

Benediction for the Summer

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Date: 26 June 2011

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[0 : 00] We're going to be looking at a prayer today, so I will begin with this prayer as our prayer. So let's pray together.

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, 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.

What a prayer. Just we'll dispense with an introduction this morning. We'll go directly to what we're going to look at today.

About half an hour to Hebrews chapter 13, verse 20 and 21, which I just read for us as our opening prayer. It is a benediction.

I did look up a dictionary definition of benediction. It's pretty straightforward, isn't it? Benediction, I guess you can call it good words. Good words of blessing.

[1 : 19] Bene, good diction, good words. Bene, good diction, good words of blessing, with which this great treatise, the letter to the Hebrew concludes. A good way to say, if you will, goodbye for the summer to one another.

As speaking good words of blessing to one another from Holy Scripture. Now may the God of peace, it says.

Now may the God of peace. Apply here now. 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, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you, that which is well-pleasing. I must have that in my memory from other translations. That which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Holy Scripture, this benediction. We may see Scripture, just in very broad general terms, I'm sure we may see Scripture as a sacrament.

[2 : 32] A divine gift is Holy Scripture, which takes a form accessible for us, so that we can understand God's word.

Here is my word, says God. The Almighty Eternal One says, Here, in this I am accessible, as he is in water, bread and wine.

It's accessible for us. We receive it, Holy Scripture, and, and here's the sense in which you can think of it as a sacrament, it gives us a participation in divine meaning.

It isn't just out there, the meaning. We participate in it. We almost become it, if you will. It is mystery, Scripture, and as we know and believe it, it always promises more and more meaning.

You never exhaust the meaning of Scripture. You don't just say, Here's a Bible, read it once, done. Never. Not just because it's a complicated book, but because there's an eternity of meaning in it.

[3 : 40] It's inexhaustible. It's about one who, as this great prayer says, is forever and ever. You can only praise God forever and ever.

If you tried to praise something less than God forever and ever, you'd run out of things to praise. But in with God, you never run out of words of praise, because he's infinite.

He's eternal. You never exhaust the meaning of God. He's inexhaustible. He's infinite. Amazing thought. Amazing thought.

You can't think big thoughts about God enough. God is the God of peace. Now made the God of peace. The world comes from peace and is going to be perfected in peace.

Only the biblical worldview teaches this. All other worldviews, you see the world beginning in some sort of chaos, and out of it somehow came order.

[4 : 41] But our God is a God of infinite peace. He's first, forever first. And on anything other than peace, he confers order.

God is a God of peace, and he will bring the world to perfect peace. What a thought this is. Peace has been disrupted by sin, and this benediction makes this clear.

Sin has disrupted the world's peace, but God is overcoming this sin and this death.

He is overcoming it. He is a God of peace who will bring the world back to peace. How? How will he do it, this God of peace?

Well, the benediction, these good words tell us, don't they? This God of peace has raised Jesus from the dead. Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.

[5 : 49] The God of peace has raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is, if you will, the sign in the world that God is at peace with the world now.

And in precise theological terms, you have to say he is eschatologically at peace. You like that big word? I do. I like that word. God's perfect future for the world is now guaranteed, and God says, there's the sign of what I'm going to do.

I have raised up Jesus out of death. So a man has been brought into this perfect future already.

God says, there's what I'm doing with the world.

I'm raising up my son out of death. Isn't that just a happy gospel thought, isn't it, for the summer?

Jesus is the sign in the world that God is at peace with the world.

God has raised Jesus from the dead. He could have left the world in chaos. He had every right to do that.

[6 : 58] He could have allowed the waters of judgment, as he did early on in the Bible, just to wipe out the world. God had every right to do that.

He almost wiped out the entire world in judgment. But he kept eight saved. Eight, the number of the resurrection day in Scripture, number eight.

God has raised Jesus from the dead. How or why is God at peace with the world? We have this sign that God's at peace with the world, Jesus. How did God do this?

The answer is tightly stated in the benediction, in this benediction. The one raised from the dead, the one who has been appointed to be the great shepherd of the sheep, is also, we're told in this benediction, he was a sheep of the shepherd who died for the sheep.

He was the dying shepherd, giving his life for the sheep. His death, his blood, has established an eternal covenant of peace.

[8 : 14] It wasn't just that God arbitrarily said, by the, ah, peace, I'm at peace with the world. No, he had to do an act to establish peace.

