

Hebrews 13:18-25 "O God, You Are My God; My Soul Thirsts For You"

As we come to the end of our study in Hebrews our writer begins to close his letter. He's taken them on a journey regarding their faith and the importance of appreciating the great God and Savior they trust and follow.

He has shown them that there's no room for turning back, no room for walking in the flesh, and no room for seeking self-interests at the expense of serving their God. Where these Hebrew Christians may have been tempted to move their dynamic faith in the Messiah into simply a religious mode, this letter leaves little doubt as to what God wants of them.

He sets the stage, in closing, as he says in HEB 13:15-16, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

This is a faith that is living and active and desiring to please the God who gave us life eternal. It is this kind of faith James speaks of in his letter.

JAM 2:14-17 "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."

What we should be doing is following after our Lord and seeking to be lights in this world to the extent that we are there for them to meet whatever needs we can, the greatest need being their salvation which is found in Christ Jesus alone. We have the message of life, let us not hide it under a basket. And it is this message and work of God that our writer is concerned with as he closes.

HEB 13:18-19 "Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I

particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon."

Here our writer speaks in the plural as he asks for prayer. He undoubtedly had a number of people in his company who traveled with him as he went about preaching and teaching. But what's interesting about this request is that it shows us that even men of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to give us the living word, needed prayer.

We should never think that we can do anything for the Lord in our own power or that we can slide on coming to Him in prayer regarding any aspect of our lives.

1CH 16:11 "Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always."

There were occasions where Israel did not do this and the Lord was not pleased. We read in the book of Joshua where they were approached by a large group of people known as the Gibeonites who lied to them to make a peace treaty with Israel.

JOS 9:14-16 "The men of Israel sampled their provisions **but did not inquire of the LORD**. 15 Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. 16 Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them."

It's not as though the Gibeonites would not have been allowed to have this peace treaty, but God wanted Israel to come to Him for everything. For all Israel knew the Gibeonites could have come in like the Trojan horse and destroyed Israel from the inside. By consulting God they could have known without a doubt that it would have been okay.

But more than that God wanted Israel, as he wants of us, to be totally dependent upon Him for all areas of life. This we must do on a personal level but we must also do it for one another. This is what our writer desires when he says, pray for us. He's asking that others would personally come to God for them.

The apostle Paul also understood the importance of this.

ROM 15:30 "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me."

If you don't think God answers prayers that are prayed on behalf of others again listen to what Paul says in 2CO 1:10-11 "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many."

Intercessory prayer allows us to share in the ministries of others. We actually play a role in the way God will work in the lives of others. This doesn't mean that God is at our beckon call, but it does mean that He has ordained prayer as a means of seeing His will accomplished in our lives and the lives of others.

When we pray for Pastors Eliphaz and Katumba, two missionaries we support in India, for example, we share in the rewards if they lead someone to Christ. If they disciple a man who then goes out to be a great evangelist in India and thousands come to Christ through his ministry, we share in that ministry as we pray for them.

You share directly in this ministry as you pray for me and everyone here who is doing the work of the Lord. Don't think for a moment that you can't do anything for the Lord. We can be praying for each other. But our prayer for each other should be the kind of prayer Paul asked of the Ephesians.

EPH 6:19-20 "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

That's a prayer we should pray often for each other as well as ourselves. But notice what our writer adds to this prayer request. He assures his readers that he is busy being about his Father's business. His conscience is clear as he lives a life that honors God in faith and obedience.

Hebrews 13:18 ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.

In other words, they can know that as they pray for him they are praying for God's will. You ever have someone ask you to pray for them knowing full well what they're asking for is not what God would desire? I had a young man call me once and ask me to pray

for him that God would open up a door for him to Pastor a Calvary Chapel in Fort Myers.

The odd thing was, he had already made up his mind to move to Fort Myers. He didn't want prayer, he wanted someone to endorse his desire. He had not even consulted his own Pastor on this. He was moving in the flesh, not the Spirit, and I shared some things to help him God-ward.

Could I pray for this man according to his request under those circumstances? No. But, could I pray for this man and intercede on his behalf that he would truly seek God and use the means God gave him in godly counsel found in his local church, Pastor and leadership, who would commission him to such a work? Of course!

It's important that we love each other enough to approach God's throne for each other in prayer to our Almighty God. It does make a difference. In this case our writer also wanted to get back with his readers. And so he asks for prayer for that.

HEB 13:19 "I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon."

