

Hebrews 13:5-6

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[0 : 00] If newspapers crave the oxygen of publicity, then the Sunday Times has hit on a real winner in their annual rich list that was published today, the thousand wealthiest people in the UK.

And you can be sure that the list will be the source of endless headlines and commentary, or perhaps not endless, but certainly the next two or three days. I went onto their website just out of curiosity to get a bit more of a handle of what the list was about and anything else that I might see, discovered that for the Times you've got to register and pay.

So I certainly wasn't going to do that. But in their kind of headlines as they tried to draw you in, I discovered that the paper is really milking the concept for all it's worth.

Apparently last week, this passed me by, but there was a super rich list. Well, I missed that, but apparently that was last week. I don't know if anybody here was on the super rich list.

But anyway, if you want to know if you're on it, have a look at last week's Sunday Times. And this coming week, well, today there was just your regular rich list. And apparently as of tomorrow, there'll be a daily rich list.

[1 : 16] Now, don't ask me what all these different categories involve, because as I say, if I were to have discovered that, I would have needed to pay a pound. And I certainly wasn't going to pay a pound to discover that.

So you can see how miserly I am. But a lot of publicity around this rich list, and it's every year. It seems to come around very quickly. We seem to have an insatiable, or we seem at least to have an insatiable appetite for discovering just how obscenely wealthy those on the list really are.

The list today has at the very top the Hinduja brothers. I'd never heard of the Hinduja brothers, but there you go. This is the first time they topped the list.

Their combined wealth is 11.9 billion pounds. I had to look down there and just make sure I got it right. 11.9 billion pounds.

I think it's two brothers. Others, much more modestly, but you'll recognize, well, you'd recognize a lot of the names, but Jamie Oliver and his wife Jules have seen their fortune leap 90 million to 240 million.

[2 : 26] I don't know if that's the Aberdeen restaurant that's solely responsible for that. I wouldn't imagine so. But anyway, their riches have gone up big time. Simon Cowell, I know you all want to know about Simon Cowell.

So 300 million, give or take, I suppose. And you do have to feel sorry for the queen. She topped the first list. In 1989, she was at the very top of the list, but is now languishing in 285th place.

It doesn't seem right, does it? But anyway, a paltry 330 million is what the queen is worth. That's her personal wealth. However, that is defined. I think one of the reasons, I may be wrong, but I think one of the reasons we enjoy hearing about the obscenely wealthy, if that's not an offensive term to use, is that it makes our own wealth appear anything but obscene.

And we say, well, that is rich. You know, what we have, well, that's nothing in comparison. And in our own mind, the filthy rich, again, using a rather unpleasant term, are invariably other people.

And we're comfortable with that. It's more comfortable that other people are really rich or filthy rich, especially when we come to the Bible and it speaks very clearly on the matter of wealth and love of money and so forth.

[3 : 46] It's just more comfortable to imagine, well, that's not for me because that doesn't apply. But as we were considering this morning, love of money, not money itself, but love of money is a temptation for all, rich and poor, however we define those terms.

Love of money is not just about conspicuous consumption. Love of money, as we suggested this morning, reveals, manifests the deep idols that we serve, be that pleasure or power, control,

influence, acceptance, security.

All of these are idols, deep idols that we serve in some measure, and that's revealed in love of money because we imagine, perhaps wrongly, perhaps foolishly, but we imagine that money can buy these things for us.

Money can provide us with power and influence. It can provide us with acceptance before others. It can provide us with pleasure. It can provide us with security, or so we think.

Jesus warns us to watch out and to be on our guard against all kinds of greed. We saw that verse this morning in Luke chapter 12, and I think it's quite interesting how Jesus says that we should be on our guard against all kinds of greed.

[5 : 14] For even that expression, all kinds of greed, should alert us to the reality that greed comes in many forms and disguises. And so we have to be on our guard against, I repeat, all kinds of greed.

Now, this morning we considered very briefly at the end of the sermon that the remedy, excuse me, the remedy to loving money.

But we also indicated that we would give this matter, we would give this matter more careful consideration this evening.

I will get through so you're not off the hook if you think, oh, good. It's not going to be able to get into this. No, I will. Now, we're going to do this. We're going to consider a little bit more this matter of the remedy, if you wish, to loving money by reflecting on what the writer to the Hebrews says on the matter in his concluding exhortations to his readers in chapter 13.

Now, we've read the verses that we're interested in, verses 5 and 6. Let's read them again. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

[6 : 30] Because God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. So say with confidence, the Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Now, we're going to arrange what we have to say under three headings. These two verses really rather neatly divide into three sections and three headings. So that's what we're going to do. We're simply going to follow the natural division that we find in these verses.

