

# *What Does the Kingdom Look Like?*

Hebrews 13:1-6

11/11/2018

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My name is John Song, I'm the pastor of youth ministries here at Columbia Presbyterian Church. It is an honor to be here to preach the Word of God. At this time, we would like to dismiss the children age 4 to first grade for age appropriate worship. And the rest of you will have age appropriate worship with me. What that says about you, what that says about me, I'll leave that up to you.

We are nearing our finish line with our study as a church in the book of Hebrews, a study that has taken us on a journey answering the all-important question of who is Jesus Christ? We've learned through this past year, 2018, we've been learning Christ is the greater prophet, better than Moses and all the others that came only as pictures and foreshadows before Him. Jesus is the better priest, the one who makes perfect sacrifice for our sins and represented us to be able to boldly approach the throne room of God. And in this final section of Hebrews as PD preached last week, we turn to Christ's third office, His role as the better king better than all the Old Testament kings before Him and establishing a kingdom that is unshakeable and without end.

We turn our Bibles now to Hebrews 13, and we're going to explore the first six verses together. This is a section of Hebrews that turns to the "now what?" section of the book. What do we do with all of this? While the writer of Hebrews certainly sprinkles application throughout the book of Hebrews, here begins the turn of seeing these seemingly random and disconnected exhortations on the Christian life.

Now, I'm going to make the argument that this is actually an extension of what the kingdom of God looks like. This is what the kingdom of God looks like based upon what PD preached upon last week. If the kingdom leaves us in a state of gratitude and of worship, as we looked at chapter 12, how can we do this? How can the Christian, in light of their sin and imperfection, ever hope to live out these kingdom ethics? So, let's read these six verses together and find out. Hebrews 13:1-6,

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 adulterous.

Keep your life free from 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?"

This is the Word of the Lord. Won't you pray with me?

Father, we thank you for this glorious kingdom. We ask now that your Word would illuminate us to show us how to live in this kingdom through the power of your Spirit and the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray all these things. Amen.

As we start our study here, I want you to just imagine with me now the first thing that pops into your mind – the most meticulous, most rule-heavy, most profitable, most friendly kingdom in the world today. What does it look like? What standards do they hold? What makes the kingdom so wonderful?

Perhaps some of you were drawing a blank when you were thinking about this. But when I think of tightly controlled happy regimes, I think of Disney World, the most magical, happiest place on earth as it is coined. Regardless of your opinion of Disney as a company, whether you think that they are the secret evil empire slowly corrupting our children into a downward spiral of the black abyss or whether

you are the hardcore Disney defender apologist believing that they promote all that is good and happy about the world.

One thing that we can agree on is the overwhelming standards that Disney employees, or cast members as they're called, have to maintain in order to keep the ethics of the kingdom. They're forbidden to point with one finger; they must always point with two. Disney princesses must be between the heights of 5'4" and 5'8", crushing the dreams of many in this room, I'm sure. Cast members cannot bend down to pick up trash; they must scoop the trash up in a sweeping motion. Music must always be on and played in a constant loop, even when guests have cleared the park for the day and it's just the cast remaining. They cannot say to a guest the words, "I don't know." Rather, they must make up an answer to the question that was given on the spot or find someone who does know the answer to that question.

Perhaps my favorite odd Disney rule is that the exact color hue of Mickey Mouse's shorts cannot be sold in any of the park's merchandising. It's a closely vaulted secret that no one to this day knows the exact color hue of Mickey Mouse's shorts. These all seem absolutely ridiculous, don't they? All of these exhortations, all of these rules, they seem completely random and downright strange at face value. But a deeper dive into why all of these rules exist add up all to the experience that Disney wants to have for the guests that arrive into their kingdom.

Kingdom ethics demonstrate the character and the heart of the king. And so, maybe that's a way in which we can digest and understand these six verses in Hebrews 13 and following when we're going to be continuing on next week in talking about these. They almost seem random. They seem flippant. They seem weird, like, why do we have to follow all of these things? What's the purpose and point of all of these little rules here? Why should Christians care about these things? And if you're a non-Christian, why do Christians care about these things? What connects these values together?

When biblical scholars, some modern ones these days, have looked at these verses in chapter 13 in particular, they somehow come to this conclusion that they're so random, they're so disconnected, maybe this was just a later addition to the book of Hebrews. Maybe this is somehow not a part of the biblical cannon.