He loved these people and wanted to personally minister to them. That's a Pastors heart. It's tough ministering long distance and yet even in such an adverse situation it gives these readers the opportunity to personally get involved with God's will in bringing this man back. It goes back to being totally dependent on God for all things and seeking His will as we seek His face.

HEB 13:20-21 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Our writer is doing two things here: he's stating the evidence regarding Christ's claim to be God and then asking that they seek Him to be equipped to do God's will.

He begins by stating who this God is. He is the God of peace. Often times we think that since God is Peace that somehow He is passive when it comes to sin and moving forward with His will. The peace we think of is often the kind of peace we were seeking back in the 60's and 70's.

And that translated out to be, 'just let us do our own thing. I won't bother you and you don't bother me. Flowers in your hair, flowers everywhere; peace brother.'

When God is called the God of peace He is shown to be a God who has provided a relational peace as opposed to being separated from Him because of His wrath and righteousness which must punish sin.

Outside of Christ no one is at peace with God, in fact they are at war with God; they are at enmity with the Lord. God desires peace with men, but it is a peace which is according to His justice. God does not operate outside of His holiness. And so true peace allows us to be justified and brought back into a peace relationship where the penalty of sin has been satisfied, which is what Jesus Christ came to do.

False peace pretends everything is okay and gives the illusion that we are in harmony with God. This is why religion is so successful. It gives a false sense of peace and security while allowing the individual to do whatever he pleases.

Paul talks about this in 2TI 3:2-5 "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power..."

How can those people just described have any form of godliness? Because it's a godliness measured according to the world's standards. This is why treacherous men like Stalin and Hitler were loved by so many of their citizens. It was a show. And many people today in Cults and dead Churches, where the Gospel is not preached and the Word of God is raped, can look holy and yet still be at war with God. They claim, peace, peace where there is no peace with the Lord.

This is the cry of the Ecumenical movement; this movement which desires to unite all faiths and religions is full of dead men's bones. They promote a false peace and unity which we should avoid.

Only the peace of God through Christ will last forever.

EPH 2:13-15 "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has

destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations..."

This same God of peace however, is a Warrior-God whose kingdom will go forth and He will accomplish His will. I love the way Paul puts it.

ROM 16:20 "The *God of peace* will soon *crush Satan* under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

This God of peace is the God who *crushed* Satan at the cross as Christ defeated him with a fatal blow from which Satan will never recover. His fate has been sealed and his judgment is sure. This was further accomplished through our Lord's resurrection.

HEB 13:20 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,..."

It is the blood of Christ shed for us that we have this peace with God.

ACT 20:28 "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

ROM 5:9-10 "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

The blood of Christ shed for us is a covenant which God entered into with man. We see the shadows of it in the O.T. and the sacrificial system. But the covenant we have today in Christ is a New covenant in His blood, not the blood of goats and bulls.

But notice that this covenant is an eternal covenant. This is to say, that before this world came into existence in the beginning, as we see in Gen.1:1, God had covenanted with Himself that He would send the Son to die for our sins. The eternal God-head of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit had this eternal covenant in place.

This is why Paul could say in Ephesians, which is the next book we'll studying on Sunday mornings, "For he chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Eph.1:4)

For Him to choose us before the foundation of the world, this eternal covenant had to be in place, and for it to be in place the Son of God, in whom we are chosen, must of necessity, be eternally existent with the Father and the Spirit, co-existing and in communion with each other. Each of them sharing in the God-head and yet still being only one God.

This God of peace has brought back from the dead our Great Shepherd of the sheep. This refers to the resurrection of Christ. The Father has raised Him up. There has been debate as to who actually caused Christ's resurrection. Some would suggest that Jesus raised Himself since He did say in JOH 10:17-18 "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Others would say that it was the Spirit of God who raised Jesus since it is the Spirit who imparts life. Still others would say that it was the Father who raised up the Son. GAL 1:1 "Paul, an apostle -sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead..."

There are probably more N.T. passages which would suggest that the Father was the agent through whom Christ was raised. But again, we finite creatures are trying to arrive at nice neat packages of truth when in fact the eternal God is not limited to such problems.

Like the creation of the world we clearly see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit being actively involved in creation. And so, we must conclude that the same God who created the world is the same God who raised Christ from the dead.

Was it the Father? Yes. Was it the Son? Yes. Was it the Holy Spirit? Yes. God is one and yet revealed in three persons. In the final analysis, the most important point is that He is risen from the dead for our sins.

