

# Communion Preparatory Service

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let's turn for a moment this evening to Hebrews chapter 13. Hebrews 13, and I'll read the portion from verse 5 down to verse 8.
- The last chapter of the book of Hebrews at verse 5. 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. So we say with confidence, the Lord is my helper.
- I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. And especially those words at the end of verse 5.
- [ 1 : 0 5 ]     God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. In the United States, I've been told in Beclaw, I don't need to tell people that that's where I'm from.
- So I'm going to assume that you realize that's where I'm from. In the United States, where I'm from, we have a mail order catalog, a mail order company, a big company.
- That's called Land's End. And you can order any type of clothing and they will send it to you. Any size, any shape, any color. And it's interesting that Land's End has a simple guarantee.
- It's actually a two-word guarantee. Their guarantee is simply this. Everything is guaranteed, period. We might need to have three words if we're here in Britain.
- Guaranteed, full stop. And the guarantee goes on to say, Land's End guarantee has always been an unconditional one. It reads, if you're not satisfied with any item, simply return it to us at any time for an exchange or refund of its purchase price.
- [ 2 : 1 1 ]     We mean every word of it. Whatever, whenever, always. But to make sure this is perfectly clear, we've decided to simplify it further. Guaranteed, period.
- This is the kind of promise that you have just heard tonight. Unconditional. That God is stating clearly and without possibility of contradiction or confusion.
- That he has made a commitment to you tonight. If your faith is in the Lord Jesus, if you're a member of his family, He is making an unconditional guarantee, whatever, whenever, always, that he will never leave you.
- He will never forsake you. He will never abandon you. Oftentimes at communion, we are asked to consider our commitment to Jesus.
- Our commitment to God. That's quite natural. That's quite understandable. And that's quite right. But what I'd like to consider tonight is what God's commitment to you is.
- [ 3 : 1 9 ]     Because I'm convinced if we understand where we stand in God's sight, that we will have a security and a stability in our Christian lives.
- That we'll serve. That we'll speak. That we'll witness. Because we know that our standing with God will never change. That his word to us will never be altered.

That his promises will never be compromised. And as we look at this passage, we see a very clear progression. A very logical presentation.

We first begin with the theme of contentment. We then move on to the theme of commitment. We then are told about confidence. And finally, we're reminded of consistency.

So let's look first at contentment. The author here in verse 5 is saying, There is real contentment and there is false contentment.

[ 4 : 20 ] He says there's, for example, the love of money. Now money is a strange thing. The strange thing about money is the more that you have tends to be the more that you need and the more that you want.

It's not always the case, but oftentimes, those who don't have much can have a level of contentment that is absent in the lives that have many.

Because the more you have, you find the more you need, the more you require, and the more you desire. So the author is saying, Look, there's a love of money that will never bring contentment.

It was said in the 1930s, in the height of the American Depression, that John D. Rockefeller III had a \$100 million fortune.

That's when \$100 million was still a significant amount of money. And he was saying that the cares of managing \$100 million kept him up all night.

[ 5 : 19 ] No satisfaction. No enjoyment. No desire. And I think it was Rockefeller, it may have been Rockefeller, one or the other, it might have been J.P. Morgan, was asked, How much money do you need, Mr. Rockefeller?

And his answer was, Just a little bit more. So there's no real contentment, there's no real satisfaction, there's no real point. If you measure your life in pounds and pence or dollars and cents, there'll never be a time where you say, I'm happy, I'm content, I've got all I need, I've got all I require.

However, the author is saying that you can be content with what you have, whether it's a lot or a little. Not if your measure is in pounds and pennies, but if your understanding is who God is.

If God is the foundation of your life, if God is the bedrock upon which your house is built, it's not only possible, but it's actually true that you can have a contentment in any and every situation.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians chapter 4. He's giving thanks to the church in Philippi, and he says, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me.

[ 6 : 40 ] Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. The Apostle Paul was not saying that the life of Christian service was a life of self-satisfaction or self-contentment.

It was not a life that you could easily draw comfort from your circumstances because he's writing here from a prison cell. And he was in that prison cell because he was serving and speaking on behalf of Jesus.

So on a human level, there was absolutely no reason that Paul would be content. But what he's saying here is that when it's Jesus who gives you strength, then you can be content.

[ 7 : 49 ] You can be content when you're happy, and you can be content when you're sad. You can be content when everything's going your way and when everything's going against you. You can be content when you have a lot, and you can be content when you have nothing.

