

Do not forget to entertain strangers

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Date: 29 August 2010

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] A warm welcome to you all to our service this evening. At the close of the service, we meet for tea and coffee downstairs, and you're very welcome to stay behind and join with us for a brief time of fellowship.

Let us worship God, singing to His praise in Psalm 65, in the Scottish Psalter on page 297. Psalm 65, and we'll sing verses 1 to 5, and the tune is Unfermline.

Praise waits for thee in thine, Lord, to thee thou's place shall be, O thou that hear art of prayer, all flesh shall come to thee.

Psalm 65, verses 1 to 5, and we'll stand to sing. And we'll sing for thee in thine, Lord, to thee thou hast made me.

O thy life we have not obeyed, all flesh shall come to thee.

[1 : 22] We will consisting of the blessing, within we are her weak, The love of God's love, the love of God, and the love of God, and the love of God.

The love of God's love, the love of God, and the love of God, and the love of God, and the love of God, and the love of God, and the love of God.

God of the grace, I am with my goodness of thy heart, in all thy holy grace.

O God of our salvation, thou with my heart just led, thy beautiful works unto thy grace.

I am with my grace, I am with my grace, I am with my grace.

[3 : 42] I am with my grace, I am with my grace.

Amen. We will remain standing for prayer. We come before you our great and good God.

We thank you for another opportunity granted to gather as your people to worship you, the living and true God. And we pray at the outset of this hour of worship that you would help us to worship you aright.

That you would help us to worship you in spirit and in truth. That you would help us to worship you sincerely and coherently. Lord, we pray that you would bless us in each element of the worship that we bring to you.

As we read the Bible, that we would do so with understanding and also with humility. That we would be willing to be subject to your work, even when the message it brings is perhaps an unwelcome or an uncomfortable one for us.

[5 : 02] Be with us as we sing your praises. We thank you for your gift of material of praise that we can make use of in expressing to you our gratitude for who you are and for what you have done and continue to do for us.

We thank you that as we turn to meditate on your word, we turn to a word that is able to instruct us in matters to do with our everyday living.

We thank you that though the Bible was written so long ago, yet its message is contemporary and has a word for us, whatever we are and whatever our circumstances.

Help us to be ever more of those who read and who understand your word and seek to apply it to every situation in life.

Lord, we come before you conscious that there are many distractions. Tomorrow we begin another week and perhaps this week holds uncertainty, it holds maybe excitement.

[6 : 10] There are duties to perform that we are worried about or concerned about. Problems that we are going to have to face and we are not very sure how we are going to be able to.

And all of these things understandably can flood our mind and our thoughts and distract us from the task at hand. And Lord, we pray that you would help us to remove these things.

And we thank you that indeed we can bring these things, these concerns and worries to you. And seeking your help and direction in that.

Lord, we thank you that as we gather here, we remember once again, as we often do, for it is good to do so, that we are not alone. We are part of a great gathering of the people of God who worship you in every continent, in every nation, in a multitude of languages and forms.

And yet with this one same desire to exalt you, the living and true God. And we pray that you would make yourself present as you do and own the worship of your people.

[7 : 20] That it would be pleasing to you. And we certainly pray that that would be so of the worship that we bring this evening. Be with us then and bless us and we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now we are going to read the Bible in the Old Testament in the book of Genesis. In the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

And we are going to read in chapter 18. We are going to read the first 16 verses of chapter 18. And then we will continue on in the reading in chapter 19.

And the first 5 verses of that chapter. So Genesis chapter 18. At the very beginning of the Bible, it is on page 17 in the church Bible.

Genesis chapter 18, reading from the beginning. The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre, while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

[8 : 25] Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, If I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by.

Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed, and then go on your way, now that you have come to your servant.

Very well, they answered. Do as you say. So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. Quick, he said, get three saiths of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread.

Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice tender calf and gave it to a servant who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them.

While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. Where is your wife Sarah? they asked him. There in the tent, he said. Then the Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.

[9 : 41] Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.

So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, after I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure? Then the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, will I really have a child now that I am old?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son. Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, I did not laugh.

But he said, yes, you did laugh. When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

And then we'll read from the beginning of chapter 19, the first five verses of chapter 19. The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.

[10 : 51] When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. My Lord, he said, please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night, and then go on your way early in the morning.

