

“An Anchor for the Soul: Finishing Well”

Hebrews 13:20-25

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 24, 2016

Today we have come to the end of our study of this amazing book, the New Testament book of Hebrews. Of course it's not a book like we think of today. It's actually a letter sent most likely to a small house church made up of Jewish Christians, probably in Rome shortly before the persecutions started under Emperor Nero. In fact, one way to look at this book is that it's really a written sermon sent to this church by a pastor who knows them well but is not there in Rome with them. He says, "bear with my word of exhortation. That's what a sermon is. And we know he's not there because at the end of today's passage he writes, "Those who come from Italy send you greetings."

An interesting thing to note about this being a sermon, scholars have pointed out that it would take about an hour to read this sermon out loud. In verse 22 the writer tells us, "pay attention to this sermon for I have written to you *briefly*." Looks like a brief sermon in the early church was about an hour. I wonder what we could learn from that?

As we have studied this book together, we have seen these alternating sections of deep theological teaching followed by a passionate exhortation to continue to follow Jesus. For example, chapter 3 begins by showing that Jesus, as the Son of God, is far superior to Moses. Then he says, "Take care, lest there be in any of you an evil and unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." This pattern continues through the entire letter. The overall theme of the book is, "Who is Jesus?" and then "Why does it matter?" And as I've said several times through this study, there is no more important message that the world needs to hear, especially these days.

Even here at the end of the book we find the same pattern in this great benediction and farewell. Who is God and why does it matter? Theology and application. Unless you are one of those people who gets up and leaves before the service is over, you are familiar with a benediction. We conclude every worship

service with some kind of benediction. A benediction is basically a blessing. It's a prayer for God to bless the people in some way. The Bible has a number of them. In Numbers 6 we find, "The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

We usually end our service with the benediction from 2 Corinthians 13: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." Most of the New Testament letters end with some form of benediction and Hebrews is no different. "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

This morning I want us to look briefly at these two elements: who is God and why does it matter. Since this is the closing of the book it's kind of like a conclusion and so there's really nothing new here. It's a summary of the book. It begins with a description of who God is. We are going to see that he describes God as the God of *peace*, a God of *power*, a God of *provision*, a God who *promises*, and a God of *purpose*.

Verse 20 calls God "the God of peace." If you turn on the news or open a newspaper, you can't help but be moved to pray for peace. Violence seems to be out of control all over the world. God is a God of peace and so you and I should be working for peace every chance we get. But when we think of peace we often consider it the absence of conflict. If people would just stop fighting we would have peace. But there's much more to the kind of peace mentioned here. The idea here is the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means peace but it also means wholeness, well-being, completeness.

Shalom means everything is the way it's supposed to be. God is the God of Shalom, the God of peace. This was an important message to that little church facing big problems. And it's an important message to us. The Holy Spirit is saying to *us*, "I am the God of peace and wholeness. No matter what happens I guarantee you will be made whole again." God's plan for each one of us who is in Christ is *shalom*, well-being, peace, a peace that passes understanding. But that peace is only available through faith in Christ. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Next we see that God is a God of great *power*. He is the "God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." God has power over even death. The resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in the history of the world and it's the proof that Jesus really is who he said he is. The power of God that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us, too. There is no greater power that can defeat God's plan for you. It's that power that has already changed us. 2 Corinthians 5 says, "if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation."

Third, Jesus is a God of *provision*. He provides for our needs. Verse 20 calls him "the great shepherd of the sheep." In John 10 Jesus referred to himself as "the good shepherd." This is an interesting metaphor. Sheep are not exactly known for their intellectual abilities. To put it bluntly, sheep are dumb animals and they can even be a danger to themselves. Sheep need a shepherd in order to survive. The truth is that you and I are really like sheep. We wander off into all kinds of trouble and need the great shepherd to rescue us.

That leads us to the fourth attribute of God in this passage. God is a God of *promises*. Jesus promises to be the shepherd we need. He promises that he goes to prepare a place for you and that he will come again for you so that you can be with him forever. He promises the forgiveness of sin and new life. He promises great joy to those who follow him. And he guarantees all his promises with "the blood of

the eternal covenant." A covenant is about the strongest promise you can make and when he instituted the Lord's Supper Jesus said, "this cup represents the new covenant in my blood for the forgiveness of sins."

The fifth and final attribute of God in this passage is that God is a God of *purpose*. He has a purpose and a plan for your life. Unfortunately many of us miss out on much of God's purpose. We get busy with other things and never find out what He wants from us. The prayer here at the end of Hebrews is "may the God of peace...equip you with everything good so that you may do his will." Here we find why all this matters. God's peace, power, provision, and promises are so that you can do "that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ."

The word "equip" in this passage means more than just providing you with the tools or equipment, the gifts and abilities, although it certainly includes that. The word means to repair something, to make it useful again. It's the same word used in Matthew 4 for the fishermen "mending their nets." The prayer is that God would mend our brokenness so that we would be useful to him in this world. God has given each one of us a job to do in his kingdom. Jesus' death and resurrection repairs you so that you can serve him. That's God's promise, and he backs it up with his power.

The only question, then, is will you work to find out where God is calling you to serve his kingdom? Will you work in a way that is pleasing in his sight. Will you bring glory to Jesus in the way you live your life? One last thought. It's fitting that he ends the letter by saying, "Grace be with all of you." The only way you and I can accomplish anything for Christ is by his grace.

So my prayer for you is that the God of peace and power and promises and purpose will equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen.