

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #41

Hebrews 13:20-25

Martin Luther once said, “I hate a long sermon, because the desire on the part of the congregation to listen is destroyed by them ...” (*Off the Record With Martin Luther*, p. 219).

Hebrews is not a short book, but it has been a riveting book. I must say these 41 studies have flown by. Tonight we turn to the final six verses, which really are the benediction to the entire book.

THE BENEDICTION OF HEBREWS IS A WISH FOR GOD TO EQUIP US TO ACCOMPLISH EVERY GOOD THING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL BY KEEPING OUR FAITH FOCUSED ON JESUS CHRIST AND THE GRACE OF GOD.

We may recall that when the book of Hebrews began, it launched off into an exaltation of Jesus Christ like a rocket shot into outer space. Now it is time for the book of Hebrews to end, and it ends with one of the most exalted benedictions you will ever read in all of the Bible, and once again it zeroes in on Jesus Christ.

There are seven final points to see from this passage:

FINAL POINT #1 – God is a God of peace. 13:20a

Ray Stedman said “verses 20-21 must rank among the most powerfully worded blessings found in the Scripture” (*Hebrews*, p. 157).

The straightforward, simple truth presented here is that **God is a God of peace and God is the source of any peace**. As Kent Hughes said, “Peace is intrinsic to the character and existence of God” (*Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p. 243). God is a God who has peace and God is the God who can give peace. He can give peace to a nation, a church, and an individual. The potential of actually having a Divine tranquility is very real.

The prophet Jeremiah said, “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for peace and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

God has a plan for His people and it is a plan of peace. This idea of having peace is more than just having absence of conflict; it includes a relationship with God in which God positively blesses with a peaceful existence because of a proper relationship with Him. He is a God of peace and this point is true in the O.T. and it is reaffirmed as true in the N.T.

Now just because God is a God of peace does not mean everyone has peace. **The thing that has wreaked havoc with us having the peace of God is our sin**. Truth is God has not granted His peace to many nations and many individuals because there is a breach in the relationship due to sin. There is only one place where this relationship may be mended and it is through Jesus Christ. Let us keep the context of the book of Hebrews in mind.

Why in the finale of the book of Hebrews, a book that is designed to exalt Jesus Christ, does the writer bring up the fact that God is a God of peace? **Because God is the One who designed a system that would enable sinners to be at peace with Him and it all comes by Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ is the only One who is able to work out a peace agreement between God and us.** In fact, when Jesus was here He said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you” (John 14:27a). Paul said in Romans 5:1 that having been justified by faith we have “peace with God.”

Hebrews is a book that exalts Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is the only One who can give peace to us in our relationship with God and peace even within ourselves.

Now the fact that God is a God of peace is qualified by two main theological facts:

Theological Fact #1 - The God of peace brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep. **13:20a**

B. F. Westcott observed this is the only place in the book of Hebrews where the subject of the resurrection is directly referenced (*Hebrews*, p. 448).

The death of Jesus Christ is the basis for any blessing we will ever have from God, and any blessing we will ever have is due to a living Savior not a dead one. So the writer stresses that God brought Christ back from the dead. What this tells us is our God of peace is also a God of all power.

Why does God bring up the resurrection in the context of peace? Because the resurrection proves we are justified (**Romans 4:25**), and when we are justified we have peace with God (**Romans 5:1**).

Theological Fact #2 - The God of peace provided an eternal blood covenant. **13:20b**

God drives home His point here - to have a peaceful relationship with God, Jesus Christ had to die on a cross; and God raised Him up and through His shed blood we enter into an eternal peace covenant with God. The only propitiation for our sins is His shed blood (Romans 3:25). Notice it is called an “eternal covenant.” To have an eternal covenant relationship with God, the Great Shepherd must shed His blood; and once one has entered this covenantal relationship with God through that blood, it is forever. It is eternal, not temporal.

All of the O.T. animal sacrifices were temporal. They had to be done over and over again. There was no animal sacrifice that could give a sinner an eternal relationship with God. Jesus Christ has forever solved the great controversy between us and God; and by believing on Him, we enter into the eternal covenant forever all due to His shed blood.

Jesus Christ is spoken of in a shepherd imagery in the N.T. in three ways:

- 1) He is called “the good shepherd” (John 10:14) who died.
- 2) He is called “the Chief Shepherd” (I Peter 5:4) who will return.
- 3) He is called “the great Shepherd” (**Hebrews 13:20**) who arose.

We have already learned in Hebrews that He is “the great high priest” (Hebrews 4:14; 10:21), and now we learn He is the “great Shepherd.” He is the greatest Shepherd we can ever have because this is a Shepherd who will always lead us to the best blessings of God.

