

Love for Strangers (Hebrews 13:2)

So, what are the marks of kingdom citizens? Assuming that you have been given a kingdom which is unshakable and that kingdom is eternal and that your life is wrapped up in that kingdom and that you are a citizen of that, what is a kingdom citizen? And what does the life of a kingdom citizen look like? That is something that should concern us from the moment that we are transformed and redeemed and saved. How do kingdom citizens live in this world which is not our home? And we are not citizens of any earthly kingdom in any kind of eternal sense. We are temporary residents here. And that is the question; answering that question is the focus of Hebrews chapter 13, as the author now comes to this giant conclusion to all of the arguments that he has been making for twelve chapters. And you see the conclusion begin at chapter 12, verses 28–29, where he says, “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.”

That “therefore” at verse 28 is the ultimate therefore. He has told us that we are redeemed and that we are saved, that our sins have been taken away and atoned for, that Christ has died to cleanse our conscience and to clear our slate and to give us His righteousness. He has told us now that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and is currently interceding for us, from which position He has secured us everlastingly. And we have hope in this life and hope for the next all because of what Christ has done. And so therefore, the author says, having brought all of that argument now to a head at the end of chapter 12, therefore here is how we ought to live. Here is what we should do. Here is what should characterize us. Here is how we should behave. And that's what chapter 13 is—a list of exhortations and commands and closing considerations by which the author is bringing to a focus now how it is that all of the truth in the first twelve chapters impacts our day-to-day lives. If all of that is true, if Christ has given Himself for you in your place and if you have received an unshakable kingdom, then here is what should be true of you. Here's how you should live.

Verse 28, we should show gratitude. Verse 28, we should offer to God acceptable service with reverence and awe. Chapter 13, verse 1, we should love the brethren. And then chapter 13, verse 2 and on, it follows these other practical applications, things that kingdom citizens do.

And last week we looked at verse 1, the brotherly love commandment: “Let love of the brethren continue.” Just two major words in the Greek which basically just says that

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brotherly affection that characterizes family members, that love of the brethren, let that continue in the church, let that continue in your life. Then that command to show brotherly love which we saw last week is natural for the believer. The expression—the possession—of brotherly love is natural for the believer. It is something that is instinctive to the Christian. That idea of brotherly love now sort of overshadows, it hangs over the rest of these commandments in this opening paragraph of chapter 13.

Look at verse 2. These are all expressions, by the way, of brotherly love. Verse 2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” We should “remember the prisoners [verse 3], as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.” Both of those are expressions of brotherly love. Let brotherly love continue, let love of the strangers continue, and let love of prisoners continue.

Verse 4 is also an expression of an appropriate brotherly love. “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” It is an expression of brotherly love that we honor marriage and keep our marriage bed undefiled from fornication and adultery. That is an expression of proper love. Another expression of proper love is to be free from the love of money. Verse 5: “Being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.”

So there is an improper love with which proper love is contrasted in verse 4. That is the love of, in an inappropriate way, of those who are not our spouse, or somebody of the opposite sex, or somebody else where that love is inappropriate. That's verse 4. Then there is the contrast with another kind of inappropriate love. That is the love for money, the love for things, and an active discontentment.

Another expression of brotherly love is in verse 7. Follow the example of godly leaders. “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” So brotherly love is sort of the overarching command, the overarching principle. This brotherly affection, let it continue in the church. What does that look like? Here are some very practical applications of that, some very practical ways where that is worked out in body life.

Verse 2—this is our text for this morning: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” That is our

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verse for this morning. That first kind of expression of brotherly love is the love of strangers, or showing hospitality to strangers.

And there are three questions that we're going to answer this morning—three considerations—and here they are. Number one, what is hospitality? What is hospitality? Number two, why is it important? Of all the things that we could be commanded to exercise, why is hospitality important? And number three, what do angels have to do with it? That's a good question. What do angels have to do with this? Like it would have been sufficient simply to say “exercise hospitality” and then to move on. But what in the world do angels have to do with exercising hospitality? You notice that at the end of verse 2: “For by this [that is, by the exercise or the showing of love for strangers—hospitality] some have entertained angels without knowing it [or “angels unaware” as some of the older translations say].”

