

Go in Peace

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Hebrews 13:20-21
October 15, 2023

Well, as I said, this series has been titled The Sheep and Their Shepherds. And throughout it I have referenced the leaders of Christ's Church as his under shepherds. But it's actually here in our text for tonight that we see the theme introduced and affirmed. And so as we think about the concept of a shepherd, it's a concept we find showing up repeatedly throughout the pages of scripture in both the Old and the New Testament. In fact, many of the men whom God called and used as instruments to bring about his plans and purposes throughout redemptive history were shepherds by trade. You can think all the way back to the beginning of Genesis, and we find that Abel was a shepherd. Abraham was a shepherd. Isaac was a shepherd. Jacob was a shepherd. Moses was a shepherd, and David, of course, before becoming king, was a shepherd of sheep.

And so, the oversight and the care and the nurturing of sheep, which is the job of a shepherd, was a commonly understood occupation and concept for the Jewish people. And that's why we see God, particularly in the Old Testament, using that concept to help his people understand some of these basic elements of truth and the relationship between himself and his people. For example, in Psalm 80, the psalmist refers to "God as the Shepherd of Israel." In Psalm 95, the people of God are called, "The people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." In Jeremiah, we find the spirit of God speaking through the prophet declaring that "He will provide his people with shepherds after his own heart." Under shepherds, as I said, who will care for God's people and who will feed them on knowledge and understanding. In Isaiah 40, we find a prophecy concerning God himself saying that he's going to come and, "be the Shepherd of his people." And that they would behold him with their physical eyes.

And then as we saw from Ezekiel 34 a couple of weeks ago, which was a prophetic indictment against the leaders of Israel, God referred to them, if you recall, as "false shepherds." False shepherds who were failing to care for the needs of God's people and were instead taking advantage of God's people and using them for their own selfish gain. They were simply resources to be used, not people to be cared for. And so, the Lord's analysis of the situation was that his people, like sheep, were left scattered, wounded, broken and dying while the shepherds who were supposed to be caring for them, got fat. And therefore, God declared through Ezekiel that he himself would come to the rescue of his chosen people. That he would that through the sending of a Shepherd King born within the lineage of David, and it would be approximately 600 years later that Jesus, standing before the people of Israel would declare, as we see in John 10, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

And so, I want us to keep that prophetic imagery in the forefront of our mind as we begin to unpack our texts for this evening. And as we seek to do that, it is important for us to remember

the fundamental exhortation that the author of Hebrews gave to these believers from last week. We want to keep the flow of the text in mind and not chop it up to the point where it's completely disconnected. And if you remember that exhortation was a call to prayer. It was a call for them to pray fervently. It was a call for them to pray genuinely. And it was a call for them to pray consistently. And so, I want us to notice that it's directly after calling these believers to pray for their leaders, that the author of Hebrews now in turn, provides his ultimate prayer for them.

And not only is this prayer the ending to our passage in this series, but it's also a prayer that really encompasses the entire letter. So it's both a prayer and a benediction, which is a statement of blessing. In fact, what's so amazing about this prayer is that it actually reveals to us the Lord's heart and his desire for each and every one of us as his people and for his church. We want to remember, there's a human author writing this down and it's his prayer for those people entrusted to his care, but this is also a letter that has been delivered to us by divine inspiration. And so, through it we see the very heart of God for his people, which is a beautiful thing to behold. As one commentator said, "This prayer might be one of the most beautiful prayers ever uttered by a Christian."

It stands near the end of the letter as a declaration of absolute confidence in God. It is a prayer for the church, from which the author is absent, but which he loves so dearly. And so, it's with that in mind that we begin now to walk through this beautiful prayer of blessing together. And as we do, the first thing I want us to see this evening is *The Provider of Peace. The Provider of Peace*. The author of Hebrews begins this benediction in verse 20 by saying this, "Now may the God of peace." And so, the writer here now demonstrates the very thing that he's been calling these believers to do, to fervently go to the Lord and to go to his throne of grace and to fervently beseech him, petition him in prayer. But what I want us to notice is that he does so both by praying for them and by pointing them to the nature of who God is. Who is this God that we are praying to? This is the answer to that question.