And the first thing we're going to consider is the duty commended. We'll see that there is a duty commended here by the author. But then also, there is a reason provided.

We're given a reason why we ought to and should comply with the duty that we're commended. And then thirdly, there's also what we could call a testimony shared.

Verse 6, so we say with confidence. These are the words of somebody who has been persuaded by the argument that he has just shared with others. So you have a duty commended.

[7 : 30] You have a reason given. And you have a testimony shared. And we'll think of each of these in turn. First of all, the duty commended. Well, in actual fact, there are two connected duties that the writer identifies in verse 5 in the first half of the verse.

Keep your lives free from the love of money. That is one duty that is commended to us. Something we have to do. We have to keep our lives free from the love of money. And also, be content with what you have.

Now, it's clear that they're very connected. And yet, they are distinct. So there are two connected duties commended to us by the author.

Well, let's just notice one or two things about these duties. We're not going to look at them exhaustively because we're really more interested in the reason that is given, which I think is more helpful for us to actually comply with these duties that are commended.

But one or two things we can notice about these duties. First of all, the language used implies that it is an ever-present danger that we might be entangled by the love of money.

[8 : 44] Keep your lives free from the love of money. It's clear that the author considers this to be an ever-present danger that we need to consciously escape from and be kept free from.

The love of money, and no doubt this is, I'm sure if we're honest with ourselves, is our experience. Or I'm sure is of many of us, that money tends to entangle us.

Its tentacles intrude into every area of our lives. We're thinking, well, what about, you know, can I afford this? Or how am I going to get the money? Or, you know, we're stressed out. And when we think about why we're stressed out, often, not always, it's connected to this matter.

And this is a constant danger, hence the language employed. Keep your lives free from the love of money. Very much related to that, another thing we can say is that it's presented in such terms that

we are to understand this as a permanent task.

Here, the twofold duty, not only of keeping our lives free from the love of money, but also being content with what we have, is a permanent duty.

[9 : 56] To free ourselves from the love of money, to think of the first of the duties commended, does not involve only one heroic effort. And with that, the battle is won.

Now, there may be in our lives particular occasions when, if we want to use the language, a heroic effort is required to establish that money isn't our master.

And a big decision we take is taken, you might say, victoriously by not succumbing to money being our master. And that's good and well if those circumstances present themselves.

But it's not about just a big heroic effort. It's about a daily recognition that we are prone to be entangled by the love of money.

And so, permanently, we need to be careful about that. And of course, that's true also with the duty commended, this call to be content with what we have.

[10 : 56] That's a daily task or responsibility that is laid upon us. That's particularly true given that our circumstances can change. For the better, for the worse, they can change.

And so, as they change, the challenge to be content also changes. And we need to confront it or take it on board on a daily or a permanent basis.

And just the third thing I want you to notice about the duties that are commended, and in a sense, this has already been stated or suggested, is that this duty commended is what we might call a parallel challenge.

We've already noticed that it's a two-fold challenge. There are two connected duties, to keep your lives free from the love of money and to be content with what you have.

But what I want to emphasize now is something perhaps that's very obvious, that these two duties go necessarily hand in hand. They are the two sides of the same coin, if you forgive the pun of speaking of a coin in this context.

[12 : 07] You'll not be able to free yourself from the love of money if you are not content with what you have. And you will never be content with what you have if you are entangled by the love of money.

The two go hand in hand. So, this is the duty commended or the two connected parallel duties that are commended to us by the writer.

Now, there follows, in verses 5 and 6, a reason that's provided for taking seriously the duties commended and also a testimony shared by the one who has discovered that the reason given is a solid one.

It is a good reason. Now, the interesting feature of this, and this is where we're going to concentrate our attention this evening, is that the writer quotes two Old Testament texts to provide both the reason and the testimony.

Now, the wisdom of him doing so is better understood when we appreciate that the letter was written very particularly, and in the first instance, for Jewish believers.

[13 : 14] The very content of this letter is evidently content that was, in the first instance, for Jewish believers. Though, obviously, it was useful, as it is today, for Gentile believers.

Now, such believers, the original audience, would obviously have been very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, and not only familiar with them, but they would have been very respectful of them.

And so, for the author to cast their eyes to the Old Testament Scriptures and draw their attention to what is said in the Old Testament would have carried significant weight in making the argument that he makes.

So, in that sense, it was a sensible thing to do. But what we also need to note, and more interestingly, is that the writer does not just choose two random texts that fit his purpose.