Let's begin with what is hospitality? Let me offer you a definition. It was important to define what brotherly love was or brotherly affection was last week in verse 1. There's a form or a part of the word *brotherly love* that also appears in this verse, and it is the word for love because that's what hospitality is. Hospitality is a form of love, and so the word that is used here that is translated hospitality is *philoxenia*. *Philoxenia*. And it's actually a combination of two words. So just as brotherly love or affection, love for the brothers, is one word that is a combination of two other words, *phileo*, meaning love or a kind of love that is a kind affection, not an erotic love and not that kind of agape love, but a brotherly affection, and then *adelphos*, which is “brotherly”—love of the brethren. They crammed those two words together to get brotherly love—*philadelphia*. It's the same word that we get our city name from. Well, this likewise is two words kind of combined into one. *Phileo*—again, the word *love*. We are to have *phileo delphia*, which is love of the brethren, and we are to have a *phileo xenia*, which is a love for strangers.

And the word *xenia* is the word that is translated in the New Testament as “lodging place” or “guest room.” It comes from the word *xenos*, which means “stranger” or “foreigner.” We're familiar with that word because we have some of our English words that come from that, like *xenophobia*, which is the fear of strangers, the fear of foreigners, the fear of those who are not like us. So a *philoxenia* is a love for strangers or a love for foreigners or for others. And so the author is commending to us a kind affection, a warm regard, a friendly love for strangers. A form of the word for stranger—*xenos* is the word for stranger—*xenia*, that Greek word in the New Testament, is sometimes used as a lodging place or a room. For instance in Philemon chapter—well,

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Philemon has one chapter—Philemon, verse 22, where Paul says to Philemon, “At the same time also prepare me a lodging [a *xenia*—prepare me a room], for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.” So the idea of *philoxenia* is the love of a lodging place. It's the combination of the idea of preparing somebody a lodging for strangers or foreigners, and then the affection that is attached to that.

You could own a hotel and have no love whatsoever and sell out your rooms to complete strangers each and every night and never exercise hospitality, even though you might have hospitality services. But that's not hospitality. Hospitality is having a kind or warm affection for strangers to the point where you are willing to open up your home, open up your table, and to provide means or sustenance to other people who are not part of your home. They might be strangers, they might be foreigners, and they may even be people within the body of Christ. So the NASB translation, “show hospitality to strangers,” is somewhat redundant because the word *hospitality*—it would have been sufficient to just simply say “show hospitality.” But to show hospitality to strangers is to say show the love of strangers to strangers. What he's describing here is the kind of love that is willing to open up your home and to prepare lodging, to prepare a room, or to give somebody room and board.

If we translate it just “show hospitality,” you and I might be tempted to think that what the author has in mind here is simply being kind to the people that we like, the people that are like us, the people that we really enjoy hanging around with. And this command would include that, but this command is much broader than that. This command has to do with doing that for strangers.

Now you say, Jim, my stranger danger warning is going up here. There's got to be some consideration. You're certainly not talking about just running and grabbing a random homeless person off the street and bringing them into my house to lodge with my family, are you? Not entirely. There are some considerations which I'll get to later on. But I want you to understand that this word is not just talking about opening up our table to the people that we like to hang out with, our close friends. That is a form of hospitality, but hospitality is in no way limited to that. This word was used to receive others into your home and to provide food and lodging. It is to open your home and your heart to others. You can see how this is a form of brotherly love.

And I think that the author has in mind here a love to brothers who are strangers. It's not just that we open our homes in hospitality to people who are believers. It certainly includes that, but it also goes beyond that. It is more than that. And notice that this was

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an expected practice, which is why the author says, “Don't neglect to do this.” In other words, it was going on and he is encouraging them to not forget. That's really the word that is translated “neglect.” It means to forget it or to lose sight of it or to simply let it pass out of your mind, to not recall to do it. It was the word used for something that is forgotten or lost to your remembrance. So, really, this is a command to remember to do something. In other words, it is the expectation that believers will open their homes to other people, strangers and people that they know well, Christians and non-Christians, and that when that is going on and this is happening within the home—within the believer's home—that you and I will not get to the point where we start forgetting to do this because of whatever considerations come into our lives from outside of this. Don't neglect it. Remember this.