Last weekend, I was conducting a wedding, and what I try to convey when I'm meeting the couple and talking about the day and planning the day is to say that really there's only a few things that are absolutely essential to the wedding day.

But what is absolutely essential not just to the wedding day but to the marriage that comes after the day is this. It's that the promises that you're making to each other, that you know what you're promising, and that your desire is to live out those promises.

So the words that we use often are, you know, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, for richer and for poorer, so that no matter what, at all times, in all circumstances, this man is saying, I want you to be my wife, and this woman is saying, I want you to be my husband, even when we're sick, and even when the times are tough, and even when there's no money in the bank.

That's what we talk about as an unconditional promise. And the Apostle Paul is speaking of an unconditional contentment. Now, if you're not a Christian here tonight, well, first of all, if you're not a Christian, I'm glad you're here.

[ 9 : 15 ] I'm glad you're here to listen to what God has to say. But if you're here and you're not yet trusting in Jesus, this kind of contentment is not possible.

Because if Jesus is not at the center of your life, you can't draw strength from him, you can't draw comfort from him, you can't take all of the resources that he is giving to you.

Later in Philippians 4, as Paul is finishing that letter, he puts it this way. He says, My God is able to meet all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

So there is a supply of resources, a supply of strength, a supply of comfort, a supply of wisdom, but that supply comes only through one channel.

And that channel is Jesus Christ. So not only does Jesus save you from, he saves you from sin, he saves you from guilt, he saves you from punishment.

[ 10 : 17 ] He not only saves you for heaven, for eternal life, but he sustains you here and now. He gives you all that is needed, all the comfort, all the strength, all the wisdom, all the guidance.

But this requires a personal relationship with him. It's not enough to know about him. It's not enough to admire him. It's not enough to agree with him.

But there's a personal response which we call faith, where you're willing to rest your life on him, where you're willing to place your life in his hands, because he placed his life on the cross so that we could be forgiven, so that we can be given a new heart and a new beginning, a new start.

So tonight, when we're talking about contentment, when we're talking about commitment, when we're talking about confidence, all of these qualities and characteristics are rooted in Jesus, in who he is, in what he has done, and thereby what we benefit in coming to know him, in coming to follow him, in coming to trust him, in placing our lives into his hands.

Because let me tell you that his hands are strong hands, and that his hands are comforting and gentle hands, and that all that he says and all that he promises, he endeavors to keep completely.

[ 11 : 45 ] completely. His promises are 100% guaranteed. So there's a contentment. A contentment that's based upon who God is, rather than a contentment that's based on what you have.

If your life consists of what you have, whether you're in school, in university, whether you're working, whether you're single, whether you're married, whatever it is, if your life or contentment is based on what you have, there will always be something missing.

Something more that you'd like. Something different that you'd like. Something else that you'd like. But if your contentment is rooted in God, you have a sure foundation.

Because notice here, that contentment follows from commitment. Because. We're told that we can be content because.

Because of what God has said. And this is really striking because it's, God is quoted as saying here, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

[ 12 : 52 ] Now this passage occurs three times in the Old Testament. Quite, almost immediately following each other. It occurs twice at the end of Deuteronomy.

That's near the end of Moses' life and ministry. And then it occurs in the first chapter of Joshua, the beginning of the new chapter in the history of God's people.

Moses is dead. Joshua is their new leader. And three times this statement is made. The first time it's made by Moses to Israel.

So it's a promise for the people of God. It's a collective promise. But then it's made secondly by Moses to Joshua. Personal.

Moses is saying, look, I'm leaving. I'm an old man and my days are coming to an end. But the country, the people of Israel will not be left alone because God will be with them.

[ 13 : 50 ] You see, leaders can come and go and preachers can come and go and we come and go but God remains forever. So you can imagine that the Israelites were worried.

Moses is getting old. Moses is coming near to the end. What will we do without him? Well, the answer is you have God. God is always there and he promises this.

He promises that he will never leave and never forsake. And then that personal promise that Moses gave to Joshua. Again, you can imagine for many years Moses led the people of God.

It wasn't easy. It was a challenging road from Egypt through the wilderness and now they're at the edge of the promised land. Moses is going and Joshua is being elevated to this position of power and he's not ready.

