

Sermon

Entertaining an Angel

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“Listen to the word of the Lord,” cries Jeremiah, his voice echoing through the centuries like a thunderclap of divine heartbreak. Israel has turned away, trading living water for cracked cisterns that cannot hold a drop. It’s a vivid image of spiritual abandonment—God as the forsaken fountain, grieving over a people who have forgotten their first love.

And then, in Hebrews, we hear a different kind of call: not a lament, but a charge. “Let mutual love continue,” it says. Show hospitality. Remember those in prison. Honor marriage. Be content. Trust in the God who says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

These two texts speak to each other across time. Jeremiah warns us what happens when we forsake God’s presence. Hebrews reminds us how to live in it.

So today, we ask: What kind of vessel are we? Are we cracked cisterns, leaking grace and truth? Or are we channels of living water, pouring out love, hospitality, and faithfulness in a world that desperately needs it?

Being in any kind of an intimate relationship – marital, friendship, familial – it requires a sense of honesty, vulnerability and sometimes moments of expressing our anger with something that has been done or said or perhaps not done or not said. These moments are risky depending on the

maturity of the relationship and of the people in it. Yet, spiritually, we know that in order to evolve we must bring forth our truth.

In Jeremiah, God is bringing just such a moment forward. *“What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me and went after worthless things and became worthless themselves?” “⁷I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.”*

This passage comes early in the book of Jeremiah, and right away we hear the heartbreak in God's voice. It's a lament—a cry of disappointment over how far His people have strayed. Israel, the nation God called His own, has repeatedly turned away. And it's not just the everyday folks—Jeremiah calls out the priests, the prophets, the leaders. The whole system is broken. Corruption runs deep. Idolatry has taken root.

Now, we don't know exactly which moment in history this part of Jeremiah is pointing to. The names and faces may be lost to time. But what we do know is that Jeremiah lived through a storm—an era of massive social and spiritual upheaval. And in the middle of that chaos, he stood as a voice for God, calling the people back to the covenant they had abandoned.

Essentially, this passage gives us a view of God not often seen – God is furious, frustrated and is demanding restitution – God even uses legal terminology such as “bring charges against” leading us to understand that God isn't just looking for the people to change their ways but is looking for something far greater – a complete change in societal priority and practice,

especially from those in positions of power both in the political realm and religious.

Yet beyond this, the most compelling imagery in this passage is that of the water and the cistern. The people were concerned about water supply. But their process seems flawed. They don't build wells or springs – they use cisterns that are temporary vessels – not something that can truly be sustainable or reliable. This is the vessel they chose...so while what they were doing seems sensible, the how is quite flawed and what's happening is these cisterns are cracked and water just leaks right out of them leaving their water supply depleted.

And I wonder... what do those cisterns represent today? Could they be our religious routines, our traditions, our structures or just our overall rejection of religion altogether —things that once held the Spirit but now leak because we've lost connection to the source? Have we built programs and platforms, but forgotten the presence?

Jeremiah's warning is clear: the living water is God. Not the container. Not the system. Not the ritual. And if we're not drawing from our Godsource, we're just patching up broken cisterns that will never satisfy.

We understand this clearly when we are confronted in life with deep challenges. None of us have not had that moment – none. Losing someone dear, facing a serious health challenge, struggles with our finances, estrangement, and yes, even issues with our very own churches and religions

throughout the world. When these moments happen, is our faith in a leaky cistern or are we firmly connected to the source of God's energy and light?

So Jeremiah paints this haunting picture: a people who've traded the living water of God for cracked cisterns of their own making. They've built systems, rituals, and routines—but they've lost the source. And that's not just ancient history. That's a warning for us today.

But Scripture doesn't leave us in the ruins. It points us forward.

When we turn to Hebrews 13, we see what it looks like to live connected to the source. The writer doesn't talk about cracked cisterns—he talks about flowing love. About hospitality. About remembering the forgotten, honoring marriage, living with contentment, and trusting in the God who says, *"I will never leave you or forsake you."*

Where Jeremiah shows us what happens when we drift from God, Hebrews shows us how to stay close. It's not about building better containers—it's about letting the living water flow through our lives in real, tangible ways.

So the question becomes: Are we just storing religion, or are we living relationship? Are we patching up old systems, or are we letting God's love pour out through us?

Hebrews 13 is rich with practical wisdom and spiritual depth. It's the final chapter of the epistle, and it shifts from theological exposition to ethical exhortation.

“Let mutual love continue.” (v.1) This sets the tone: love isn’t optional—it’s foundational. The chapter urges believers to show hospitality, even to strangers, reminding us that some have “entertained angels unaware” (v.2). It’s a call to radical welcome and inclusion. Last week I challenged you to share your light with others as you went out into the world...how did that go for you? Did you notice people looking at you in a different way – did their light shift a you shared a smile or a kind gesture? Did that feed your own? Did it feel like life? Like true living, not just going through motions? It’s different when you make a conscious choice to bring love and light through your spirit.

“Remember those in prison as if you were in prison with them.” (v.3) This theme emphasizes compassion for the suffering. It’s not just sympathy—it’s identification. The church is called to stand with the marginalized, the imprisoned, and the mistreated. It is critical that we do this – that we notice and act when possible. There’s a lot of threat against innocent people in our world today. More of our babies were slaughtered this week. ICE in our communities taking our neighbors to where we don’t know. A colleague of mine shared with me that her neighbors were taken – they legal business owners, law -biding, documented citizens. They took them, left their house wide open and unlocked, left the dog and nobody knew where they were taken or if they would come back. The neighbors took care of the dog, their home, their cars. “Remember those in prison as if you were in prison with them.”

“Keep your lives free from the love of money.” (v.5) The writer encourages believers to be content, trusting in God’s provision. This theme ties directly to

the promise: *“I will never leave you or forsake you.”* It’s a reminder that security isn’t found in wealth, but in God’s presence.

Jesus is the same today and always...while the world changes, these themes that Jesus lays in front of us never do. To be in relation with one another and to put this above all else – understanding that we need each other and we need our God Source to survive. No matter how many cisterns we think we have stored away, nothing replaces your tribe – those that God places in your path to give you strength when yours is depleted.

Relationship is difficult and sometimes, even intimate commitment like marriage, is not successful. It is critical to remember that God intends us to be nurtured, loved and respected in these relationships. When they fail, it is devastating but know that God places his “angels” in your path to lead you, guide you and love you through those times.

Trust in the unchanging Christ - In a world of shifting values and constant change, this is your anchor. Jesus doesn’t change. His love, His truth, His presence—they’re steady. When life feels chaotic, return to Scripture. Remind yourself of who Christ is. Let His constancy shape your courage.

So we’ve journeyed from Jeremiah’s lament over broken cisterns to the practical, Spirit-filled life described in Hebrews 13. And now we land on this quiet, almost mysterious line: *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”*

What a thought. That in the ordinary moments—welcoming a stranger, sharing a meal, offering a ride, listening with compassion—we might be touching heaven. That the divine doesn't always arrive with trumpets and fire, but sometimes in the form of a weary traveler, a lonely neighbor, a child in need.

This is the antidote to cracked cisterns. Not flashy religion. Not self-made systems. But simple, sacred hospitality. A life so open to God's presence that even angels feel welcome.

So as we go from this place, let's ask ourselves: Are we building lives that leak, or lives that pour? Are we chasing control, or practicing compassion? Are we entertaining angels—or just entertaining ourselves?

May we be a people who choose the living water. May we be a church where strangers become family. And may we never miss the miracle standing right in front of us. Because for me, the miracle has been you.
Amen.