In fact, this list of commands is a list of commands to remember different things. We are to remember to let brotherly love continue. We are to remember to show hospitality to strangers (verse 2). We are to remember the prisoners (verse 3). We are to remember our marriage vows (verse 4). We are to remember that the Lord Himself has said, I will never leave you nor desert you (verse 5). We are to remember those who teach us the Word of God (verse 7). There's a lot of things to remember, and this is just another one of them. This hospitality, this love for strangers that is to go on, don't let it slip from your mind so that it gets out of your mind and thus out of your life. Because once it is out of your mind and you're not thinking about it, life will come and the days will stack up and the weeks will pass one after another and pretty soon you realize it has been months or years since I have done anything like this. But once you forget to do it, then it will be forgotten from your life, and you and others will suffer as a result of it. And I mean suffer not because God's going to discipline you or hurt you or harm you—that's not the idea—but just that we lose out a blessing when we forget to do this.

One last thing I should say about what hospitality is, and this is something that needs to be dislodged from our minds and our hearts. It is not a spiritual gift. It's not a spiritual gift, it's a command. People say this all the time; “my gift is hospitality.” No. Nobody has the spiritual gift of hospitality. The command to you is to be hospitable, to exercise hospitality, but nobody has that gift. Now you may have certain character qualities, you may have certain natural wiring, you may be a gregarious and outgoing personality. There might be things about your life and your pattern of life or your home that makes hospitality easier than it is for somebody else, but there's no such thing as that gift. You may have other gifts that play well with exercising hospitality, but it is not a spiritual gift. And you can go to Ephesians chapter 4 where the teaching gifts and equipping gifts are

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listed, or you can go to 1 Peter chapter 4 where the distinction is made between serving gifts and speaking gifts, or you can go to the list of gifts in Romans chapter 12, or the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and guess what you will not find in any of those listings of spiritual gifts. In any of the four places where spiritual gifts are dealt with in the New Testament, you will not find hospitality listed among them. Because it is not a gift, it is a command.

Imagine if you will that it were a gift but it was listed here along with all of these other commands. Have you ever heard anybody say, “I would be very hospitable, I would exercise hospitality, but hospitality is not my spiritual gift.” Of course it's not your spiritual gift. It's not anybody's spiritual gift. Nobody has that gift. But everybody has that command. Nobody would ever say, “Look, brotherly love is not my spiritual gift. I know it is commanded here in verse 1, but it's not my spiritual gift. I'm more of the sarcastic, cynical, critical, snarky type of a person. That's my spiritual gift. Brotherly love is not it.” Would you ever expect anybody to say, “Remembering prisoners is not my spiritual gift”? It's nobody's spiritual gift. How about the person who said, “Look, moral purity and holding my marriage in honor and keeping my marriage bed undefiled is not my spiritual gift”? What would you think of such a person? You'd say, “You're a lunatic.” It doesn't matter whether it's a spiritual gift or not. It's not a spiritual gift. Guess what it is. It is a command, which means that it is incumbent upon all of us.

Nobody has that spiritual gift. It is a command to be obeyed, which is why Paul in Romans chapter 12, after talking about spiritual gifts by the way—He does mention hospitality, but not in connection with spiritual gifts—in Romans chapter 12, in verses 3–8, he talks about the various spiritual gifts, but then he talks about things that are incumbent upon all of God's people. Romans chapter 12, verse 9:

9 Let love be without hypocrisy [notice the reference there to love]. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Rom. 12:9–13 NASB)

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That's not a list of spiritual gifts. Rejoicing is not a spiritual gift. Being diligent, fervent in spirit, brotherly love, giving preference to one another, those are not spiritual gifts. Those are commands that all of us have to exercise by God's grace—virtues of lovingkindness toward one another—and hospitality is included in that list. Hospitality is also included as one of the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. It is also included as a qualification for widows who were to be put on the list that the church would support in their destitution, and that's in 1 Timothy 5 as well.

Hospitality is also not just in a New Testament command or ethic. This is something to remember: it's not just a New Testament ethic. It's something that goes back to the Old Testament. In fact, it's part of the law. Leviticus 19:34: “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.” Now notice how the Lord there says, you once were an alien, a foreigner, a stranger, and therefore when you get into the land, and the people come into your land who are aliens and foreigners and strangers, you should treat them with kindness, remembering that you yourself were once just like them. And that command is repeated in Deuteronomy 10. “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:18–19).