And throughout the New Testament we see the biblical authors doing this frequently. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, we see the Lord referred to as "the God of Israel." In Acts he's referred to as "the God of glory." In 2 Corinthians, he's called "the God of all comfort." And we could go on and on and on looking at those various references, specifically referring to God. But here, the author of Hebrews specifically calls him the *God of Peace. The God of Peace*. So why then is the question we want to be asking tonight, would the author of Hebrews want to highlight that particular aspect of God's character? Of all the different aspects of God's nature or character that he could have highlighted at this point in summarizing and finishing up this amazing letter, why does he refer to him as the God of peace?

We'll remember, he's writing to professing Jewish believers who are being tempted, because of those outside the church and some within, to revert back to the dead, lifeless, works based system of Judaism. Remember that? There's a temptation here that's creeping in and around these professing believers. And therefore, I believe that the author of Hebrews wants to emphasize for these believers that in the Old Covenant there is no peace with God to be found. But rather that

the God of peace has provided peace exclusively through the prince of peace who is Jesus Christ. And in order for us to truly appreciate the peace that God offers to humanity through the gospel, we must first come to understand our relationship to and with God apart from Christ.

Because contrary to what some may believe, we do not enter this world with a blank slate. We don't come into this world in just a neutral position. It sounds nice, but that's not the context into which we enter or to which we exist. No, because of the fall of humanity, all the way back in the garden with Adam and Eve, we are born into this world as sinners. All of humanity and all of creation has been plunged into the darkness of sin. With Adam as our representatives, it is as if, in other words, that we ourselves, we there in the garden willfully choosing to disobey the Lord's command just as they did. And it's from that sinful nature which we all inherit from our first parents, that every aspect of our being is totally depraved.

Paul explains it like this in Romans 3. He says, "None is righteous." And in case you were confused by that, "No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God all have turned aside together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave." Just notice with me how he just lays out the entire human body. "They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips, their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

So from head to toe, there is utter wickedness within humanity. And so, while we may see that passage or hear it and be tempted to say, "Well, my goodness, whoever Paul is describing there, they are absolutely wicked." The reality my friends, is that he's describing you. And he's describing me. This is who we are in our natural condition apart from Christ. We were the sinful rebels who have been guilty of committing cosmic treason against the Creator of the cosmos.

We were the criminals who have broken God's holy law. We were the deceivers who betrayed the Son of God with a kiss and called for the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. We were there in the crowd mocking Christ as he went to the cross. And we were the enemies of God who deserve rightly to suffer his righteous wrath in hell for all of eternity. And if you're sitting there thinking, well, how do we deserve that? That seems a little bit extreme. Then you do not understand the holiness of this God. Because one sin against this God's holiness is worthy of eternal condemnation.

And yet in the midst of our rebellious, deceptive wickedness, my friends, the God of peace has graciously, mercifully and compassionately sent his own perfect Son into the world to die in our place. Think of that. And now because of our faith in the perfect person and perfect work of Christ, we can have peace with God. His wrath has been satisfied for us, the penalty for our sins has been paid, our transgressions have been forgiven, and we have been credited with Christ's perfect righteousness. That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The God of Peace takes our sins upon himself and provides us with peace so that we can be brought into a right relationship with him. Through the cross, we the sinners, are reconciled to God, the sinless. All because of what Jesus

Christ has done for us. And so, if we will repent of our sins, surrender our life to him and place our faith, trust and confidence in the perfect person and perfect work of Christ, we will be at peace with this holy God.

And because we still struggle with doubts and uncertainties, and the assurance and the confidence of our salvation, the author of Hebrews continues in this beautiful prayer of benediction to provide these believers, and by extension us, with the ***Proof of Peace. The Proof of Peace.*** He goes on to say in the very next part of verse 20, concerning this God of peace that, "He is the one who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep." And so, what the author of Hebrews is doing here is paraphrasing an Old Testament text, he's applying it to Christ and he's drawing out from its gospel implications. These words are reminiscent of Isaiah 63:11. Isaiah 63:11, which these Jews would have been intimately familiar with, and it's there within the context of God's mercy to rebellious Israel that the prophet says this, "Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he?" It's a question, "who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock."

