Living our Mature Christian Morality: Real Gospel relationships in our lifestyles and love

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Date: 03 May 2020

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[0:00] Well we are going to turn to our Bible reading now and we're back in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. We left that some weeks ago at the beginning of all of this rather strange time but we've been studying all the way through this book and we are going to go back now hopefully and complete it over the next few weeks and we're going to read this morning in Hebrews chapter 13 looking particularly this morning just at the first six verses but I'm going to read from the very end of chapter 12 and a little bit further on into chapter 13 just so we get the flow of what the the preacher is saying. So at the end then of Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 28 he says this, therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, well-pleasing worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire. Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have for he has said I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say the Lord is my helper I will not fear what can man do to me. Remember your leaders those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of lives and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings for it's good for the heart to be strengthened by grace not by foods which have not benefited those devoted to them.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is poured out into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.
Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the approach he endured. For here we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come.
Through him then that is through Jesus let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.
Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. For such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Amen.
[3:26] And may God bless to us his word. Well do turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 13.

We're going to look at it together this morning. Colin Gardner, I see you've got your phone. I said real Bibles. You know you're doing naughty things. Right. Good. Well we're going to start here in Hebrews chapter 13 this morning.
And returning to our studies in Hebrews. Which is in this chapter now really the climax of the whole message.
And it's all about the worship that is really pleasing to God. It's a while since we were in chapter 12. So I want to do a bit of a recap for us of the whole of Hebrews message.
A slightly longer introduction this morning. Hebrews tells us over and over again that it's Jesus alone and Jesus forever who can guard us in unwavering faith for his unshakable kingdom.
[4:36] So he tells us that in Jesus we have the great revelation come. In these last days in Jesus we have the proclamation of the supreme son who alone has revealed God to us fully and forever.

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God is revealed exclusively to the world in Jesus Christ. And in him we have the first four chapters of the book.
And that's particularly the focus of the first four chapters of the book. And then from the end of chapter 4 to halfway through chapter 10. The focus is secondly on the great reconciliation that is won through Jesus Christ.
In these last days we have the priesthood of the sufficient savior who alone has reconciled us to God forever. We're reconciled eternally through Jesus.
And through him we can therefore draw near to God forever. Jesus the great proclaimer has brought God down in his fullness from the invisible heavenly world above.
[5:47] And Jesus the great priest brings us into fellowship with the invisible God above. And of course Jesus the great pioneer is now leading us to our future in that unseen heavenly world to come.

So thirdly there is for us still a great race to run. We must run enduringly with Jesus. With whom God is now perfecting us forever.
As Dick Lucas once put it, the initial privileges won't help us. We need perseverance to the end. And we've seen that so clearly, haven't we, in our studies.
And particularly that's the emphasis of these last chapters from chapter 10 verse 19 to the end. Which are calling us to enduring worship.
The whole of Hebrews pictures the Christian life as being just like the journey of Israel of old. Through the desert from Egypt to Canaan. Well we too, he says, are on a journey through the desert of this world and to the promised eternal rest in the world to come.
[7:01] And there are many dangers, many toils, many snares which pressure us into slipping back, into turning back, into being lured back into this world.

To drift away from such a great salvation. As chapter 2 puts it. And the Christians that Hebrews wrote to were faced with all of these things, just as we are.
The pressures of suffering. Of shame from society and family because of their faith. Or just the pressure of their own sins. Which, remember chapter 12 verse 1 tells us, cling so closely and entangle us so badly.
That's why the call is for us all to run with endurance, perseverance, the race that is set before us. And that's the whole message from chapter 10 verse 19 right to the end of the letter. To endure in a life of real response to the gospel. In a life of enduring worship.
[8:04] Look back at chapter 10 verse 22 and the paragraph there. We are to keep on drawing near to God in faith through Christ.