No, they answered. We will spend the night in the square. But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, taking bread without yeast, and they ate.

Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom, both young and old, surrounded the house. They called to Lot, where are the men who came to you tonight?

Bring them out to us, so that we can have sex with them. The Word of God. Now we're going to sing again. We're going to sing in Psalm 62.

It's on page 80 in our psalm books. Psalm 62, singing from verse 7 through to the end of the psalm.

[11 : 55] Psalm 62, singing from verse 7. The tune is head or foot. My honor and salvation rests on God, my rock and mighty fort.

O people, trust in him always. To him alone pour out your heart. Psalm 62, verses 7 to the end. We'll stand to sing.

Amen. Warm. Jesus. Amen.

to speak please. Oh oh Oh Oh oh O, mambo Porter, Kira-ekera.

God, I have laid out myself alive.

[13:25] We did retreat in the Francaa game, Recast the fallingphalt of start.

To the heart Hask, after where I ■' ■■■■■■, I tend to live in my house and be.

That we undescuries the apcrafter heart Juan can say.

My God, my soul, and my heart, my dear and love, and love is God.

This love, my Lord, is you in me, you will not to live in me, Lord.

[15:17] Amen. Together again in prayer. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. As we come before you again, our Heavenly Father, we recognize that our condition as men and women is no different to that of men and women through the generations. We are prone, as those the psalmist speaks of, to set our heart on that which is vain and passing and of little consequence or significance.

We are captivated by the trivial. We are enthralled by that which can be seen and felt and touched and which fascinates us.

And we are often careless concerning matters of eternity, concerning matters of true and lasting significance.

[16:20] We recognize it is so. And we ask that you would forgive us. We ask that you would help us to flee from those things that bring no profit to us.

And rather to fix our eyes on things above, to fix our eyes on those things that you determine are important. Help us to have that discernment to see and to understand.

And help us to have the will that having recognized that which is important to pursue it. Lord, we pray that you would help us even in this week that has begun, to fix our priorities in a manner that is consistent with what you teach us in your Word.

That we would redeem the time, that we would make use of what is a gift from you. The gift of life itself. The gift of health that allows us to do different things.

The gift of the very time that is at our disposal. Of opportunities, of abilities, of so many things. Help us to recognize that these things are from you.

[17:31] That we would be grateful for them. And make use of them in a manner that is pleasing to you and glorifying to you. Lord, we come before you and ask that you would help us very particularly in this great duty that we have.

And indeed, a privilege at the same time of sharing the good news concerning Jesus Christ with those who as yet do not know this news.

We are slow to speak. We are consumed by prejudices and fears. And we are so prone to allow the time to pass.

And to seemingly show little concern for those who are lost and heading headlong to a lost eternity. Help us then, Lord.

Grant us a burden for such. Help us to be stimulated and motivated with an eye to your glory. That all would exalt you. That all would praise you as you are due, as you are worthy.

[18:38] Help us, Lord, to also remember that it is a cause of great rejoicing. In heaven and indeed among your people on earth. Even over one sinner who repents.

And that this too would be a reason that would motivate us and push us to engage in this task. Lord, we pray that the gospel would spread across this world.

We live in a privileged generation. But as we look around the continents, we know that you have been pleased to bless in our generation in a very particular way.

The cause of the gospel. Perhaps not so evident in our land. But as we look beyond to other continents and indeed to the southern hemisphere of any in particular.

We are conscious and we rejoice in the fact that your church is as it must be. A growing church. A living church. A church that is blessed and used by you to reach the nations.

[19:40] We do think of those who as yet have not had the opportunity to hear. We imagine perhaps that all have had that opportunity. But it is not so. There are those for whom even the word of God is as yet not in their own mother tongue.

And we do pray and commend to you every effort that is made in that regard. For those involved in Bible translation. We think of the Wycliffe Bible translators and others who similarly are engaged in this very important task.

Prosper their efforts. Help them to proceed ever more quickly. We thank you for the help of modern technology that so often allows this work to be done in a manner.

And with a speed that perhaps in the past was unheard of. Unimaginable. We do thank you that the ingenuity of men and women can be harnessed for furthering the ends of the gospel.

Lord we pray for those not only engaged in translating the scriptures. But those who then take these scriptures to share the content of them with those who have not heard as yet about Jesus.