The texts chosen have been chosen very carefully, and an appreciation of their original context will enrich our own appreciation of what is being argued and what is being testified.

[14 : 19] So, let's move on and look at these two Old Testament quotations, one of which serves as a reason given for complying with the duties, and the second one given as a testimony that the author is sharing of his own convictions and experience.

First of all, then, the reason provided, and where does this verse come from? Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

Well, in the footnote there in your Bibles, you'll be able to identify the source, and it's the passage that we read in Deuteronomy, in Deuteronomy chapter 31.

Now, what significance might there be in the author drawing his readers' attentions to this passage in particular, by the use of the verse that he uses?

Well, this chapter, Deuteronomy chapter 31, is the final episode in the account of God's rescue of His people from slavery in Egypt, and their imminent possession of the promised land.

[15 : 33] Joshua is succeeding Moses, so the forty years in the desert have reached their conclusion, and this final chapter, this final episode of the Exodus is about to take place, and the promised land is going to be occupied.

Now, with this in mind, let's note three, what we might call intertwined reasons provided or implied by the use of this verse, given its original context, that are relevant to the duties that have just been commended, to keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have. Three related reasons that reinforce, that would encourage us to comply. I think the first one we can notice is simply the faithfulness of God.

Now, that is something we could identify even without taking great notice of where the verse was first used, or when God first said this to His people.

And I say the faithfulness of God because, clearly, this is a promise that is being spoken of. God has said, Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

[16 : 50] Now, if we believe that God keeps His promises, then irrespective of the historical context referred to, the bottom line is that God keeps His promises.

He has promised to never leave or forsake His people, and He will be true to His promise. And given that that is so, why get stressed out accumulating wealth or grumbling at the lack of wealth, given the promises of a faithful God?

Why would we be so foolish as to allow ourselves to be consumed by such things when we know that we have this surefire promise from God?

Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. God is faithful. Hence, we have good reason to comply with the duties that we have commended to us.

The faithfulness of God. But moving into the occasion when God first made these promises, or they're first recorded for us, that takes us to a second related reason, good reason to comply with the duties commended, and that is the track record of God.

[18 : 04] It's not just that we have a promise. Now, that ought to be enough in and of itself. If God promises that He won't leave us, that He won't forsake us, then that alone is reason sufficient.

But by drawing our attention to when God first made this promise here in Deuteronomy, what the people can draw on and can be reminded of is God's track record.

It's not just that there is a promise. They are able to look back and say, well, He made that promise before, and He kept it. When we think of our own history as a nation, and we look back to those momentous events in the history of Israel, when we look back to the Exodus and the possession of the promised land, when we think back to the events recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 31, we say, well, yes, it's true.

God has a track record of keeping promises. If He kept His promise to Moses, if He kept His promise to Joshua, if He kept His promise to the people at that time, in the midst of all their challenges and difficulties, well, surely we can be confident that He will keep His promise to us. When we are reminded or when we are directed to this promise, God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

[19 : 24] Indeed, when we go through the Old Testament, it's interesting that this promise, the very language of this promise, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you, appears periodically in the history of God's people.

To give just one example, in 1 Chronicles, in chapter 28, we have David giving a charge to Solomon on the occasion of Solomon, soon after taking over the mantle of David as king of Israel.

And in that chapter, for reasons of time, we won't look it up and read it, but David reminds Solomon of these very words. He says, remember this, my son, remember this promise that the Lord has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

And it's a very beautiful scene, a father commending the promises of God to his son. In this case, the king to the heir apparent.

But if we think of it more in terms of a father to a son, a very beautiful scene, a challenging one. What about us as parents? Do we commend trust in God to our children?

[20 : 34] Do they look at us and say, well, yes, my parents, my mother, my father, they trust in God. Or do they see us stressed out and worried about money and not having enough and the mortgage?

And what are they picking up? What are the vibes they're getting from us at home? Or do they say, no, mom and dad, they trust in God. If there's a problem, they pray to God.

They're not stressed out by it because they believe these promises. Is that what they see? Is that what they pick up from us? Well, for the people who receive this letter and they think of this verse and they think, well, where does this verse come from?

Oh, well, it comes from when our own people were about to enter the promised land and God made a promise. Well, he kept the promise. Here we are. We're on the very soil of the land that God promised.

And we're still here. God is a promise keeping God. The faithfulness of God, the very promises and His nature as a promise keeping God reinforced by the track record of God.