He's not able but yet God isn't going to leave him. Moses will leave but God won't leave. And then again at the very beginning of Joshua, Joshua 1, the word is repeated by God directly to Joshua.

[ 14 : 52 ] Don't worry. Be courageous. Be strong. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. And if your faith tonight is in Jesus, this is a promise that you can take to heart.

Whoever you are, whatever your circumstance, whatever your background, whatever it is that you're dealing with today, notice this, that God is making an unconditional promise to you.

And the language that we have, the English language, is limited. Each language is different. When you take one language and you translate it into another, you can never get it just right.

In English, if you take two negatives and put them together, that equals a positive. If you say, I'm not not coming, that means I am coming.

You know, you take the two negatives and you cancel them out and effectively you're saying a positive rather than a negative. In this statement that we have here, there are five negative words.

[ 15 : 55 ] Let's say five no's. And instead of canceling each other out, they amplify each other. It's like, you know, if you highlight or you underline, you're amplifying a word in a book because it's important.

And God is amplifying this truth. So if you want to translate this loosely, but yet accurately, you could say, because God has said, I will never, never, never leave you.

And I will never, never forsake you. So if you didn't get to the first time or the second time or the third time or the fourth time, you've maybe gotten it by the fifth time that God isn't going anywhere.

God isn't going to let you go. God isn't going to let you down. God isn't going to remove himself from you. And if you stop and think for a minute, ask yourself, what's the context here?

What's happening in the background? Well, what's happening in the background is that you have a group of Christians who are tempted. They are being tempted to give up.

[ 17 : 01 ] The Christian life is too tough. They are being tempted to go back, to go back to the old way of life, to go back to the old religion. They are being tempted to give in, to give in to temptation and to just do what other people do.

Following Jesus seems to be very difficult. Following Jesus gets them into trouble. Following Jesus brings persecution. Following Jesus brings economic hardship. And the real thought is, it would be much easier if I just left this life of following Jesus.

And maybe tonight, if you're honest, you can say, I know exactly what you're saying. Because it's difficult. It's difficult to be faithful to Christ in a world that seems to be moving in completely the different direction.

It's difficult to be a witness for Jesus when so many other people have no knowledge or no interest or no knowledge and no interest in Jesus. But the message to these people, and if you read through the letter to the Hebrews, it's a very simple message.

The message is this. Jesus is better because Jesus is best. Jesus is better than, and you can put a blank, so he's better than the old way of life.

[ 18 : 22 ] He's better than the old way of thinking. He's better than what the world can offer. And the reason why he's better is because he's best. Now, the issues might change.

This is predominantly to a Jewish audience that had left Judaism to become Christians, to become followers of Jesus. But you can easily update this letter. You can see the temptations.

You can see the challenges. You can see the oppositions. You can see the alternatives that are being put before you. And you can say to yourself, well, Jesus is better than all of these alternatives because he's the absolute best.

So tonight, it is possible to be content as a Christian with whatever you have, not because of you, but because of God.

Our commitment to God is always going to be variable. Some days good, some days bad. Sometimes high, sometimes low, sometimes strong, sometimes weak, sometimes warm, sometimes cold.

[ 19 : 23 ] But God's commitment to us is unchanging because God doesn't change. His promises don't change. His nature, his character doesn't change.

So you see, if this was the only promise in the Bible, this would be all that we need. But the Bible is full of promises. And they're all true. And they're all yes.

And they're all amen. So when you enter into this relationship with God, you might be aware of your sin. You might be aware of guilt. You might be aware of a need for forgiveness.

And you come to Jesus and you receive the gift of life. You receive the gift of salvation. You receive forgiveness of sins. But as you begin to learn more, you realize that that's just the beginning.

That's just the beginning of all the blessings that God wants to shower upon us, that God wants us to enjoy day by day. He's not promising us an easy journey.

[ 20 : 21 ] He's not promising us a carefree life. But he's promising us company. He's saying, wherever you go, whatever you face, whoever may be with you or against you, God will be with us.

He will stand alongside of us. He will lead us. He'll protect us. And he'll preserve us. This is who he is. This is what he does. We read from John's Gospel, John chapter 10.

Now I said in this particular verse, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. It occurs once in the New Testament here. It occurs three times in the Old Testament. But the verses that we read in John chapter 10 in many ways are reworking of this theme.

We read in John 10 at verse 28, Jesus saying, I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one. So isn't Jesus saying the same thing?

