

# The Benediction of Hebrews

Hebrews 13:20-21

*Halifax: 8 September 2024*

## **Introduction:**

We are coming to the end of our sermon series in Hebrews.

- Today, we come to the benediction at the end of the letter.
- Most of the letters in the NT have a benediction at the end.

Benedictions are wonderful things.

- God appointed them as blessings to be pronounced upon His people.
  - In Numbers 6:22-27, He appointed them to be pronounced by His priests as an official act of blessing.
    - An official act is one that is done by one who is officially appointed. It carries the authority of the one who appointed him.
    - Just as baptism and the Lord's Supper are not casual acts that are to be done by a grandmother or a friend, so it is with benedictions.
      - In the assembly of the church, the church has historically not allowed anyone but one who is properly ordained as a minister of the word and sacrament to do this. Reformed churches rightly retain this.
      - It is a way of showing that it is done by God's authority, to make it more solemn and significant and encouraging—because it is from Him.
      - Since He appointed it for officers in the OT, and we find officers solemnly doing it in the NT, we rightly conclude that only ministers should do it.
    - I don't think this means that we cannot bless each other or bless our children, but we must be careful that we do not do it in a way that does not recognise that it is a solemn thing to bless someone.
      - Just as we should not throw out curses flippantly or because we are personally offended (as if we have authority to judge), so we should not throw out blessings without realising that it is only God who blesses.
  - God graciously appointed the official pronouncing of benedictions to be an encouragement to His people because they are His people and He loves them.
    - He wants us to know that He is committed to us and that He intends to treat us well and to saturate us with the blessings He has promised in every way.
      - His name and reputation are upon us as those that He would be ashamed to not bless.
    - He will stand by us, He will do good to us, He will love us and never leave us.
      - He has forgiven us and He is committed to make us good through and through.
      - He will make us happy, fulfilled, and full.
      - He will even enlarge our capacity so we can be more full than is possible now.

Let's take a look at the benediction in the epistle to the Hebrews.

- The benediction in Hebrews is aimed at taking all that has been written in the epistle about God's saving work in Christ that brings His blessing to us...taking it all and packing it into a benediction to say to every elect person, "This is yours."
- It is found in Hebrew 13:20-21. I will read it to you now. This is God's holy word:

**Heb 13:20-21: Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, <sup>21</sup> make you**

**complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Thanks be to God for this encouraging word. May He indeed bless us with these things.

As a church of Jesus Christ, we have gone through Hebrews over the past two years. It is only appropriate that we might covet the blessing that is presented in this book.

- It shows us what God has done through Christ to make sinners whole! We want to be whole! We want each other to be whole.
  - We have not read and heard sermons just to learn information—we have done it that we might be blessed and edified and encouraged. We want what is spoken of.
- In Romans 15:4 God said: **For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**

**I. I will begin by looking at the outcome that our gracious heavenly Father pronounces upon us as His people.**

- I trust that you understand my language here.
  - As I have explained already, in a benediction, God places His name upon us as His elect people to assure us that because we are His, He is going to bless us.
  - What are those blessings that He is going to bring about in you if you are His?
  - What are the blessings that we want to crave for ourselves and the church—the blessings that we can pray earnestly for, knowing that He will give them to us.
- A. He declares that He is going to **“make you complete in every good work to do His will.”**
  - To make you complete means to furnish you with everything you need—to fit you and equip you that you might do His will.
    - There are so many ways that we need this work.
  - 1. To do God’s will, we must know His will, we must understand what He has called us and commanded us to do. We must have our eyes opened.
  - 2. To do His will, we must also do whatever we do with an eye to God. We are to do it for Him and in love to Him. Only then is our obedience acceptable.
    - We must know Him rightly and love Him as much as we should.
  - 3. To do His will, we must also have the will to follow through with what we know to be right—we must want to do and we must actually do it, not just think about it.
    - As it says in Philippians, God is at work in us to make us able both to will and do of what He wants.
  - 4. To be furnished or made complete to do His will means that we must be reconciled to Him from our past sins. Without forgiveness, we are unacceptable to Him.

- We must be forgiven and we must be born again—made alive to God—who were dead in our trespasses and sins.

TRANS> We need to realise though that God’s promise is more than mere acceptance despite the fact that we are unacceptable.

B. His blessing makes us delightful and pleasing to Him. This is brought out in the parallel clause: **working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight.**

- By His powerful saving work, we can actually be beautiful and desirable to Him!
- What is pleasing to Him was summarised for us in 13:15-16:
  - **Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. <sup>16</sup> But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**

1. Our love for Him is the first and greatest thing that pleases Him.

- It involves the sacrifice of praise—
  - We are the assembly that assembles together to do this on the Lord’s Day. We place too little importance on this. This is where we express our love!
  - This sacrifice of praise, as I told you, means that we see the glory and beauty of God and we praise Him—we see His glory and perfections and we adore Him. We express our love to Him in songs of praise and prayers!
    - We consider His wonderful works of creation and of redemption, we look at His faithful providence in these, and we give thanks to Him.

