

“Benediction” Hebrews 13:20-21 Shane Hatfield 3/13/22

For the last few weeks, we’ve been studying our new name, Grace & Peace, and we’re going to wrap that up this morning by looking at a benediction, a grace and peace benediction from Hebrews 13:20-21. So, please read along with me as I read that. Hear the word of the Lord:

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.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be equipped for every good work. Let’s give our attention to it.

If you don’t know what a benediction is then you’re probably not alone. One time a visitor reached out to me via text message and said, ‘Hey, I have a theology question I want to ask you, can we meet?’ And so, that’s one of the duties of a pastor, so I said, ‘Sure! Yeah, I’d love to meet with you sometime and answer your theology question.’ So, leading up to the meeting my mind raced with all the typical theology questions that people ask. How could a loving God allow people to suffer? Do miracles occur today? How do we reconcile God’s sovereignty with man’s free will? Which end times view is the best? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Which is an unanswerable question, but you know, it always gets thrown out there. So, we met up and we made it through all the small talk and I finally mustered up the courage to ask them, ‘Okay, what is your theology question?’ And they said, ‘What is a benediction? I’ve never gotten a benediction before until I came to your church, can you please tell me what it is?’ And I was shocked! I’d actually never had that question before! So, we had a good talk about what a benediction is.

The word benediction comes from a Latin word meaning ‘to bless.’ It is a blessing given by the minister at the end of a worship service. It is a good word. Sometimes it’s a prayer to God on behalf of the people. God gives the first benediction in the Bible after He created man and woman, He blessed them and said that they were very good. The most common benediction is the Aaronic blessing that Moses commanded Aaron to give to Israel. It says, “The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His face upon you and give you His peace.” All of the New Testament letters end with a benediction. When Jesus was resurrected, He gave His disciples a benediction. Benedictions are a way of bestowing blessings on people. Benedictions can serve as a transition, as sort of a type of bridge from worship that we do in here, to life out there. I like what one pastor said, he said, “Benedictions teach us to expect what only God can give.”

Our benediction this morning comes from the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is a mysterious book. We don’t really know who wrote it, a lot of people say Paul, but there’s a lot of other guesses. We really don’t know. But we know that whoever wrote it had a pastor’s heart. He had immersed himself in the Scriptures. He understood that all of the Scriptures found their fulfillment in Jesus. He wanted his readers to remain faithful to Jesus despite all of the suffering and persecution they were undergoing. We don’t know exactly to whom the book was written, but we know that they could read Greek and that they were well acquainted with the Old Testament. We know that they understood the sanctuary and the priesthood and the sacrificial

system. We know that they had heard the gospel from the apostles, but they were in danger of falling away because of persecution from inside and from outside the church. They were also undergoing a transition of church leadership and they were worried about the stability of the church. Maybe they are not that much unlike us! I chose this benediction this morning because the pastor, the people, and the situation, seem similar to ours and I thought this was an appropriate way to transition to a new name and a new chapter in the life of our church.

What I want you to see this morning, as we look at this benediction, is that no matter what happens, from this day forward in Grace & Peace Presbyterian Church, we are secured in Jesus. We are secured in Christ no matter what happens from this day forward. Our peace is secured by Jesus. Our work is secured by Jesus. Our purpose is secured by Jesus. So, those are the three things we're going to look at today. Our peace is secured *by* Jesus, our work is secured *through* Jesus, and our purpose is secured *for* Jesus.

So, first let's look at how our peace is secured by Jesus. The benediction starts out with, 'The God of peace.' God assumes the title of the peace He possesses and the peace He gives. As we have seen, week after week, as we have studied grace and peace, God did not create this world sinful, broken, and chaotic, filled with pain and suffering and hostility. He created a good world filled with peace and harmony and tranquility, and we broke it. We broke the covenant and brought sin and misery into the world, but God graciously brought peace to the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The pastor tells us that when he says, "he brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." God defeated Satan, sin, and death through the resurrection of Jesus, and He seated Him on high as the Lord, the King of heaven and earth. But He wants us to remember that He is not some distant, powerful, omnipotent King, He is also the Great Shepherd. The Great Shepherd that loves His sheep, that knows His sheep, that leads His sheep, that feeds His sheep, and protects His sheep. Matthew 9 tells us that Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages in His area teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel and healing every disease and affliction. Why? It says when He saw the crowds, they were helpless and harassed like sheep without a shepherd. He was the Great Shepherd that came to comfort God's sheep.

Now not only was He the shepherd, but He became the sacrificial lamb. The pastor alludes to that when he says that "He sealed us through the blood of the eternal covenant." Throughout Hebrews, the pastor over and over again reminds the people that Jesus was better than the angels. He was better than the priests. He was better than Moses. He was better than the temple. He was better than the sacrifices. A more glorious, more permanent, more complete salvation came through the person and work of Jesus. It was His perfect blood that secured our salvation for us and gives us His peace. Like that pastor, it is my prayer, it is my blessing, it is my desire that the God of peace would give us peace through our resurrected, ruling and reigning shepherd King Jesus. It is my prayer that we would know His power protects us, His care protects us, His blood cleanses us, and that every week, week after week, year after year, until eternity, we would focus on the good news of that gospel when we come together and worship.

