

# Hebrews 13:18-25

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like to begin my message this morning as we close the book of Hebrews in two ways. First, by asking a simple and applicable question.

What do you really need for Christmas? You're certainly going to get something or a measure of many things, but what do you really need for Christmas?

Put that aside and let me introduce the message in a more elevated way. One of my favorite volumes on the library shelf of my own home is the facsimile reproduction of William Tyndale's 1526 first edition translation of the New Testament.

Tyndale had fled to Germany to complete the work in English. It had never been done. And the initial run of a few thousand copies had been printed in worms.

Only two complete copies of that first edition run remain, with a portion of a third recently being found.

[ 1 : 19 ] My facsimile comes from the volume housed in the British Museum. The plates are magnificent.

The type, bold. The text, black. And the folio that graces the opening chapter of Hebrews is especially brilliant for a number of reasons.

It reads, quote, The epistle of Paul unto the Hebrews. It even contains a colorful work of the great apostle replete with a sword nearly as long as his torso at his side.

Let me put my attraction to the Hebrews page of Tyndale's work this way. In the quiet, cobalt, blue morning hours of the Reformation, it is St. Paul, according to Tyndale anyway, who authored the letter we've been studying together this year.

In a few short years, though, the sentiment toward Hebrews being authored by Paul would change forever, never to be recovered, really.

[ 2 : 44 ] John Calvin himself would soon write, Quote, Now, if this Timothy, and he's referring to the Timothy you can put your eyes on there in 1323. Now, if this Timothy was the renowned companion of Paul, which I am inclined to think, says Calvin, it is very probable that either Luke or Clement was the author of this epistle.

Now, I've mentioned this before, and it bears saying it again as we close the book. The author of this letter seems forever closed off to us, even though we've been living with him all the year long. His identity is forever opaque, veiled from our view, even if in these final verses especially, we see all the markings, the intonation, the tone, and even the text of what we have come to expect of Paul.

Greetings are given, travel plans are mentioned, the esteemed Timothy is named, let me put it this way, if not penned by Paul, the letter certainly bears the echo of his voice, and we can easily see why Tyndale attributed the book to him.

Now, let me bring my opening question to that exalted, extended word on the authorship. What do you really need for Christmas? And what about the fact that we don't know the author of the letter?

[ 4 : 24 ] While the authorship of Hebrews is ever a puzzle, in verses 20 and 21, one thing is not. There is something here at the close of the letter beyond doubt, let me put it this way, you don't have the author's name, but the goal of his writing, here in the postscript, more than anywhere else in the letter, has been made expressly plain.

The prayer, given to us, discloses the author's aim in writing for us. In other words, here you find what he thinks you really need.

Let me read it. Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 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. The postscript contains an aim. And I don't believe it's simply general in the sense that it could be applied to any letter.

It's particular in that it belongs to this letter. This is what he thinks we need. Now may the God of peace, and you could almost go straight to it, may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do his will.

[6:02] Imagine getting that under the tree in one week's time. The controlling verb in the benedictory prayer is this word equip.

That's what we need. The tense of the verb is in a very rare form. It's actually expressing the internal heart's desire of the writer.

It's as if he's saying, Oh, that you would be equipped with everything good to do his will. It's as if he is saying, Let me explain my heart to you.

This is what I think you really need. This is why I have been writing. This is the aim, although I've never identified myself to you. That you would be equipped.

It's the aim of the anonymous writer. While the identity is unknown, his intention has been stated.

[7:07] We may never know, we will never know, until we arrive at heaven who penned Hebrews. But here, we are told why Hebrews was penned.

It will be worth our time this morning to linger on this word. I want to sit down on this word, equip. Not only what it means, but how the writer has chosen to speak about it.

For if you can get a hold of this come Christmas, you will be better prepared to walk out displaying the gifts and the glory of God. Or, as the text says, to live in a way that's pleasing in His sight.

So what is it meant by the word equip? It's used 12 times in the New Testament. The semantic range, the ways in which the word is used with elasticity is wonderful.

Listen to this. Matthew 4, 21, the same word is used when referring to James and John and their father who were, quote, mending their nets.

[8:14] to equip you is connected along the lines of its meaning to mending of nets. We'll come to that in a moment.

Two times elsewhere, both in 2 Corinthians 13 and in Galatians 6, it's translated restoration or to restore. There's one use of the word in the New Testament where the construction of the verb is absolutely identical to the way you find it here.

1 Thessalonians 3, 10, where Paul is expressing his heart's desire that God will, quote, supply all that is lacking in your faith.

Now, just notice what you begin gaining from looking at the uses of the word. They all indicate there's some need among the people to whom they are being addressed.

There is a need that needs to be met. The nets of fishermen need mending. Why? Because they've been frayed by cutting waters, by repeated throwing, by resistant pulling.

[9:30] Over time, rope gives way. It needed to be restored. That's another phrase here.

I mean, think of that wonderful word restoration. Churches need restoration. Christians need restoration. You will sit next Sunday under the lights of a tree looking for restoration.

I think of it in terms of HGTV. A rehab is needed.

