here the writer acknowledges that they're already doing it.

That's why they have the exaltation to keep at it. But he then also urges them to show hospitality to strangers. And the Greek word there for hospitality is actually philia, xenos, which I've got on the slide there.

Philia, as many of you will know, is love. And then xenos actually means outsider, from which the word xenophobic, or fear of outsiders, come from. So really, those two commands are paired.

Love your brothers and sisters, and don't forget to love outsiders too. And here perhaps he's appealing to their own experience. So remember, these people had been persecuted for their faith, and perhaps made to feel like outsiders, even though they were Jews being persecuted by other Jews.

And so they were outsiders until Jesus came and loved them. Not until, but because Jesus came and loved them. And even though he's greater than all of us, Jesus actually welcomes us, doesn't he?

[5 : 53] It says in chapter 2 of Hebrews that he was not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. So we're not by nature his brothers and sisters, and yet because of his love for us, he welcomes us and calls us his brothers and sisters.

So further in verse 3, he does the same thing then, by urging them to remember those in prison, those mistreated for their faith. Again, these are Christians that are ostracized, perhaps robbed of their safety and sense of belonging.

And so they felt like outsiders as well. But the writer urges them to remember to extend love that's in the community of the brothers and sisters that were in the church to those outside, whether they're strangers or whether they're prisoners.

Treat them as though they were part of the community. Now let's think about our own church. I can see, just thinking back, I can see many examples of love in our own church.

I know that for some of you who are younger, you don't have homes, so you can't really open your homes to show hospitality. But I see other forms of love where you've helped people by giving lifts so that they can come to church, for example, or you're cooking meals or baking cupcakes, which I think William has done today for others.

[7 : 16] So thank you. And then when newcomers come and visit our church, I've seen you welcome them. Often I would go over to greet someone after church only to already see that someone has already got that before me.

These are great things and I'm sure you can think of more examples of loving, loving brothers and sisters, loving strangers. But here's a couple more for you to consider before I get you to put something down for your own application.

First of all, think about the times when perhaps you're being called to stick up for other Christians at work or school. They're being picked on for their faith in Jesus.

What do we do? Do we stand up with them, come to their aid? Or, you know, do we try and keep our heads down just so that we don't get it too? Well, this verse exhorts us to stand with them.

So that's one example. Secondly, what about the support that we give to the persecuted church? Are they regularly in our prayers? I make it a point as I send out the weekly newsletters each week to have them on our prayer list from time to time.

[8 : 30] And so I want to encourage you to pray for them, perhaps in your personal quiet time or perhaps as growth groups. And also think about helping them financially. So if you go on the internet, you could search organizations like Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs or the Barnabas Fund.

And you'll be able to then pray more intelligently for them because they have prayer points and stories and also an opportunity to help them financially. Anyway, so that's two that I've thought of but I'll leave you now to have a minute or so to just think over and write down something you might apply from these three verses.

And try and be specific if you can rather than general. Okay, just a minute or so. Okay, let's move on. Now actually, before I do, I just want you to know this, that little writer in verse 2 as well.

There we're told that some who show hospitality to strangers have welcomed angels without knowing it. That is, they've actually sought to be a blessing to others but what's happened instead is that they've been blessed themselves because angels are God's messengers.

They are the ones that carry God's blessings with them. Now, whether these are literally angels or simply people who somehow blessed them back, I don't know. But the encouragement is this, that often when we think about loving strangers, it's sort of like we do it not knowing whether there's anything in it for us, is it?

[10 : 02] But we're encouraged to love even those we don't know because we have a generous God and you never know. A generous God tends to meet our needs through those we least expect from.

God is so generous that even from strangers, He would use them to bless us as well. And so that's an encouragement for us to keep doing it even though we may not know or see the benefit of it.

Okay, let's move on to the next section which is verses 4 to 6. Here we are asked to live for the kingdom by shunning immorality. So it's verse 4 to 6.

Now, recall that by being in this kingdom over the last few chapters, we have confidence to approach God in the most holy place. And we can only do that because we're being made holy by Jesus' blood.

But that also means that because Jesus has made us holy, we're called to live holy lives as well. And we do that by shunning immorality. Now, there's a lot of areas of immorality, but two of them are being mentioned here.

[11 : 10] Probably the two more important ones. First, there's sexual immorality. And here, Esau's example, remember from chapter 12, should still be fresh in our minds.

Remember how Esau forfeited his inheritance for a cheap bowl of lentil soup. It's like giving away your Touareg mansion for a McDonald's Happy Meal and without even getting that free toy.

That's the contrast, isn't it? But that's what immorality does. We forfeit our eternal inheritance just to satisfy our desires now for a moment.