[20 : 55] And pray that you would be with such missionaries of the cross. Wherever they are.

Perhaps some in situations of danger of one kind or another. That you would be protecting them.

And Lord that you would ever be calling men and women to this task. Lord we know that in a very real sense all who are your people are missionaries.

Wherever we are. We begin at home. But we do pray that out of our own number. Indeed out of this very congregation you would be pleased to call those who would go to other lands.

Who would cross boundaries of one kind or another. We know that there are many boundaries.

Even without going beyond the boundaries of this very city. Boundaries of different kinds.

That we find very difficult to cross. But we pray that you would help us. To be of those who do not retreat into our ghettos. But rather who rush out into the crowd.

[21 : 53] To tell them about Jesus. Lord we pray that you would continue with us this evening. As we would turn to your word. To sing from it once again.

And to meditate on the message that you would bring to us. And we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen. We are going to sing again.

And we are going to sing in Psalm 119. The final section of the psalm in the Scottish Psalter on page 414. So Psalm 119.

The final section. That is from verse 169 through to the end. We will sing to the tune Contemplation. Let my earnest prayer and cry.

Come near before thee Lord. Give understanding unto me. According to thy word. Singing on through to the end of the psalm. And we will stand to sing. Let my earnest prayer and cry.

[23 : 05] And hear beoptimos. You never must am■■■■■■ ZANG EN MUZIEK Let my regrets be o'er begun As I, my earth is free I did not die to me My guts are too late

As I, my earth is free That the word shall speak and live the best.

Heel of the light, O lander, our Christ is righteous.

The light of God may help to me.

I think that thou my joy. I know my life, the great God Lord.

[25 : 22] I think that thou my joy. O let thy soul break on this side.

His grace is gone to thee. And let thy grace be saved.

I know my joy. I know my joy. I know my joy. I know my joy.

For life, the Lord. She's friend of mine. I know my joy. I know my joy.

I know my joy. O God, who had thy prophet told, Is created by soul thy name.

[27 : 01] Do I or don't I? This was my dilemma on Thursday morning. It may seem rather late in the week, but that's the reality.

On Thursday morning as I pondered on what to preach today. Now this morning, as we continued, considering Psalm 34 was a no-brainer because there was a section to be considered and not much thought was required for that.

But the other sermon was my dilemma. Now the verse that I was drawn to was Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 2.

It's a very brief verse and we'll read it now. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels.

Without knowing it. I was drawn to that verse. This wasn't a random thing, but it was for a reason.

[28 : 05] And the reason why I was drawn to it was as I considered that in a couple of weeks Aberdeen will be invaded, if that's the right word, by freshers and returning students.

And we know that they will come from every continent, to use the language of Revelation, from every nation, tribe and language.

And the numbers are impressive. Of the 30,000 or so, or something approaching 30,000 or so students in Aberdeen in term time, it's calculated that something approaching 1 in 4 are from outwith our country.

Well, you can do the maths, it's not too complex. But looking beyond the student population, we know that Aberdeen is home to economic migrants from around the world. We have many from Eastern Europe. We have many from Africa, Nigeria very much in particular. And indeed, just up the road in Rosemount Square, we have a community of Bangladeshi families. [29 : 17] If you come, as some of you do, to the church on a Friday morning, little lambs, well, you will find little lambs who hail from many countries.

The world at our doorstep represents an opportunity and a privilege to show a Christian hospitality. Which brings me back to what I said at the beginning about the dilemma. And you might say, well, why the dilemma? Well, in considering whether to use this as my text for this evening, well, some of you who have a keen memory, and I imagine there are some among you who are so endowed, may remember that a year ago I preached on this same subject. And the dilemma was whether broaching this same subject might be considered overkill or disproportionate to the whole balance and content of what we have in the Scriptures. But I decided that it would not be disproportionate, and for two reasons. The first thing is, as we will discover as we proceed just in a very brief moment, to consider the text, is that it does introduce elements that were not considered previously. [30 : 39] As I say, those who do have a very keen memory may remember that it was in Romans chapter 12 and verse 13 that we considered the same theme.

But this is a different text, and it introduces one or two elements that were not present in that text. But perhaps another reason for preaching again on this subject, and it's something I refer to in passing in the intimation sheet, is that on that occasion the sermon was preached with a very specific purpose in mind, and it was to present, introduce, encourage participation in the Friendship Link scheme run by Friends International, which is focused particularly on international students and thinking to show friendship to them.