[21 : 35] But also, as the people would have thought of when the promise was originally given, they might have given thought to the purposes of God. You see, as they would think of this occasion, they would remember that God's purpose was to lead His people into the promised land, a land, intriguingly, given how the author uses these verses, was a land flowing with milk and honey where they would be provided for in every way, including material provision.

God provided for their material needs generously in the promised land. And it is God's purpose to generously provide for His own. And He will fulfill that purpose in our lives because that is His purpose for us, that we be provided for by Him.

And so, this verse, not just the words themselves, important and significant as they are, the promise in and of itself, but as we think about when it was originally given and when I'm sure the original audience would have been aware of that, they would have recognized these words, they would have recognized that the author was giving them good reason to comply with the duties commended, to flee from the love of money, to keep their lives free from it, and to be content with what they have.

Notice also, just for a moment, the original audience for this promise of God. When we read the chapter, the promise is actually repeated twice. I don't know if you've picked up on that in Deuteronomy chapter 31.

First of all, the promise is directed to the people together. All the people are gathered, and Moses communicates this promise from God to the people. But then, immediately following, the same promise, almost exactly the same, is made to Joshua individually as the leader of the people.

[23 : 35] And we can draw from that as well. We don't need to just think that, well, yes, this is a promise for all of God's people, and, well, it applies to all of God's people, and that's true. But what I would want you to be persuaded of, even this evening, as you face whatever challenges you're facing, and perhaps financial challenges and worries and concerns about, you know, how are you going to reach the end of the month, or I don't know what concerns you might have, this is a promise for you.

This is a promise directed to you, as it was directed personally to Joshua. So it is directed personally to you. Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.

Notice also the condition or the emotional state of those to whom the promise is made. We've read there in the passage in Deuteronomy, don't be afraid and terrified.

Now, why are they urged not to be afraid and terrified? Well, because they were afraid and terrified. And they're being told, no, don't be afraid. Yeah, seemingly there's good reason to be afraid as you face the prospect of having to battle with the giants across the Jordan.

But no, don't be afraid. Don't be terrified. Don't be discouraged. Another word that we find in our passage. Equally for us, whatever our circumstances might be, where we're maybe afraid, afraid that we won't have enough to fulfill our obligations, to provide adequately for our family.

[25 : 01] Maybe afraid of losing the job that we've got or afraid of the Bank of England deciding to put up interest rates and suddenly our mortgage is much greater than it's been thus far.

And what is the challenge? The challenge is in the face of those fears and concerns, not to mindlessly chase after more money and thinking, well, that will keep me safe, but to trust in God, to

trust in the One who has promised, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. If you're discouraged by difficult circumstances, then know the contentment that accompanies trust. So we have a reason provided by the author for complying with the duties that are commended to us.

Keep your lives free from the love of money. Be content with what you have. Why? Well, because God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. But then thirdly and finally, we also have the testimony shared, or to kind of explain that a little more, the testimony of those persuaded. The writer introduces the second Old Testament quotation with the words, so we say with confidence. This is the voice of experience. This isn't theoretical.

[26 : 23] The one who's writing has discovered it to be true. So we say with confidence. We've discovered that these duties that God commends to us are duties that we can comply with because of the solid reasons that are given.

So we say with confidence. It's the voice of experience. But notice whose voice the writer adopts as his own and encourages us to adopt.

Well, it is the voice of the author of Psalm 118, which we've read and which we've been singing this evening. And the fact that Psalm 118 is chosen is itself fascinating and demonstrates that the author is not grasping randomly for his favorite verses, something that we might do.

I'm not saying there's anything wrong in and of itself. If a verse comes to mind in a particular circumstance that seems helpful, then by all means grasp at it. But that's not what the author is doing here. He is very carefully choosing the verses that he employs and in this matter of sharing his own testimony to God's faithfulness.

When we think of Psalm 118, Psalm 118 forms part of a set of Psalms, Psalm 113 through to Psalm 118, that are known as the Egyptian Hallel Psalms.

[27 : 45] Hallel is simply the Hebrew word for praise. And these Psalms were traditionally sung as part of the Passover celebrations. Jesus and his disciples would have sung these Psalms in the upper room and as they made their way to Gethsemane, where we're told that they sang praise to God.

Particularly at the close of the Passover, it would have been this Psalm, Psalm 118, that we can with significant confidence say that they would have sung. So, the reason given from Deuteronomy chapter 31 points the believers to the Exodus and God's deliverance of his people.

And the song of testimony adopted also directs the people or directs their gaze to the Passover, to the Exodus, and perhaps especially to God's people in triumph, taking possession of the promised land, especially as we read through the Psalm and the language that is employed.

