

# The HUMILITY and GLORY of the GREAT SHEPHERD

## Part 3 - Benediction

HEBREWS 13:20-21 (ESV)



(Photo provided by Rick Sams, 2009)

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Oak Hills Presbyterian Church,  
Overland Park, Kansas

## He is Risen!

Today we celebrate the most pivotal day in the history of the world—the day the son of God, who was crucified, dead and buried rose again.

Are you troubled today? It is impossible to overstate the significance of this day to those troubled in Spirit. Eternity stepped into time, rescuing desperate people from their separation from God that they might know peace with Him. For the past two weeks, we have taken time to look with hindsight through the lens of Hebrews into Who this Jesus Christ is.

**IN PART ONE**, we talked about God's intention to save. The coming, life, death and resurrection of Jesus were not some last-ditch effort by God to try and bring some good out of a messed-up situation. The original recipients of Hebrews were unsure whether God would keep His oath to preserve them. The author reminded them, and us, that God's vow to never leave or forsake us was made long before we even had the chance to struggle with doubt, much less believe in Him.

**IN PART TWO**, we dug into the juxtaposition of the proceedings leading up to Jesus' crucifixion with the majesty that followed. The opening verses of Hebrews spoke of Jesus as the Son of God who is God's prophetic voice and appointed heir. He was involved in the creation of the world and upholds it still by the word of His power. He is the radiance of God, the exact imprint of His nature and God's unique, perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people. <sup>(Heb 1:1-4)</sup> Today we look again at the glory of the Risen Jesus Christ by looking to Hebrews' benediction.

## Hebrews 13:20-21

<sup>20</sup>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, <sup>21</sup>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.

## Imagine You Were There

Two weeks ago, I told the story of how back when I was a young Christian, I found a bird frozen on the bough of a tree in my yard. I described how where I lived was draped in a beautiful snow and how I was captivated by that display of God's glory. I told you that I took that bird in my hands and prayed that if it be God's will, He could raise that bird to life. I even told you what happened next remains one of the most memorable moments of my life. What I didn't tell you was what ever came of that bird. Did it stay dead or fly away? Today you'll know.

I told you about that bird because part of the joy of Easter comes in learning how the story ends. For the last part of Jesus' earthly ministry, it was clear that the religious leaders of His day saw His ministry as a danger to their stability under Rome. Add to this the fact that Jesus worked many miracles—not the least of which included raising a man named Lazarus from the grave, which led people not only to put their faith in His teaching, but in Jesus Himself. This aroused the ire and envy of the religious leaders. Who did Jesus think He was? Consequently, the tension leading up to His death had been building for some time.

Imagine you were there. Imagine you were one who knew Him well. Here is this teacher, this miracle worker, this man of untold wisdom, and you've invested in Him. You've hoped and believed He would change things—the world even. But then He gets arrested and His trial before the religious leaders seems to go horribly against Him. He is handed over to the Roman authorities with the instructions that the religious leaders have found Him worthy of death, but since they can't officially carry out an execution, the Romans would have to oversee that.

Before you know it, He is scourged and sentenced to death. A crown of thorns is pressed into His brow and a huge, heavy cross is placed on His back as He is ordered to carry it to the mount of crucifixion, where, nailed to it, He dies. After that, He is buried in a nearby tomb and as far as you know, that's that.

Do you know the feeling of hoping in something only to watch it crumble? Are you who you imagined you would be when you were younger? Do you ever feel like a fool for chasing a dream, investing in a particular leader, cause or vision, or believing you finally understood what would give your life meaning and value, only to be let down? Have you ever felt the fool for believing something could really make a difference in your life?

If you have, you know what it means to live with this gnawing feeling that life is not the way it was supposed to be. Is there anything that can give you real hope when the bottom falls out? I can think of one thing—resurrection. The belief that our existence isn't merely contained by the number of our days on this earth, and the conviction that not only are people eternal, but that we were made for an eternal relationship with the One who made us and loves us means that this life is just a vapor of all that we are meant to know and love and savor as people created in the image of God. I believe without the hope of the resurrection we will never truly have peace in our souls, because this life will be spent trying to cram as much meaning in as possible before the curtain drops and we forever go dark.

## If You Really Knew Peace

The hope of resurrection tells us that no matter how bad things seem, they have no power over us or our destinies. Hebrews' first readers were confronting their own mortality because of persecution. But let's not think we don't face our mortality on a daily basis too. We face losing our lives to things other than swords—like wasted years chasing after appearances, standards of living or control in the hopes that they'd give us peace. But how big is the difference between a person who hopes an enemy will let them live and someone who hopes controlling things will? Are either free? Do either know peace? Do you?