In Job 31 when Job was defending his own integrity and talking about how he had not sinned against his neighbor, he lists his treatment of aliens and his acts of hospitality as among his righteous deeds. Job 31:19: “If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing or that the needy had no covering. . .” Verse 32: “The alien has not lodged outside, for I have opened my doors to the traveler.” You ask Job, “What is one of the marks of your righteousness?” He had opened up his doors to the traveler. That's exercising hospitality. It was an expression of God's heart, and therefore it was to be important to Israel, and if it was to be important to Israel, it was to be important to you and I as well. So not just a New Testament ethic. This goes all the way back to the earliest—the first book of the Bible ever written is the book of Job. First book was not Genesis; the earliest book was the book of Job. Even Job there talks about how he had exercised hospitality and treated aliens and strangers.

Now the second question, why is it important? What is it? It is the love for strangers. And second, why is it important? It is important because it displays the character of God through the lives of His people. This is significant. It displays the character of God. It is

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no mistake that the author has just said, “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken. . .” (Heb. 12:28) In other words, all of the future is yours. The new heavens and the new earth, the new creation, resurrected body; you are heirs of the kingdom. Everything that Yahweh owns He has given to His Son, and everything that the Son has received He shares with all of those who are in Him. So you are looking around here at other believers and you are seeing a kingdom of kings and priests who will reign in that new heavens and that new earth. So it is as if the author is saying, since you have been given everything by God that can possibly be given to you, show love to strangers. In other words, out of the wealth of what you have been given, what we have been given, we give out to other people. You've received a kingdom, God has opened up His table to you, God has opened up His family to you. Everything that God has, He has made available to you. He has laid it out and welcomed you to that table and welcomed you into His family. He gives you His entire kingdom! And so now it is as if the author is saying, so that little kingdom that you have here on earth, open that up to other people and share it with them in the same way that God has shared His kingdom with you. You've received an unshakable kingdom. So therefore this little shaky kingdom that you have, open it up and share it with other people. It models the character of God and the nature of God to show kindness like that and care for outsiders.

And just as the children of Israel were once aliens and strangers in a foreign land that was not theirs, God redeemed them out of it and brought them into their land. So you and I were once aliens and strangers from the covenants of promise and from God's family, and we have been brought in and brought near through the blood of Christ. And the title “pilgrim” or “alien” is one of the best titles that you could use to describe what a Christian life is. We are in that way exactly as Abraham was and as Isaac and Jacob were. Hebrews 11:9: “By faith [Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise.” Remember his sojourn? Wandering around, living in tents, looking for that city that has foundations, whose maker and builder is God. And Abraham lived as a sojourner in this world. There's a very real sense in which when we welcome strangers and other people into our homes—they may be strangers or travelers or aliens or people we don't know very well and we welcome them in—we are modeling the same thing that God has done for us. And we are offering up what God has given to us to serve other people and to benefit them. And then we are modeling the character of God in doing so and reminding ourselves that you and I were also once aliens and strangers to the covenants of promise. And God has brought us in and welcomed us.

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This practice was essential in ancient cultures, by the way. Far more essential than it is in our culture and in our time. And I speak here only of western American Christianity. But it was something that was incredibly necessary in ancient times when people would travel because they didn't have hotels and Airbnbs and ramadas and inns with pools and hot tubs and all that good stuff. If you wanted to go to a hot tub, you went to a bathhouse, and those were places of ill repute. And if you were traveling from one city to another and you didn't know anybody in that city to go stay with—a friend, a family member, an acquaintance, somebody that you had connected with previously that would open their home and share it with you—then you either slept outside, which itself was dangerous because imagine sleeping outside in South Central LA. That can be a dangerous place to sleep. And if you didn't do that, then you might choose to take up lodging in one of the houses or places where they would sell rooms. And those were something akin to a brothel. Not a ramada but a brothel. So as a believer, if you were traveling to another city and you wanted to avoid danger, temptation, the appearance of evil, and just being immersed in a culture that you had already left, if you didn't have somebody in that city to stay with, you were in horrible straits. It was essential back then.

Not only essential in the ancient culture, but listen, it was essential in a culture and in a place where the church was persecuted. And these early Hebrew Christians, they were being persecuted. We already read back in chapter 10 how some of them had had their possessions seized and some had been thrown into prison. When you live in a persecuted culture, there is of course the temptation to close in for yourself and amongst your own. If we lived in a persecuted country, the natural inclination for the child of God would be to turn inward and to say, “I need to protect my family. I need to protect what is mine. I can't trust people traveling into the city that they're not a turncoat, that they're not a plant from the government trying to seek out the location of a home church. I can't trust that.” So the natural inclination is to close up and to stop doing that. You don't even want to go exercise kindness to prisoners and to remember them. Why? Because if you go to the prison to give bread and sustenance and show kindness to people who are in prison who were once the week before in your church, if you do that, then guess what? They think of you. You become the next target on their list.