We would reject that as a church. But actually, I would argue that if we understand this from a different view point, I think we can safely say that this chapter is actually the glue that holds together everything that the writer or the preacher of the sermon of Hebrews has discussed this far. These are gospel imperatives asked after gospel indicatives. This is a statement of, how now shall we live in light of all the richness of Christ as king in a kingdom that is unshakeable? And when you read it like that, this opens up this passage. And so, it becomes not random at all, but it actually tells us what the kingdom looks like.

And so, where does he begin in telling us what the kingdom looks like? He starts by stating that the kingdom is a kingdom of love for the family. This is your first point in the bulletin, a kingdom of love for the family. Notice the phrase in verse 1, "Let brotherly love continue." Some of you that are astute with American history may know that the city of brotherly love is Philadelphia, right? Takes its name from the Greek words here. And I see some of you are smiling at that idea right now, perhaps because you have a deep fondness for Philadelphia sports teams or because you have a deep disdain for Philadelphia sports teams, right? But that's not how we're going to apply this passage here today. Nor should you apply this word "philadelphia," the concept of brotherly love, to an experience that you personally had with an older or younger brother. This passage isn't telling you to take a Christian brother and put him in a headlock and read his diary and all that stuff. That's not what brotherly love is talking about here in this passage.

This is about telling us about the kingdom and pointing us to the character of the king who is our brother. This is pointing us to the reality that we who are united into faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, bought by His death on the Cross for our sins, resurrected to call us into a new family, He calls us His brother. And that this love is the one that we model and continue to walk in. So, this is not equating us to a familiar brother, this is equating us to the brother who is Christ. This is a continuous love, a continual love that is

not based upon any condition of righteousness but rather based upon His continual, abounding, faithful love to us despite our weaknesses, failures, sin, and disgrace. This is the brotherly love of our brother Jesus that sets us for the means and the way to show brotherly love to each other. We are echoing the king, our brother, who is Christ.

Because you've got to remember, division within the early church was common. Teachings and teachers would often be pitted against each other. Some followed Apollo, some followed Paul. False teaching challenged orthodox views on Christ. Wolves led sheep astray. Foolish controversies were debated needlessly. Disputes about the law were constant. Jewish nationalism tried to play into the traditions of the church. People were divided into ideological camps, and on top of that, the church was persecuted heavily. Good thing we don't struggle with that today. I hope you caught my sarcasm there.

Do you see the call for the church in Hebrews to let brotherly love continue? To let philadelphia reign in the kingdom is the call for us today. We are situationally almost exactly identical to the early church in Hebrews. It's hard enough to fight a war on two fronts, and so the posture of the kingdom is to remain together as a family looking to the brotherly love of Christ for our example for how we show philadelphia to one another.

Now, this causes us to ask ourselves what are the limits, then, of brotherhoods? Is there a way in which we should rightfully part ways? Certainly, we all as Christians believe that there are certain closed hand truths that all believers who truly profess faith must hold on to, right? The infallibility and the authority of Scripture, the persons of God in the Trinity, salvation by faith alone through grace alone in Jesus Christ, a robust understanding of Hell and sin, etc. But we must become even more prudent and wise as believers to hold fast to the idea of letting brotherly love continue with maybe those Christians who hold to these closed hand positions, but we may disagree with on the open hand. To maybe think, perhaps, before we post and tweet – myself included. To hold our tongues where Satan would have us rage and to prevent ourselves from using the excuse, “Oh, I was just speaking my mind,” which by the way is not a biblical concept.

Our tongues are a raging fire, the Scripture says, when not controlled. And it has needlessly separated the bonds of brotherhood with fellow believers when unchecked. So, this is maybe a gut check for some of us here today. How many Christian brothers or sisters do you share fellowship with that have different view points with you in the open hand? How do you share brotherly love with Pentecostals, Anglicans, Baptists, non-denominational community churches? Do we still consider the universal church universal? In almost every modern poll of the reason why people leave the faith and leave the church, at the very top of that list is the way that Christians treat one another. And that should be instructive for us. This is why Paul exhorts the church in Romans – the verse that's printed on the front of your bulletin – “to remain steadfast in brotherly love for one another, to out do each other in showing one another honor,” because he knew how dangerous it was for believers to get swept up in the trials of living life together as a Christian family.

So, what would it look like for our church, Columbia Presbyterian to be a church where you could say without self-promotion or exaggeration or embellishment: I am loved in this church in ways that shows me the love of Christ each and every day. I belong to a family. I am loved by this community more than any other worldly community can offer me, more than Soul Cycle, CrossFit, knitting clubs combined, I am loved by this community. I feel like family here because this community by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit guiding and exhorting us that this community reflects the philadelphia of Christ.