The benediction at the end of Hebrews is about peace—not political or financial peace, but eternal peace with God. The word “benediction” literally means “good word.” The writer writes this benediction, and it is a good word spoken over those reading his letter. To a troubled, weary, fearful people, He invokes the God of peace. Peace is what we need—peace that came through an empty tomb on Easter morning.

I could try to paint for you how great the peace is that we're talking about, but let me invite you to imagine it for yourself. Imagine all the surface tension in your life—all the broke-down stuff in need of repair: unfinished conversations, unresolved fights, the warning signs you see in the life of someone you love and the coming crash you know will happen if something doesn't give and soon. Imagine peace covering over all of that.

Now go a layer deeper. What about the heart issues you carry relationally—the disappointments in your marriages, jobs or futures that don't relate to any one particular struggle or miscommunication, but the disappointments that have formed over the course of years—the stuff that makes you so sad to describe as “*just the way it is.*” Imagine all that junk put right.

Now dig deeper still. What about the dark stuff that resides in you alone—the lust, the fear, the insecurity, the bitterness, the anxiety? What about that part of you that knows you're keeping people who want to love you well at a distance because you fear what it could mean if they got too close. What if you had the sort of peace where all of that was forever taken away?

And what about the stuff inside you that doesn't even have that much to do with your own brokenness, but rather the grief that comes from living in a broken world where things like divorce, sickness, accidents and war have the capacity to level any one of us? What if every sad thing came untrue? What if God would come and “*wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*” (Rev 21) What if the God of this kind of peace had anything real to do with your life today, right here and now?

## How God Supplies Peace for Us

While I can't tell you all that that would mean, I can tell you it would mean your life would have greater meaning and purpose than you could ever conceive. It would mean all the struggles that bend you so low today would lose all their power over you. Guess what? Our text today says because Jesus rose from the grave, this is **not** a hypothetical peace. We're talking about something real. Not only is this God of Peace at work in the lives of those who believe in Him, but our text tells us why: so that our lives might overflow with the purpose of doing what pleases God so that He would be glorified through us.

When the author of Hebrews' prays to the God of peace, his prayer is that God would equip His people for this. No mere mortal or self-help book can equip you for the purpose God has for your life. Why? Because that purpose was conceived in the mind of God, not man. It requires His intervention. And this is precisely what God promises to provide. Today's benediction shows three ways God has already supplied peace for our souls.

**FIRST, BY ACCOMPLISHING REDEMPTION:** Our text begins: “*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.*” This is what we celebrate on Easter. God raised from the dead our Lord Jesus and by His resurrection has established peace between us and our Maker by the blood of His Son.

**SECOND, BY GIVING US HIS HOLY WORD:** The Author prays that God would “*equip you with everything good.*” How has God fulfilled this? He has given us Scripture; God's very breath, useful for our teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:17) God hasn't left us guessing. He has revealed Himself to His people, equipping us to live as His own.

**THIRD, BY SENDING HIS SPIRIT:** God hasn't just given us an instruction manual to follow. He has also provided the power we need to obey. God equips us, “*working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.*” (v. 21) Who is the worker in this verse? It is God. In Christ, we have redemption and reconciliation with God, we have His living word and we have His Holy Spirit living in the hearts of those He has called to proclaim His word.

On Easter, we remember not only what God accomplished centuries ago outside Jerusalem when Jesus' disciples found His tomb empty. We also celebrate the lasting impact of His resurrection—that He sits at God's right hand forever, reigning over all. He will come again and when He does, for those whose faith is in Him, they will know a deeper peace than they ever dreamed possible. If you believe this, know this is your future.

## Know Jesus, Know Peace

I prayed over that bird, held it up to God and waited. The wind blew, ruffling its feathers—which about made me jump out of my skin—but in the end, the bird stayed dead. But the Lord met me in another way. There and then I was overcome by an awareness that I really did believe in a God who could raise the dead. I believed that death couldn't hold Him. With a word He could overcome the grave. And if He could overcome the grave, what couldn't He overcome? What He might have done in that bird was nothing compared to what He had already done in me. I was slowly beginning to see that my hope and peace rested in nothing less than the Giver—even the *Author* of life.

You and I, we have a lot we worry about. But on this day, Easter, we are reminded that we share this proclivity for anxiety with every generation to come before us and with every one that will follow until the Lord returns. But we are not left here alone. We have a Shepherd—a Great Shepherd. This One who leads us and guides us shall prevail over everything you need Him to prevail over, and you can know this because He has prevailed over death itself. God has meaning and purpose for your life right now. He has accomplished your redemption, given you His word and sent His spirit to dwell in you so that He might work in us that which is pleasing in His sight. (Heb 13:21) Rest in Him. May your celebration of Easter be marked by your worship of Jesus, our humble and exalted Great Shepherd.