

WHAT'S ENTERTAINMENT?

Sermon, September 1, 2019

Text: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

"Over the years, under the leadership of Louis B. Mayer and others, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has produced a series of musical films whose success and artistic merit remain unsurpassed in motion picture history. There were literally thousands of people artists, craftsmen and technicians who poured their talents into the creation of the great MGM musicals. This film is dedicated to them."

That was the dedication of *That's Entertainment!*, a 1974 cinema release by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film studio in celebration of their fiftieth anniversary. *That's Entertainment!* was originally the title of a song from a 1953 MGM musical The Band Wagon, starring Fred Astaire, Nanette Fabrey, and Cyd Charisse; a repeating refrain in that song was *"The world is a stage, the stage is a world of entertainment!"* The 1974 film was a nostalgic collection of clips from fifty years of musicals. Segments of the documentary were hosted by Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, Peter Lawford, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds, Mickey Rooney, Bing Crosby, James Stewart, Elizabeth Taylor, and Liza Minnelli (*who was representing her late mother, Judy Garland, who had died in 1969 at the age of 47*). Seventy musical performances were presented; here's just seven: *Singing in the Rain* with Gene Kelly; *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* by Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra; *Puttin' on the Ritz* by Clark Gable; *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* by Judy Garland (*Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz*); *La Cucuracha* by the Gumm Sisters (*Judy Garland and her sisters, Mary Jane and Dorothy*); *Abba Dabba Honeymoon* with Debbie Reynolds and Carleton Carpenter; *Heigh Ho the Gang's All Here* by Fred Astaire and Joan Crawford; *Ol' Man River* by Kathryn Grayson, from the musical Showboat.

"The world is a stage, the stage is a world of entertainment!" That lyrical line was "borrowed" from Shakespeare; *"All the world's a stage"* begins a monologue from Shakespeare's As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII: *"All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players ..."* In a sense, the Bible agrees! This world really IS a stage, and as we've noted in the past few weeks, the author of Hebrews tells us we have an audience as we live out and/or perform our roles on the stage of this world. We have the divine audience of God and the heavenly angels, and we have an audience of all the faithful, the "great cloud of witnesses," who have gone on before us, sitting in the heavenly theater and cheering us on. We read two weeks ago from Hebrews 12, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame."* The epistle of Hebrews ends with chapter 13, which our pew Bibles have subtitled *"Concluding Exhortations."* Seven exhortations are given in our reading today; I like to look at these as seven ways to keep the divine, angelic and heavenly audience heartily and wholesomely **entertained** ... these are seven "training exercises" that will make us better players on the stage of life. Follow these and not only will we "perform" our "stage" roles well, but we will be more successful in our roles as human beings ... better people, better parents, better spouses, better neighbors, better employees and/or better employers.

The first three of the seven exhortations are found in the first three verses of Hebrews 13.

- 1. KEEP ON LOVING EACH OTHER.** Verse 1: *"Keep on loving each other as brothers."* Love is primarily a verb, not a noun; it is primarily something we do, not primarily some "thing" we "have" or "feel." (*Quite often the feeling follows the action, rather than vice-versa, but that's almost another sermon.*) This first exhortation is to be loving toward people we live with, work with, worship with ... even when they're obstinate, or small minded, or too stingy, or too thick, or too prickly, or too liberal, or too conservative, or too whatever. While we're at it, be loving toward people we don't even know, even those you might not normally even associate with ... which brings us to the next exhortation.
- 2. EXERCISE HOSPITALITY.** Verse 2: *"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."* Some translations of Hebrews 13:2 have "offer hospitality" instead of "entertain." When the word "entertainment" entered English from French in the late fifteenth century, it meant "to maintain, to keep." When you entertained, you "kept" somebody, you put them up, you "maintained" them, you cared for them ... all of which primarily connotes *hospitality*. By Shakespeare's time, the word had acquired a meaning of *"engage or keep the attention of a person"*, which carried the related nuance of "amusing" a person. So, *entertaining* can have the related meanings of *amusing*, of *engaging*, AND of *"keeping"* or *caring for* someone. Hence this second exhortation: OFFER HOSPITALITY. Foster an open-door policy in our church and in our homes to wholesomely engage and welcome and entertain and care for and help out friends AND strangers. Try to engage all whom God brings our way, wherever we go, with a warm

receptiveness. And we never know ... in so doing, not only are we wholesomely entertaining the heavenly angels and the cloud of witnesses who are looking on, we may even be offering hospitality to and/or engaging an actual angel in disguise, as has happened a few times in the Bible ... and we just never know how that angel might bless us!

