

Easter Sunday
April 16, 2006

Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ Over All Things
Parting Prayer: Present Power
Hebrews 13:20-21

Text:

Hebrews 13:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰Now 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, ²¹equip 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.

Introduction:

Today, we end a journey that began on September 5, 2004. Preaching through the book of Hebrews has been the single most refreshing thing I have ever done as a pastor. For me, it has provided an absolute cohesion for my own systematic theology. I had no idea I would find some of the rich nuggets of doctrine that I found as I dug around in this book.

I am eternally grateful to some of my heroes and “mentors-at-a-distance” for teaching me and unearthing some of the truths we came to discover. I am thankful to God for men like Don Carson, John Owen, John Reisinger, Geoff Volker, John MacArthur, Thomas Schreiner, Donald Hagner, George Guthrie, and above them all, the old Scottish Preacher, John Brown. His commentary on Hebrews, first published in 1862, has become one of my most cherished possessions. He was the kind of pastor and preacher I want to be.

I bring this up for two reasons, really: First, Hebrews has called us to have heroes. Do you recall chapter 6?

Hebrews 6:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Or, maybe you remember chapter thirteen’s admonition:

Hebrews 13:7 (ESV)

⁷Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Who are to be our heroes? Men and women whose lives have born out their faith. For this reason, I draw a distinction between heroes and “mentors-at-a-distance.” A hero is someone who has died – an individual whose life, with its “outcome,” can be studied and imitated. I want you to see, church, that there is biblical warrant for following other men and women as they follow Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 1:13). However, there are men and women still living whose pattern of life and sound teaching are worth imitating; but the full outcome of their life and faith is not yet born out. They are, for me, “mentors-at-a-distance” – role models – heroes in the making.

John Brown is one of the heroes of the faith that I want to imitate. Ian Murray wrote a short biography of John Brown in the front of the book I own. Let me share with you a few of his statements about John Brown (I would so thoroughly love to make this a biographical sermon like John Piper and Dave Saxon do so effectively; but that will wait for another day). Here is what I love about John Brown:

Dr. Brown's most distinctive abilities were reconised [sic] by his denomination in 1834 when he was appointed to the chair of Exegetical Theology. The conception of this chair was new to Scottish theological training and it was due to John Brown's own suggestion...The purpose was not only to teach principles of Bible interpretation – they had long been taught in Scotland – but to apply these principles in the actual exposition of large portions of Scripture in the original languages. Dr. Brown was profoundly disturbed at the all too common custom of ministers preaching a truth which was nevertheless not the truth of the text upon which they based their sermon. “It is of radical importance to you,” he would repeatedly say to his students, “that your views be not only consistent *with*, but derived *from* a careful exegesis of the words ‘which the Holy Ghost teacheth...’ it has been my sincere desire to bring out of the inspired words what is really in them, and to put nothing into them that is not really there; impressed with the conviction that imaginary exposition is one of the worst ways of ‘adding to the words of the prophecy of this book’.”

John Brown coined a phrase in Latin, *Exposito non imposito*, which means *exegesis* not *eisegesis* – dig the meaning out of the text, do not read the meaning into it. It reminds me of a saying my Greek professor used to say to us, “Wonderful things in the Bible I see; most of them put there by you and me.” That is the kind of passion I want to have for handling the Word of God. John Brown is worth imitating!

Well, the second reason I herald my fondness for John Brown is because he has made 13:20-22 my most favorite passage in Hebrews. These two verses were among the first of the passages I ever memorized from Hebrews. They are verses that I quote and refer to often in my ministry due to their packed theology. While modern-day commentaries gloss over these verses with a paragraph, John Brown spent eleven pages on these two verses. They are the summary of the letter in a parting prayer.

So I want to ask the question this morning, how are these two verses a summary of the sermon? I believe these verses are a parting prayer for present power!

In order to come to the answer to our question, let's ask two more: Why does he address God as “the God of peace”? And, what is the main content, the main concern, the central request of this prayer?

Let me read the text again and then pray:

Hebrews 13:20-21 (ESV)

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, ²¹ 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.

We do not know who wrote the book of Hebrews. Most of the ancients ascribed it to Paul, but we don't know. This passage, however, seems very Pauline. It is a massive run-on sentence with one simple main clause and a ton of modifying clauses added on for effect – grounding effect.

The main clause is simple: “Now may the God equip you to do his will.” That's it! Do you see it? All I did was skip all of the modifiers. May the God of peace equip you to do his will.

What a fitting and appropriate way to end a sermon like the book of Hebrews. For twelve chapters he trumpeted the supremacy of Christ over all things. He warned them and urged them not to turn aside from following him with utmost allegiance. In chapter 13 he gave them a list of nine exhortations as to how they could live out the supremacy of Christ over all things in areas like relationships, sexuality and marriage, leadership and submission and money. Now he parts paths with a prayer for present power – “May you be equipped by God to do his will.” His will is clear: they must persevere in their faith and not cave-in beneath the pressures that threaten; they need to persevere in their faith and not sell-out to other pleasures that beckon; they need to honor the supremacy of Christ over all things.

