

The
New
Testament
in a Year

November 30-

December 4

Hebrews 12-13
Revelation 1-3

This week's reflectors are
Maryann and Dale Skinner.

Dale is the Pastor at
St. Stephens-on-the Hill United
Church in Mississauga.

Maryann is the pastor at
Bloomingdale United Church
near Kitchener

Monday, November 30
Hebrews 12

This chapter strongly urges us to constant devotion and perseverance. The example of Jesus is emphasized here as being central to teaching devoted loyalty to God. Following Jesus' example will help believers. In keeping with the rewards of being dedicated, God is with us even through suffering. God's plan is a loving plan.

A well known saying in our lives is that, "every cloud has a silver lining". A ten year old child once referred me to similar insight. Saying that she likes to look for the "Easter Eggs" in life; she explained that even when things go bad, there are always those little gold nuggets of goodness and hope. I believe this is similar to the perspective written here in Hebrews.

Peace and holiness are recommended with cautions against overlooking spiritual blessings. Moreover, we are called to be convicted that God's Grace supersedes all things of ill ease. The last part (18-29) upholds the excellence of the new covenant made through Jesus. Overall, a witness of God's love is being written about in this chapter. In, through, and with God there are overwhelming blessings in spite of the human tendency to despise.

Tuesday, December 1
Hebrews 13

This chapter continues along a similar vein as the previous; setting importance on steadfast love and devotion.

Verses 1-6 give encouragement in various duties, calling us to be content with the unexpected aspects of how life unfolds. Hold fast to right relationship over and above material things.

Verses 7-15 work to inspire confidence in the instructions of faithful pastors, with cautions against being carried away by strange doctrines. (A rule or principle that is the basis of a belief.)

In verses 16- 21 there is more advice and encouragement to duties that relate to God, to our neighbour, and to those who serve us in the Lord.

The final verses of this chapter (22-25) spell out the bottom line that this epistle to be seriously considered.

These days it seems that duty and obedience are words that run the risk of turning people away from churches. In meeting an "un-churched" friend, how would you explain God's freedom and love in the same conversation with God's service and authority?

Wednesday, December 2

Revelation 1

The book of Revelation belongs to a genre known as “apocalyptic literature.” This kind of writing, popular amongst post-exilic Jews and early Christians, seeks to make known what was previously thought of as “hidden.” Characteristics of this genre include symbolism, numbers, mythological creatures and cosmic events.

An apocalypse is a story that tells the end of the old era and the beginning of a new age. The new age should not be considered a “restoration” of the old way. Instead it is the establishment of how things should be. Destruction is not the last word of an apocalypse. An apocalypse is written to offer hope beyond the life we know.

The hope of John of Patmos, the author of Revelation and who sits in exile on the island of Patmos, is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In all that transpires, it is Jesus who will have the first word and the last. He who holds the “keys of death” also “lives forever and ever”. John now shares his vision with us.

Thursday, December 3

Revelation 2

John writes to 7 churches and each church has been assigned an “angel” or “messenger.” The 7 churches are the seven lampstands that Jesus holds in his hands earlier on. Jesus is as close to the churches as he is to John on Patmos. Knowing the closeness of Christ is a reminder for each of the churches of the one in whom they owe their origin. It is the same one in whom they will find their future. The one who holds them in his hand.

The church in Ephesus stands accused of forsaking their initial inspiration for being a church. The reminder is to get back to the things “you did at first.” The call is to be a “spirit-filled” church –an inspired people. The church in Smyrna suffering affliction and poverty is called to be faithful unto death. It’s a matter of integrity.

The church in Pergamum has given way to idolatry. Yes, they hold to the name of Jesus, but in their actions they give authority to other individuals and desires. The church in Thyatira, although faithful, has given in to the pressures of the dominant cultural mores. For them, they have given assent to questionable leadership.

Friday, December 4

Revelation 3

Chapter three continues John’s messages to the seven churches. One wonders how the messengers were treated when each church received these words. Thinking of these messengers as angels, should remind us that they are actually the bearers of “good news” for the churches.

The message to the church in Sardis starts off bad, really bad. They’re dead! But there is still time to “wake up” and live the faith they say they believe. For the church in Philadelphia the reminder is that the doorway to Christ is always open. Christians who remain patient and authentic in the faith, even though they appear weak, there will be vindication before the ones who only deceive themselves.

The letter to the church in Laodicea is the most negative. There is indifference and apathy in the church. They are lukewarm, not hot...not cold, just one sip and Christ is ready to spit them out. They have wealth and riches but no passion for faith. They are boring! Followers of Christ should be anything but boring.