He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, our benediction for the summer, says, the great shepherd of the sheep he is, and it was all done by, again, the blood of the eternal covenant.

This is a very theological benediction, isn't it? How, again, is God at peace with the world? He gave his son to give his life for his sheep.

Again, his death, his blood, is an eternal covenant. It establishes an eternal covenant of peace. I know I'm stating obvious gospel truth this morning, and I want to do that.

The God of peace, theological here for a moment about our theological benediction. The God has, the God of peace has done a work which satisfies justice, and has set aside his just wrath on the world.

[9 : 27] Rather than be in a state of wrath with the world, God has established the legitimacy of him being at peace with the world. Atonement, a great theologian said, atonement is the price God pays for his forgiveness.

There's a weighty sentence that bears a lot of thought. Atonement is the price which God pays for his forgiveness.

have you ever had to forgive somebody something, an obvious wrong? To do that, you have to pay a price. You have to absorb the other person's wrong somehow.

You have to deal with the other person's wrong somehow for the benefit of the other person. God had to pay a price so that he could forgive you.

And the price was the death of his son, the great shepherd of the sheep, who shed his blood to establish an eternal covenant that can never be broken.

[10 : 49] Just think of it. Other great world religions know nothing of this. they don't. They just say, God can arbitrarily forgive.

Our faith reveals that is not true. God had to pay an incredible price for his forgiveness of you and I. The death of his son. Creating the blood, if you will, of the eternal covenant. Atonement, is it not? God is profound and challenges our understanding. It's meant to, isn't it? And it is helped by the order here, I think.

The blood of this eternal covenant was shed again by the shepherd of the sheep. What a shepherd. How much this shepherd loves his sheep. We should understand the event or the action of God in atoning for our sin.

[11 : 52] in atoning for our sins by means of the understanding of who this great shepherd is. This is not expounded much in this benediction, but it's pointed at.

It's Jesus, the one who said, I am the shepherd. He is the one who did the atonement. The gospels therefore describe the person of Jesus and then the gospels tell us about his work.

That is not an accident. Nothing in scripture, I'm preaching to the choir when I say this, nothing in holy scripture is an accident. There's a reason why Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell us about who Jesus is, what his character was like, the kinds of things he did and said.

Then they say, here's what he did. So we can understand in a great measure, in some measure, what he did by the person that he was. It was the great shepherd who loves his sheep, who gave his life to the sheep.

Wonderful stuff. Even the very, again, the structure of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is profound. The good shepherd, says this benediction, lays down his life for the sheep.

[13 : 11] We cannot know the Jesus of the Gospels too much. There's a good reason to come to Learner's Exchange. You'll learn a bit more about Jesus, and that's good.

I hope you spend the rest of your life, starting with, say, this summer, learning a bit more about Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. Everything in our faith, is this not true?

Here's another good reason to come to Learner's Exchange. Everything turns on the mystery of his person. The deep, profound, unthinkable mystery of who Jesus is.

To think about that is healing and beautiful. He is God, and he is man. He's the second Adam. He's the second person of the Trinity.

Through him the worlds were created. Through and in him the worlds were brought back to his father. His person is with endless thought.

[14 : 15] No other person is worth endless thought. Not even some of you, as charming and witty and bright as you are. Sooner or later we exhaust the meaning of you, but we'll never exhaust the meaning of Jesus.

He's worth an eternal, eternal glory forever and ever. and then it's amazing to think what this benediction now says.

And I hope we'll see all the specific concentrated application for us folks this particular June in 2011 as we face an unknown future.

this God of peace, this God of peace, who is bringing his errant creation back to them, through this shepherd, who has atoned for our sin, was paid this incredible price so that we might be forgiven.

This God says that he will equip you with everything good that you may do his will. And he says more but there is something to stop and ponder just for a moment.

[15 : 38] This God of peace, praise this Bible writer, equip you, he will equip you with everything good that you may do his will.

Think about it. This applies, of course, to the church, firstly, and to the individual Christian. God has that for you.

The Bible never really makes much of a distinction between the two. You're the church. You're not just an individual believer, but God recognizes us as individuals, but we are the church. He will equip us with everything to do his will.

Everything that you need for Christian life, God has that for you. I don't know what more to say about that.

Does that comfort you today? In our particular situation, now we need to hear that. God promises in his word that he will equip us with everything good that we may do his will.