And the sermoning question that I'm referring to was, I'm quite happy to recognize singularly unsuccessful in achieving the goal in mind. And so that seemed another reason to broach the subject again. So if you wish to take this as a form of punishment from the minister, then by all means you can take it in those terms if you wish. But that's not really the intention. However, to the text in question that I've already read this evening, there in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 2, Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

[32 : 11] In this verse there are three things that I want us to notice. First of all we have the duty presented, or a duty presented to us.

There's also what we might call a danger, identified and warned against. And then thirdly there is a reason given for performing the duty presented.

So these three things, a duty, a danger and a reason. And we'll think of each in turn. First of all, the duty presented.

Well there, it is clearly before us. Do not forget to entertain strangers. Entertain strangers. And again, as I hark back to the previous sermon on this same subject, we notice then that the word translated on this occasion entertain strangers, and in Romans chapter 12 translated hospitality, is a Greek word, philothenia, which literally means love of or love for foreigners or strangers. And it is, as I say, a word that literally has that meaning, but is translated in different ways, as noted here, entertaining strangers, or showing hospitality.

[33 : 39] And I want to dissect a little this word, or perhaps more than the word, the duty implied. That is our concern at the beginning, the duty that we have before us. And as we explore this, or dissect it if you wish, I want to do so considering the who and the how.

And I hope that will become clear as we develop it. But first of all, the who. And the who can also be subdivided into who is to be entertained, who are those who are to be the recipients of this entertainment or this hospitality, and also who are to be responsible for this.

So who is to be entertained, who is to be shown hospitality, and by whom. First of all then, who are to be entertained? Well, the verse is clear.

Do not forget to entertain strangers, or foreigners. The word can be variously understood. I think if we did have to step back and say, well, to whom does it refer?

We might say that it refers to the outsider. It may not be somebody coming from another country, but somebody who, in one way or another, is an outsider to the group that they find themselves in.

[35 : 03] The one who is different. I think we would be honest to recognize that it is easy, or relatively easy, to entertain the insider.

The one who is like me. The one who speaks like me, and thinks like me. The one who is on the same wavelength as me. That's not so difficult. To have them in our home, to spend time with them. And we can get on with them. We can strike up a friendship, perhaps, without a great difficulty, because they're like us. And we feel comfortable with those who are like us.

But this is not what we are being commended to do on this occasion. Rather, we are to entertain the outsider, the stranger, the foreigner, the one who is different, the one who is from somewhere else, the one who thinks differently to the way I think, the one who looks different to the way I look. And, well, we could go on. This is the duty that is being commended to the Christian. Who might we consider in that category of the outsider, the one who is different?

[36 : 18] Well, certainly. We began by making reference to the influence of so many, thousands indeed, students from other countries who come to study in Aberdeen.

It's a striking thing that there is in Aberdeen today, or there will be once turnstarts, more overseas students than there were the totality of students at Aberdeen University when I was a student there. That probably just betrays how long ago that was. But in the 80s, or the early 80s, the total student population at Aberdeen University, if my memory serves me right, was something around 5,000. Well, in this term that begins, we will have something around 7,000 students from other countries, not just at Aberdeen University, but across the different institutions.

So the scale itself is very impressive and challenging. And they most certainly are those who are included, who come under the umbrella, if you wish, of the writer to the Hebrews, exhortation to his readers.

[37 : 24] Do not forget to entertain strangers. But there are, of course, others. It could be a fellow Scot who lives next to us, but who has no Christian background, no seeming interest in our faith.

And so, in that sense, we maybe find very different to ourselves. It may be the homeless man or woman. It may be that young person struggling with substance abuse or addiction of one kind or another.

It may be those who are mentally unstable or socially awkward, who are difficult or who we find difficult to get along with and to show friendship to.

The one nobody else will welcome. The one nobody else would be willing to show love to. They are the ones who are to be shown hospitality.

They are the ones who we are commended to entertain. But by whom? Who are entrusted with this task? Well, who is Paul writing to?

[38 : 39] And this doesn't need to occupy our attention very long. I think it's very evident, the answer. Well, I say Paul, or in any case, the writer to the Hebrews is writing to a Christian audience.