So in a persecuted culture, in an ancient culture like that, the natural inclination is to turn inward, and the author here is saying you need to remember to do the exact opposite. Open yourself up to strangers who will come in. Show them hospitality. It is an

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evangelistic opportunity. It is also a way to demonstrate grace and kindness to your brothers and sisters in Christ. And though you might be inclined to forget the prisoner and to forget hospitality, a persecuted culture is the wrong time to do that. That is so counterintuitive, is it not? That is so counterintuitive. The natural inclination would be to say no way. I will exercise hospitality once it is safer to do so. And the reality is that hospitality is a risky thing. This kind of grace and obedience is an expensive thing and it is a time-consuming thing. It is an energy-draining thing, but it is a Christian thing. Not a gift, but a command.

It is all the more necessary in difficult times for believers to exercise hospitality. We have a great New Testament example of this in Acts 16 when Paul is on a second missionary journey. After receiving the Macedonian vision, they sail across the sea and they land in the city of Philippi and they go into the city and then on Sabbath day they go back outside of the city to where the Jews who had been expelled from Roman colonies at that time met for prayer outside the city by the river, and it says that Paul went out there and spoke to the women who were gathered there for prayer. Acts 16:14:

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us [Luke says]. (Acts 16:14–15 NASB)

Notice what happened. The Lord opened her heart, and Lydia opened her home. The most natural response for her after embracing Christ and being baptized and understanding that salvation, the most natural thing for her was to open up her home and to implore Paul and Luke and anybody else who was traveling with him to come and to stay there and have lodging. Lydia was, by the way, the first convert in all of Europe. He landed in Europe and converted this woman, and she gave them a place to stay. She opened up her house and gave them lodging. That is the most practical demonstration of love and brotherhood. God opened her heart, and Lydia opened her home. And if she hadn't done that by the way, then Paul and the traveling companions would have had no other place to stay. They'd never been to Philippi before; they didn't have connections there. She was the first convert, the first Christian in Philippi.

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Now here's the question. Is this only for believers? I suggested to you that there is no limit that is placed on us in the text that we just exercise this grace to those who are in Christ. So is this something that we are called only to do for believers? I don't think that it is something that we are called *only* to do for believers. I think it is something we are called *especially* to do to believers. We are to do good to all men and especially those who are of the household of faith. In other words, some of our very first expressions of brotherly love should be to the brothers in exercising hospitality and welcoming them in and sharing our sustenance with them. But it certainly should not stop with the church. It certainly could go beyond that. And we should be seeking opportunity to have other people into our home who are not believers because that is an evangelistic encounter. That is an evangelistic opportunity. When you have unbelievers at your table and you say, "May we ask the Lord's blessing on this? This is our custom as a family, so we are going to pray," and you begin to pray and thank God for that food, and then you begin to discuss things as a family, spiritual things, that is an incredible evangelistic opportunity. So it's not just limited to believers. It should also have something to do with unbelievers. And there should be unbelievers who are on your target list of people to welcome in and to demonstrate the grace of hospitality to.

By the way, this is something that is almost uniquely a Christian thing in our culture. There are rare times when, outside of this, unbelievers get together. But what do their get-togethers look like? Their get-togethers look like exclusively their drinking buddies or their partying buddies or something that they do that gathers everybody together. The Christian expression of hospitality and showing kindness to others is something of an entirely different nature, an entirely different character. We do this evangelistically. We do this as an expression of affection and love. How different that is from what the unbeliever is exposed to when they get together and they think it's just all about talking about politics and it's all about getting together and drinking or partying or doing what they do till late at night and then going home. The Christian expression of this grace is such a testimony to the unbelieving world.

Now having said all of that, before we talk about what angels have to do with it, let me offer to you some practical considerations now. A little over a year ago—if you want to know what this looks like in application, I would commend to you a message that was preached here a little over a year ago by David Forsyth where he talked about how to start doing hospitality, what hospitality looks like, how you express it, some considerations, etc. And I'm not going to go back, and I don't want to rehash all of that. I

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would just commend that message to you. But I do want to talk about some practical considerations. And then I will leave the application of this up to you.