[ 21 : 34 ] He's saying that when you come to know Him, you receive eternal life. When you receive this gift, He says, nobody will take you out of my hand.

Nobody will take you out of my Father's hand. Nobody will take you from Jesus. You are safe, you are secure, and that is His promise.

That is Jesus' commitment to you. That is His guarantee on your behalf. Yes, there may be times where we struggle. There may be times that we rebel.

There may be times that we want to move away. But ultimately, this promise of Jesus depends upon Him. Does He really mean what He's saying? Does He really understand the problems or the challenges?

Is He really able to do what He says? And the answer is yes. He really means what He is saying. He really does understand what we face. and He really is able to do what He says He will do.

[ 22 : 38 ] So this kind of commitment on God's behalf enables us first to be content. And then verse 6, it also enables us to be confident.

To have a confidence, to have a strength. In verse 6, so we say with confidence, since the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Well, the answer to that last question is quite a bit. We have the ability to love and be loved, to hurt and be hurt. The capacity of evil or the capacity of malevolence on the part of men and women is vast.

You don't need to look beyond the daily newspaper or the evening news bulletins. We see what men can do to men or women can do to women.

The violence, the hurt, the abuse, whatever it may be. But the author here isn't saying that man is powerless to hurt. But if God is your helper, then you can face life without fear.

[ 23 : 46 ] You can face life without anxiety or uncertainty. And isn't it interesting the way in which the Lord, a word that speaks of his power, a word that speaks of his majesty, is described in this way.

The Lord is my helper. There are so many different ways in which God is described. He's described as king. He's described as the lord of the armies or the heavenly general.

He's described as the one who is all present or all powerful. Jesus is described as friend. He's described as lord, as master. But here we're told that we can look upon the Lord as our helper.

Now somebody who knows you, somebody who cares about you, somebody who is intimately involved in your life. So he not only knows the trouble, he not only knows the anxiety, but he is so close to you that he helps you in any and every trial.

He's there in any and every tribulation. He's there no matter what the opposition, no matter what the challenge or temptation. He's your helper. Yes, he's your lord and savior.

[ 24 : 58 ] Yes, he's the one who died to give you life. And yes, he too is that helper who's there no matter what at all times in all circumstances.

Earlier in the letter to the Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 4 reminds us of what kind of priest we have in Jesus. He's a high priest. He's a great high priest who is able to help us.

This is Hebrews 4 at verse 14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[ 26 : 06 ] If you're a Christian, you have a friend in a very high place. He's at God's right hand. He's at that ultimate place of power, that ultimate place of authority, and he is saying to you that the door is always open, that he is always there, that his ears are always open, that his power is now at your disposal, and whatever it is that you need, he'll provide.

Now, faith trusts that he knows the right time, he knows the right answer, he knows the best way. So by all means, pray, pray in every circumstance, by all means, suggest a remedy, but have faith to trust that Jesus, your helper, that Jesus, your savior, Jesus, your friend, that he, when he answers, his answer is always the best answer.

His timing is always the best timing. His intervention is always the best intervention. So you see, when Jesus is in your life, you can be content.

When Jesus is in your life, you can be confident. You can be confident because he's your helper. And when he's on your side, though man can hurt, they can hassle, they can trouble you, there's persecution, there's opposition, when Jesus is on your side, nobody can really harm you, nobody can really hurt you because you have someone there who is protecting, someone there who knows you, who loves you, who cares for you and says, I am now your helper.

Whatever it needs, just tell. Whatever you require, just ask. Whatever the circumstance, whatever day, time of day or night, he's always there. He's our Lord, he's our savior, and he's our helper.

[ 27 : 57 ] But one thing to notice is that there is a consistency. And this comes from verse 8. We move from contentment to commitment to confidence, and then finally this word of consistency.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We're told earlier in Hebrews 4 that he's just like us, except without sin.

But we're reminded here that there's another difference. We change. We grow old. We grow weak. We can grow forgetful. We can have highs and lows.

We can be strong. We can be weak. We can be discouraged. We can be encouraged. But there's a consistency of Jesus that means that his promises, that his guarantees, that his commitments, that his work on our behalf is never diminished.

He's never weak. He's never tired. He's never forgetful. He never says one thing and means another. So there's a perfect consistency within his character and a perfect consistency in his promises and in his actions.

