


JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

HEBREWS READING GUIDE

WEEK 25



JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

WEEK 25
NOVEMBER 20, 2023



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A PASSAGE TO READ,

... SOME COMMENTS TO CONSIDER,

... THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK,

... A PRAYER TO PRAY.




WEEK 25

HEBREWS 13:17-25



DAY 1
HEBREWS 13:17
WATCHING THE SOUL
5

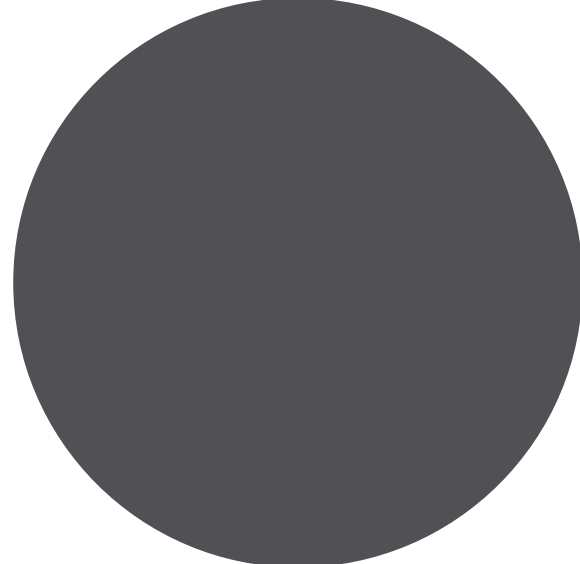
DAY 2
HEBREWS 13:18-19
CLEARING THE CONSCIENCE
7



DAY 3
HEBREWS 13:20
BEHOLDING THE LORD
9

DAY 4
HEBREWS 13:21
EQUIPPING FOR GOOD
11

DAY 5
HEBREWS 13:22-25
BEARING WITH THE WORD
13



DAY 1 WATCHING THE SOUL

First read Hebrews 13:17.

Obedience and submission are sandpaper against modern sensibility. Personal autonomy is supreme. Therefore to release our will to another, we believe, is to lose grip of ourselves. *And the fact that Hebrews teaches us to surrender to church leaders?* Well, that only solidifies our deep aversion.

In previous generations clergy were generally revered. Today they're just as often questioned. For the past decade or so, the Barna Group has been reporting on what they call a "credibility crisis" in American church leadership. In 2021 they conducted a project in which they found that 38% of U.S. adults don't trust local pastors. This number understandably spikes to 68% when exclusively polling those with no religious affiliation. Fueled by countless stories of abuse, corruption, and celebrityism, our desire to obey and submit to our spiritual leaders is at an all-time low.

Some leaders **"do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites"** (Romans 16:18a). Or as Jesus put it, they show up **"in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves"** (Matthew 7:15). You see, it's only when a leader is **"keeping watch over your souls,"** that it's good and wise to submit to them. When we're led by men and women who know they **"will have to give an account"** and serve **"with joy and not with groaning"** we're wonderfully equipped and built up in Christ (v.17). Obedience becomes hopeful. Submitting becomes life-giving. Because righteous leadership reflects Jesus' leadership. He didn't use his power to abuse, corrupt, or become famous. Instead, surrendered to his Father's will, he used his power to bring us to God (see Luke 22:42 and 1 Peter 3:18). In other words, we only obey and submit to our leaders as much as they are in obedience and submission to Jesus.

DAY 1 WATCHING THE SOUL

1. How does God lead us?
2. What's godly leadership look like? What does godly surrender look like?
3. Why is it life-giving and joyful to submit to Jesus?

Heavenly Father ...

It's terrifying to obey. It's hard to submit. It's vulnerable to release my will to earthly leadership. Give me wisdom. Give me joy. Give me faith. Empower me to obey and submit to those who obey and submit to Jesus.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 2

CLEARING THE CONSCIENCE

First read Hebrews 13:18-19.

Prayer is a bold enjoyment of intimacy with our Heavenly Father. Pastor Eugene Peterson explains that “Prayer is a refusal to live as an outsider to my God and my own soul” (*Tell it Slant*, 135). And as we seek our way inside ourselves and the Father’s heart, we cultivate closeness with our spiritual siblings. That’s what the writer of Hebrews is doing. He’s ushering closeness by asking for his readers to **“Pray for us”** (v.18a). It’s not just information but an invitation to shoulder his burdens through prayer. He wants a clear conscience. He desires to act honorably. He wants to be with them again.

At first blush this seem like little more than a laundry list of requests. However, by sharing these particular needs with his readers he’s actually confessing his weakness and asking his Father and his brothers and sisters to see him *truly*. You see, in asking for prayer for a clear conscience he’s really confessing that his conscience isn’t clear. By sharing his desire to act honorably he’s also admitting an innate impulse to act dishonorably. Describing his longing to be with them is also a lament of isolation and distance from those he loves. Prayer draws them close.

Perhaps this is why Jesus warned about the temptation of pretending in our prayers. In our prayers we **“must not be like the hypocrites”** (Matthew 6:5). Out of religious routines we’re prone to use prayer as a covering for our guilt and shame. Our requests float on the surface, failing to pursue closeness with the Father and his family. But prayer is not our covering. Jesus is. And because he covers and cleanses our conscience, dishonor, and lament ... we can draw close.