But what makes the Father's involvement so important in the resurrection is that by raising Jesus from the dead He accepted Christ's sacrifice as a pleasing sacrifice on our behalf. We need never wonder if the Father is satisfied with us just trusting in His Son's righteousness. It has been fully accepted. We are truly saved in Christ Jesus.

What our writer is doing here is showing us, once more, Jesus Christ in the light of Scripture. He's shown Christ as creator in Heb.1:2. He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature as seen in Heb.1:3.

He is shown to be a faithful Son over His house whose house we are as seen in Heb.3:6. Jesus is shown to be our High Priest in Heb. 5:5, and the Mount Zion we are able to approach in Heb.12:22. And now, after showing the excellency of Christ in awesome holiness and greatness our writer addresses Jesus as a Shepherd.

The idea here is that this awesome, Almighty God, who is our Lord Jesus, is also the very one who loves us and nurtures us and cares for us in every way. He is our Shepherd. He guides and is concerned for our safety and well-being. And if anyone can accomplish this loving care it is the Almighty Son of God who rose from the dead for our sins.

He tells us Himself in JOH 10:11-15 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep."

This is what our writer of Hebrews wants us to see. Jesus will not abandon us because He has purchased us, unlike the hired hand who only looks after his own interests. Peter also describes our relationship with this Great Shepherd.

1PE 2:25 "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

He is our Shepherd as well as our Overseer. This word for overseer is an interesting word in the Greek. It's *episkopos* and it's the word we sometimes use for Bishop. But it carries with it the idea of one who is a Guardian. In fact the NAS uses the word Guardian.

Jesus Christ is personally guarding that which He has entrusted to the Father. He is guarding you and me and watching over every

detail of our lives and encouraging us to follow Him. He is our example of how we too may glorify the Father with our lives.

It is this Great Shepherd and Savior who wants and can equip us for His work.

HEB 13:21 [to] "equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Notice he says that our Lord wants to equip us for doing His will, not our own. Isn't that what Jesus said. 'I came to do the Father's will, not My own.'? And yet, how we often think that we've been saved to do our own thing. We often don't consult with our God and pray to Him as those children who are dependent on Him because we live in a society that promotes independence to the exclusion of God.

We sometimes use God just when we need Him, not realizing we couldn't take the next breath if He didn't permit it. He wants total allegiance and total reliance. And in that process of seeking Him we will find that He is in fact equipping us and strengthening us.

But again, we must see that He is equipping us for His army not ours. When we take the attitude that, "I'm the General in this army", we are not very likely to take orders from anyone. And yet it is God who is the Sovereign Lord over His Kingdom of which He has graciously allowed us to be a part.

And as He equips us He is doing it with the purpose of producing fruit in our lives that is pleasing to Him. That's what verse 21 is saying; "and may he work in us what is pleasing to him,.."

Unfortunately, we don't always allow Him to work because we either think He's working too slow or not working in a way that we like. And yet we're promised that "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Everything He does in our lives He will use to His glory.

PHI 2:12-16 "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence -continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. 14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and

pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold on to the word of life..."

But none of this can be accomplished if we will not submit to our God. Just as our writer said in HEB 13:15 *Through Jesus*, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise..., we see here in verse 21 that all that the Father will do in our lives will be *through Jesus Christ*.

There are no short-cuts. We must do all things through Him, in His power, as we rely on Him, seeking His face in prayer, submitting to the power of the Spirit who indwells us and obeying as He leads, not just paying lip-service to Him.

As we do this Jesus Christ receives all glory forever and ever. This is our desire. To honor our Lord with a sacrifice of praise with our entire lives that lifts up high our Savior.

Peter sums it up this way.

1PE 5:10-11 "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Our writer now closes this letter.

HEB 13:22-25 "Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter. 23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. 24 Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. 25 Grace be with you all."

That's the way we want to approach all of life, in the grace of God. We never want to forget that it is by grace through faith in Christ that we are saved and it is by grace through faith that we live each day, relying on the God who gives grace.

Grace is undeserved, but it is given by God to poor hungry sinners like ourselves. May we live in the grace of God and may we extend grace to others in this world as we love them with the truth of God's Word and His great gospel of Salvation in Christ.

It's been an interesting venture through the book of Hebrews. I hope we've gleaned some things in this letter and take it to heart as we desire to offer a sacrifice of praise to God with our lips and our

lives, and that we would never forget how much our Lord and Savior loves us and desires to conform us into His image through the grace which He richly supplies.

May we say with David in PSA 63:1-7 "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. 3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. 4 I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. 5 My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. 6 On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. 7 Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings."