

# **A Final Blessing**

## **Hebrews 13:20-25**

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Well, Good morning.

Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is great to be with you. I'm glad that we can join together and engage in worship, singing to our God and coming to His Word. And if we haven't had the opportunity to meet yet, I would love to meet you. I'd love to greet you after the service. I usually hang out around the doors back there in the gathering area, so I would love to greet you if we haven't met, because we're glad that you're here, because the truth is, is that whether this is your first Sunday or your 200th Sunday, we are all in need of the exact same thing, and that is the grace of our Lord. We all need it. You need it. I need it. That's why we come here every Sunday, right? So that we can be reminded of our need, but also we can be reminded of the one who satisfies that need through our Lord Jesus. And so we're glad that you're here with us. And this morning, we're going to be looking at Hebrews chapter 13.

So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Hebrews 13. And we're going to be looking at the last few verses, verses 20 through 25. And really, though we're going to read all these verses, these six verses here, we're really going to focus our attention just on verses 20 and 21 this morning, as we come to the end of this book. So we've been in Hebrews since the first week of January. We're completing it now the middle of June. This has been, for me, it's been a very fun book to work through, right? Because there's so much in here, right? Hebrews isn't an easy book to understand. It's complicated. It's difficult. We were confronted as we went through this book with pastorally challenging passages about apostasy and about discipline.

We've also been confronted by theologically difficult passages about prophets and angels and priests. But the overriding message of the entire book, whether we're in difficult passages or easy to understand passages, the overriding theme is that what we are in need of is Christ. And that Christ is better than anything else that we can give our lives to. That Jesus is our life. He is our hope. That is the overriding message of the message of the book of Hebrews. And so having heard these amazing and beautiful themes throughout the book, you have to wonder, like, how is the author of Hebrews going to land the plane? Like, what more can he say? How can he conclude it with a wonderful description, a wonderful passage? What can he say? Well, how he ends it is with a blessing. That's how he's going to conclude this book of Hebrews. It's going to be with a benediction. And this is what he writes, beginning in verse 20.

“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.  
I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

*Heavenly Father, we ask, as we come to your word, that you would lead and guide us now. That you would help us to marvel at your beauty. That we would be overwhelmed by your goodness. And that we would rest in the blessing that you bestow upon us. And so I ask that you would help us, help the one who preaches, and help all those who listen. So that what is said and done would honor you. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*

So we heard this blessing, right? And you've probably heard this blessing before, because every once in a while we'll use this as the blessing at the end of our service. And so it might seem weird to us, or maybe we've never really considered what are the words that we encounter when we receive a benediction, or when we receive a blessing. For many of us, maybe we simply think of this as a liturgical conclusion to our service. As a way of just saying, okay, we're done. It's time to go, right? Like, because we can't say that at the end of the service, right? That wouldn't be a decent and in good order, right? If I just said, okay, see you next week, right? That wouldn't be okay. And so we have to have something maybe with poetic language, or something with heightened language. Maybe that's how we sometimes think of the benediction, or the blessing.

But actually, there's something much deeper going on with the blessings that we encounter in the Bible. In fact, if we think about the very first blessing that is instituted for the people of God, way back in Numbers chapter 6, we have this occasion where the Aaronic priesthood, so Aaronic, not ironic, right? So the priest coming from the line of Aaron, they are given a blessing to bestow upon the people. They're told that you shall say to them, "the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord causes face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you his peace now and forevermore." This is what they're to bestow upon them. And this isn't just like a word of, you see, God loves you, go get them, you know, go get them, you know, go out from this place. No, it's something much deeper than that, because when God tells Aaron and his descendants to bestow this blessing, he says that when this occurs, God's name is being bestowed on the people. He is attaching his name to those who receive the blessing. That's what number 6 tells us. And so what's occurring with the blessings that we encounter in the Bible, with the benedictions, is that God is not only conferring upon his people grace and kindness, but he's also declaring his presence with them.