By virtue of the fact that Jesus is identified as “the great Shepherd of the sheep” and as “our Lord,” we are to think in terms that we are sheep and we need a saving Shepherd who is our Lord. By the way, He is the Shepherd of the sheep, not the wolves or the goats. He has no intention of saving wolves or goats, but He will save His sheep.

Now sheep are not intelligent animals. Years ago there was a Christian philosopher, whose name was Dr. Bob Smith, who used to like to use humor in his classroom, and he used to use sheep as a proof against evolution. He used to say sheep are so unintelligent and defenseless that they could not have possibly evolved, because there was nothing lower than them from which they could evolve. They are already at the beginning - there is nothing dumber, nothing more defenseless, nothing more stubborn. Sheep disprove evolution because there is nothing lower from which they could have evolved.

Sheep are animals that when lost have no idea where they are, or no idea how they got where they are, and no idea where they need to go. A lost sheep is in a totally lost state and unless a shepherd comes to find them and save them, they will be lost forever.

That image describes us perfectly. We are the lost sheep and we don't even know how lost we are. Unless a great Shepherd comes to find us and save us, we will be forever lost. That is precisely what Jesus Christ did. He came into this world to find us and save us, which He did. By the way, notice He is the Shepherd of the sheep, not the goats. This doctrinal point clearly lends itself to the doctrine of election.

Now our Shepherd is a risen-from-the-dead Shepherd. We may notice that what our Shepherd did was to atone for our sins by shedding His blood.

What makes Jesus our Lord our great Shepherd is that He shed His blood to give us an eternal covenantal relationship with God. This is the new covenant we have been seeing all through Hebrews. Jesus Christ has given us an everlasting and eternal relationship with God.

FINAL POINT #2 – God is able to completely equip us to do His will. **13:21a**

W. H. Griffith Thomas said the highest purpose of our life is to do God's will (*Let Us Go On*, p. 181). The greatest achievement any of us may ever have is that which knows it accomplished the will of God. If we are doing our work according to God's will, we are right where we are supposed to be.

Dr. S. L. Johnson made an interesting observation about this verse - works are only good if they are agreeable with God's will (*Hebrews 13:20-25*, p. 8). Works that God will classify as good works will be works that are in harmony with His Word and will.

This text makes it clear that in order to do God's will, we need to be equipped by Jesus Christ. That word "equip" (καταρτιζω) is interesting. It is a word that presents the idea of repairing or mending something so it is completely restored (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 238). What this means is that if we are going to do the will of God, God is going to have to mend us, repair us, and completely furnish us with the character and the ability to do it. **The amazing thing about this is that the key to doing God's will is God working in us and through us to do it.** We tend to think the key to doing God's will is what we do, but the truth is it is about what God does.

Everything that God has done in the Redemptive work of Jesus Christ is designed to effect our hearts, our minds, and our will.

FINAL POINT #3 – God is able to work in us what is pleasing to Him. **13:21b**

Dr. Warren Wiersbe made an interesting theological observation. He said that when our Great Shepherd was here on earth He was here to work for us. Now that He is in heaven He works in us (*Be Confident*, p. 155).

Again, carefully observe how we please God; by God working in us. The thing that pleases God is when we are doing the will of God; and in order for that to be accomplished, God must work in us. Anything we will ever do that is pleasing to God will be done "through Jesus Christ."

We need to be looking for God to work through us. We must want this, we must desire this, we must look for this, we must pray for this.

When the writer thought about all of the Christological work in Hebrews, and the possibility of us having an eternal relationship with God in which He works through us, he broke out in an anthem of praise. We have an eternal covenant, a risen Savior, and a great Shepherd and when the writer thought about this, he broke out in an amazing benediction - to Jesus Christ be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Everything that we have in a relationship with God is due to Jesus Christ.

FINAL POINT #4 – The exhortation to carefully consider the written Word. **13:22**

The work of God cannot go on without the Word of God. God has given us His written Word; and the more we study it, the more we will accomplish His will.

It is most interesting that the writer says that he had written "briefly" (βραχέων). This word has to do with something short as opposed to something long, something little as opposed to something large (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 85).

Truth is Hebrews is a relatively long N.T. book. The brevity, as I understand the context, is in regard to Jesus Christ. The writer could have written volumes on the Christological importance of Jesus Christ, but he had covered exactly what God wanted written in this Epistle. He could have unraveled all of the O.T. offerings and shown the superiority of Jesus Christ. But he wrote exactly the right amount of data God wanted, not more or less.