Because, well as the end of chapter 11 says, that's who we are. We are to do it just like all those saints of old who have gone before us.
But we have something far better. We are to do it just like all those saints of God. Verse 22 of chapter 10. We draw near, he says, in full assurance of faith. Because we look back on the cross of Christ.
And we know that our sin is forgiven forever. And we are to hold on, he says, verse 23, to the confession of our hope. Because he who promised has been proved utterly faithful.
And so now we can look forward to the coming of Christ. Knowing that our Savior is coming to bring in his eternal kingdom forever. That's what we saw in chapter 12, isn't it?
[9:06] With its great focus on hope. On the unshakable kingdom that's coming. But thirdly, chapter 10 verse 24 tells us, We're urged to stir up one another in love.

We're to live looking around and looking out as the church of Jesus Christ in the present. And our lives are to be lived as a continuous sacrifice to God through Christ.
We have the great privilege of living with intimate access to God through Jesus. And we live with the joy of purged sin. And awaiting the joy of our promised Savior.
And showing that in our lives by living out lives of pleasing sacrifice to God through Jesus. And that's what chapter 13 is all about.
Real worship. As Paul puts it in Romans 12 verse 1. Presenting your bodies as living sacrifices. Holy, acceptable, well-pleasing to God.
[10:11] Which is, he says, your spiritual worship. Worship. That's exactly the language echoed here, isn't it? Look at chapter 12 verse 28. Let us offer to God acceptable worship.

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Well, pleasing worship. In reverence and awe. Look at the very end of chapter 13 verse 21. The writer prays that his readers will do God's will.
Which is pleasing. Which is acceptable in his sight. Same words. And at the very heart of chapter 13. Look at verses 15 and 16. He tells us what doing God's will is.
What the sacrifices are that actually do please God. And notice, look. It's the fruit of lips and lives that confess Jesus' name.
That's true gospel worship. That's the only worship that is actually pleasing to God. William Lane, the scholar, puts it, I think, very well when he says that the message of chapter 13 is that authentic worship is an expansive concept that makes sacred all of life.
[11:23] It infuses every aspect of public and private life with the character of consecrated service to God. And that's so, so important.

Not just for these first readers, but for everyone today to understand it. Because real Christian worship is nothing to do with religious liturgy. It's everything to do with real life.
There's nothing here, is there, in chapter 13. Nothing at all about liturgical services in church performed by clergy. It's all about living service by every Christian in the Christian community.
That is the acceptable worship. That's the pleasing sacrifice that God really wants. And that's why actually verses 15 and 16 are so central to this chapter.
We'll come back to them, I think, in more detail next time. But do look at these two verses just now. And note the deliberate symmetry in them. There's a sort of sandwich structure that emphasizes the point.
[12:27] Look at verse 15. It begins with us offering sacrifices to God. And verse 16 ends with God receiving such sacrifices that please him.

And then the meat in the middle of the sandwich, the end of verse 15, the beginning of verse 16, can tell us what kind of sacrifice it is that actually pleases God. Do you see? And it's the fruit of lips that acknowledge or that confess his name, Jesus' name.
And the lives that adorn his name. Lips that acknowledge his name live lives that adorn his name in loving and generous sharing in Christ.
In fact, there might actually not even be a distinction here between lips and lives. It may well be that the real fruit of lips that confess Christ is just the lives that are consecrated to Christ.
But at the very least, what is certainly clear is that real praise to God, the sacrifice that consists in praise, is not just sweet song on our lips.
[13:33] It's solid substance in our lives. Sharing. Real partnership. Communion is the word.

Sharing everything that is good generously as the church and with the church. So Christians will be continually praising God in Christ with their lips and their lives in both their words and their works.
Continual real praise is in words of confession of Christ, that is, gospel proclamation, and in works of communion in Christ with gospel people, sharing and partnership.
And that's what chapter 13 is all about. It wants to stir us up to love and to good works, as chapter 10, verse 24 said. To be a church that lives out a life of continual, pleasing worship to God in Christ.
Lives that are lived in and through and for, in every way, the Lord Jesus Christ. So it does talk about Christian leaders, and we'll see that next time.
[14:45] It is not at all teaching us about right religious rituals, but rather about restored right relationships through our great Savior Jesus Christ.

