

Text: Heb. 13:2

Title: "Love strangers"

Time: 8/14/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - I have enjoyed much hospitality as the pastor of New Boston Baptist Church. I remember with fondness our first night's stay in this town in the comfortable home of Ted and Jaime Fountain. They were expecting Ben's arrival in those days, and they made us very comfortable with a servant's heart and a generous welcome.

The first visit to a home I made as the pastor of this church, however, was a Ziti delivery that did not go very well. A neighbor had been in a motorcycle accident, and we wanted to present a meal and encourage this family with our prayers. They scolded us for coming, refused our gift, and made clear that they never wanted anything ever to do with our church. At the time I wondered what that visit portended for the future of our new ministry here in New Boston. After that first experience, however, I have rarely encountered anything less than a warm welcome at the homes of those I have gone to visit in our neighborhood.

Our text this morning speaks of the importance of hospitality. Some of you are naturally very gifted in this regard. Some of you are like me and have to work at this. My mom used to be very hospitable. There were many days when she had friends and neighbors over for coffee and encouragement. I can remember those times as times during which I made it a point to stay upstairs in my bedroom and not be seen for fear of actually having to talk to someone I did not know.

Hospitality is certainly important. But I believe that our author is addressing a need of our hearts that goes beyond welcoming the company of our pastor or our favorite friends into our home. He launches the command of this verse off of the launching pad of the previous verse. In that previous verse he spoke of *philadelphia*, brotherly-love. In this verse, he talks of entertaining strangers, which is the word *philozenia*, which means *the love of strangers*. Not only are we to let brotherly-love continue, we are not to forget to love strangers, those whom we do not know.

So this command is really about how we treat people we do not know, not how we treat those we do. They may be our brothers in Christ, or they may not. The point is, we do not know who they are. How do we treat people, whatever their background or beliefs, whom we do not know? I have titled the message this morning very simply, "Love strangers," and I think the passage indicates that we need to do that in three ways.

I. Love strangers by making them a priority (v. 2, "forget not").

III: Derry, New Hampshire's Robert Frost wrote a poem about his neighbor and the stone wall their properties shared. It says in part the following:

"He [Frost's neighbor] only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it

Where there are cows?

But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down."

Appl: It almost goes without saying that few of us make people we do not know a priority in our lives. You do not have to be a true-blue New Englander to feel that way, but it helps. I have a brother-in-law who is one of those big, loveable, talkative kind of guys who will go up and talk to someone he has never met as though he had known him all his life. Most of you and I are not like that. In fact, I find myself often cringing when I am with Tim and he engages people that way. Well, Tim has a love of strangers that I do not have. He has made them a priority in his life in a way that I have not. Nor had these Hebrew believers. The command is not "remember" but "forget not," and one commentator [Westcott] says this indicates "that the virtue was now being neglected" (p. 430). The command is really, "Stop forgetting about the love of strangers." "Stop neglecting their need for your love." That is the command we need to hear from our Lord this morning.

Appl2: Christ, of course, made loving complete strangers a priority in His life. Every once in a while, Jesus would say, "I must," when referring to a priority He was pursuing:

1. "I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49; He was in the temple speaking to complete strangers).
2. "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43; He was not content to just preach in His home town of Nazareth and the neighboring town of Capernaum where He was known).
3. "Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33; His ministry to strangers would

put Him in a long line of prophets murdered by the people of Jerusalem; they were nevertheless the priority [vv. 34-35; "O Jerusalem!"]).

4. "I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5; He said this to Zacchaeus, a stranger).

5. "I must go through Samaria" (John 4:4; He wanted to meet the woman at the well).

6. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

Jesus was filled with the love of strangers who needed to be brought into the fold. Second perhaps only to His determination to go to the cross, seeking and saving that which was lost was the great priority of His life. Is it so for us? The Christianity that walls itself in without ever making the love for strangers a priority is not the Christianity of Jesus Christ. What needs to change in our lives to make loving strangers a priority?

II. Love strangers by caring for their material needs (v. 2, "unawares" = "treat as a guest").

III: The two passages most often cited as the likely references behind the author's statement about entertaining angels here are Abraham's encounter with the three angels in Genesis 18, one of whom was the Angel of the Lord (the Son of God), and Lot's encounter with the two of these who, in Genesis 19, continued on to Sodom. In both cases pains were taken to provide these guests with material provisions - food and lodging.