And so instead of bringing them up out of the sea, the author of Hebrews says that the God of peace has brought Jesus up out of the grave. And instead of leading the flock by the hand of his shepherds, Moses and Aaron, it is the Great Shepherd of the sheep himself who saves his people through his resurrection. And how does the resurrection of Jesus provide us with the proof that we have peace with God? Well, by raising the Shepherd from the dead, it was as though the Father was placing his stamp of approval upon what Jesus had accomplished on the cross for his sheep. Paul says it like this in Romans 4:24-25, it says, "Righteousness is counted to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

In other words, the proof that we have been justified, that is to say declared righteous, is not just that Jesus died for our sins, but that three days later he rose from the grave. The Father did not leave him there to rot as others who had gone before him. No, after he paid the penalty for our sins, He demonstrated that that sacrifice was accepted by raising Jesus from the dead and by conquering the greatest enemy known to mankind, which is death itself. And it is that accomplishment of raising Jesus from the dead, that leads us into the last portion of verse 20, and it's there that we're going to see the price of peace. The price of peace. So, if you look there with me, he goes on to tell us that, "This was accomplished by the blood of the eternal covenant."

As we think about the price that was paid for our redemption, which was the precious blood of the Great Shepherd himself. I want to call to your mind again Jesus's words from John 10. Because it was just before Jesus declared himself to be the fulfillment of the prophetic good shepherd that he referred to himself as the door of the sheep. In verse 9, He said, "I am the door." One of those great I am statements from John's gospel. And he went on to say, "If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

And so to help us capture the imagery of that statement, I came across a story a few years ago that I think will be helpful. And it's a story about a man who once traveled to Israel. And one day as he was traveling with his tour guide, the two of them came across a shepherd that was caring for his flock of sheep. And the man and the shepherd began to engage with one another in conversation. They really hit it off. And the man who was curious about the life of a shepherd began to ask lots of questions to which the shepherd was obliged to answer. So the shepherd went on to explain a number of aspects about shepherding, and at one point began to show the man the actual sheepfold where the sheep go to sleep at night. Consisted of a pretty basic structure, four walls with only one single way in and out. And so as the man looked at the entrance, he said to the shepherd, so this is where they go in at night? And the shepherd said, yes, and as soon as they go in that door, they are perfectly safe.

But the man who was a bit perplexed in that response asked the shepherd what seemed to him to be pointing out the obvious. And so he said, but sir, there's no door. It's just an opening. How then can the sheep be safe? And the shepherd responded, I am the door. And as the man heard this response, he was a bit taken back. So he thought for a moment, and he said, sir, what do you mean that you are the door? And to that, the shepherd replied, when the light has gone and all the sheep are inside, I lie down in that open space. And no sheep ever goes out without crossing my body. And no wolf ever comes in without having to cross my body. I am the door. And of course, this is what Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, has done. As the door to the sheep pen, he has laid down his life for the sheep and in laying it down, he has sacrificed himself for his flock.

So the picture and the imagery that comes to the surface for us then in Christ's case, is a bloody, battered shepherd who died protecting his sheep. But instead of leaving the flock defenseless, he stands again after his death in victory, conquering death and paying the price for the salvation of his flock. And all of this was to fulfill the requirements of the eternal covenant which was designed for us before the world was ever made. As Charles Spurgeon once said, in a way that only Charles Spurgeon can, before God had spoken existence out of nothing, before angels' wing had stirred the unmitigated ether, before a solitary song had disturbed the solemnity of the silence in which God reigned supreme, he had entered into solemn counsel with himself, with his Son, and with his Spirit. And had in that council, decreed, determined, purposed and predestinated the salvation of his people."

And of that salvation and of this eternal covenant, which God himself designed before the foundation of the world, Jesus spoke to his disciples at the last supper as he broke bread, and he poured out the wine into the cup. And in Matthew 26:28, he looked at them and he said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." And my friends it is through that ultimate price of the Great Shepherd that the author of Hebrews is able to pray for this flock, entrusted to his care, specifically as we see next, for ***The Power of Peace***. ***The Power of Peace***. And we see that as we continue to the beginning of verse 21. If you look there with me, the writer says there, "May this God of peace equip you with everything good that

you may do His will. Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ." And so notice with me that this prayer is coming from the heart of a pastor for those who are entrusted to his care.

This is what Ephesians tells us is the primary job of pastors. It is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, but especially as we consider everything else, we've seen throughout this series, this under shepherd of Christ sheep is praying that these believers would be equipped for all that they need to accomplish the Lord's will in their lives. And to help us understand that we need to think about this word equip. Some translations say, to make complete or to make perfect. And that's literally what it means. It means to make complete. It was used in a variety of ways in the first century.

And just to help us see the variations of its usage, for doctors, they would use it to refer to setting a broken bone into its proper place. To align the bone the way it was designed by the Lord. For fishermen, it meant mending a net so that it could be used for catching fish. For sailors, it meant to prepare a ship to go out onto the sea for a voyage. And for soldiers, it was used to speak of an army that were being fit and prepared and readied for battle.