He is writing to those who are disciples of Jesus Christ. It is to such that he commends this duty. And of course, the one who we are disciples of.

He is the one who welcomed us when we were outside the fold. He is the one who loved us when we were unlovable. He was the one who walked the extra mile for the outsider, for strangers to grace.

And we know that that extra mile that he walked was not any mile. It was the mile to Calvary. It was the mile to the cross. That extra mile that he walked for the outsider.

He went outside the city gates to save the outsider, to save the one who was different, who was marginalized. And you and me, his followers, his disciples, are, and it ought not to surprise us, commended to entertain strangers.

[39 : 56] This is a personal duty we have as Christians. It is a duty that we have as a Christian congregation. And I wonder whether, even as we extend the net, as it were, might there be for us in these exhortations and in the truths that lie behind them, might there not even be pointers for us as a society?

Now, we know our society is not a Christian society, and it would be naive to think that it would operate on the basis of biblical principles, though it is a worthy desire that we might long for the day when that would be so.

There have been days when it was so in great measure, and we can certainly long and pray for those days to return. But even though it would be naive to expect our society to operate on the basis of Christian principles, certainly I think it is fair to say that our own Christian identity should

inform our perspective on how as a society we welcome strangers.

And this would inform, influence our views on matters such as immigration, which we know is always something that causes a great deal of debate, and sometimes heated debate.

Now, I'm not pretending that this one verse would provide us with a policy, but I think the principles that are found here do at the very least inform in this regard.

[41 : 29] Excuse me one moment. So that's the who of the matter.

Who are we to entertain, and by whom are they to be entertained? But also there's the question of the how. Remember that at the moment we're just considering the duty that is presented to us in this verse.

Do not forget to entertain strangers. How are we to do so? Well, the primary space for hospitality is our home. There's no doubt, I'm sure, I think it's entirely reasonable to presume that the one who writes these exhortations has this in mind.

He is commending the believers to use their homes as a space, as the location for showing hospitality, for entertaining those who are from the outside, those who are different, those who are strangers in their midst, providing a meal, a bed for the night, the time of day, a listening ear. These are the things that are being considered by this exhortation. and perhaps, as we think about that and how good we are or not, as the case may be in this matter, one thing that is a cause for reflection that I share with you, and I don't pretend to have any answers, but I share it with you for your own consideration.

[43 : 04] Here in Bonacord, we are privileged to have, almost on a weekly basis, those who come and worship with us, and often we have those who come from other countries, generally those who are in Aberdeen for one reason or another, be it students or workers, but who appear.

And we're very glad to see them, and I think there is a genuine effort made to give a welcome to such. But it is striking, or I find it striking, and maybe there are good reasons that I'm just too slow to identify, but it's striking to me how the vast majority of such would seldom return on a second occasion, even though seemingly they have appreciated being with us.

And I think that certainly is something for us to ponder on, why might that be? And I don't pretend to have the answers, and I don't pretend that there is one simple answer, but I leave that with you for your own thought.

The duty commended then. And maybe before I move on to the second element, which is the danger identified in this verse, I would take the opportunity to encourage you again on this matter of a means whereby we can be involved.

Perhaps some would say, well, I'd like to be involved, but how would I do that? How would I meet people who I could show hospitality to? And certainly in the matter of international students, the scheme that has been mentioned in the past, and that I make reference to in the intimation sheet is a very helpful means, the friendship link scheme of Friends International.

[44 : 47] That way you don't need to go and look for your guests, but a guest will be provided for you. And I do, again, commend that to you, and as I say, the forms that need to be filled in are in my possession.

By all means, ask me and I can provide you with one. The duty commended, but also the danger identified. There in the verse we read, do not forget to entertain strangers.

And it's very clear. What is the danger? Well, the danger is that we might forget. The verb here, translated in this way, can carry the idea, and of course these are related meanings, of neglecting something, of disregarding something, even more strongly of caring nothing for a particular duty. And the writer says, do not do that, do not forget, do not neglect, do not disregard this matter. And the idea is of a current failing that has been identified.

We could translate it in this way, do not go on being unmindful. The idea that we have here is not you're doing something good, but careful not to forget in the future.

[46 : 05] Sometimes that is the idea that we would take from an exhortation, don't forget to do something. And we say, oh, what that means is I am doing it, but there is the danger that at some point I might forget.