[ 29 : 12 ] So when we read in John chapter 10, remember Jesus described himself in two ways. He described himself first as I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

So Jesus is the gate. He was the gate yesterday. He is the gate today. And he will be the gate tomorrow unless he returns in the meantime. So he's always there opening up for us that way from us to him.

That way from us to God. He says, here's the door and that door is wide open and that door is me. So there's no other door. There's no other gate. But we enter personally through him.

He goes on to describe himself as the good shepherd. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. So the shepherd looks out for the sheep.

The shepherd protects the sheep. The shepherd feeds the sheep and guides and guards the sheep. So Jesus is the good shepherd yesterday and he's the good shepherd today and he's the good shepherd tomorrow.

[ 30 : 14 ] So he's always there guarding us and guiding us and keeping us and protecting us. He laid down his life as a measure of his commitment, as a measure of his love. So you see, when it comes down to it, when we're sitting at the Lord's table, we are not drawing attention to ourselves. We're not saying, look at me. Look at how strong my faith is. Look at how strong my commitment is. Look at how consistent I am as a Christian. No, we're doing exactly the opposite.

We're saying, look how strong Jesus is. Look how consistent he is. Look how strong his commitment is. Look how constant his promises are. I'm weak, but he's strong. We're drawing attention not to ourselves, but to the one who has saved us, to the one who has set us free, to the one who sustains us, and to the one who will one day bring us to be with him forever and ever. So Jesus is the gate.

Jesus is the good shepherd. And that was true yesterday. It is true today, and it will be true tomorrow. But remember too, also the great promises. He gave two promises in John 10. John 10:10, he says this, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. You should at least know what the opposition is offering here. Here's the alternative. Satan doesn't put it that way. He puts his offer in a much more pleasant perspective. He offers you to have life that's real fun. He offers you joy that doesn't end. But ultimately what he delivers, as Jesus says, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. He lies, he steals, he cheats, and he wants to destroy. Jesus says, but I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly. So he says, if you follow me, if you take me into your heart and into your life, he says, I'm going to give you life. Not just the breathing, respiring, and brain functioning kind of life, but I'm going to give you life that's described as abundant. And then in verse 28 of John 10, he goes on and says this, I give them eternal life. So he has a gift of life.

The thief can only offer. The thief can't deliver. Because the thief desires to do exactly what he promised, exactly the opposite of what he promises. The thief wants to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus says, here's my offer. Here's my invitation. I want to give you abundant life, and I want to give you life that never ends. So you see, those promises are true yesterday, and those promises are true today, and those promises are true tomorrow. So Jesus Christ, his person, his character, doesn't change.



Jesus, his work on our behalf, doesn't change. The payment price that he made on the cross never diminishes, never reduces. And isn't that remarkable about God? You see, when we give, we have less to give. If I were to give you 10 pounds, I would have 10 pounds less. I'd be 10 pounds poorer. You'd be 10 pounds richer. When God gives, he's never diminished. He's never poorer. When God exercises his power and authority, he's never weaker. He's never fatigued. So you see, Jesus has exercised his work, his life on our behalf. And it's always there. It's always done. It's always full.

[ 33 : 54 ] And he gives and gives and gives and never is diminished. So his work is the same, his word is the same, and his gospel is the same. So tonight, if you're not yet a Christian, the offer is still the same. The terms and conditions are unchanged. The work that Jesus accomplished remains undiminished, and the invitation that he gives remains completely the same. Would you like life? It's theirs for the taking. Would you like life that's complete? It's yours for the asking. Would you like life that never ends? It's there offered to you with open hands, with an open door, and with an open invitation.

And for those of us who do know Jesus, we have confidence to tell others. We have confidence to say to anyone and everyone, place your faith in Jesus, and he'll never let you down. Place your life in his hands, and he'll never let you go. Trust in him, and he will never leave you. We can never really make those guarantees ourselves, because we'll never live. We don't live forever on this planet.

Ultimately, those that we love most dearly will either leave us, or we will leave them. But Jesus promises never, ever to leave. Never, never, never to forsake. This is his commitment to you. His promise on your behalf, and he doesn't change. He's the same yesterday, and he's the same today, and thanks be to God. If we have tomorrow, he will be the same tomorrow, and his gospel will be the same. As we sit together at his table, we are promoting who he is, and we are celebrating what he has done. So may God give us the grace to humbly accept his help, humbly receive his gift, and to live in the light of his goodness. Let us pray.