

Finishing Hebrews: Grace to Finish Well
Hebrews 13:20-25
Reading: John 10:11-18

Bethany Baptist Church
September 29, 2019

...pray...

I've titled my message this morning: *Grace to Finish Well*

Turn w/ me to Hebrews 13:20-25.

And just like *that...* Hebrews is *over!*

Hebrews draws to a close with a *prayer*, and a *postscript of instructions and blessings*.

Final words in a *powerful* message!

I've *outlined* them like this:

Four words that close the book on Hebrews.

- 1. A word of *benediction* for God to work in you (20-21).**
- 2. A word of *exhortation* for God's Word to stay with you (22).**
- 3. A word of *instruction* that God's leaders be honored by you (23-24).**
- 4. A word of *blessing* that God's grace always be with you (25).**

A benediction is a *concluding prayer* that asks God's blessing (read 20-21).

1. I like to say that *last words* are *important words*.... But what do you say to a friend who is *so shaken by fear* he's about to *throw in the towel*?
 - a. *That* was the church that *first* read this letter! The *storms of persecution* were on the *radar*. Many were *toying w/* the idea of *evacuating Christ's Kingdom*.
 - b. They were about to *abandon* God's way & God's will!
 - c. Our writer leaves them with *this* prayer: *May God equip you to do His will through Jesus Christ. (2X)*
 - d. *That* is the *essence* of this lovely benediction. Let's use that simplified version to understand this important blessing: *the God of peace, the God who equips, the God of purpose, the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

2. And so we hear this appeal made to the *God of peace*.
 - a. "*Peace*" suggests *reconciliation* and *refuge* and *assurance*.
 - i. *Reconciliation*. We are *reconciled* to God through faith in His Son (Rm 5:1): *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through the Lord Jesus Christ*.
 - ii. *Refuge*. When you are in the path of the tornado, you *run* for *refuge*! Jesus pictured Himself as our *Solid Rock*, the *eternal foundation*, who can withstand any *hurricane*.
 - iii. *Assurance*. Because Jesus has gone before us into Heaven's Holy of Holies, we can *rest assured* that we can go too (10:22) – *let us draw near w/ a sincere heart in **full assurance** of faith*.

- b. So clearly, God has secured our *peace* through His gift of His Son. There is no *reconciliation* to God **w/o** the *work* of Jesus our Lord. Next we are reminded of Jesus' *resurrection & eternal covenant*.
- i. “*God brought up from the dead....*” This is the *only* explicit mention of Jesus' *resurrection* in all of Hebrews! The writer has focused, instead, on our Lord's *ascension* and His *throne* (but, of course, Jesus had to be *raised from the grave* in order to *ascend* to the right hand of the Father!).
 - ii. But Hebrews **has** emphasized the *New & Better & Eternal Covenant*, over and over!
 1. In **8:10** we read this reminder of the promises of the New Covenant, as God declares: “*I will put My law into their mind and write them on their hearts (new life!), and I will be their God and they shall be My people (restored relationship!).*”
 2. The **New Covenant** was *ratified* by the blood of Jesus. He is both *Great Shepherd* who came to seek & to save His lost *sheep*, and **also** the *Lamb of God* (Jn 1) whose bloody sacrifice *takes away the sin of the world*.
 3. The **New Covenant** is *eternal*: it will never be replaced or improved. And because it is **unshakably eternal**, you can have *peace*!
3. But *peace* does **not** mean *leisure*! Our God is *equips us* to serve Him.
- a. The Greek word translated “*equip*” (NASB) was used in the **NT** to describe *fishermen* repairing their nets. In classic Greek literature, it portrayed a *physician* setting a broken bone.
 - i. When life has *tattered* our nets, God *mends us* – to *use us*!

- b. Beloved, God saved you by *faith* so you can pursue a path paved w/ *every good thing!*
 - i. As we've found in **Hb 13** (alone) "*every good thing*" includes: **13:1-6**, *love of brethren, hospitality to strangers, remembering persecuted, faithfulness to husband/wife, content with God's provision; 13:8-14*, *resisting error, following Jesus, seeking His city; 13:14-16*, *praising God, sharing with others; 13:7,17-19*, *imitating and obeying and praying for your leaders.*

- 4. And *good works* are the focus of God's *good purpose* (21): *may God equip you in every good work... to do His will.*
 - a. God's *purpose* is really the same in the life of *every* Christian: for you & me *to become like Jesus.*
 - i. So we read in **Rm 8:28-29**: *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His **purpose**. For those whom He foreknew, He also **predestined** to become **conformed to the image of His Son** ... God chose you to become Christ-like.*