3. **REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON.** Verse 3: *"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."* The third exhortation is not just about remembering those behind iron bars in a literal brick and mortar jail, but it is also an exhortation to be mindful of those stuck in prisons of the soul and body ... those trapped behind the bars of addictions, or illnesses, or emotional handicaps, or physical limitations. Anything that locks people up, immobilizes them, keeps them from living freely ... that's a prison. We are to remember them as if we were their fellow "prisoners;" visit them, pray for them, be compassionate toward them, as we would want people to do for us if we ourselves were in similar situations.
4. **HONOR MARRIAGE.** Verse 4, *"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."* This fourth exhortation is to honor and protect and uphold the institution of marriage. Honor our own marriages; honor and protect and uphold the marriages of others! Like the flying buttresses that held up the walls of the ancient cathedrals, the church's prayers, teachings and encouragement are to be buttresses upholding the God-ordained institution of marriage! And this probably goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway, that we shouldn't undermine the institution with our continual cultural and denominational sophistry on issues of human sexuality. When there is marital conflict, don't take sides and incite, foster and encourage reconciliation! *(In several wedding homilies I've given over the years, I delivered a charge to all the witnesses present ... their role is to be here to witness vows this couple is making to each other, and they are to do all in their power to help that couple keep those vows they witnessed. In short, the witness's duty is to do all he/she can to push the couple together; never, ever to take sides to pull them apart. The latter does not honor marriage.)* Also, we should prepare our young people, modeling for them by word and deed and example the sanctity of marriage, the only God-ordained relationship within which sexual activity is appropriate. In short, God honors marriage, and so should we. A question I often put to Confirmation classes is this: Are certain things good just because God says they are good, OR does God say things are good because those things really ARE good? The latter! God is the Creator, the Architect. He knows how things are supposed to work, He designed the created order, and He really wants the best for us. So, *trust Him*, which brings us to number five:
5. **Keep on trusting in God.** Verse 5: *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.'"* Our currency reminds us with the motto emblazoned on every coin, *"In God We Trust."* It's almost as if every nickel, dime, and quarter jangles in our pockets with a chorus singing, *"Don't trust us; trust God!"* Do we trust God? Do we love and honor Him more than the material "stuff" we strive to amass? Believing and trusting in God alone will help keep us performing well on the stage of this world, regardless of our economic circumstances.
6. **Respect and imitate your leaders.** Verse 8 - *"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* This isn't just a reference to the church leaders, it also includes remembering all the storied leaders of our faith, as highlighted in chapter 11. This sixth exhortation is to remember and learn from all who have earned the right to be heard, all who have earned the right to be seen and respected as leaders by their faithful examples. Remember such who are leaders by example and word, and *"... consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."* Take a good look at their lives, see the *good* things in their lives and in the lives of those around them which are a direct result of their faithful integrity, and imitate that faithfulness! And finally,
7. **Offer verbal and public praise to God.** Verse 15: *"Continue to offer God a sacrifice of praise -- the fruit of lips that praise His name."* Basically, I take this exhortation to mean we are to *verbally* and *publicly* give credit and thanks where credit and thanks are due. God is pleased when we worship him, when we pray to Him, when we intentionally do what is right and good *and* when we publicly acknowledge Him by *"... the fruit of lips that praise His name."*

So ... Love each other, show hospitality, remember those in prison, honor marriage, trust in God, respect and imitate your faithful leaders, and all the while verbally and vocally give praise God. As we practice these seven exhortations, not only will we provide the most wholesome and uplifting entertainment possible ... both for our heavenly audiences and our earthly ones ... but we will also do ourselves a world of good. *That's Entertainment!*