So here's my practical considerations. We do have to remember that we have obligations alongside hospitality that can sometimes conflict with hospitality. That should be obvious. There are limits to the ways in which we express this love and this grace to other people, especially when we're talking about strangers. So for instance, I am not suggesting that you go find a random homeless person, bring them home, and allow them to sleep in the basement with your small children. That's not hospitality. See, that's not wise. You may have obligations to your family, to your spouse, to your children that will affect how it is that we make application of this principle. There will be times when hospitality looks different for different families and even for the same family at different seasons of life.

So for instance, a single mother who works an eight-hour day so that she can provide for her two teenage children, the exercising of hospitality, this grace, is going to look different in her life than it looks in the life of a retired couple who have nothing but space, nothing but time, and nothing but money. You see how it's going to look different? It's going to look different for you with small children and all the demands that go with that than it will look for you when your children are older and half of them are moved out of the house or all of them have moved out of the house. Hospitality is going to look different for different families. It's going to look different in different environments. And my job is not to say here's what it's going to look like in your life, you should follow this person or do exactly what this person does, because that may be unrealistic to you. But here are the principles.

Do I have a heart for strangers? These are the questions. Do I have a heart for strangers? Am I willing to open up my little kingdom and give of what I have to other people, those that I know well, as well as those that I don't know as well? Am I willing to give of myself and my provision and my efforts and my time and my attention and my affections to other people? Do I welcome others into my home with grace and kindness? Have I neglected to show love to strangers? Do I demonstrate my love for others in such a tangible way? How can I improve in showing hospitality to others, and have I forgotten how important this is?

Those are the questions we can answer. Now again, I would leave the application of that up to you and your circumstances and your situation. We're all reasonable people, and we can evaluate where we're at and say, I can do this better, I could do that better. But I

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would just encourage you with this: do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. We know what it is, we know why it is important now.

The third question: what in the world do angels have to do with this? That's probably what you've been waiting for since the beginning of this. You're like, the time is ticking on now. I know we have communion; you haven't even talked about angels yet. What is this interesting statement at the end of verse 2? "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this [that is, by the love of strangers and showing hospitality] some have entertained angels without knowing it." The event that the author has in mind here goes back to—I think that there's one event that actually incorporated two different people, Abraham and Lot. His reference here goes back to the event in Genesis 18:1–3. I'll read that, and then I'll give you the follow-up. Genesis 18:1–3:

1 Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day.

2 When he [that is, Abraham] lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth,

3 and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by." (NASB)

So Abraham is sitting in the doorway of his tent; it's the heat of the day, and he notices three men who are over standing next to the trees. Abraham has no idea who these men are; he has no idea where they have come from. It is not until later on in the text that it is revealed to Abraham that these are actually angels. But at that moment, he just sees three men standing out in the heat of the day and he offers to provide them shade and shelter as well as food and drink. And he does so; he gives them water to refresh themselves, and then later on Abraham came to realize that these three strangers were not all that they had cracked up to be, not all that he expected them to be. In fact, he finds out that two of them are angelic creatures and one of them is not an angel of the Lord, but *the* Angel of the Lord. He's called Yahweh in verse 13. So one of them begins to have a conversation with Abraham, and Abraham recognizes this is an appearance of God in human form, or what we would call a theophany, an Old Testament appearance of God. It is the second Person of the Trinity, the Son before His incarnation, making an appearance in physical form. Abraham calls Him Yahweh, and He has a conversation with Abraham.

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Now those two angels, or two of the angels who are not Yahweh, leave and go into Sodom. And Yahweh then begins to have that conversation with Abraham where they're negotiating over the city—"How many righteous people are in the city before You destroy it?" And Yahweh has that conversation while the other two angels go into the city of Sodom, and there inside the city gate is Lot, and Lot sees these men, and Lot rushes up and does the same thing that Abraham did to them and offers them lodging and a place to stay. And they say, "No, we'll stay out in the courtyard," and Lot says, "No, you come into my house; it's not safe in the courtyard." And he ends up bringing them into his house. Neither of them, neither Abraham nor Lot, realized that these were angels. Now that is what the author is describing here.