[16 : 47] He promises that. Space, time, money, people, gifts, whatever you can add to that list, it would be much more than I can think of.

God will give us that. He will equip us with everything good that we may do his will. Then he says, working in you, this writer of this great benediction, working in you, working in us, that which is

pleasing in his sight.

For the first time ever, I really just was stopped and wanted to ponder and was blessed by this thought. Just think of it.

Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight. Our creator is a worker. Have you ever thought about it?

Just stop and thought about it. God is a worker. That is staggering.

[17 : 55] Stop and ponder that. Aristotle's God would not have worked a day in his life. It would have been beneath him. Most gods are above working.

Not our God. He works. Our God is a worker. A worker God. God likes to work in the world and do things.

Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight. God is a worker. And at that comfort, surely.

That heaven will work in us creates expectation. God is working in us at St. John. Right now. In our little dispute.

And in God's eyes, surely it is a little dispute. At Learner's Exchange this year, we've been learning about the cosmos. Infinities of space.

[19 : 00] Do you know what a light year is? You do know, but I like to remind myself of it. Dr.

Barlow and as Dr. Erdman spoke to us about some of these big numbers. First, you get into a spaceship that travels at 100,000 miles a second.

Boom. Off you go. Every time a second goes by, you go 100,000 miles. And the scientists will forgive me for the lack of utter clarity about the details, but I'm close enough.

But at that speed, it takes millions and millions and millions and millions of years to get to places in galaxies. Our own and others.

God created that. And it's just a little thing in his hand, the prophet. Just a little thing. So I think he can handle where we're supposed to worship, where we'll meet, when, what time, what pew are you going to sit in, which I think that's better for me than you.

I want organ. I want piano. I want this. I want that. That's my parking spot, not yours. We'll work it out. God is at work enough.

[20 : 09] God is at work enough. To think of it is amazing. This expectation that God's at work enough will, I think, help us to put aside our worry and our troubles just now about the church that we love.

Applies very much to where we are now. I hope, I hope that again, that this is a good picture for us. That this benediction says that God's at work in us to bring about his will. And that means that we are, in a sense, to become sacraments.

As Holy Scripture is a sacrament, we are to become sacraments of God's presence in the world.

The only way that other people may find God accessible on some occasion is through you.

I didn't know about things. I was confused about things. I needed to understand things. My life was desperate. And then God made himself accessible to me when I met you.

[21 : 25] And you said something that began to point me to Jesus. You were like a sacrament. God made you available to me.

We can be sacraments of God in the world. Most of all, as God equips us to do his work, we become a witness, finally, to God's peace.

Now may the God of peace. This author could have said God of encouragement, God of hope, God of steadfastness, God of patience. Often God has called these things, God of justice, God of wrath, God of many things.

But here, finally, God of peace. That we finally witness to God's holy peace. I hope you have a peaceful summer and that you bring peace to other people.

I met a saint the other day. A real elderly gentleman. I won't mention his name. Some of you would know him. He's a lovely saint. I used to go to St. John's.

[22 : 32] He used to go to another neighborhood. One of us. One of us. He said every time he meets someone, he just quietly says to the Lord, peace for this person.

Peace. I think he's brought peace to many people. He just brings peace. He has a spirit of peace about it. He's not a wrangler. He brings peace. God's a God of peace.

And finally, finally, we bring peace because we are going to spend forever in peace.

In understanding Jesus Christ as this benediction witnesses to him for us. And what he's doing in us, equipping us for everything that God wants us to do in the world.

We're being equipped by understanding more and more about Jesus Christ. Again, God and man. And we are going to give him glory forever and ever.

[23 : 33] That's what this benediction says. Working in us, that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom we glory forever and ever.

This is what the God of peace wants to teach us to work in us. To equip us for. There it is. So, as we pray this prayer, we pray that it will be enacted in us.

That we'll become sacraments of God's presence of peace in the world. At Learners Exchange, we sometimes visit people like Gregory of Nisa, who lived in the 4th century.

We meet, quite frequently, famous evangelicals of the 18th, 19th century. Great chaps, chapettes. Sometimes we travel to Ethiopia.

Places like Ethiopia and we commune with Coptics. Sometimes we grow bored with Earth and so we go to take a quick trip through the cosmos and discern its origins.