Here's the deal, like the original readers of Hebrews, we are going to face pressure and temptation and persecution from inside the church and from outside the church. They were tempted to abandon Jesus and go back to the Jewish sacrificial system. We are going to be tempted to go back to our secular and religious ways of saving ourselves. The God of consumerism is going to tell us that we need more and more stuff to make us happy. The God of humanism is going to tell us that we define truth and beauty and goodness in and of ourselves. The God of moralism is going to tell us that we can remove our shame and our guilt if we just

work hard enough. Week after week, day after day, year after year, we need to come in here and hear the good news that none of those gods will save us. They will only bring more shame and more guilt. Jesus invites us to receive His peace every week. His blood covers us. His power protects us. His care sustains us.

There's a statue in a church called Lady Church in Copenhagen, Denmark, I've never been there, but I've read about it and I've seen it. In that church there's a statue of Jesus Christ and when the original architect designed that statue, he designed it so that Jesus' hands would be up like this giving a benediction. When a pastor gives a benediction, they traditionally hold their hands up like this. Well, as the sculptor was working on the statue, something in his soul said, 'It's not right for His hands to be up here,' and he grabbed those hands on the statue and he began to mold them and form them so that they went down like this. So now, the statue has Jesus' hands, not up here, but out like this. As if to say, that every sinner and sufferer who walks by is invited to come to Jesus and find peace. As we come here to hear the gospel every week, to experience the gospel through our worship, know that there is always an invitation in this benediction. There's always an invitation no matter who you are, no matter where you're at, no matter what you've done, to come to Jesus and find peace. He has secured it for us, for His church. That's the first thing we see.

The second thing we see is that Jesus has secured our work. The pastor prays in verse 21 that "the God of peace would equip them with every good that they may do His will and that He might work in them that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." When we come to God, we come as we are. We come as sinners and sufferers, but God does not leave us as we came. His grace is a transforming grace. When it saves us, it transforms us. It moves us from death to life, from rebellion to submission, to broken to restored. In Christ we receive everything that we need to do His will. He gives us His Spirit, and through His Spirit He gives us gifts that we can use to worship and serve Him. Through the Spirit, God works in us that which is pleasing to Him.

Before Jesus was betrayed, before He went to the cross, He spent His final moments in the upper room with His disciples and He was giving them sort of last instructions. We went over that as a congregation last year. His disciples were confused, and they were afraid. Jesus was telling them everything that was about to happen. Jesus comforted them by telling them everything that was going to happen. He said, 'I'm going to be betrayed. I'm going to be rejected. I'm going to suffer, die, and then I will come back and visit you, then I will ascend to heaven, but fear not, because when I ascend to heaven, I am going to give you my Spirit. The Spirit will be your helper, your counselor, your equipper.' Everyone who comes to Christ in faith has been filled with His Spirit, has been transformed into a child of God and has been given everything they need to do God's will, and to do that which is pleasing in His sight. My prayer for us is that God would equip us to do His will, that He would work in us everything that is pleasing to Him.

Now, here's the thing that you need to know about me: I am going to try to do this myself. I'm telling you now, so when it happens you know. I'm admitting to you that I need to remember that *I can't do it*. I can't make you do God's will. I can't make you do that which is pleasing to the Lord. It is my prayer that I would trust the Spirit of God is at work in you, and that He is the one who is working in you to do His will, and that His Spirit is working that which is pleasing in His sight. As I am dependent on the Lord, and as you are dependent on the Lord, the Lord is going to work through us to do things that we could never think or imagine, to do His will.

Over the last year, I have loved hearing stories about the ministry that has taken place in Ethos over the years. It is incredible to hear about the lives that have been transformed, the lives that have been changed, the people that have been saved, the healing that has been brought, marriages that have been saved. It has been so encouraging. Thank you so much for sharing that with me. And I'm excited about what God is continuing to do through our congregation already! I'm hearing stories about little girls who are praying for their coaches and teammates to be saved. I'm hearing stories about PA students who are inviting their friends to Bible study so that they can hear the gospel. I'm hearing stories about community groups where people are open and honest about their loneliness, their addiction, their divorce, their failures, their anger, all those things. All of that is taking place because the Spirit of God is at work in you to will and to do that which is pleasing to Him.

So, it's my prayer that God would continue to do those things. That He would raise up ministry leaders, musicians, greeters, elders, deacons, evangelists, counselors, community group leaders, Bible study leaders, all those things. It's my prayer that the Holy Spirit would raise those things up in us, that God would equip us for everything that we need to do His will through His Spirit and that the fruit on our tree would continue to grow and blossom into something that's beautiful and God-glorifying.