Now, I want you to think about why that would be important for the people of God to hear at the end of this letter. They've encountered all sorts of persecution, and they've been tempted to return to their old way of life. That's one of the reasons why the author of Hebrews wrote this book. And so, as they go out into the world, as the words of Hebrews are ringing in their ears, as they continue to experience persecution and temptation, why would a blessing of presence be needed? Well, in answering that question, I thought back about a time when we lived in St. Louis. The school my kids attended, it was a small Christian school, it was like pre-k through sixth grade, and every year the school, the first graders through the sixth graders, had the opportunity to go and sing at a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game. I mean, that is awesome, right? I mean, to sing at Bush Stadium, right? It is called baseball heaven for a reason. To go and sing at Bush Stadium. I've never sung at Bush Stadium. I mean, if anyone from the Cardinals is listening to this recording, you know, I'm happy to come. I would love, right? None of them are listening. But I want you to think about this. So, you're in first through sixth grade, and it's the seventh inning. And the door in the right field wall opens up, and you come out, and you step onto the field in right field, and there's 30,000 people there.

And who knows how many more are watching at home? And you are to lead them and take me out to the ball game.

It's amazing. It's incredible. But wouldn't it also be terrifying? I mean, a third grader standing on the field at Bush Stadium with all those people watching? I mean, it's not out of the realm of possibility that maybe they get a little cold feet. That maybe a few of the kids would forget their lines. Maybe they'd have to be like shoved through the doorway, right? No, no, no, no. You are going out there, right? Like, it's not hard to imagine that. But, you know, for all the years that we were there and all the years that my kids got to do it, I don't remember hearing a single occasion of a kid who claimed up, who froze, who had to be pushed through the door. No, no, they all went out there. And they sang as though they were singing back in their classroom. Now, maybe they were too young to realize that they should have been nervous, right? Maybe they were unaware of the terror that this was. But I actually think the reason why that they could stand in front of those thousands of people and why they could sing like they were singing back in their classroom was because in that moment they weren't alone. If they were all by themselves, it may have been a different result.

But standing there with all their classmates and with their parents in the stands watching them and with their teacher in front of them leading them, they were calm and they had peace. And they could do the very thing that they had come to do. They could sing because they weren't alone. Because they had the presence of others. And that's what God is giving his people with this blessing. That as the people are going out and they are facing the world and they are going to encounter all the various things that they're not even sure what will come. But they are called to live as God's people in the world. They are going with God's name bestowed upon them. They are going with his presence.

### **The God of Peace**

That's what he gives with this word of blessing. He could have given them a pep talk, the author of Hebrews, right? He could have shoved them out the door. He could have said you could do it, but that's not the words that he bestows on them. He bestows words about who the Lord is and who they are in the Lord. What they are to do in light of who the Lord is. And what he says about this Lord who gives them presence, who blesses them, is that this Lord is the God of peace. Did you see it in verse 20? That's what he's called, the God of peace. Now what's interesting about the author of Hebrews calling the Lord the God of peace is that this is a title that doesn't appear in the Old Testament. Now what's unique, what's interesting about this, what makes it really interesting in the book of Hebrews is that if you've been with us from the very beginning, you've heard Old Testament references pretty much every single Sunday, right? I mean, Old Testament themes and passages are all over the book of Hebrews, and yet at the end of Hebrews, he doesn't call God the mighty one or the Lord of hosts. These are titles that come from the Old Testament. Instead, he calls him the God of peace, a title never used in the Old Testament and only a handful of times in the New.

And I think the reason why he makes sure to leave them with this title of who God is, is so that they would remember that God is their God of peace, that he is the one who has bestowed peace upon them. Because it not only talks about who God is, but it talks about the fact that they are in need of this peace, because they were people who were once not at peace with God. Right? I mean, that's who the people of God are, or who we were. The Bible's clear that we were dead in our sins, that in our rebellion, we were opposed to God, that we were his enemies, that we were walking in our ways, our own ways, and we were going down our own

paths, and we were pursuing life apart from him. In our sin, we were at enmity with God. By our sin, we were making war against him. And yet, he made peace with us.