2. Loving our neighbour is the second aspect of what is pleasing to God.

- This is described as not forgetting to do good and to share.
  - We are to be busy about doing good to others and sharing what we have with them—everything from wisdom to food, from encouragement to deeds of service. God is pleased with these things.
- He wants us to use the gifts and graces that He has given to us for each other.
  - He says, don’t forget to do this.

➤ Praise to God and doing good to our neighbours... this is what pleases God.

C. And the great thing here with this benediction is that it tells us that God is the one who is working these things in us.

1. We cannot do this. It is the work of the one who is here called “**the God of peace.**”

- The Hebrew people often spoke of *peace*—the Hebrew word is *shalom*.
  - It speaks of everything about us being as it ought to be...
  - Sin brought everything into disorder and confusion—it makes us twisted and wicked—we were defiled and corrupted and sentenced to eternal misery.

2. What a grand work! What a wonderful amazing excellent work God describes here!

- Who but God could change sinners into those who are able to be full of good works—works that are not only in accordance with God’s will, but works that delight Him?
  - It is a work that only He can do—and that He assures us that He will do in us.

- So much divine power and so much grace is expended.
  - Giving us a Saviour, working in us by His Spirit, using the word, sacrament and prayer, arranging our experiences to bring about this outcome of making us complete!
  - What wisdom does He use! What love does He exercise! What power does He expend! He brings us up from wilderness. He transforms us by His hand.
- 3. This benediction assures us that, as those who have come to God in Christ for salvation, He will do it.
  - It says that it is done **through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.**
    - It is His work. He is the only Saviour. He gets the glory for the transformation—for making us beautiful and pleasing in His sight.
      - He looks on you and He sees your love that He has worked in you and He is thrilled with you and tells you that you have ravished His heart.
      - You look to Him and say, “All the glory is yours!”

**II. In this benediction, the work that God has done to bring us the blessing is outlined in verse 20.**

- **This work that He has done in Christ that is the subject of this whole Epistle to the Hebrews.**
- A. So what does it tell us that He has done?
  - He has **brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead!**
  - 1. This speaks of more than merely giving Him life from the dead.
    - It refers to the fact that God brought Him up from the dead to present Him to us as our Lord and Saviour—as the One who has procured our salvation—as the priest who has saved us from our sins.
    - Hebrews sets Him forth to us as the Saviour that God has brought up for us after He offered Himself for our sins on the cross.
    - Hebrews presents Him, not by apostolic authority, but by showing what the Old Testament said He would be and do as the priest who saves us.
  - 2. The prophecies referred to in Hebrews describe Him as the only one who can save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him.
    - He is spoken of as superior to all the angels—He is the only one who is called “God” and who is said to have a throne forever (He is brought forth from the dead).
    - He is spoken of as the one who is perfected as the captain of our salvation, who is not ashamed to call us brethren because God accepted His offering and prayer to deliver us when He was on the cross for our salvation.
    - He is the apostle who is greater than Moses—not just a faithful servant in the house, like Moses was; but as the one who builds the house.
    - He is spoken of as the one who gives us the rest that God promises His people... the rest that was greater than the rest Joshua gave the people in Canaan.
    - He is described as the priest after the order of Melchizedek who has no beginning and no ending, but is a priest forever.
    - He is the only priest who was made a priest with an oath from God.
    - He is the only priest who is also the king of righteousness.

- His priestly work is the work that brings about a new covenant in which there is full remission of sin and in which the law is written in our hearts to do God's will.
- His is not service in an earthly tabernacle, but the heavenly. Not of a temple of mere shadows and types, but before God's throne in heaven.
- His offering is not the sacrifice of animals, but the offering of His own blood as the one who came as God in human flesh to do God's will as it was written of Him in the volume of book.

TRANS> He is the one God brought forth from the dead to bring the blessing to us.

B. The blessing goes on to speak about who He is. He is called the great shepherd of the sheep.

1. This is actually the first time that He is called a shepherd in Hebrews.
  - But that is how He has been presented throughout the book.
    - He is the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep.
    - He is the loving shepherd who is a sympathetic high priest who helps us in all our weakness and opens to us the throne of grace.
2. He was chosen and appointed by God to be our shepherd—the shepherd of His sheep.
  - He came to gather us into His kingdom—into His very household and family.
  - He rescues us, He purchases us, He keeps us, He heals us, He feeds us and waters us, He instructs us, He makes us fruitful.
3. He so works for us and in us that He makes us complete in every good work to do His will.
  - It is through Him along that we are able to do what is pleasing to God.