Notice the emphasis on studying, understanding, and applying the Word of God. We have the responsibility to study the written Word, to listen to it, and to apply it. We must not ever stop studying the written Scriptures.

H. A. Ironside said the written Scriptures cut right across all natural inclinations (*Hebrews*, p. 177).

The Scriptures convict us, challenge us, and change us.

FINAL POINT #5 – The exhortation to take notice of Timothy. **13:23**

Back in the middle of the first century, Christianity was growing and expanding, but there was basically “a very small pool of leaders” who had the authority to go to various congregations. Timothy was one such sanctioned man.

Timothy had been a very close associate of Paul. He not only had a close relationship with Paul, he had an exclusive relationship with Paul. Timothy was Paul’s true son in the faith (I Timothy 1:2). Timothy was a co-worker with Paul (Romans 16:21); he was a companion of Paul in his missionary work (Acts 16:1-3; 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4); he was a trusted delegate (I Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; Philippians 2:19; I Thessalonians 3:2, 6); he was a close associate with Paul in six letters (II Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1:1; I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:1). Timothy received two specific letters of Paul written directly to him (I & II Timothy), and Timothy was the one to whom Paul turned to for help and encouragement when in prison (II Timothy 1:1-2, 8; 4:9).

Apparently Timothy had been locked up in prison and had just been released. It has been speculated that perhaps when Timothy went to Troas to get Paul’s coat and the books and the parchments so he could take them to Rome to Paul, he was locked up in Troas for a while (Ben Witherington, *Hebrews*, pp. 368-369). Apparently when Hebrews was written, the writer learned that Timothy had been released; which would indicate that he was nearer to Timothy than the Hebrews were, because he knew things about him that they didn’t know. The writer anticipated that they would have a future meeting with Timothy and perhaps both would be able to come to visit them.

What is not completely clear is whether Timothy was going to meet the author of Hebrews, and together they were going to travel to meet these believers, or whether Timothy would travel himself to the place of the Hebrews and the author would meet him there. It is clear that Timothy had been released and apparently at the time the author was not in prison.

FINAL POINT #6 – The final greetings. **13:24**

The word “greet” (ἀσπασασθε) is more than just say “hello.” The word means to actually welcome and salute someone, or as one writer said to “embrace” them (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 64-65).

The writer wanted all leaders greeted, all believers greeted, and he wanted them to know that all the believers of Italy greeted them. By the middle of the first century, the name “Italy” came to be known as the modern day geographical meaning. So this greeting is one that cannot just be limited to Rome, but to the entire area known as Italy. Some Italians sent greetings to these Hebrews. The Italians would have been Gentile believers and they sent their own greetings to them. There ought to be a mutual respect among all believers who love Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

Just recently Delwin Fowler said that he had met with Jonas, who, in my opinion, was the best Bible student of all the pastors in Peru. Delwin said, “Jonas wanted me to tell you hello and asked me to ask you when are you coming back to teach him again?”

I don’t know about any of that, but what I do know is the greeting did mean something to me. It reminded me that our church has had an impact on that part of the world. That is what greetings do. They stimulate a mutual respect.

FINAL POINT #7 – The necessity of grace. 13:25

Ben Witherington said grace is the ultimate message of Hebrews (*Ibid.*, p. 370). The entire book of Hebrews has shown us that the grace of God is totally and completely found in Jesus Christ. This final grace admonition would mean much to the Hebrews because the threat was to drift away from grace and go back under law.

Everything we have in our relationship with God is contingent upon God’s grace that is found in Jesus Christ. This book of Hebrews has been an amazing journey, and one of the many great things we have seen is that through Jesus Christ we can draw near to God. We have wonderful access to God through Jesus Christ.

W. H. Griffith Thomas said five simple words sum up the entire Epistle to the Hebrews from the standpoint of Christian life and duty: 1) Enter, 2) Experience; 3) Enjoy; 4) Exult; 5) Extol.

Verses 20-21 are really a sort of benedictory prayer or blessing. If we take these final verses of Hebrews, and form our own personal prayer for our own lives based on them, we can form one of the most powerful prayers we could ever pray:

“Lord, thank You for the grace that You have given to me in Jesus Christ that enables me to have peace with Thee. Please work in me today so that I may experience Thy peace, accomplish Thy will and be pleasing to Thee. I realize that everything that I have in regard to You is through Jesus Christ.” AMEN!

We have come now to the end of this grand Epistle known as Hebrews. We commit our efforts to God. Hopefully those of us who have journeyed together through these 41 studies have a deeper understanding of all that Jesus Christ is and did. May God help all of us to move far away from legal Judaism and move deep into Grace.