Note: The word *unawares* or *unknowingly* is a popular translation of the word *zenizo* here. In fact, I could only find two translations that do not translate the word that way, Wycliffe's translation, which actually was done from the Latin

and not the Greek, and a translation called the Jubilee Bible, which I had never heard of before. That said, the standard Greek lexicon I use translates the word here as those two translations do, namely, as *to host as a guest*. The word can mean *to host as a guest* or *to surprise*. I translate the phrase, “some, having hosted them as guests, received angels.”

There are three reasons I think the two translations I mentioned and the lexicon are correct against all the others. First, those who showed hospitality to angels in the past seemed to know that they were doing so (Gen. 18:2, 19:1). They were not really entertaining angels unawares. Second, the participle translated *unawares* is active, not passive. So those doing the entertaining are also doing the surprising in the original. This is not recognized in the common translation, where those doing the entertaining are being surprised. That idea would require the passive participle. Finally, I believe Luke is the author of Hebrews, and it turns out this word is used often in the narration of the Book of Acts by Luke to illustrate what hospitality and the love of strangers really is all about:

1. In Acts 10:6, 18, 32, Peter was *staying with* a tanner named Simon, whose house was by the sea.
2. In Acts 10:23, Simon did the same for the men who visited from Cornelius.
3. In Acts 21:16, Paul’s team *lodges with* Mnason of Cyprus on their way to Jerusalem.
4. Acts 28:7, Paul and his shipmates *are lodged by* Publius after they suffer shipwreck on the island of Malta.

Appl: So I mention all this to make a simple observation – the point of the verse is not that we might have a chance to unknowingly host an angel. If God wants us to host an angel, we will know it like Abraham and Lot did. The point of the verse is that what it means to love strangers is to host

them as your guest, to care for their physical needs. We need to be willing to meet the material needs for food and housing of people we do not know if we are to fulfill the commandment of this verse. Our church has a hospitality committee, and they do great work. But in reality, we all are commanded to have that kind of love for strangers. Cooking a meal may not be your strong suit, but how about providing some transportation or help moving? When was the last time your home had a lost family over for dinner? Needs for this still persist around us. We love strangers by meeting their material needs.

Appl2: Our deacon fund as a church is focused often on this duty. When given the opportunity to give to that fund, we should be mindful of the command of this verse.

III. Love strangers for the spread of the gospel (v.2, "some have entertained angels").

Appl: What makes entertaining an angel special? Why is that such a big deal? Well, in Abraham and Lot's case, they had come with an important message that people needed to hear. You do not have to be a supernatural creature to be an angel in this sense. The New Testament calls John the Baptist a messenger (*angelos*) of Christ in the sense that John was the one who proclaimed that Christ was soon coming. The 7 churches of Revelation are called messengers (*angelos*). The point that encourages our love for strangers here, I believe, is this truth – the one we show that love to may become a messenger of the Lord who reaches people we would not ourselves reach.

III: The woman at the well was one stranger who became a great messenger of the gospel (John 4:27-30, 39-42). All that happened because one day Jesus said, "I must needs go

through Samaria to love a stranger.” Where are the strangers we have loved in the Lord’s name? May it be that we have not many messengers for the gospel today because we have not understood how to love strangers, many of whom God could use as He did this Samaritan woman?

Conclusion: D. L. Moody used to tell the story of a tragedy at sea that happened on Lake Erie: “A few years ago, at the mouth of Cleveland harbor, there were two lights, one at each side of the bay, called the upper and lower lights; and to enter the harbor safely by night, vessels must sight both of the lights.

“These western lakes are more dangerous sometimes than the great ocean. One wild, stormy night, a steamer was trying to make her way into the harbor. The captain and pilot were anxiously watching for the lights.

“By-and-by the pilot was heard to say, ‘Do you see the lower light?’ ‘No,’ was the reply; ‘I fear we have passed them.’ ‘Ah, there are the lights,’ said the pilot; ‘and they must be, from the bluff on which they stand, the upper lights. We have passed the lower lights, and have lost our chance of getting into the harbor.’

“What was to be done? They looked back, and saw the dim outline of the lower lighthouse against the sky. The lights had gone out. ‘Can’t you turn your head around?’ ‘No; the night is too wild for that. She won’t answer to her helm.’ The storm was so fearful that they could do nothing.

“They tried again to make for the harbor, but they went crash against the rocks, and sank to the bottom. Very few escaped; the great majority found a watery grave. Why? Simply because the lower lights had gone out. Now, with

us the upper lights are all right. Christ Himself is the upper light, and we are the lower lights, and the cry to us is, keep the lower lights burning; that is what we have to do. He will lead us safe to the sunlit shore of Canaan, where there is no more night." Can we name the strangers who have seen the light of our love for them in Christ? Are our lower lights burning, or have they gone out?

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*