Now here, sexual immorality is defined as pursuing sexual desires outside the sanctity of marriage. Marriage, as the Bible defines it, is an exclusive lifelong commitment between a man and a woman.

Any relationship of a sexual nature outside this is considered sexual immorality. And so, verse 4, the command is for marriage to be honored by all.

[12 : 17] That is, by those who are married as well as those who aren't. If you're married, then you are to be faithful to your husband or wife. Keep the marriage bid pure.

That is, don't sleep with anyone but your spouse. But if you're not married, then you also have a duty to honor all marriages and not come between those who are married.

So, don't flirt with someone who is married. Don't organize a trip away where your married friend is tempted to be unfaithful. Don't encourage your friend to complain about their spouse.

in a malicious way. Or gossip about the troubles that others may be having in their marriage. That is, to honor marriage.

That is, to want each and every marriage to continue to thrive. Instead, pray for married couples. Help them to love and be faithful to each other.

[13 : 16] And, now I know that for some of us who are not married, this can be a challenge because you struggle with strong feelings and desires which you cannot express. Some of you may even be struggling with same-sex attraction.

And, you want to be faithful but this discipline is hard. Well, if that's how you feel and that's what you're going through, then please know that God understands what you're going through.

He will give us the strength to persevere. Yes, He asks us to flee sexual immorality but He will strengthen us to do that.

And, if we do slip up, then please also know that God is a forgiving God and that if we come to Him in sincere repentance, then God doesn't reject our failure. No, He will forgive us and welcome back, welcome us back again into His kingdom.

Instead, if we read verse 4, the warning of judgment is for those who persist in adultery and sexual immorality.

[14 : 27] They are the adulterers who fail to repent. That's what that verse is saying. So, here's my encouragement. Don't throw away your eternal riches for a momentary pleasure in this life.

It's just not worth it. Now, related to sexual immorality is the sin of greed and it's called in verse 5, the love of money. So, verse 5 says, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

Now, there are many reasons that tempt us to love money but key among them, I think, for most people, is the fear of not having enough. Again, this could have been the fear of the original readers.

We've read earlier that they've had their property confiscated. They've perhaps got their livelihood threatened. And so, for them, if the opportunity to get rich came along, it'd be tempting to take it, wouldn't it?

After all, given all the troubles they've gone through, what is wrong with a bit of financial security? And for us, that's probably our temptation as well, isn't it?

[15 : 40] Perhaps we want to keep up with the lifestyle of others at work or school. We've seen how, you know, house prices keep going up and up and we start getting anxious that perhaps we wouldn't have enough.

And so, we succumb to that temptation to perhaps chase the promotions for money, to have a flutter with the pokies or whatever, or take on more debt than we can afford. But aside from the risk of getting into financial trouble, doing that also has serious spiritual consequences.

Because when we do that, what we do is that we take our eyes off God, off trusting in Him, and we start to look to money to give us what only God can provide.

And that's why the writer immediately goes on to that promise from God, never will I forsake you, never will I leave you. We don't need to love money because God has promised that He will provide.

This quote, incidentally, comes from Deuteronomy just before Joshua was about to enter the land. And in some ways, that's analogous to our situation and the situation of the readers because as Christians, we too are near our final rest.

[16 : 50] God has already saved us from slavery, slavery to sin. And so, we can be confident that if God has given us His Son, then how much more will He ensure that we get to our final rest?

How much more can we be confident that He will not forsake us, that He will provide for our every need? Now, that doesn't mean that we don't have to plan financially or be wise stewards.

But not loving money means we don't allow money to dictate our choices. We don't allow it to cause us to be consumed by worry. Instead, whenever we are overcome with anxiety or circumstances in life throw us by surprise, then we're given verse 6 as a way to respond.

We say to ourselves with confidence, the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? And I think this actually is a verse worth memorizing.

We can commit it to memory so that if ever we need it and we're out and about in times of need, we can actually say it back to ourselves.

[18 : 03] If ever we find ourselves anxious, say to ourselves, the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? All right, let's pause again and this time I'll give you a chance to write something down to apply this second section of the passage.

So how can you guard against sexual immorality if you're married? What can you do to remain faithful? And what are some of the areas which tempt you to love money? Perhaps you've got one or two things you can write down and then put into practice.

All right, maybe half a minute or so this time. Okay, now in our third section let's move on.

The exaltation now here is to live for the kingdom by following our leaders or imitating and submitting to them. There's a sandwich happening here because the instruction about leaders if you look down the passage is both in verses 7 and 8 and then in 17 again and then in between we have some teaching on true worship.