Don't forget to pray. Yes, you are praying, but don't forget to do something. But that isn't the idea here. Rather, the idea here is that a current failing has been identified.

There is an existing neglect. And the exhortation is that they ought not to continue neglecting this duty.

Why do we neglect this particular duty? Well, I imagine there are any number of reasons that we might identify.

At heart, I think it's fair to say that we are all by nature selfish. We enjoy our privacy, our own space, our own routine, the way things are done, and we're not overly enthusiastic about anything that would interrupt our comfort zone or the way we live and the spaces that we enjoy, the privacy that we value.

[47 : 22] There may be, for some, a fear as to what would be involved. We're very cautious sometimes. And we think, well, maybe if I were to have somebody in my home, what would we speak about?

And would they enjoy being with me? Maybe they would find it an experience that they don't enjoy and I just don't know what I would say. Or we might have any number of barriers, mental, imagined barriers that we have that would hold us back.

Maybe we're simply just very busy and we say, well, yes, that's something that would be good to do, but I just don't know how I could fit it in. Or maybe we fall into the mistake that we so often make in these matters of considering, well, somebody else will do it.

I've always wished to meet this somebody else because this somebody else is a very, very busy person. Somebody else will do it. Somebody else is more suited to it. Somebody else would fit that better than me.

Perhaps we could multiply other possible answers to this question. Why do we neglect this duty? We're not alone. The ones to whom the letter to the Hebrews is written made the same mistake.

[48 : 44] And so it was necessary for them to be exhorted, lovingly, graciously, but firmly nonetheless. Do not forget to entertain strangers.

Whatever the reason why we do neglect this duty, what we are being told is don't do it. Don't neglect. And then finally, as we draw things to a close, there is a reason given.

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so do some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Now, as we consider the reason given, what we want to do is concentrate exclusively on the reason given in this verse.

Of course, many good reasons could be given, and no doubt the writer could have given other reasons. He chose to give this one. In Romans chapter 12, that we considered on a previous occasion, the whole chapter which presents a series of Christian duties is introduced in this way, in view of God's mercy, do this, and do the following, and do the other thing.

And under that umbrella, if you wish, or under that introduction, we have practice hospitality, in view of God's mercy. We might say that is the fundamental reason.

[50 : 10] In the light of God's mercy towards us, we are to show mercy to others. angels. But on this occasion, the reason given is a different one, and it's a rather peculiar one.

For by so doing, some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Now, there's no explicit reference to what occasion is being considered.

The writer doesn't choose to give some historical reference and say, for example, as on this or on that occasion. He simply throws it out as it were, and makes this point by so doing.

Some people, he doesn't say who they are, but some people have entertained angels without knowing it. So given that the writer himself does not identify who these people were, we have to be somewhat cautious.

But as we read that verse, I think for many of us, it does reasonably bring to mind the occasion we read about in Genesis chapter 18 and 19.

[51 : 17] But before just turning to look at that for a very brief moment, the question remains, why is this presented as a reason or as a motivation for entertaining strangers?

It is presented in that way. For some people, by doing this, have entertained angels without knowing it. But why should this constitute a reason?

Or a motivation? Well, the idea seems to be that if you don't entertain strangers, then you could miss out on something special. What might that be?

What might you miss out on by not doing that which is commended? Well, let's just consider, as I say, in a very sleeping way, the passage that we read there in Genesis chapter 18, or the occasion described, described, there at the beginning of chapter 18, and it probably would be helpful if you have your Bibles open there as we very quickly run through the order of events to draw this in a manner that I hope will helpfully tie up what we're considering this evening.

chapter 18 begins by referring to the fact that the Lord appeared to Abraham. There we have it in verse 1, the Lord appeared to Abraham.

[52 : 42] And then in the following verse, reference is made to three men, three visitors. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. Now at this point in the narrative, there is no obvious indication that these two statements are connected.

In any case, it's not clear in what way they're connected. We're told that the Lord appeared to Abraham, that is clear, and we're told that Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. But how these two go together at this point in the narrative is not clear. But then as we continue, in verse 9, we read, or we notice that these men asked a question of Abraham.