DAY 2

CLEARING THE CONSCIENCE

1. Why do you think God wants you to pray?
2. Why do you pray? What do you pray about? Who do you pray with?
3. How does the gospel change the reason, content, and community of our prayers?

Heavenly Father ...

*Your Son has made intimacy with you possible by grace.
(Inhale. Exhale.)*

*Your Spirit holds us fast as your children by mercy.
(Inhale. Exhale.)*

*Your family is a gift; help us to confess and shoulder burdens
for your glory.
(Inhale. Exhale.)*

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3 BEHOLDING THE LORD

First read Hebrews 13:20.

After asking his readers for prayer, the writer of Hebrews prays for his readers. He begins where Jesus instructs us all to begin in prayer: **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”** (Matthew 6:9). He begins with the nature of God. *He is the God of peace.* He begins with the power of God. *Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.* Then he speaks of the nature of Jesus. *The great shepherd of the sheep.* He speaks of the power of Jesus. *By the blood of the eternal covenant.* Everything else that will sprout from his benediction finds meaning, possibility, and life in the soil of the nature and power of God.

Beholding God is the beginning of every true prayer—regardless of how it’s answered. If anything we pray about comes about, it’s because of God power and grace. If anything we pray about does not come about, it’s because of God wisdom and mercy. That’s because no matter the outcome, God is committed to bringing about **“what is good and acceptable and perfect”** (Romans 12:2). You see, beholding God from the start is not a way of buttering him up to get what we want. Beholding God shapes our expectations around his glory, wisdom, and love, preparing us to trust him come what may. Prayer doesn’t conform God to our will, but rather conforms us to his.

When we behold God we realize he doesn’t need to be tricked to use his eternal resources for our good (see Psalm 98:11). He has already sent the fullness of heaven down in our midst, **“and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14).

DAY 3

BEHOLDING THE LORD

1. When you behold God, what do you see?
2. How do you begin your prayers? How is this shaping your heart and expectations?
3. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus help you trust God with your prayers?

Heavenly Father ...

You are the God of peace. You are good. You are holy. You are perfect. With all that I'm desiring, needing and wanting, lamenting and celebrating, and waiting for help me to trust you, my loving Heavenly Father who withholds from me no good thing.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4 EQUIPPING FOR GOOD

First read Hebrews 13:21.

Few of us have not experienced a season or task for which we felt ill-equipped. Perhaps your boss asked you to do something but didn't give you the appropriate knowledge, resources, or authority to do it well. Or maybe the loss of a loved one forced you down a road of grief you didn't have language, understanding, or time to process. Being ill-equipped leads to all kinds of negative feelings and destructive coping measures.

The Lord never leads us to a place where we don't need him. Quite the opposite. As the Spirit led the Son ***"into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil,"*** we are always led into seasons and tasks where we desperately need the Lord (Matthew 4:1). And we often feel ill-equipped. That's because Christian maturity isn't measured by our independence, but by our dependency. Another way of thinking about it is that we never face a situation for which we are spiritually ill-equipped. Because God is with us (see Matthew 1:23). ***"The great shepherd to sheep"*** equips his flock through his very presence (vv.20,21). ***"Through Jesus Christ"*** we have all we need to ***"do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight"*** (v.21).

Being ill-equipped leads to all kinds of negative feelings and destructive coping measures. But when Christ goes with us, we get wiser and stronger, we find healing and space, and learn new vocabulary to describe each new wilderness we traverse.

DAY 4

EQUIPPING FOR GOOD

1. What does it mean that God is with us?
2. **How** have you recently felt ill-equipped?
3. How did Jesus encourage, mature, or correct you in your inadequacy?

Heavenly Father ...

Thank you for meeting me right where I am, whatever I am in, whenever I am there.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5 BEARING WITH THE WORD

First read Hebrews 13:22-25.

Customary to first-century correspondence, our writer ends with a final exhortation as well as some updates and greetings. It's personal. The heart-felt salutation reminds us of the author's humanity. The Lord has used his pen to instruct Christians for all times and season that Jesus Christ ***"is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power"*** (1:3). But our author is just a person. He's a son to parents. He may be a brother or husband or father or uncle. He's a member of a local church. He knows grief, anxiety, happiness, and boredom. Whoever the writer might be, he's a human being. He's a sinner much more fit to receive this message than write it.

God's Word is often banished to holy moments. We carve out a certain ten percent of our lives and allow God to speak and rule over what seems sacred or religious. Eighteenth-century theologian Abraham Kuyper famously said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" Jesus over everything.

It's knowing that Christ reigns over all and is greater than all that compels us to bear with the writer's ***"word of exhortation"*** in all things (v.22). God's Word must not be silenced—anywhere. Every event on our calendar, every conversation in our homes, each person we meet, and every molecule of our souls longs to be dissected by the living and active Word that is ***"sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow"*** (4:12). In the radiance of God's Word every untruth is exposed and corrected; every injustice named and made right; every brokenness dignified and healed.


DAY 5 BEARING WITH THE WORD

1. Why is God's Word so powerful?
2. In what areas, situations, or relationships in your life do you often fail to bear with God's Word?
3. How does Jesus' incarnation tear down what is often called, "the sacred and secular divide"?

Heavenly Father ...

Thank you that your Word brings power, meaning, and hope to all of life.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



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