That's one of my prayers for this church, not that we're bad at this or we're terrible at this. This is such a loving and wonderful church to be a part of, but this is the challenge for us. “Let brotherly love continue.”

Now not only that, but the writer of Hebrews asked us to extend philadelphia in verses 2 and 3 of this passage asking for the kingdom to be a kingdom of love of the other. This is the second point in your bulletins. Here we see two exhortations to demonstrate hospitality to strangers and to remember

persecuted Christians in prison as though they themselves were in prison. Now what's interesting in the original language of Scripture here is the verb that ties to the verb in verse 1. If philadelphia is brotherly love belonging in the family of Christ, the root verb for hospitality to strangers is the lesser known word "philoxenia" from the root "xino" meaning "stranger" in demonstration of the idea that we are to love others who are not in the family of God and bring them into our world, bring them into our homes.

Now when we think of the word "hospitality" these days, some of type A'ers become stressed immediately, right? We think of ornate parties, fun, and decorative themes, cleaning every square inch of our homes, boujee food and drink if you're under 35. That's not what's in view here, okay? Hospitality isn't defined as showing people the greatest and the best side of us. You see, hospitality back in the context of this sermon in Hebrews was more of a matter of survival and safe haven in a world where to travel was to actually risk life and death. Inns were notorious for being in bad condition, and they were often equated by many historical resources as the equivalent of staying in a brothel. To try and find rest in such an establishment like an inn was to risk getting robbed, kidnapped, or killed. Even Plato would write about inns, and he would write about how travelers would be held ransom by these innkeepers that needed to be paid off before they could leave. And inns knowingly were hugely expensive paying for beds that were ridden with flees and other diseases. Think of a very unregulated air b&b, just real terrible places to live in.

So, when Christians first started popping up around the scene, one of the markers that they actually became widely known for around the non-believing community was that they above others were hospitable to anyone that would come into their homes. You can probably imagine what came next when word spread about this. Christians were abused for the hospitality. They were taken advantage of, their property was destroyed, the natural order of their houses was ruined. And so, the early church community had to ask themselves, how do we do all of this? And maybe good natured and perhaps ill-willed Presbyterians, they created a book on church hospitality. And they released a chapter on it in this little handbook called the Didache, which is a non-canonical teaching of the twelve apostles in the first century. And it was designed to protect itself from these abuses of hospitality. And so, in it there are rules of hospitality that made Christians to actually be less hospitable to protect their front doors.

Perhaps the funniest and most arbitrary of these rules comes in the form of how to treat people who are disguising themselves to be apostles. I'm going to read this in full because it's great. It's really funny.

"Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord but let him not stay more than one day or if need be a second as well. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when an apostle goes forth, let him accept nothing but bread until he reaches his night's lodging, but if he asks for money, he is a false prophet."

These rules are kind of silly in the Didache, and that's perhaps why they are not Scripture. But more in line here is that the writer of Hebrews knows about the Didache. And it's interesting that he still says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers." For sure, hospitality comes with it measures of wisdom. We have to be careful. But nevertheless, he still exhorts this Christian community to love the stranger, hospitality to the stranger as though they were like Abraham and Laud and Gideon and the parents of Samson in the Old Testament when they were unknowingly in the presence of entertaining angels.

Now, it's not that the writer is assuming that every stranger that comes to your home is an angel ready to smite you if you don't offer him a bed, but rather that every chance you get to love the stranger is a chance to extend the grace of Christ as witness to those who don't understand why in the world would someone offer them such abundant generosity without condition of prior relationship? Again, this is something that's so against the tide of our current sentiments, isn't it? We may ask questions. I mean, you've got this community with an open-door policy that allows perfect strangers to come in. I mean,

surely, you've got to be kidding me, right? Are these Christians dumb? Don't they know what kind of dangers await them if they just let any person stay in their homes? I mean philoxenia, that's not practical. That's not wise. It's dangerous to care for the other in this way. It's much better if we just keep philadelphia and we remain safe within our walls, people that we know, people that we trust. But to do so would be to forget the king that we worship and the decrees He's made for us.