The church in some sense has succumbed to the wear and tear of life, to hard living, to the drift of unholy ways.

In the Thessalonians reference, the faith of the church was simply incomplete. people are not yet fully complete.

[10:36] None of us is what we want to be, let alone what we should be. Something needs to be supplied to make up that which is lacking.

Finally, in filling out this picture of what equip might mean here, we should note that it's used twice in Hebrews itself. Once in chapter 10 where he uses it, translating it this way, that there was a body prepared for Christ, that God prepared a body for him.

Or in 11 verse 3 where the universe itself was in a sense said to be created by God, that it was like put together by God.

It was equipped, it was fitted, it was filled out. In other words, from the letter itself, the word captures the idea of God fitting you for something, of pulling our constituent elements together for something.

Are you beginning to get a sense of the heartbeat of the author for Hebrews according to the proscript? He is writing because he's aware that people need mending. He put down what he did

because you, he felt, resembled a home in need of restoring.

[12:00] If you were a piece of furniture at the outset of the letter, he already knew you were thread bare. If you were a chair, you were in need of wood glue, both for neglect and misuse.

If we were an army reading, we were an audience that lacked supplies, we couldn't get where we needed to go without this letter. letter. If you were a body, you were in need of preparation.

If you were a universe, you were in need of being yet constituted, pulled together, put in place. As he closes the letter, he simply says, may the God of peace equip you.

And I would take the full range of the semantic meaning to probably lay out what he means. peace. Let's talk about our state in life, your state in life, and mine, our congregation, and our church as we prepare to close the year.

The faith that many had at the beginning is showing signs of wear and tear. If yours isn't, praise God from whom all blessings flow.

[13:15] Get to be 55 like your old pastor standing here, or dare I say even a couple out there that might be older, and you will know that Christianity, life itself, goes through many seasons, many seasons, many struggles, many hardships, many unfulfilled dreams and aspirations, many difficulties, many ruptures.

The faith we have at the beginning shows signs of wear and tear, worn, torn, thread bare, cupboard nearly empty, glass not half full.

How about a quarter? How about one who needs mending, those who need restoring, those who need supply? The question is, where is this going to come from?

How are you going to get it this winter? If what you need at Christmas is that the God of peace, who comes to us in Jesus, that the peace of Christ would rest upon you in ways that restore and mend and supply and strengthen and confirm and fit you with all things good that you might walk on and do his will?

Where is it going to come from? That is where this little benediction at the end of the letter packs, I think, its greatest punch. Look again at verses 20 and 21. They don't only reveal the author's aim in writing to us, point one if you're taking notes.

[14:52] They also begin now to put down how that aim is accomplished in us. How are you going to get what you want got come Christmas?

This is your reach gift to be equipped. You know what a reach gift is, don't you? One of my five kids, when they were younger, we asked them to put down a list.

What do you want for Christmas? So we knew what their list was. One of them put down a gift they never thought they would get. We ended up buying it for them. Unbeknownst to us, when the individual opened it up, he said, I can't believe you got this.

This was my reach gift. This was the one I laid out thinking I might get it, but dared not hope to get it. To be equipped by the God of peace.

With every good thing to do His will come the coming year, that's your reach gift. How are you going to do it? How does it end up under your tree? The postscript explains not only that that is His aim in writing to us, but shows how that aim is accomplished in us.

[16:02] Take another look. He doesn't merely say, may the God of peace, and then skip to the word equip you. No. He lays down between those words an emphasis on God's relationship to His own Son, Jesus.

Look at how this expands out. Now may the God of peace, and now you're going to see how, the God of peace, A, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.

There's the threefold description of how may that God 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. I don't know if you picked up on it, but there are two direct and one indirect reference to the relationship that God has to Jesus. First, he begins to explain what God had done for him in the past.

May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, may that God, the God who has the power to raise His Son from the dead, may that God equip you, may that God mend you, may the power of life itself then be given to you, and you know that because of what He has done in the past.

[ 17 : 28 ] But then he refers not only to Jesus in the sense of what God did for Jesus in the past, he refers to what God is doing through Jesus in the present. May that God work in us, verse 21, that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus.

Jesus is the one who mends, who restores, who makes right, who supplies, who equips, who gives you good things that you might please His will. The past, God in His relationship to His Son, the present is the way in which He accomplishes it.

But notice the reference even to the future. To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. That God is going to do something for Jesus in the future.

He is actually so concerned when God wakes up in the morning, although He never wakes up, but if He were to wake up in the morning, His mind is on His Son. It has always been on His Son.

He is accomplishing wonderful things through His Son. He creates, He confirms, He redeems. In fact, He says, He brought Him again from the dead to save you from your sins.

[ 18 : 38 ] He gives you His Spirit now that you might accomplish His work in the present. And I'm still thinking about my Son, because at the end of eternity, God the Father says, I am elevating my Son.

I mean, this is the message of the book. In times past, God spoke to us in many diverse ways, but in these last days, He spoke to us through His Son. And what I'm telling you is the Son of God has always been on the mind of the Father.

He has accomplished great things through Him. He is accomplishing things through Him. He has great plans for Him. To Him will be glory forever and ever through this God who raised Jesus from the dead.