[24 : 43] People like Dr. Barlow can do things for us. So we visit the mystery of our beginnings with brilliant, newly minted PhDs. We're amazed at what they know.

We sometimes hear the gospel from Bach. We did this with great help from our learned music friend. Or we look at the gospel with famous French painters.

Renner did that for us this year. And when computers cooperate, we visit famous Italian chapels. We argue with atheists.

I wouldn't want to be an atheist arguing with Dr. Hill, would you? They're in for it. Sometimes we pray with Luther. We don't curse with Luther, but we pray with him.

And we review 17th century thinkers and we meditate on chaps like Milton. Again, more newly minted, brilliant PhDs.

[25 : 43] And even on occasion this year, we worried about the psychological and mental balance of some of our famous forebearers in the paper. It is quite a ride. Seeing the whole Bible with Keith Ganser and looking at two gyms with someone equally learned like Ola Slaynickle.

How would you summarize all of that that we've been doing this year and more? Well, we could say that God, we see in all of this, that God is at work. God is a worker.

What he does. What he teaches. Where he works. It's amazing what he does. So, as we draw towards 9.30 and this is our last session in this place for this year, and maybe for a long time, there is some ambiguity in the air because of our situation, obviously.

We can't hide that from ourselves this morning. So, for me, and I'll be selfish today and just bring my own particular word that I have found comforting in the last month or so as things have unfolded for us.

And it's always appropriate in a Christian life, I think, this word. And since we talk much here in Learners Exchange about famous ones, I'd like to give the last word to a famous Christian poet, George Herbert.

[27 : 02] One of his poems ends with a profound and always gospel true word. There's a poem of Herbert's that ends with the words, I will lament and I will love.

I think that's profound. That's the Christian life in a nutshell in this world. I will lament and I will love. We lament because God's work is not yet complete enough.

But we love because it will be someday. And why do we lament and love? Because, again, we look forward to the day when we can give glory forever and ever to Jesus.

And we start to do that at a place like Learners Exchange. We learn more about what this worker God has been doing across the centuries. And what he's undoubtedly going to continue to do in this troubled world until Jesus comes and straightens it finally out once and for all.

He's going to do that. So that's what I wanted to share with you today. I hope you can take this benediction and probably most of you have it memorized, I know. You've read all the commentaries and you know where I've been bumped up against air, as I usually do.

[28 : 27] There's a great word of scripture to take with you through the summer. I hope that's a good set of words for your summer. So there's a half hour look at the benediction that ends Hebrews and Antrim is exchanged for the season.

Let me say a quick word of prayer. Maybe we can have two minutes of quick feedback before we have to leave this place. Lord, thank you for your word.

It's always so rich. May it abide in us livingly and may it bring about in us that for which you have sent it. And may it all bring glory forever and ever to your endlessly glorious name.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Please.
Please.

[29 : 48] Thank you. Thank you. Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I recently read the words that in his home, God is punishing himself and sharing us.

Does that seem like that? Thank you. Thank you. Sure does. To me, the judge judged. Bart puts it. I'm the judge.

I'll judge myself rather than you. I'll take reason. Harry used to say, didn't you? Dear Harry, we lost this year. One of our exchange people. He had other jobs at St. John's in the past years.

He used to say, God's not responsible for the evil in the world. He just made himself responsible. That's a profound word.

When you forgive someone, you have to, in a sense, make yourself responsible for what they've done, and in some nature, sometimes the consequences. And then the other person breathes freely with you again.

[30 : 58] Someone has paid a price. Our God has paid an infinite price for us. For his forgiving stance towards us. Do you like Pascal off the hill?

I'm sure you do. He has Jesus. He puts words in the word. He says, Jesus says to us, come to me. I've been more foul than you.

I became your sin. And there's the price that God gave. It's interesting that this great atonement and this great benediction, this theologically minded Bible author will not let you get off easily.

He'll put a theological piece of gravity, weightiness, right there. Don't forget this as you pray. The blood of the eternal covenant.

He came, fulfilled the meaning of the temple. God's a worker.

[32 : 12] Just still amazes me. To do things. Build things. He's an engineer, I guess. God would always be called. He would be an engineer.

He'd be very good at building things. So there's learnings that change for another season. It's all comes and goes so quickly, though, to you. We have an amazing room full of people.

Learners. And I think it's your perfect exit for the moment. Thank you so much. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.