And so as one commentator said so well, "Our Savior in heaven wants to equip us for life on earth. Tenderly, he wants to set the broken bones in our lives so that we might walk straight and run our life races successfully. He wants to repair the brakes in the nets so that we might catch fish and win souls. He wants to equip us for battle and outfit us so that we will not be battered in the storms of life. In brief, he wants to mature us so that he can work in us and through us, that which pleases him and accomplishes his will."

Brothers and sisters, this prayer points us to the reality that the Lord desires to work powerfully in and through our lives. But the question for us this evening and really for this entire series is this, are we seeking to align our wills with the will of God? Do we recognize what the will of God is for our life? To live obedient lives to Christ, to submit and surrender our wills to the will of the Father. Remember Jesus's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Here is the Son of God, wrestling as it were, with the Father's will. And he prays, "Father, let this cup pass from me, and yet not my will be done, but yours be done." That should be our heart's desire as well. To surrender our wills to the will of the father, and that will is revealed for us in the Word of God. So, are we availing ourselves of the means by which God seeks to equip us for this life?

Certainly, he desires to save us as his people, but once he has saved us, the entire work of sanctification is for us to live out our lives in a way that brings him honor. So, are we treasuring and applying God's Word to our lives? Are we fervently seeking the Lord in prayer? Are we looking for opportunities to serve and to fellowship with other believers? And ultimately, are we aiming to be a functional member of the body of Christ? Not just a spectator, but as someone who actually gets in the weeds as it were. Seeking to serve others and to carry out the one another's of scripture that we see provided for us throughout the New Testament.

It is for this reason that we are called in Philippians 2:12-13, and if you ever want to see a beautiful place of compatibilism between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of us in our sanctification, this is the passage to look at. Philippians 2:12-13. It says, "Work out your own salvation." Not absent mindedly, not flippantly, but with what? "Fear and trembling." Those words were selected with great intention. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." There's the human responsibility. Now for God's sovereignty. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

And it is the ultimate joy and pleasure of God through Christ that brings us to the final words of our passage for tonight and for this sermon series. And it's there that we are going to discover The Purpose of Peace. The Purpose of Peace. The author of Hebrews at the end of verse 21 tells us that all of this is centered upon Jesus Christ. He says there, "To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." And so this, my friends, is the ultimate pinnacle. This is the crescendo of all that God has done and all that He desires to do in us as individuals and as a church. It is to bring Christ glory and honor and adoration and praise, not only in this life. That's only a speck in God's great plan, but for all of eternity.

And we need to remember that, that the things that God brings us through in this life has an eternal purpose. It has everything to do with the plans and purposes that He has for your life, for all of eternity. Colossians 1:16 says this, "For by him," that is Christ, "all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him." Ephesians 2:7, "So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." My friends, not only are we called to fulfill the purpose that God has for us in this life, but it is ultimately so that all of eternity is an opportunity for the Lord to point to the church, the bride of Christ, and to demonstrate the vastness of His grace and kindness and mercy, which He has infinitely showered upon us through Jesus Christ.

And so as God continues to work in and through us, brothers and sisters, as we seek to live out this rich robust relationship between the shepherds and the sheep, may we always remember that we are together, serving and seeking to bring honor to the great shepherd of the sheep. He is our savior. His gospel is our salvation, and his will for our lives is our sanctification. All for the supreme honor and glory of his matchless and awesome name. So with all of that said, 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, Redeemer Bible Church, 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. And together we say, Amen. Let's pray.

Father, you are an amazing, awesome God. We are indeed unworthy. I pray, Father, that you will help us to truly and genuinely consider our condition, our status in relation to you apart from Christ, help us to see our lostness and the darkness and our unworthiness. And in great contrast to that pitch black, dark backdrop of our sin, help us to see the beauty and the splendor of your gospel. Help each and every one who is here to taste and to see that Jesus Christ is good. Not

only as a thought in our mind, but as a treasure that we grasp and that we take hold of, and that we surrender our lives to. And as we live in the sphere of that mercy and grace, I pray, oh God, that you will use the truths that we have uncovered throughout this series to help us to live out our lives in honor to you as individual believers, as disciples of Christ, but also collectively as one body, seeking to carry out your great commission and to love and serve and honor one another. And I pray, father, that through Redeemer Bible Church, you will be honored and pleased and glorified, both now and for years and years to come until the coming of our great shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's in his name we pray these things. Amen.