Where is your wife, Sarah? They asked him. They clearly referring to these three men. And then immediately following in verse 10, we read, Then the Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

Now here, things do appear to be becoming a little clearer. And it does seem reasonable to presume that these men, or in any case, one of these men, is being identified as the Lord, the one who speaks.

[54 : 10] Then the Lord said, I will surely return to you. The Lord, or certainly one who represents the Lord in a very intimate way. Although if we take it at face value, as many, I think, reasonably do, say, well here, clearly it is being said, however mysterious and difficult this might be to understand, that one of these men can be understood as being the Lord.

And one of them addresses Abraham in the way that we have described. Well, let's move on. In verse 16, the visit to Abraham is concluded, and we read there, When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

Now, if you're following the narrative, I ask you a question that you can answer in your own mind, how many men have now proceeded on their journey? I think it's not difficult to answer the question, well, the three men, the three men who have been spoken of, and we're told where they are heading.

We're told very clearly that they are heading towards Sodom, they looked down towards Sodom, clearly an indication that they were heading in that direction. So, three men leave Abraham.

But then in chapter 19, if we jump through to chapter 19 and verse 1, what do we read? The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening.

[55 : 37] Now, it seems very clear and reasonable to presume that it's the same party who had visited Abraham, but minus one member now. Three men had left Abraham, but now we're told that two angels arrived in Sodom.

It is then a reasonable conclusion that the missing member of the party, of the three who had left Abraham, only two arrive in Sodom, the missing member of the party is the one identified as the Lord.

The remaining two, now identified for the first time in the narrative as angels. In chapter 18, we're not told that, but in chapter 19, we are, the two angels arrived in Sodom.

There were three who came to visit Abraham, described as three men, but as we proceed through the narrative, it becomes clear that one of them is the Lord, and two of them are angels.

Or in any case, that seems to me a reasonable conclusion to come to. Now, to bring us back to the concern that we have, and the writer to the Hebrews makes reference, it seems to me, perhaps to this very occasion, though he doesn't do so explicitly, but to bring it back to that theme, Abraham showed hospitality to these men.

[57 : 06] He didn't know who they were, but he showed them hospitality, as was the custom in his time, and he did so he showed very clear and open-armed hospitality to these unknown visitors.

And we conclude that unknowingly, he was entertaining not only angels, as the writer to the Hebrews comments, but the Lord himself.

And in so entertaining, he was blessed with that greatest of blessings, the promise of a son. I wonder, and of course this is a speculative question that we cannot answer, but had Abraham turned his back on these men, what would have happened?

What would have happened to the promise that he received from the lips of one of them, designated, identified in the narrative as the Lord?

What about us? the writer to the Hebrews clearly makes reference to some entertaining angels without knowing it as being a motivation, as being significant.

[58 : 18] Mysterious and strange as it might seem to us. Well, what about us? Are we seriously to imagine that something similar could happen to us?

Okay, we might be willing to accept that well, this did happen to Abraham, a very strange occasion, a very unique occasion, and yes, we recognize the historicity of it, we are very happy to accept the historicity of it, but that happened way back then, it's not going to happen today.

So what relevance is it to us? As a motivation, as a reason for entertaining strangers, might we entertain the Lord unknowingly?

Is that possible? Is that not just a fantasy scenario? Well, I would suggest that it's not as far-fetched as it might appear.

And in closing, I will do so by simply reading to you the words of our Lord that I think throw relevant light on this matcha.

[59 : 25] In Matthew chapter 25 and verses 34 to 40 where the Lord speaks of that final, great and solemn day of judgment and we read, then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothed you?

When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The king will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you and we thank you that you are good to us in reminding us of the duties that are laid upon us.

[60 : 48] And we recognize that we need to be reminded of so many things. We are careless in fulfilling the duties of that we have and we ask your forgiveness.

But we do thank you that you do prod us and you give us a gentle and sometimes not so gentle reminder. Help us to be attentive to your voice as you would speak to us through your word and in particular on the matters that have been our consideration this evening.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We will close our service this evening by singing and we will sing in Psalm 136 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 136 the second version of the psalm. We will sing verses 1 to 6 to the tune St.

John. Praise God for he is kind. His mercy lasts for day. Give thanks with heart and mind to God of God always for certainly his mercy is due most firm and sure eternally.

[62 : 02] Psalm 136 verses 1 to 6 and we'll stand to sing. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen. Amen.