And that's what the Christian gospel is all about. The restoration of everything that's been shattered, every shattered, damaged relationship in this whole universe.
Everything in nature, and of course, above all, everything in humanity. Remember back in Hebrews chapter 2, where he says, We don't yet see, do we, the world as it ought to be?
With mankind crowned in glory and honor and ruling over all things in this world, as the king of the world, as God made it to be ruled. My goodness, how clearly we see that today, don't we?
Where we, the whole of humanity, is being ruled over by a tiny microbe that none of us can see, humbling every single nation on this earth. We don't yet see man ruling the world.
[15:48] But, he says, remember we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. And, now leading, he says, his brothers and sisters to a glorious future of restoration and of rest.

Where everything will be made new as it ought to be. But, already, through his great saving work, he has sanctified his people here on earth.

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And, he's calling us back to our true destiny as human beings. To show forth the image and the glory of God in this world. Because, our eyes have been opened, haven't they, to see our glorious Savior.
But, the only way this world of darkness is going to see his glory, is if it sees that heavenly glory reflected in us, in his church on earth.
You are the light of the world, said Jesus. To his family, to his church, his followers. Let your light shine. So that the world will see your good works.
[16:51] And, give glory to your Father who's in heaven. Who can't yet be seen by the world. But, who can be seen in the family of God and Christ.

In the brothers and sisters of Christ. Living out the restored relationships of his eternal kingdom. In this world, now. Living out real gospel relationships.
In our lifestyle. And in our loves. That is, in living out what we could call mature Christian morality. And, that's what verses 1 to 6 here are speaking about.
Which is led by a real mature Christian ministry. Which shows real gospel relationships in its liturgy and in its leadership.
And, that's what verses 7 to 19 are about. And, we'll look at that next time. So, when verse 1 says, Let brotherly love continue. That is the real love of God's family expressed in this world.
[17:49] That means, verse 2, Do not neglect to live out real Christian morality. And, that's what verses 1 to 6 here display.

Worship pleasing to God. Sacrifices that are pleasing to God. Means, solidly living out and demonstrating real gospel relationships.
In our lifestyle and in our loves. Then, these verses show us a sharp contrast. Between living truly for the unseen God above.
And, for the as yet unseen world to come. Which is our calling as the church. A contrast between that and slipping back into the ways of this passing world.
Moses, remember. Abraham. All the saints of old in chapter 13. They were called out from the lifestyle and the loves of this world. And, for those of the world to come.
[18:49] And, so are we. And, so there must be no slipping back. No turning back. No, through Jesus, we are to continually offer up sacrifices of praise to God.

In lives that are pleasing to him. And, verses 1 to 6 here help us to do just that. And, to know how to do that. So, I want to look at these verses now just for the rest of our time this morning.
First, we'll be offering pleasing worship to God in reverence and awe. If we take seriously the injunction here in verses 1 to 3. Which is to love truly the people of God.
And, we'll do that by sharing with them. And, by standing in solidarity with them. Especially, when it might be very costly for us to do that. Now, he says they are doing it.
But, they need to keep on doing it. Let brotherly love continue. Because, of course, our natural inclination is to be so taken up with ourselves. That we don't easily enter into the real needs and burdens of others.
[19:56] Here's something I came across John Calvin saying in the 16th century about this. This command, he says, is very necessary in this generation.

Because, nothing evaporates more easily than love. When everyone looks after himself more than his wife. And, gives even less consideration to others.
Well, that's a punch in the gut to married men, isn't it? It's rather offensive. Maybe I'll report John Calvin as committing a hate crime against married men. But, we need it, don't we?
Perhaps, the only difference between our century and the 16th century. Or, indeed, the first century. Is that, actually, we've evacuated that word love.
Of almost all meaning other than the sentimental. So, that the word hardly challenges us. But, look how solid. Look how substantial love actually is here. Love involves action.
[20:54] Actually sharing with and actually standing with other Christians. Do not neglect to do that, he says in verse 2. Love means not neglecting sharing.