What we deserved was judgment and punishment and discipline, and yet God gave us peace. He is the God of peace, who makes peace by the blood of Christ. That's what he said, right? By the blood of the eternal covenant. By Jesus's sacrifice in his death, he takes those who were enemies and makes us friends. He takes those who were once rebels and makes us loyal subjects. He takes those who were opposed to him, and he brings peace to us. That is the one who goes with us. He's the God of peace, the God who shepherds us. That's the second thing that we see in this blessing.

## **The God Who Shepherds**

He's the God who shepherds us, in verse 20, the great shepherd of the sheep. Now, this is also interesting, because for all the themes that are used throughout the book of Hebrews, all the Old Testament themes, shepherd, flock, and sheep are never used, until now. That's interesting, right? But we're familiar with this theme, because this is a theme throughout the Bible. It's a theme that's used all over the scriptures. In fact, in our Old Testament reading, Psalm 23, easily the most well-known, probably most popular psalm in the entire Psalter. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures....Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." There's good reason why this is one of the most popular psalms in the Psalter. Why many of us have, like, knitted, crocheted, I don't know what they call them, things that hang on our walls, right? Right? There's reasons why these are, you know, are on our walls, these words, because they're so comforting. They're so beautiful, right? They speak of who God is, that he is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd. And these are the very words that Jesus applies to himself in John 10, when he calls himself the Good Shepherd. That this is who God is over us. He is the one who shepherds us, and he leads the flock, and he cares for the sheep, and he directs their ways, and he protects them.

And y'all, that's what we need. That's what we need. You know, just a week ago, we talked about leaders a little bit from the sermon, from our passage in Hebrews. And we know that the Bible will talk about church leaders as being under shepherds, but one of the things that I'll sometimes remind our leadership at our church about is that though the Bible might call us under shepherds, though we are to shepherd the flock that God has put here, before we were ever shepherds, we are still sheep. Every one of us. We're sheep. That's what the Bible says. And that isn't very flattering. Right? Because sheep, though from a distance, they look fluffy and, you know, maybe soft, and maybe you want to cuddle up with one, right? They're actually not that way. Sheep bite. And sheep smell. And sheep are obstinate. And left to themselves, they will go on their own ways, and they won't find food, and they'll get lost, and they will perish. And that's who we are. That's why we need a shepherd.

That's why we need a shepherd. And that's who the Lord is. He's the one who leads us and directs us. Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep." It's pretty amazing that though we are sheep, Jesus lays down his life for us. It's not because we're beautiful. It's not because we're intelligent. It's not because we have so much to offer him. No. He lays down his life for us simply because he loves us. Because he is a Good

Shepherd. On the cross, he was punished in our place, and he gave his life so that we would have life. So that we wouldn't go along our own ways any longer, but instead, we would follow after our shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd who shepherds his people.

## **The God Who Equips**

He's the God who makes peace, but finally, he's the God who equips. That's what we see in verse 21, that the Lord would "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." You know, the Bible calls us to do a lot of things, and a lot of things that sound very simple, but are not easy, right? I mean, the commandments of God, love your neighbor as yourself. It sounds really great until you have to love your neighbor, right? Or turn away wrath with a soft answer. That sounds super simple until you're getting into a conversation where your blood starts to boil, and your blood pressure rises, and your heart rate is racing, and voices are starting to rise, and all of a sudden, you think miraculously, a soft answer. That's what I need right now, right? That's what happens to you all. It happens to me every time when I'm talking to my kids, I promise. Ask them. Don't ask them. No, right? It sounds simple, but it's not easy. Or caring for the sojourner or foreigner in our midst. Loving, not hating our enemy. Not trusting in power or wealth, right? The list goes on and on. The commandments that God gives us, and these things are the will of God. These are the will, these things are the will of God for our lives, and they can feel overwhelming, and burdensome, and impossible. And so, what are we to do? What do we need to do God's will?