In the past, verse 20, through this God who works in us through Jesus in the present, verse 21a, through this God who is bent on bringing glory to Jesus forever in the future, 21b, through that God, the God of peace, may that God equip you.

Now, finally, you have reason for hope come the end of the year. For your ability to mend yourself, to restore yourself, to supply the things that you need for yourself, is not within yourself.

[ 19 : 57 ] I stood at a concert, no, I sat at a concert the other evening. The whole concert was given to the theme of hope and peace. One of the individuals got up and grabbed hold of the mic and talked about how this is a wonderful time of year to reflect because you have everything within you to do what you need to be done.

And I sat there thinking of my own text. You don't have it in you. You can't mend your net. You certainly know how to break it. You can't restore your life.

You certainly have known how to trash it. You can't supply your needs. Only God can accomplish it. If His aim in writing to us is to equip us with all that is good that we would do His will, then how He accomplishes that aim is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your tendency at the end of the year will be to drift from Jesus. Your tendency and mine is to place all our efforts for mending in our own selves.

We will self-medicate our way to wholeness. Not going to work. In our need for restoration, we can too early turn to self-correction.

[ 21 : 21 ] We'll correct ourselves along the way. Some might turn to religion. If I can only start doing the right things religiously, I'll get it all squared away.

In our need for a faith that is lacking, we can leave off with the Word. We fill it with other pursuits. Not so in these closing verses. The prayer of the writer highlights not only the love of God that he has for his son, but get this, that he loves his son.

in ways that enable his love for you to move forward and make progress. May the God of peace then equip you this Christmas season.

Call out to him. Pray to him. Plead with him. As men sat around on a beach in mended nets, ask him to put together things that have frayed.

As you look around your own place, or worse yet, come on Sunday and wonder if you sit down in a chair or whether it's going to fall down with you. If that's the state of your own soul, always need it to be tested to see if it's got strength to even hold you up, the Lord can do this.

[ 22 : 46 ] This is his specialty. He came come Christmas to complete all that we lack. His aim is given to us.

How that aim is to be accomplished in us. And then finally, a final appeal is put before us. Verses 22 to 25, I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

Bear with this word. The book of Hebrews, while we finish it today, should be read by many of us in one sitting, even before the sun goes down on this day.

The book of Hebrews is not long, it's short. It takes about 40 minutes to read out loud. I can't imagine it would take more than 20 to read silently on your own. You're to bear with this word of exhortation.

You're to give yourself to it. The author is convinced that if you understand his argument, you will know how to apply it to your life.

[ 24 : 01 ] You will be equipped to make a fresh start come January 1st. in Jesus you have a better way forward than the way you've been walking.

In Jesus you have a better priest than any religious act you might do. In Jesus you have a better covenant. It's built on a better promise. In Jesus you have a better advocate.

And in this letter you have better examples to emulate all these people of faith. They made it through. They call you to the same. I encourage you as we close out the year to read the letter through again.

To take his appeal seriously. To bear with that word of exhortation. And to ask God to supply them all that you need.

Well, our time in Hebrews is now drawn to an end. It's a bit sad for me as a preacher to finish a book.

[ 25 : 02 ] Perhaps for some of you you are like, thank God that was the longest series I've endured at this church. But our time is drawn to an end.

But I want you to know that the author's aim right here at the close has been made clear. And his appeal has been given. It ended with a benediction.

This is a benediction. Now the practice of giving a benediction has a long history in ancient Israel. A benedictory prayer was given to Aaron and his sons who were to serve as priests that when the people of God gathered and stood, he would, in a sense, stand above them and place upon them the name of God.

That was the fundamental call of a benediction. To place upon the people the name of God. Now in just a few minutes I'm going to do that.

I'm going to place the name of God, this God of peace, this three fold reference to his son upon you. As my earnest heart's prayer for you, that he will equip you with everything good needed to do his will so that you and we might see what life looks like if it is to please God.

[ 26 : 44 ] The writer here has done that. He's laid down his pen by placing the name of God upon his readers. And conclusively, that name that has been put down is Jesus.

After we sing, I will place this word upon you once more, not in some mystical way or magical way, not in some priestly way, but just by way of declaration, that you might know my heart for you and the heart of this author for us, our earnest desire, that we would do the will of God in the coming year, and that areas of life where you now know that are ruptured in need of mending, that you'll actually see it be reconstructed.

Areas where you know you are lacking, you'll actually see God supplying. may God be gracious and merciful to you as we enter into a season where we celebrate his birth.

Let us pray. Our heavenly father, we close the book of Hebrews. We close it as we look to the celebration of the birth of your son.

Thank you for giving us a book that is so wonderfully, beautifully, and magisterially presented all that you have done for us in your son.

[ 28 : 26 ] And now as we see him come in the form of an infant king, we take great joy in knowing that in him we have a priest like no other and a ruler that will run unto eternity.

That in him we have one who is worth following. In him we have one who is capable of mending, restoring, supplying, equipping.

We give ourselves then in worship to him. And through him and his name we come to you. Amen.