Especially, he says, with Christian strangers. You're to show hospitality to them. You're to share your life and your substance and your home in welcoming them. Real love and real hospitality.
Real sharing of time and substance go together. By the way, John Calvin points out that there's a lovely alliteration in the Hebrews writer here. So, it's not just me. Philadelphia, brotherly love, is visible in Philozenia.

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Welcoming strangers. I like that. And the primary reference here to these strangers probably is traveling gospel workers. Those who relied on the churches that they visited to give them lodgings. To feed them. To help them. In fact, Paul, the apostle in Romans chapter 15 verse 24, implies that it also involved helping them financially in their onward journey.
[22:00] If you read 3 John, likewise, you'll read the apostle there urging the church to send messengers like that on their journey.

He says, in a manner worthy of God. For they've gone out for the sake of the name. I suppose the equivalent today might be itinerant evangelists coming to speak for us at an event or a visiting preacher.
And we're not to do as, well, sadly, some churches do do. To be mean. To fail to pay the expenses. Or even to contribute to their support.
If they don't have a regular salary and they rely on that sort of thing. Because it's not restricted just to those sorts of situations. What he's implying here, surely, is a generous welcome to any in Christ's family.
Just because they are family. Even if they don't know them well. Maybe he didn't even know them at all. Even if they're not like us. Even if they're not quite like our type.
[22:59] Well, sometimes that's not easy, is it? But the whole Bible, friends, is absolutely clear on this. The Old Testament, everywhere. Remember the many injunctions that we saw in the book of Deuteronomy when he studied it.

About not neglecting the widow, the fatherless, and the sojourner. And the rebuke, and indeed the curses. Pronounced on those who do do that.
Well, think of the Lord Jesus. Think of the people that he welcomed to his band. The undesirable lepers. The unwanted cripples and the blind. The dubious and rather tainted women.
The hated tax collectors. Because all of these and many more welcomed into his family. And the whole New Testament is consistent with our passage here.
The living sacrifice that I said Paul talks about in Romans chapter 12. Well, that includes contributing to the needs of the saints and pursuing actively hospitality.
[24:02] He talks about in that chapter. Even amid great tribulation. That is not only in the boom times where there's lots to share and everything's easy. But actually when things are bad and tough. That's why we felt it was so important for us, ourselves here, to have that Easter appeal for the Barnabas Fund.

Even in the midst of the COVID crisis here. Not just because of the needs of brothers and sisters elsewhere. But also to help us let brotherly love continue and not cease.
Just because we're facing a crisis. Whatever the circumstances, he says, we are to show love by sharing our livelihood and our lives.
Show hospitality. Don't neglect it. Now, of course, there's another side. Hospitality can be abused. Interestingly, the Didache, which was a church document from the first century.
It said that if you are traveling, you should expect lodgings for one or just two nights. And it actually warns people in the church. It said if somebody asks for more than that, for three or more nights, want to stay forever, then they're very probably an imposter.
[25:15] Somebody who's just taking a loan of you. Stringing you along. Not a genuine Christian worker. Remember, Paul the apostle was assiduous. It was assiduous. He made a point, didn't he, of not seeking that sort of support from the church.

It's just to show beyond doubt that he wasn't a sponger. He wasn't sucking them dry. So we're not to be gullible. There are spongers aplenty.
But that's no excuse not to be generous. To be loving brothers. Even to strangers in the Christian family. And even to the stranger members of the Christian family.
What a blessing a welcoming home is. To the lonely Christian. Or to the shy and timid Christian who maybe finds it hard to make friends. Or to the oddball Christian.
And there are plenty of them. People who need folk who will love them like that. Over a Sunday lunch. Or over a barbecue. Or over an invite. Perhaps to a party that they would never normally get invited to.
[26:18] See, he's not talking, is he, about social entertaining. He's not talking here about giving a party so that you'll get an invite to an even better party. No, no, no. It's just giving to give.