C. And how does God bring all of these benefits to us? What is at the heart of it all?

- The benediction emphasises this. It is: **“through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”** God does it through the blood of the everlasting covenant.
  1. That blood is the blood of Jesus, God's Son.
    - It is the blood of the new covenant by which that covenant is ratified.
      - The covenant that promises complete forgiveness and new life for those who come to Him is only possible by Jesus crucified.
  2. That blood is *the* sacrifice for our sin—His blood poured out for our sin.
    - He took the penalty, He bore the shame, He died for us... and then... He was brought forth from the dead with eternal salvation through His blood.
      - It is the basis of our forgiveness.
      - It is the basis of our new life that pleases God.
      - It is the purchase price of our inheritance in God's house forever.
  3. It is clear here that you cannot have the blessing of this benediction without Jesus and the shedding of His blood.
    - Sin is our problem, and Jesus crucified is God's solution.
      - It is the only solution. No one comes to the Father but by Him.

- God's Son crucified is the great shepherd that God brought forth from the dead to be our great high priest.

### **III. Where are you with this blessing?**

#### **A. Some of you are visiting here at church.**

1. You are learning about Jesus and His saving work.
  - You are checking it out.
  - That is good.
2. But we want you to do more than just check it out.
  - We want you to have the blessing of forgiveness and new life by this Lord Jesus Christ, this great shepherd of the sheep who shed His blood, this priest that God brought forth from the dead.
  - You will never find anyone else who can do what He did. You will never find anyone else that God our creator brought forth from the dead to make us complete to do His will and to work in us what is pleasing in His sight.
    - You simply cannot have these blessings apart from Him.

TRANS> But some of you are more than visitors here.

#### **B. Some of you have Him, at least in form, but you are not leaning into His salvation.**

- You know of His salvation.
  - You have tasted something of it.
  - You have known the convicting work of His Spirit.
  - You have been baptised in His name and perhaps you have professed Him as your Lord and Saviour.
- But something is wrong—something is missing.
  - You are not leaning into this salvation.
  - You are focused on excuses instead of looking on looking to God for mercy. In other words, you excuse your sin and shake it off instead of confessing it and coming to Jesus to be saved from it...
- As a church, we have had the sadness of seeing some depart from the faith.
  - We see others who are not leaning in and we fear that they will do the same.
  - We see some who are bitter, who are complaining about God instead of crying out to Him for mercy. They see Him as the problem instead of themselves.

#### **C. But I am very glad to say that there are many of you who love the Lord Jesus.**

1. You have put yourself in His hands to do the saving, and you are experiencing free forgiveness and the transformation of your life to love God.
2. You want to pour your life out for Him, as that sacrifice of praise—adoring praise and thanksgiving to Him... and the sacrifice of service to His people—doing good and sharing the blessing of salvation and the blessings of this life with others.

#### **D. Brothers and sisters, as a church, it is our calling to receive these blessings of God's salvation and to spread them to each other as well as to those in our community!**

1. God has given our congregation unique opportunities in this city.

- He has not given us a church that is a showcase of mature Christian families that go back for many generations.
    - He has not given us that kind of stability that some of our sister church have—like Covenanters in the valley. Most of their people have reformed ancestors that go back for generations.
2. We have many people come to us who are from broken families.
- We have people who did not grow up knowing Christ in a saving way.
    - We have many people who have deep scars from the abuse they received as children and from the sinful way they responded to that abuse.
    - We have people who were into drugs, demons, abortion, sexual immorality—people who were angry and bitter—and who still struggle with these things.
    - We have many people from other nations who have come to learn about Jesus—people who were atheists or who served other gods.
  - This does not create such a stable church.
    - There are many who come, check it out, even get baptised, but then leave. Sometimes they come back, sometimes they don't.
    - There are some who deeply love the Lord and who go on and on with Him and could never turn back because they know how much they have been forgiven.
    - They pour out their whole lives as a pleasing sacrifice of love.
3. Praise God for His saving work through Christ.
- As a church, we want people to know this blessing.
  - We need to be sure that we are leaning into it with faith—really looking to Jesus for the mercy that He brings by His saving work as the great shepherd of the sheep.
    - We need to pray earnestly for each other.
      - We need to be ready to help each other, to share and do good.
    - We need to pray for the lost, to reach out to them, to bring them to church so they can hear and receive God's word that can save their souls.
    - We need to be zealous to offer the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of our lips praising and thanking His name!
      - It seems like that ever since Covid, people don't care as much about gathering for worship, gathering for prayer—about the assembly.
      - Our very name is church—a worshipping assembly—we come to Jesus as a living Stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious. We come as living stones, who are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
  - We need to encourage each other and to exhort each other to go on for our Lord.
    - He has given us unique opportunities and we need to embrace them with gladness.
      - **Will you commit right now to do this?**

- God promises to work in us through Christ whom He brought forth from the dead for our salvation to make us complete in every good work to do His will, working in us what is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory forever.
- Are you in?