 - b. And *being like Jesus* involves the pursuit of *doing every good thing!*
 - i. Paul writes (Eph 2:10): *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works** that we might walk therein.*

 - ii. God *saved* you to be *like* Jesus by *doing* the kind of works Jesus did! That pursuit (21) is *pleasing in God's sight.*

5. And so our benediction appeals to the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

a. All that God does *for* us and *in* us, He does *for* and *through* His beloved Son! Jesus just *saturates* this *benediction*!

i. He is the *Great Shepherd of the sheep*. **John 10** - He *laid down His life* for us!

ii. He is the *Resurrected One*. The angel said: “*Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen!*”

iii. He is the *Mediator of the New & Better & Eternal Covenant*. **Hb 9:24** – *to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood. He ratified that promise through His blood.*

iv. He is *Jesus – Savior*: “*You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.*”

v. He is *Lord – Master*. He is *Christ – promised, anointed King!*

vi. He is *worthy* (21): *to Him be the glory forever and ever!*

vii. And just **one** more *soul-securing truth*, brothers & sisters (do you see it there in **v.20.b!**!?) ... *He is ours!* The *Lord Jesus* is *ours!* ...

1. *Blessed assurance...Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God. Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.*

2. *Amen!*

As so *this prayer*, beloved, for days when we *struggle* keep our feet on the path and our eyes on the prize: May God equip us to do His will through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Next we read an *exhortation* for *God's Word* to stay with you (22).

1. ...or *maybe* I should say, for *you* to stay w/ God's word! **Read v.22.**
2. The command here is to *bear with* this word. Don't let the *length* intimidate you. Don't let the *tone of exhortation* offend you!
3. The book of Hebrews **is** a *word of exhortation* – calling its readers to *believe* and *obey*, sometimes with *extremely* strong warnings.
 - a. Sometimes focused on worried and wavering *believers*, sometimes targeted on fearful *procrastinators*. → *Get off the fence!*
4. *Is it short?* **He** thinks so! ☺ He says his letter is *brief!* A little less than **10,000** words. *Shorter* than **Romans & 1 Cor** (but *longer* than **Philemon** or **Jude!**).
 - a. **Thirteen** chapters so *packed* with glorious truth it will make your head *spin* while your heart *catches on fire!*
 - i. **Head spinning truths**; here's practically the first one: **1:3** – *Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.* He's God! Jesus is God!
 - ii. **Heart igniting battle cries: 10:26** - *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what was promised.*
5. Whether or not you agree that it's short, the writer needs to *exhort* you to *hang in there* – *bear with him!*
 - a. Truthfully, your *flesh* doesn't want to pay attention to *God's Word* (your flesh doesn't like to *read/QT, study, Sunday School, small groups, preached to* from the pulpit).

6. And **not** just your *flesh*, your *Enemy* doesn't want you to pay attention to God's Word. Do you know *why*...? Because God's Word equips you (21) to *know God's will* and *follow God's ways*.
- a. **2 Tim 3: 15** - *from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. It's the Gospel that rescues you from the Devil's dark kingdom!
 - b. **Psa 1:2-3** – *But [the blessed man's] delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in it he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water which bears its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither and in whatever he does he prospers.*
 - c. And God's Holy Word, *inerrant* and *clear* and *sufficient*, teaching *all things pertaining to life & godliness*, will build *faith* in the soul of the *beleaguered saint (Rm 10:17)*: *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*
7. The Puritan **Thomas Watson** wrote... “*Leave not off reading the Bible till you find your hearts warmed. Read the word, not only as a history, but labor [with it] to be affected [changed by] it. Let it not only inform you, but inflame you. 'Is not My word like a fire?' saith the Lord*”(Jer 23:29). *Go not from the word till you can say as those disciples, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" Luke 24:32.*”

God's Word saves and God's Word equips and God's Word ignites and God's Word leads.

But next, a word of instruction that God's leaders be *honored* by God's people (read vv.23-24).

1. This is the *third* reference in Hebrews 13 to various church leaders.
 - a. **V.7-** a reminder of the *legacy* of the church's **past elders**. A legacy that makes them worthy of *remembering* and *imitating*.
 - b. **Vv. 17-19** – a command to *obey* for their **current elders** (note *plural*) and to *pray* for the author and his friends (who are also *leaders*).
 - c. **Now (vv.23-24)** – with the *final command* in Hebrews, to *greet* their *elders* and to prepare for some *important visitors*.... And that would be *Timothy*!