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To love. To share. To please our generous giving God. And yet, actually, he says to us, in giving, you do in fact receive.
Some have thus had not just royalty, but angels incognito in their midst. You know, like thinking of Abraham, isn't he? Who welcomed those two angels back in Genesis 18.
Two strangers. He offered a meal to who turned out to be angels, messengers of God. And that's so, isn't it? So often in receiving an unknown brother or sister, we have found an angel come into our life.
A real sense of somebody who's been a messenger of the Lord. Who's blessed us. But, of course, above all of that even, didn't Jesus himself say? That whoever receives a disciple of his, receives the Lord himself.
[27:24] A cup of refreshment, a cup of cold water given to them, is actually given to the Lord Jesus himself. Well, I wonder if we do that.

Is our church, is your home known for that? Do not neglect to show hospitality. Serving. Welcoming the stranger. And walking with them through suffering.
That's verse 3, isn't it? Don't neglect to show solidarity in suffering with Christian brethren. Don't be people who disdain and socially distance from believers who are suffering for their testimony and for their faithfulness to Jesus.
Paul knew all about that. When he was in prison, read Philippians chapter 1 or read 2 Timothy. Many were ashamed of him. They didn't want to be tired with the brush of Paul's imprisonment.
It was a scandal. So they disowned him. But Onesiphorus, remember, went to be with him. He stood with him. As indeed Paul says in 2 Timothy 4, the Lord stood with him.
[28:35] And he needed that. And he deeply appreciated it. Well, it's often hard and it's often costly to show solidarity with those Christians who are suffering.

Maybe physically or perhaps in prison or maybe some other mistreatment. Physical or just verbal. Because of Christ. It's hard to stand with them because, well, it brings us under threat, doesn't it? It brings us to a place of shame. It brings us into disrepute. But we must stand with them if we're to offer real sacrifices of praise that please God.
Not just empty praise. It's much easier to sing songs about Jesus than to share shackles for Jesus. But it's the latter that makes the sweeter music in heaven.
That's why we mustn't neglect to pray or to give to partners like the Barnabas Fund and others. And be willing to stand with people who are being mistreated publicly, physically, socially, legally for the gospel.
[29:42] So, when the Billy Graham organization was banned from their meetings at the Hydra, when Destiny Church was banned from using the Usher Hall in Edinburgh, we stand with them.

We might not agree with everything in these groups. And we don't. But we must publicly stand with them. Even if it tarnishes us with their same brush in the eyes of others.
Because we're brothers. We too are in the body, he says. The same thing might very easily come to us. In fact, many of us know what it is like to face those things.
I'm not sure there's a reference here, as John Calvin thinks, to the body as the body of Christ. But there certainly is an appeal to the family, to the bonds of family. And Paul does say, doesn't he, in 1 Corinthians 12, we're all members of one another in Christ's family.
And if they hurt, we hurt. And the worship that pleases God loves truly God's people. Sharing substance with them and sharing solidarity with them.
[30:52] Especially when it's costly and hard. Someone's put it well. Praise becomes sacrifice when it costs us something.

To confess our faith in God. So is that us? In our fellowship? In our church? Is that you in your home? Is that you in your life as a Christian?
Imagine a heavenly Airbnb. I suppose we should call it Angel B&B.; Where the angels look for traveling accommodation.
What do the reviews say about our homes? And about us as hosts? A great welcome. They shared with me and they stood with me when I was attacked for the message that God sent me to bring.
Is it that? Well, I guess we'll have the same reputation in heaven that we have here on earth, won't we? Worship that pleases God loves truly the people of God with regard to sharing and to solidarity.
[32:04] And secondly, verses 4 and 5, it lives truly the purpose of God with regard to our sexuality and our substance. Which are also a vital part of that sacrifice of praise to God.