Well, almost none of you know this, but this past week, I started building, making two cutting boards and a bowl, turning a bowl out of wood, okay? I've never done either of these things before. I've never done either of these, but Tom invited me over to his house. Tom teaches classes on how to make cutting boards, and so he invited me over, he took me down, and he's showing me how to do it. Now, I want you to imagine, I just said I've never done any of these things before. So, I want you to imagine that on this day when I went over to Tom's house, he takes me into his basement, he walks me into his shop, he turns on all the power, right? He says, there's the lathe, here's the planer, there's the table saw, here's the wood and the glue, don't forget the goggles, right? He says all these things, and then he goes, okay, I'll see you in a couple hours, I'll check in, I can't wait to see what you've made. Now, if Tom would have done that in two hours when he came back, you know, at best, I may have hurt myself. At worst, I've probably destroyed one of his tools, right? Like, it's not going to go well. He can tell me this is the material I need to make a cutting board, to turn a ball, but I need more than that. I need more than him just saying, you know, go get them, hope this goes well. I need him to show me how. I need him to equip me to be able to do these things, and that's what God does for us. God doesn't say to us, here's the will of God for your life, here is what I want you to do, here are the commandments, go get them, I'll check on you in a little bit. That's not what God says.

No, no, we would never accomplish it. No, he equips us, that's what we're told, right? That the Lord would equip you with every good thing that you may do his will. What's interesting is this verb, equip, it only shows up two other times in the book of Hebrews. It shows up in chapter 11, verse 3, with relation to the creation of the world. There, the universe was created or fashioned, that word created or fashioned is the word equip, by the word of God, and in chapter 10, verse 5, regarding Jesus and his body, it says that his body was prepared or fitted for him, equipped him, he was equipped with a body, and in all these instances, what we're

seeing is that it is God that's doing it, right? God is the one who fashioned the world to give him glory. God is the one who fitted Jesus with a body to serve his heavenly father. God is the one who is equipping us to do his will. And he's the one who can do it, because did you see how he's described? The God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.

So think about that for a minute, y'all. The God who brought Jesus from the dead, the God who has the power over life and death, that is the God at work in us. That is the God that is equipping us. In our own strength, in our own ability, we can't keep his commands, but the God who raised Jesus from the dead, he can equip us, and he does. He equips us with every good thing to do his will, and what are those good things? Well, there's many things I could point to, but let me name three. He equips us with the body. He gives us good things like the body of believers, other believers to encourage us in our faith, to walk alongside us, to pray with and for. He gives us the good thing of his word, right? His word which leads us into his truth, which teaches us the way that we are to go, which reminds us of who God is. And he gives us his spirit who convicts us of sin and leads us into truth and assures us that we belong to him. These are the good things that God uses to equip us to do his will, and as we do his will, we are pleasing to him.

Y'all, that is beautiful to think about, that God looks upon us, and it's not like God looks down upon us begrudgingly like, well, I guess Jesus died for them, so okay, you're my people. But he looks down upon us and is pleased. That is amazing, that as we do his will, God smiles upon us. He is pleased with you, that he is working in us what is pleasing in his sight, and he is doing it through Christ. He does it by his son, making us more like Jesus, forming and fashioning us after the image of his son. God said of Jesus, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased, and that same son is now the one who shepherds us, who brings us peace, who is at work in us, who is equipping us so that we would do what is pleasing to the Father. And friends, that is the blessing that God bestows upon all of his people. That is the blessing of his presence, that the God who brings peace, and the God who shepherds, and the God who equips his people, that that is the God who goes with us, and he is pleased by his people. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that we, we're thankful that that we are your people, and that you, Lord Jesus, have have done a great work in and through us, so that by your work we might do what is pleasing to our Father. And so, Father, we ask that you would shepherd us, that you would guide us, that you would equip us, and that we would rest in your peace, and as we would do these things, that we would be found pleasing to you. And so, I pray, Father, that you would help us to walk with you, turning our eyes towards Christ, resting in the blessing that you bestow upon your people. We ask that you would do this in the name of Jesus, and all God's people said together, Amen.*