Ephesians 2:13 and 19, "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ so that you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." And Deuteronomy 10:19, we "are to love the sojourner, therefore, because you were a sojourner in the land of Egypt." You were redeemed by the blood of the lamb. You who were once strangers to God dead in your trespasses and sins, Jesus Christ prepares a home for you. He prepares a place for you. He shows hospitality to you who were a stranger to Him. You see, our position of hospitality towards the other opens the door to the stranger to taste and see what the kingdom of God is like and what the kingdom of God has done for us in gospel, witness, and testimony.

The posture of the front door of your home shows the world the posture the king has towards all that would call His name. Now, speaking truthfully here, this can be a danger for us who live in the suburbs. Me speaking as a lifelong Howard County resident and pretty staunch introvert by nature, I'm going to go and take the longest nap ever after this sermon. I feel this tension pulling me towards my own sense of comfort and convenience in my lifestyle.

The writer Ross Lester in his excellent article – which I think should be mandatory reading for all of us here – "What I've Learned as a Suburban Church Planter," he writes this, and I just want to challenge us here with this statement.

"Houses used to be near the front of the lots with the front porch as the focal point. Now they're built with the living areas all facing the back of the lot with the private deck as the focal point. The suburbs are in many ways an attempt to create an alternate kingdom, a place of peace and security here on earth. We must be reminded that our homes as suburbanites are mission stations, outposts of hospitality, kindness, and grace in an increasingly hostile context. They are orchids where the fruit of the Spirit can be grown and shared."

Again, I'm so grateful that this church is so generous with its hospitality in so many ways and forms to the stranger, from those who every week come to our English Language ministry every Tuesday night to those who host a community group and open up your doors and those who invite your neighbors to those community groups. It's a wonderful thing. But again, these questions here as we read them in verse 2, is the ever-facing challenge for us and those who are ambassadors of the king to ask ourselves the question have we made ourselves so busy that it becomes impossible to invite the stranger into our home? Have we got caught up in the rat-race of living in this culture that it becomes impossible to have any disruptions in your schedule to love the other and make space for them? What does it look like for you to evaluate what you've been swimming in both personally and as a family? And see where Christ as King can have lordship over your front door.

He not only talks about that, but he moves from the front door to the prison door in verse 3 as the writer applies philoxenia to these persecuted Christians who are suffering for the sake of their confession. As many early Christians relied upon other Christians to provide them food, clothing, and support while they were in prison – remember there were no amenities for prisoners back then, they were solely reliant upon visitors. Christians risked exposure and shame in these visitations to the believers. But this risk is commanded because these imprisoned Christians have nowhere else to turn to. You've got to remember, prisoners are easily forgotten because they are out of sight. And Christian remembrance of them required not just a thinking of them, not just their prayers, but also provision.

So, this is why for us as we think about the support of missionaries, praying for the persecuted in countries where Christianity is most dangerous, maybe perhaps taking the World Watch List which is posted every year by Open Door Ministries to read about persecution and pray for places such as North Korea – which was ranked number one again this year – Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, and Eritrea – which are two through six. These are things that I think are healthy rhythms for us. It's important to be in our mission as remembering those who are in the kingdom persecuted because of their citizenship in the kingdom.

If our king of the kingdom, Jesus Christ, was sacrificial and costly in the giving of His life for our sins, if He was unjustly arrested, tortured in captivity, suffering these things on our behalf, then how does it reflect the values of the kingdom that we now live in in our posture for philoxenia to the world? These are the kinds of questions that the text raises for us. Because if we're not cautious about philadelphia and philoxenia, other loves come creeping into the kingdom.

And so, we must be, point three, a kingdom that watches what it loves to not let other priorities or thoughts or desires invade our kingdom ethics. Sexual immorality, verses 4 and 5, adultery, verse 5, the love of money, so he's juxtaposing philadelphia and philoxenia against the love of money. These were all prominent values, sexual immorality, adultery, love of money, in ancient Greek culture. In the age of hedonism, self-pleasure, short-term satisfaction, and Christians were standing in this ancient Greek culture as sort of a strange witness. Why are you not participating in the things that we are not participating in? Why do you not covet the things that we covet? As one commentator notes, "Christian sexual ethic was unique in a pagan world and a source of wonder to them, even those who sought to persecute Christians saw their ethics as a unique feature that was mysterious and commendable to them."