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We might not think that, but it's true. We're very surprised when God says, let's have a discussion about worship. Now, I'm not talking about songs. I'm talking about sex. That surprises us.
But that's what he does here. Our attitude to marriage is part of our worship of God. For all of us, whether we happen to be married ourselves or not.
Let marriage, he says, be held in honor among all. So verse 4 is clear. Look, sexual responsibility is a key part of worship that pleases God.
Chastity and fidelity within the sexual union of one man and one woman for life. Because, as John Calvin rightly says, there is only one lawful union which is approved by the name and the authority of God.
[33:11] And honoring that reality is part of recognizing God's lordship over the whole of life. Well, of course, today there are many threats to marriage, aren't there? To marriage as God ordains it.

And people who despise it, who disdain it, and who are trying to deform it. There's also plenty of threats to marriage from within marriages themselves.
But Christian people and the Christian church must keep the marriage bed undefiled. That is not undermined and not damaged, he says, by adultery or by any sexual immorality.
All sexual activity outside the proper marriage bond. And I would add to that today for clarity. All sexual and gender expression that flies in the face of God's created order.
Again, William Lane has a very helpful comment. All such, he says, is a rejection of the presence and the goodness of God who created the human family in its maleness and femaleness.
[34:15] The writer warns that those who place personal gratification above responsibility to God and to the community will encounter God himself as judge.

Well, friends, we have to take this seriously. God will judge such. He's already judging, in fact, in our society in the West and its abandonment of his pattern.
And we see the consequences all around us today, very sadly. And it's overwhelmingly the most vulnerable who have suffered the most in a world that dishonors marriage.
Marriage, broken marriage, damages children. That is an indisputable fact. And where cohabiting has replaced marriage as it so often has, there are four times as many breakups in those relationships.
Two-thirds of cohabiting parents break up in our society. And it's the poorest parts of our society which have the least benefit from the institution of marriage today.
[35:23] If you live in a sexual relationship before marriage, you greatly increase the chance of that marriage failing. All of these things, friends, are facts.

These are not religious dogmas, not religious opinions. They're facts, empirical facts. Go and look it up on Google. You'll see it endlessly. Dishonor marriage and you will damage human life.
Treat sex casually and you will harm society catastrophically. And when human beings say, I demand to do it my way, God has said, Okay, but don't say I didn't warn you.
He gives us up, as the Apostle Paul says, to our desires. And that in itself is judgment already. But he will also judge these rebellious attitudes ultimately.
Make no mistake. Chapter 12, verse 23 reminded us, he is the judge of all. He is a consuming fire.
Don't be deceived, says the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6.
[36:36] The sexually immoral, the adulterers, just like the thieves, the drunkards, the swindlers, will not inherit the kingdom of God if they do not repent. Just as here.

If you won't bow to the lordship of Christ over this area of your life, as over every area of your life, it will exclude you from his grace.
He must be the lord of our sexuality. Otherwise we're worshipping these things as idols and we're not worshipping him. We're rejecting him as lord.
And verse 5, he must also be lord over our substance. Keep your lives free from the love of money. Striking, isn't it, that he puts marriage and money together like that?
Because it's a common pattern, isn't it, of selfishness, of greed, that leads us to love pleasure above God. And so we seek then satisfaction, either in sex or in substance, in wealth and all the things that that brings.
[37:39] But the Bible's clear. Love of money, love of material things, and trust in God are mutually exclusive. You cannot serve God and money, said Jesus, Matthew chapter 6.

It's a great irony, isn't it? At least I think it is. That what this world does trust, which is money, and especially in a time of crisis like we're in, what the whole world is scrabbling for is money in the form

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of US dollars.
And what is it? I've printed in block letters over every greenback dollar. In God we trust. And nothing could be further from the truth, could it?
Well, people are desperate to get their hands on those greenbacks. But it's very tempting, of course, to trust in money and wealth and to seek it as a means of protection in life.
These Christians, we know from chapter 10, we know that they had known persecution, they'd known what it meant to have their property plundered in the past. Mistreatment was obviously still going on.
[38:48] Prison was a possibility. And no doubt, many of them were very tempted to seek wealth as a means of escape, either to maybe bribe their way out of these things, or perhaps just to move on up in the social circles, to win friends and influence people, so as to insulate themselves from the dangers that other Christians faced.