2. *Timothy*, the Apostle Paul's *true son in the faith*, has been *released*. In the **NT** this kind of language generally refers to *release* from prison.
 - a. Admittedly there is **no record** of Timothy's *incarceration* anywhere elsewhere in **NT** but *this* verse.
 - b. Which strongly implies Hebrews was written **after** Paul's *martyrdom*. At that *time*, though sometimes *timid*, Timothy took the *ministry baton* from Paul (all *previewed* in final weeks of Paul's life – 2 Tim).

3. Hebrew's writer *knows* Timothy. He *is* with, or *will be* with, Timothy. And he intends to *come* with Timothy soon, in order to see them.
 - a. So we might ask the question *again*: *who is this guy?* → Some *authority* over these readers (teach/command/protect), currently *absent* from readers, *longs* to be with them, and now... we've learned he is a *friend* of **Timothy**.
 - b. Some infer from this that our author once served on Paul's *missionary team*, alongside men like *Timothy & Titus & Luke*.
 - c. But as to his *name* – his *exact identity* – it still remains a *mystery*!

4. But *again*, there is this final *command* concerning their own *leaders* and *friends* (**read 24**): “**Greet them.**”
- a. Don’t *avoid* them, don’t *cuss* them, don’t *gossip* about them, don’t *resist* them. ... *Encourage them. Welcome them* (v.7 – *remember, imitate*; v.17 – *obey and submit*; v.18-19 – *pray* for them.
 - b. I find it a little *curious* that in **ch.13** our writer *comes back* to their leaders *over and over*! Have these saints been a little *rebellious*...?
 - c. Could a resistance to their *elders’* instructions and leadership be a part of the larger problem of *potential apostasy*?
5. But v.24 refers not only to their elders, but to – *all the saints*. Which reminds us of **13:1** – *Let love of the brethren continue. ... Love, now welcome (greet)*.
- a. *Love has to be maintained, like a fruitful garden or a flaming fire.*
 - b. Like a **garden**: *cultivated, planted, weeded, guarded, harvested*;
 - c. Like a **fire**, *brotherly love* must be: *ignited, stoked, stirred up, watched over*, it should be *enjoyed*.
6. But what about that *last word of greeting* in v.24: *Those from Italy greet you...?*
- a. Who *were* those Italian saints and why does our author **esp. identify** them?
 - b. Is he writing from somewhere in *Italy*? Is he *in Rome* waiting for *Timothy* to get out of prison (23)?
 - c. Or is he somewhere else with a team that *includes* Christians originally from *Italy*?
 - d. Do you *know* what the answer is: *who knows?* ☺

But here’s the important lesson to draw from v.24...

God’s people, great or small, are to treat one another with love and honor.

Hebrews concludes with a final word of blessing: *God's grace be with you all!*

1. Hebrews is about Jesus' *new* and *better* "Covenant of Grace" in place of Moses' *old* and *inadequate* "Covenant of the Law."
 - a. So we could *also* say Hebrews is about a **new** life of *grace* in place of the **old** life of *works*.
 - b. So **don't** go back to the *dark side* of *tradition & law*.
2. The *Good News* is **grace!**
 - a. **13:9** – *It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace (not by strange teachings & dietary regulations).*
 - b. And we might say Hebrews has just provided us with working definition of *grace* (**13:21**): **Grace** is **God ... equipping you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ.**
 - c. Here's my *simple take* on that same definition: **Grace** (def'n.) – "*God giving you the desire and power to do His will, first in salvation and then every day of the Christian life.*"
3. *Who* needs grace? *All of us!* Think about that w.r.t. *Hebrews'* first readers:
 - a. The ones he's *warmly encouraged* and the ones he's *sternly warned*.
 - b. The ones who are *following Jesus* and the ones still *sitting on the fence....*

4. We *all* need *grace*: Grace to *come* to Christ. Grace to *stay* with Christ.
 - a. Grace to put old, inferior *traditions* and beliefs behind you.
 - b. Grace to put *fear* behind you.
 - c. To *draw near* to God.
 - d. To *enter* within the veil.
 - e. Grace to *go to Christ* outside the gates.
 - f. To *bear* His reproach.
 - g. To *endure* and *do* His will.
 - h. To *please* God as you live by faith.
 - i. To *live in love* with one another.
 - j. To live in *grateful worship*.
 - k. To *seek* His lasting city.
 - l. Grace to *arrive* there, safe and sound.

Grace, and *grace alone*, beloved, from eternity *past* to *forever & ever*! Amen.

And so Hebrews draws to a close: **Read vv.20&21...25**

...pray...

Our text (NT) describes being a Christian as being “*in Christ*.”

Are you *in Christ*? Or are you like some of the first church-attenders who heard Hebrews’ message: *gospel fence sitters*.

Will you *turn* to Christ *and* believe in Him alone today! I can help you – let’s talk & pray together!