The prayer is really built in two parts: (1) the one part referring to an end (2) and the other part consisting of the means to the end.

The end – that you may be equipped to do his will.

The means – by God working in you that which is pleasing in his sight.

Do you see that?

So the main concern, the central request is really pretty simple: May God equip you to do his will by working in you that which is pleasing in his sight.

Do you understand the power behind that request?

Do you understand the need for that request?

First, the need. The word for “equip” means to set something straight; to mend what has been broken; to restore to usefulness again. It means to prepare something for its proper use.

You see, we are all by nature utterly unfit to obey the will of God; we do not know it; we do not love it; we cannot do it. Only God can render us fit for doing his will. Unless God works, we cannot.

Now, first, the author says, God must work in order to secure peace – that is – reconciliation with Him. So he offers this request to the God of peace. In answering the question, why address God as the “God of peace,” he also simultaneously shows us the power behind the request.

God is the God of peace because he secured our peace. How? This is very noteworthy. He did it by preparing, by fitting, by equipping another man to do his will. Can you see where we're going?

Go with me to the other place the word for “equip” is used in the sermon to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:5-10 (ESV)

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” ⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The very God who perfectly equipped Jesus to do his will in going to the cross, thus securing our sanctification, our peace, is the very same God the author now prays will fit you and me to do his will. That’s one part of the answer. There is power in the request because it is the same God. But there is more.

Back in our text, the God of peace raised Jesus from the dead by the blood of the eternal covenant. Where does that come from?

Hebrews 9:11-15 (ESV)

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

There are a number of important phrases here.

First, note the correlation between the blood of Jesus, the eternal inheritance, and the new covenant. The NC possesses eternal promises secured by the blood of Jesus. So in a summary statement the blood of Jesus is the blood of the eternal covenant. That is easy enough to fit together. Oh, but it’s deeper...

Look again at 9:11. But when Jesus appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent [where is that greater tent? Here comes a clue] (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by the means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

Answer this question: By what means did Jesus enter heaven?

Answer: by the means of his own blood.

Answer this question: When did he enter heaven? Was it when he died? Or was it when he ascended? 9:24 answers the question by telling us where he is now.

²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

There is one more link we have to make before I can make my point. Go back to 9:12. What did the blood of Jesus secure? The answer is that it secured an eternal redemption. Look at 9:15. How is Jesus the mediator of a new covenant? The answer is in the phrase, “since a death has occurred that redeems us.”

Here is the \$100,000 question: How do you know that the death of Jesus was sufficient for securing an eternal redemption, ratifying a new covenant, and purchasing an eternal inheritance?

Because Jesus was allowed into the presence of God himself by means of his blood (v.11-12). And the only way you and I can know that the blood, the death was sufficient is in the resurrection. “The God of peace, who brought again from the dead by the blood of the eternal covenant...” (13:20).

That which chapter 9 taught by implication – chapter 13 makes explicit. The resurrection was by means of the blood of the covenant because the blood that secured the new covenant was sufficient for gaining access into the holiest of all places – heaven itself. There Jesus still sits as the great high priest who will never die. Thus, his redemption is eternal, his covenant is eternal, his inheritance is eternal and his promises are eternal.

Look at...

Hebrews 7:23 (ESV)

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Here is how the logic was working for the writer of Hebrews when he started 13:20

1. Jesus Christ is the great shepherd of the sheep.
2. As the great shepherd of the sheep, he laid down his life for the sheep.
3. God brought him back from the dead.
4. When God brought Jesus back from the dead, He did so by the blood of the eternal covenant.
5. In bringing Jesus back from the dead by the blood of the eternal covenant, God acted as the God of peace.
6. It is to this kind of a God – a God who makes peace with his people – that I want to make a request...

You see, the very God who equipped Jesus to do his will, can equip you and me to do his will. That is, He can work in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

In order for you and me to live out the will of God in acts of obedience, good works, sharing, etc. there must first be working within. John Brown put it this way:

“In order to external good works, there must be internal good principles. In order to conform to the will of God in life, there must be conformity to the will of God in the heart”

The very same God who raised Jesus from the dead did so by means of the very same blood that secured the New Covenant promises:

Go to...

Hebrews 10:16 (ESV)

¹⁶“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”

Folks, we had better learn these two verses by heart.

If God is not working in you to fit you with the proper heart, you will never be able to change your behavior.

We need to learn how to bring behavior modification by enacting heart change.

We need to learn how to address ourselves at the deepest possible level of the heart.

We had better learn how to pray this way:

“Oh God, that you might equip me to do your will with the members of my body by working in my heart that which is pleasing in your sight.”

The blood of the covenant

sealed your pardon,

secured your redemption,

purchased your inheritance, and

completes your sanctification

and the proof that it is all a reality is the resurrection of Jesus by the blood of the eternal covenant.

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, ²¹ 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.