In verses 4 and 5, the writer of Hebrews' exhortations are not simply just judgmental moralistic Christians asserting their superiority over culture by their sexual ethics and their contentedness, no. Rather these exhortations are a call to demonstrate the goodness of the king in showing the beauty of the kingdom and what it means to uplift the picture of Christ in His church, in marriage, and to be content with what we have in this world. These warnings are warnings. These warnings are here on our behalf, not to sort of stifle the best life that we could possibly live, but to warn us against the devastating consequences of sin. Just in case the severity of hurt of sexual immorality isn't enough, we are soberly reminded that these sins are highlighted in God's judgement, a unique judgement against sexual immorality in Scripture. These aren't sins as sort of the cultural milieu of our days says, you know this doesn't hurt anyone, why care about these things? But rather, these are kingdom destroying ethics that deserve the just penalty for the wrongdoing.

Everything hinges on this. Look at 1 Corinthians 5:9, Ephesians 5:6, 1Thessalonians 4:3-7, Revelation 21:8, make no mistake about it, apart from the grace of God we stand in severe judgement for our sexual deviancy against His commands. Apart from the mercy of Christ, we stand in condemnation. And to wash the force of that minimize God's very words on this passage and to minimize the beauty of the kingdom of God. And this is exactly the same with love and possessions and money. A discontentment with what God has graciously given to us leads us down a path of asking ourselves a question of when is enough truly enough? How many zeros? How many toys? How many possessions until we are satisfied?

The words of a biblical commentator by the name of Stirgeon echo here when he says this,

"It is not possible to satisfy the greedy. If God gave them one whole world to themselves, they would cry for another. And if it were possible for them to possess heaven as they now are, they would feel themselves in hell because others were in heaven, too. For their greed is such that they must have everything or else they have nothing."

Or, in other words, to quote *The Greatest Showman*, "All the shine of a thousand spotlights, all the stars that we steal from the night sky will never be enough. Never ever," right? It's actually a really

depressing song when you think about it long enough. Great song, but depressing. Love of money leaves us constantly waiting for something that love of money can never fill us with. How much more is the provision of God's faithfulness in our lives?

We are reminded Genesis 28, Deuteronomy 31, Joshua 1, and here in this passage at the end of verse 5 that God will never leave us or forsake us. What a comfort that is. God will never leave us or forsake us. All of us here who have experienced the grace of God can attest to the wonder of His provision, whether we are in plenty or whether we are in need. Whether we come to Sunday morning encouraged and in joy or hurting and stumbling, we are echoing Paul's cry that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us not because He's somehow giving us some magical shot of adrenaline, but because He has given us all that we need through His precious sacrifice on the Cross for our sins.

He's given us contentment. And in this, we see the balance of the writer of Hebrews to help us remember that while it is, yes indeed, a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of God in judgement, paradoxically it is the safest place to be for those of us who belongs to His kingdom. Jesus has given us an eternal inheritance. He's given you life and fellowship with Him. What greater treasure in the world than that? The kingdom is here. The kingdom is coming. And we can enjoy it here today.

This is how the Christian can say in verse 6, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?" Because lastly, we are a kingdom in love for the king. We are a kingdom in love of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

The gospel reminds us each and every time we gather together as the body of all the good things our king has bought for us. And He continues to guard us from falling because He is the good shepherd. How He sustains us with grace to do things like philadelphia and philoxenia, how He makes the darkest place in life be the most joyous occasions because we are surrounded by kingdom people who are there to pray for us to give us an encouraging word, to give us a bed to sleep on, a meal to feed us, a prayer of remembrance. He gives us a global family to turn to. This is what makes the happiest place on earth. Not an overpriced plot of land in Orlando, Florida, but where the presence of God, and the people of God, and the Spirit of the Lord resides, there is freedom, and joy, and peace, and happiness in the greatest place to be.

Church, I'm going to ask you, do you believe that today? If you believe that with me, here's what we're going to do. We're going to pray to this great Father who sends us this king, and then the last point of the service is we're going to sing to Him. We're going to sing this song talking about what Jesus has done for us, talking about the joy that He brings us, talking about the Christ who shows us philadelphia and philoxenia, who helps us to guard our hearts against false loves, who brings us into His own, who loves us and cares for us and shows us what this kingdom can look like for us here in the church today. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for establishing your throne. We thank you for these principles which help guide our kingdom living. You have not left us in the dark in how to imitate this great king. Rather you've shown us brotherly love. You remembered us and show hospitality to us while we were still strangers, while we were still slaves and prisoners to sin, you remembered us. And you call us now into a new family, one that exhibits real love, one that exhibits a real contentment and joy in knowing that we belong to this great kingdom. Father, may we now go and respond in love and grace and mercy and joy guided by your Spirit, sustained by your grace to sing to you and worship to you now. God, we thank you for this time together. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.