Money doesn't just attract us because of the pleasures it can bring, but also because of the position, the power that it can bring us. And many Christians can covet these things.
But no, you see, that kind of selfishness is opposed to the true Christian life of sharing, just as fornication is opposed to the true Christian way of fidelity in marriage.
That can't be a Christian way of worship. That's anti-worship that displeases God. No, be content with what you have, he says.
That's where the real gain is, as Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6. Godliness and contentment. That's real gain in life. Not jealously sneaking the fleeting gain of the pleasures and the power from gold, but joyfully finding the lasting gain in the presence and in the promise of God.
[40:11] For, look at verse 5. He has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. That was his word to Israel of old, wasn't it? To Joshua too, on the brink of the promised land.

All through the Bible, in multiple places and promises. From the God who came to be Emmanuel, to be with us forever in his son Jesus Christ.
Like Enoch, remember in chapter 11, who walked with God, we too have his presence. And therefore we can have utter contentment in the midst of many temptations. Like David, remember Psalm 16 where we're looking at last Sunday evening.
The Lord is my portion and my cup. I have already a beautiful inheritance. Nothing can top that. And like Moses too, verse 6 here, the Lord is our helper in the face of many threats.
Well again, David in Psalm 16 said the same thing. I have the Lord ever before me because he is at my right hand. I shall never be shaken. We have his presence with us and we have his power for us so we can be utterly satisfied and never shaken.
[41:26] Isn't that describing a life of utter blessing for us as well as the life that is truly pleasing to God? Well of course it is because that is the way of true human flourishing.

We were made to worship God, to glorify him and in doing so, as the catechism reminds us, to enjoy him forever. That's our destiny. So live that way in lives of true and pleasing worship to God, loving truly the people of God, sharing with him and standing with him and living truly the purpose of God for your sexuality and for your substance.
And you'll find that even as your life is there for a pleasing sacrifice of praise to God, as you live pleasingly in his sight through Jesus Christ, you'll find that you also are liberated truly in the peace of God.
That's what verses 5 and 6 are describing, isn't it? The truly liberated life. We have his presence with us, verse 5. I will never leave you nor forsake you so we can be utterly satisfied.
And we have his power for us, verse 6. The Lord is my helper. We can't ultimately be shaken. In the face of many temptations, we have liberating contentment, no covetous love of money.
[42:56] And in the face of many threats and trials, we have liberating confidence, no crippling fear of man. That is the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's a great paradox, you see, of the gospel. To use the words of verse 5, you keep your life free, totally free, by submitting yourself absolutely to the lordship of Christ.
Make me a captive lord, says George Matheson's hymn, and then I shall be free. Once, you see, in seeking freedom and autonomy to live life my way, well, we were slaves to sin and death.
But now, as the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 6, now you're set free from sin and death, you've become, through Jesus Christ, slaves to God.
And the fruit of that slavery is life. Life eternal. Life in all its liberated human joy.

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[44:06] What a wonderful message we have in the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ. That through him we can offer to God pleasing worship, a true sacrifice of praise.

And that the more we live to bring him pleasure, the more we will actually find he brings us pleasure and purpose and peace in all the way that we take all the days of our lives here on earth.
So says Hebrews, let us all offer to God pleasing worship. Let brotherly love continue always.
Amen. Well, let's pray together. Oh God, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee.
Mercifully accept our prayers.
And because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee.
Grant us the help of thy grace. That in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee both in will and in deed.
[45:25] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, as we close our service this morning let's sing again together the words of this great hymn.

Oh bless the God of Israel who comes to set us free who visits and redeems us and grants us liberty.■cy. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.
Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.
Amen. Let's pray together.
Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.
Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.

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