So let's deal with the leaders bit first. In verse 7 we are exhorted to remember our leaders. Now these I think are past leaders because it says that they spoke past tense the word of God to us or to you.

[19 : 27] Probably that's when they were converted and maybe initially how they were built up in their faith. But these are past leaders because they're encouraged to consider the outcome of their way of life.

It almost suggests that they finish their race of faith or at least are very close to the end and that is possible to see how they persevered. How they stood firm in spite of persecution.

And so they are to imitate their faith because if Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever that's the next verse then the kind of faith that the leaders showed would be exactly the same type of faith that they will need now and so will we many many hundreds of years later.

What a contrast I think when we read this to the way we sometimes follow our Christian leaders today. I feel that sometimes nowadays some Christian leaders are treated like pop stars.

They're followed because of their popularity or charisma or because they have supposed miraculous powers or whatever words from God. And if they came through town some people would actually pay top dollar to go and hear them speak.

[20 : 37] Buy their merchandise strange but buy their merchandise and hang off every word they say like it's a gospel. And I don't think that that's what the type of leaders that's being talked about here.

It's not the type of leaders that the Bible wants us to follow. Rather these are leaders who have endured suffering and they've lived godly lives. They're the ones who have actually followed verses 1 to 6.

They've honored their marriages. They've loved strangers. They're the ones who are like Jesus who are going to be told in verse 13 went outside the city gates to bear the shame of the cross.

And sadly I'm sure many of you will know this we have seen haven't we in our age day and age leaders who have built up a huge following and then only to be found out later to have cheated on their marriages or abused their power at church.

Those are not the leaders that God wants us to follow. but it's right for us to want to imitate Christian leaders but we have to be very careful who we choose because the leaders we want to imitate are those who have qualities of perseverance and discipline because those are the very qualities we need to finish our own race of faith.

[22 : 01] Now when we get to verse 17 I think then the attention turns to present day leaders. Here in verse 17 we are to have confidence in them that is trust their leadership by submitting to their authority.

Someone I shall not name that person said cheekily last week that this must be my favorite verse in the letter because it means you all have to submit to me. Well let me say it's not actually because what I focused on you guys have focused on the first part of the verse while I focus on the second part which says that the leaders will actually have to give an account.

It's actually a scary thought because this isn't a performance review by my line manager or your line manager which you know sometimes can be pretty daunting but this is a performance review by God himself.

And friends of all the responsibility I have as a pastor this is probably the most serious one for me. So yes as pastors we conduct weddings and funerals, we go to nursing homes and do services and visit the sick, we do service rosters, we even order chicken and chips every month.

But how we lead the church so that its members persevere in faith, that's the most important job that I have. And it's like being a shepherd which is where the word pastor comes from anyway, whose job it is to guide the sheep into green pastures.

[23 : 37] But the job of the shepherd is to defend against predators to make sure there's enough water and food along the way. And so for us as pastors, that's the job of teaching the word of God faithfully.

And one day I'll be called to account for it. And if you're a leader of some sort, whether Bible study leader or youth leader or Sunday school or one of those, then so will you.

Although perhaps to a smaller or lesser extent. And so the question I keep asking myself is, am I being faithful in teaching God's word? And that's the question you should ask of me as well.

Because it's his word, the voice of God that people are following, that's the thing that will guide them to their final rest. And so when you think about it, the call to submit to leaders is not for the benefit of the leaders to make their life easy, although that would be good, but it's actually for your benefit.

Because God is using leaders to safeguard your salvation. And sometimes that means speaking words of discipline. That means stopping you from straying or going away in sin.

[24 : 51] And let me tell you, that's not a fun task for me. But we do it because we love you. I'm doing it because I love you and I want to see you get to your final rest.

And one of the most heartbreaking things for me as a pastor is when I see people fall away from the faith. Even after they've been warned, even after you show them from the Bible not to do it.

It's almost like you're seeing them give up their to-rack mention for the sake of a make-happy meal. Now of course if I as your leader start to go astray as well, then you need to alert those people that lead me because you want me to be corrected, don't you?

You want me to get to my final rest as well. And that's why in verse 18 we're also asked to pray for the leaders or pray for us, the writer, so that day two will finish the race or as it says in verse 18 that they will live honourably in every way.

So follow your leaders, follow their examples, but also submit to them because they are trying to help all of us to get to our final destination. But let's turn finally to that meat in the sandwich verses 9 to 16.

[26 : 13] It's not an easy passage to get a handle on and at first it appears that it's a bit of a digression. It's being prompted by the specter of false leaders who are in direct contrast to the faithful leaders that are just being talked about in verse 7.