But notice the twofold nature of this confident testimony as we have it expressed in the totality of the Psalm from which one verse is extracted by the author.

I think there's basically two elements to the Psalm in terms of testimony to God's faithfulness. First of all, there is testimony to how God has delivered his people from his enemies.

[29 : 06] Now, we're not going to go into the Psalm and look at it in detail. And difficult to artificially divide the Psalm neatly in two, but there are these two big themes, let's put it that way.

Deliverance from our enemies. We've sung much of that already this evening. But then the other side of that and connected to it, the provision of salvation. So, deliverance from, but also deliverance to.

Saved from their enemies, but saved for, enjoying God's provision and inheritance. Deliverance from our enemies, but also salvation in all its wonder and in its fullest sense.

And this salvation, very clearly from the Psalm, is a salvation that is ultimately to be traced to the coming of the promised Messiah. The Psalm is replete with Messianic references.

The words of verses 25 and 26 in Psalm 118 were echoed by the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

[30 : 15] We notice there in Psalm 118 and verses 25 and 26. Notice the language of the psalmist. And you'll recognize how these words were used by the people as Jesus entered in to Jerusalem just a week before He died as our Savior.

Verses 25 and 26, O Lord, save us. That expression, save us, the Hebrew is Hosanna. And it was that Hebrew that was employed by the crowds as Jesus was entering Jerusalem.

O Lord, save us. O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. And then, of course, when we turn to the book of Acts, we find

how Peter employs the language of this psalm in identifying Jesus as the stone the builders rejected.

And so, he quotes from this psalm as he explains who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. So, the writer testifies confidently and joyfully to the reality that God does indeed accompany and provide for and deliver His people.

And he does so by highlighting that God both delivers from our enemies and delivers to the blessings of salvation. Now, we think of those two aspects of God's saving work from and to and then apply them to the duties commended in Hebrews.

[31 : 54] We can see how helpful that is. The duties commended in Hebrews, remember, are one, to keep your lives free from the love of money and secondly, be content with all that you have.

And as we think of God as our deliverer God, as our redeemer God who delivers from our enemies and delivers for the enjoyment of His many saving benefits, so we apply it to the matter to hand. May God deliver us from slavery to money, from slavery to chasing after possessions. May we be delivered from that. But not just delivered from that, but delivered to contentment in Christ, in all that He provides for us, in all that we enjoy as believers, as Christians.

Trusting in God and His promises will both deliver us from the love of money and enable us to be content with God's generous provision for us in His Son.

Well, let's just draw this together and as we do, draw things to a close. Are you clear on what your duties are? The duties commended here. There are two.

[33 : 06] Very connected. Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have. Are you persuaded by the reasons given to comply?

The promises that He will never leave you, He will never forsake you. That He is a God who promises and a God who has a track record of keeping His promises.

And can you testify confidently to the reality to the reality of God's care and provision in every trial and need in your own experience? And if you can, then join with the writer in so testifying.

So, we say confidently. Well, may God help us to know what our duties are, to be persuaded that there are very good reasons for complying, and in due course as we do, discover and experience that God is indeed true to His promises for us.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come and we thank You that You are indeed a God who is faithful, a God who promises to never leave us nor forsake us. And we pray that that would indeed be a promise that we can lean on and take at face value, that we would be persuaded that You are indeed a God who has a track record of keeping Your promises to Your people.

[34 : 33] And that so our experience would be that we need not fear, that we need not be afraid, that we need not be afraid what man can do to us, what circumstances might contrive to do to us, but rather that whatever the circumstances are, whatever the needs we may face, whatever the difficulties that may meet us in the lives that we live, that we would be able to confidently say that we do not fear, for we have no reason to do so.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close by singing the concluding verses of this psalm.

Psalm 118 from verse 23. And we'll read through, or we'll sing through to the end of the psalm. We'll sing to the tune Werem. The Lord Himself has done all this.

It is a marvel in our sight. This is the day the Lord has made. In it let us take great delight. Verses 23 to 29. And we'll stand to sing. The Lord Himself has done all this.

It is a marvel in our sight. This is the day the Lord has made.

[36 : 12] In it let us take great delight. Save us, O Lord, we humbly pray.

O Lord, we pray grant us success. He's blessed who comes in God's great day.

You from the Lord's we will bless.

The Lord is God and He has made His glorious light upon us all.

let us approach the altar's heart and celebrate the festival.

[37 : 40] you are my God and I'll give you thanks.

You are my God and I'll give you grace. O thank the Lord for He is good His steadfast love endures always now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

Amen.