So now the question: why does he bring it up here in this context? What is the point of this? What do angels have to do with this? Is the author suggesting that if we exercise hospitality, we might end up showing hospitality to angels? "You never know. There's angels wandering around Walmart right now as we speak, out in the city of Sandpoint, down in the homeless shelter, and if you just go find yourself a random person, a stranger, and invite them in for a meal, you might want to poke them and see if they're actually physical and then start asking them questions and see if maybe they will reveal themselves to be angels." That's not what the author is suggesting. He's not promising that if we exercise hospitality that we might end up exercising hospitality to angels. In fact, I would be willing to promise you that if you showed hospitality to every person in this room, you would not end up having an angelic visit, because none of you are angels. I would be willing to bet that none of you are angels. That is not his point. But what his point is, is that Abraham, without knowing they were angels, went out to give of himself and his kingdom to these complete strangers. And who got the bigger blessing? Abraham got the blessing. Abraham did. He had no idea what he was doing. That small act of exercising hospitality to them, that small act of opening up his house and blessing them, it ended up being he who was the one blessed because of what he did.

And he ended up actually serving angels, and he ended up serving Yahweh. And friends, there is a very real sense in which, when you and I exercise hospitality to strangers and when we exercise hospitality to people that we know and that we love who are part of the body of Christ, we are actually offering service and hospitality to Yahweh Himself. It was Jesus who said as much when He said, "What you've done to the least of these, you've done to Me. And if you give even one of these a cup of cold water in My name, you will not lose your reward." What was He saying? When we do this to the body of Christ, when we do this to the bride of Christ, we are serving the Bridegroom as well.

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And He blesses that. We're demonstrating the character of God. We're opening ourselves up for blessing. We're pouring out blessing to other people. And there's a mutual blessing that is involved in this.

Now, what is more likely? That you will exercise hospitality and that you will entertain some angelic being, or that you will exercise hospitality and by so doing serve Christ and serve His bride and earn an eternal reward? You're not likely to entertain an angel. You might; I wouldn't bet on it. But certainly that is not the motivation. The motivation is because I have been given an unshakable kingdom and because I have an unshakable kingdom, therefore I can serve the King by yielding up the resources that He has given to me at this time with my little shakable kingdom to serve Him. And when I serve others, I'm actually serving Christ Himself.

Entertaining angels was simply an example of the hospitality that Abraham gave, which held more blessing than Abraham could have ever imagined. He didn't go to those angels and offer them those things because he knew they were angels. He went to those angels and offered them those things because that is what righteous people do. That is what God-fearers do. You want to see a demonstration of Abraham's faith, which is mentioned in chapter 17? Then you go into chapter 18 and you see a man whose heart has been opened just like Lydia. And so he opened up his home just like Lydia. That's the example that we are to follow. God had promised Abraham all the land that he could see. Remember that back in chapter 11? God had promised Abraham all the land that he could see. "Walk amongst the land. Everywhere you go, north, south, east, and west, it's all yours, from the great river to the sea, from the tip of this to the top of that, you get it all." Dan to Beersheba, He had given him all of the land. Abraham believed that and possessed that land by faith. And he lived in that land by faith. And so it was quite natural for one who in his own mind already possessed the kingdom, already possessed the land by faith, having embraced that, to say, "I can show hospitality to three men." And so he did it as a natural expression of his godly piety, his godly and righteous respect and love for God.

If we love God, we will love those who are born of God. That's brotherly love. And if we love those who are born of God, we will also love the stranger. It's just another expression of the kind of affection that we are commanded to have. And thus we follow the example of Abraham. That's what the angels have to do with it. It is a simple act of brotherly love where we remember to show grace and hospitality to strangers and of course to those that we know well and love well. That is included as well as that.

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It can be risky, it can be costly, it can be uncomfortable, but it is love in action. And it is not only the example of Abraham, it is also the example of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. You and I were aliens and strangers and we have been brought near to Him. And God has opened up His table, He has opened up His kingdom, He has opened up His family and His house and He has given to us everything. And when we exercise hospitality and show grace to others, we're simply passing on grace that has been given to us. And we are modeling the character of God in Christ who has done that Himself. And Christ has promised that there is coming a day when we are going to sit down with Him in the Kingdom and we are going to eat and we are going to drink, and it is going to be a lavish, enjoyable, blessed feast. All the saints gathered together in that Kingdom.

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