One of the ways that we describe what we want to see in our church is a tree. Imagine a tree with fruit on it, and there's different types of fruit on it. Each one of those different types of fruit reflect a different aspect of Jesus' heart. We want to see evangelism and missions in our church, and that reflects the heart of Christ for the lost. We want to see fellowship and service in our church, and that reflects Christ's heart for the church. We want to see a Biblical world and life view in our church, and that reflects Christ's heart for the world. We want to see growth in grace in our church, and that reflects Christ's heart for the Father. The good news is that the Spirit is at work in us doing all those things. Jesus has secured it through Him. He has given us His Spirit so that our work is secured through Him.

I'm praying that God would raise up more and more people like Lydia in Acts 16. Lydia of Thyatira is just a great example of how God transforms people and they become a part of His body and they do His will. Acts 16 tells us that she was a worshipper of God, she believed in the God of Israel. But when she heard Paul preaching, the Lord opened her heart to understand the gospel and that her and her entire family was baptized. The text says that she prevailed on them to stay with them. That means that she was radically rigorous about her hospitality. She was like, 'You are going to stay with me, and I am going to serve you, and care for you!' The Lord blessed that. Later on, her house was the house church where the Philippian church met. It's my prayer that the Lord would raise up people like that in our congregation, and we know that Jesus has secured it through His life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus has secured our peace. Jesus has secured our work. And then lastly, Jesus has secured our goal. Our goal is to glorify Him. The pastor says that here at the end of the benediction. He says, "To whom," that'd be Jesus, "be glory forever and ever, Amen." God created man to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Jesus saved us so that we can glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The Spirit sanctifies us so that we can glorify God and enjoy Him forever. So, that's our goal. Our goal at Grace & Peace is to glorify Jesus forever and ever and that goal won't change, that goal can't change. That is our goal in our small groups, in our one-on-ones, in our worship services, in our Bible studies, in our homes. We pray that Jesus would be glorified! Every week when we come here and we have the preaching of the gospel, we want Jesus to be glorified as the King of creation and the Savior of sinners.

He is worthy of all praise and glory and honor. He is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of God's nature and the final word that God has spoken to us. Paul tells us that as we come in here each week and behold Jesus face to face, we are transformed from one glory into the next. Do you want to change? Do you want to be transformed? Do you want to glorify Jesus with your life? It comes through beholding Him and His word. We want Jesus to be glorified in our worship music. We want to sing His praises. We want to sing about the lion who defended us and the lamb who sacrificed for us. We want to sing about His truth and beauty and goodness until it gets deep in our bones and we believe it like we never thought we could believe it before, until that's the song we sing when we wake up and when we go to bed. We want to fill this world with songs that praise Jesus. I pray that our community would glorify Jesus, that as people see us loving and serving each other, they would see Jesus who has loved and served us. May our preaching and our singing and our community glorify Jesus so that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

For that to happen, we have to become more and more like Jesus, and as we become more and more like Jesus, we become more and more like John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the prophet that God sent to prepare the way of the Lord, to prepare the people for Jesus. John the Baptist had an incredible self-awareness about himself. He knew that he was not the Lord, but he knew he was sent to prepare the way for the Lord. He knew that he was supposed to baptize with water, but he knew that Jesus was going to come and baptize with the Holy Spirit. He knew that he was not the Christ, and he knew that Jesus was, and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He knew that Jesus was the bridegroom and that he was just the best man standing next to him. He knew that Jesus must become greater, and he must become lesser. Grace & Peace does not exist for anyone other than Jesus Christ. It does not exist for my glory, it does not exist for your glory, it doesn't even exist for the glory of itself, it exists for the glory of Jesus and the more that we worship and serve Jesus, and the more that we seek to glorify Him and enjoy Him in every aspect of our lives, the more He will be glorified and the more we will enjoy God, and the more it will create a spiral of wonder, love, and praise.

Let's pray that we would always believe that Jesus has secured our peace, that we work through Jesus and that we work for Jesus. As we do that, we are going to have a peace that surpasses all understanding, and no matter what this world throws at us, no matter what this life throws at us, we will give ourselves to Jesus because He has given Himself to us.

One of the early church fathers was a man named Polycarp. He was the bishop of Smyrna. He was a disciple of John the apostle. That's a pretty good resume, right? I was discipled by John, the one whom Jesus loved. Whenever Polycarp was 86 years old, he refused to denounce Christ and he was sent to the stake to be burned. His last words were these, "For 86 years I have been His servant and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King now?" And he gave his life for Christ. It is my prayer that Grace & Peace church, for as long as it exists, will say that Jesus is its King and that He has done it no wrong, and that we would never blaspheme His name. That we would be secure enough in Jesus that we would give our lives for Him. Let's pray that the Lord would make that happen. Please pray with me.