These false leaders are tempting the church back to false worship of Judaism. They are advocating following certain rituals which are tied to Old Testament worship such as the eating of ceremonial foods.

But verse 9 says that while it's good for their hearts to be strengthened by grace, it should be done by grace and not with foods which is of no benefit. The ultimate sacrifice as we've seen over the last few chapters has already been offered by Jesus in heaven.

There at that altar, Jesus has offered his own blood as an atonement for our sins. And it's at that altar that no earthly priest can take part in.

What Jesus has done is a fulfillment. Again, I'm repeating myself from a few weeks ago. It is a fulfillment of what the day of atonement was simply a shadow of. And so in our reading today, a small portion of it, that was a description of the day of atonement.

[27 : 31] This is the day that verses 11 and 12 are referring to about the high priest bringing the blood into the most holy place. But the important bit for the writer now is that while the blood brought into the most holy place, was brought into the most holy place, the rest of the body of the animal was actually taken outside the camp to be burned.

And if you listen to that reading from verses 26 to 28, that was an actual description of what they were to do. And so unlike some of the other offerings that was written off in Ludoviculus on other occasions, on the day of atonement, no part of the animal could be retained by the priest for their own consumption.

sometimes with the other offerings, some of the animal could be retained and they became food for the priest. The blood is offered to God, but the rest of the animal is actually rejected and taken outside the camp.

And by sending Jesus outside the city gates to die, this is what the high priest did, that became a sign of rejection for Jesus by the religious establishment of the day.

they rejected as it were the one sacrifice for sin that God found pleasing and acceptable. And so now if anyone wishes to worship God acceptably, and that's the language I'm using from Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 28, he or she needs to go outside to Jesus.

[29 : 07] From the moment that Jesus died, the temple, that physical temple in Jerusalem, was no longer an acceptable place of worship for God. Those rituals and sacrifices were no longer effective, even as a shadow of the reality.

But henceforth, God's purgant people, who are on a journey to an eternal city anyway, verse 14, not a journey to Jerusalem, they don't need a fixed place of worship or set rituals in order to worship God acceptably.

Rather, verse 15, says that acceptable worship now involves sacrifices of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess His name.

Now, please note firstly that the sacrifices that are spoken here are not sacrifices for sin. As I said before, the sacrifice for sin has already occurred with Jesus' atoning death.

But if you read the rest of Leviticus, there are other forms of offerings. So if you look at the grain offering or the fellowship offerings, these two are acts of sacrificial worship, but they don't relate to sin.

[30 : 16] Rather, they're more in the form of thanksgiving offerings or freewill offerings. And I think this is being compared here with the sacrifices in verse 15 and 16.

This is the same as the sacrifice of praise, but also the sacrifice of doing good and sharing with others, sacrifices which are pleasing to God.

That is, we are encouraged to do them not to earn forgiveness, but we are encouraged to do that as a response of thanksgiving, as worship to God.

And so, based on these verses, worship to God, to worship God is to live for the kingdom. Notice how doing good and sharing with others are the same as some of the things that are being listed in the first few verses, such as loving others.

And so our whole life now is one act of worship to God. We don't just worship God when we gather here on Sunday. We don't just worship God when we sing songs of praise.

[31 : 18] Rather, every word and deed in our lives is offered as an act of worship. Everything we do is now a pleasing aroma or should be a pleasing aroma to God.

And we're doing all this, not in a fixed place, no, but as we're heading towards the heavenly Jerusalem that is the throne of God in heaven.

That is, we're doing this as we're running the race of faith. And while we have earthly under-shepherds to guide us, leaders, ultimately, the one who's leading us is the great shepherd himself, Jesus Christ.

And that's why there's a prayer right at the end in verse 20. God, through his shepherd, Jesus, is equipping us with everything we need to finish this race, to reach our final destination as God's program people.

Now, there's also a postscript, verses 22 to 25, by the writer. And we won't spend much time in it. But again, I think it gives us a glimpse of the writer as a leader himself, giving final encouragements, telling them that, hey, you know, you're not alone.

[32 : 26] You might feel persecuted, but actually there's people in Italy, there's people everywhere that are on the same journey as you, heading towards the final destination of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Well, that's the end of our letter. And I think the letter has had one singular aim, that is to show us that Jesus is the one we must follow. Or as the title says, Jesus is the greatest, the reality of which everything else is the shadow, and it's to him we are to hold on to.

And we are to persevere by faith in him to the very end. So let me pray, and I'm going to use verses 20 and 21 to close our time today, but also to close our time looking at this wonderful letter.

prayer. And so may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.