

Exhortation, Blessing and Prayer
Hebrews 13:14-25

March 22, 2015

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^E Psalm 77:20, 80:1; John 10:17-18; Philippians 2:13; Romans 5:5

^F Matthew 26:41

A. Final Notices

1. The Conclusion

- a. usually these come at the end of the sermon
- b. but that is where we have arrived today
- c. recently Maureen was able to telephone Jenn and Andrew in Malawi
 - (A) the special rates available today make a long call possible
 - (B) even so, the time came to close and there were quickly injected a number of messages that needed to be sent along
 - (C) years ago, the situation on telephones was even more acute, as finances limited overseas long distance calls to 3 minutes, so that as the egg-timer sand ran down, a lot of last second news was given on various – and sometimes unrelated – subjects
- d. today we come the then of this written sermon, which the readers would have read in less than an hour, and the writer injects some brief, final reminders and messages for his readers

2. Our City (14) – “For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.”

- a. this is one of the concluding points that needs to be made
- b. God’s salvation in Jesus has forever changed this world
- c. for the Christian, this means that the transience of earthly life is no longer a matter of sorrow, but a reminder of our eternal home
- d. we can view this world objectively and realistically: its hardships and difficulties, its gains and glories, are all but passing events
- e. our objectives, our decisions, our values should rather be based on the eternal realities – in effect these words give the same message as the famous cricketer & missionary, C. T. Studd’s poem, which concludes,
 - ‘Only one life ’twill soon be past
 - Only what’s done for Christ will last.’
- f. though the city is yet to come, even how we have in it ...

3. Our Citizenship – “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ;” (Philippians 3:20)

- a. originally, those who belonged to a city were called its citizens

- b. only later was 'citizen' by extension applied to countries
- c. but, city or country, it is heaven that is our home; and like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the earth is merely the place of our pilgrimage
- d. yet as citizens of heaven, we each live on this earth as ambassadors – ambassadors of the heavenly kingdom, and of its King, Jesus Christ
- e. so, it is to us as Christ's representatives on earth – Christians – that the closing words of this book addresses ...

B. The Exhortation

1. Acceptable Sacrifice

- a. Words (15) – "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."
 - (A) the pagans may have maliciously slandered Christians, that since they had no shrines, no altars, no priests, no sacrifices – that they therefore were godless atheists
 - (B) but the write has said that we do have an altar – verse 10 – it is the place where the Lamb of God was sacrificed for us, and to that altar no one can come who does not trust in Jesus for salvation
 - (C) the first sacrifice mentioned is one that we can give in the form of words – the fruit of our lips – the sacrifice of praise
 - (D) but concerning the religious services of the Jews, God had said through the prophet Isaiah, "... this people draw near with their words And honour Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote," (Isaiah 29:13), and the Lord Jesus affirmed the words as yet true
 - (E) so is 'through Him' – that is, through Jesus Christ and through Him alone – that we can offer this sacrifice acceptably
- b. Actions (16) – "And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."
 - (A) 'through Him', there are other spiritual sacrifices to be offered
 - (B) the first is the more general sacrifice of 'doing good'
 - (1) the NT has plenty to say on this, in some cases specifying some examples of just what this means
 - (2) of this James 1:27 says, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."
 - (3) and Paul in Galatians 6:10, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

- (4) and in 2 Thessalonians 3:13, encourages us, "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good."
 - (C) and the second, and more apparently involving sacrifice, is that of 'sharing' – a word frequently translated 'fellowship'
 - (1) Acts 2:42 tells of those in the early church "... continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." – sounds pleasant?
 - (2) but Acts 2:45 explains what that fellowship really meant: "and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."
 - (3) and Romans 12:13, 'contributing to the needs of the saints'
 - (D) with such actions, done in Christ's name, and done to Christ's glory, are sacrifices with which God is pleased.
2. Relations to Leaders (17) – "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."
- a. Obedience
 - (A) this is not the mindless following of some charismatic personalities who have led people into atrocious acts in name of religion
 - (B) rather this is the action of a person who has been fully persuaded in his own self that the leader has been called by God – based on the leader's life, his testimony, his actions – and therefore suits his or her actions to the leader's direction and counsel
 - (C) this well-thought response of a godly Christian to a godly leader
 - b. Submission
 - (A) is more of an attitude, and is the overcoming of personal pride and position to men that have been given spiritual authority
 - (B) you could be sounder in matters of business, more knowledgeable and adroit in political manoeuvring, and better educated – but in spiritual affairs all these skills have little weight
 - (C) all too often church boards have been populated by such skilled people and there has been a severe spiritual price paid
 - (D) sometimes this is a hard lesson for capable people to learn
 - c. Responsibility
 - (A) there is another side to this people-leader relationship
 - (B) the leader needs to take his responsibility seriously

- (C) this is that they 'watch over your souls' – literally, 'losing sleep on behalf of your souls', which can be understood of a watchman or a vigilant sentry standing alert for any danger, or more simply, that the responsibility keeps them awake at night in concern
- (D) in 1 Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul in defending his apostleship recounts the personal cost of his ministry and ends with these words: 'Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.'
- (E) Peter instructed leaders as to their attitude, "1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, ... 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, ... 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:1-3)
- (F) it is to such men that obedience and submission can safely be given, and as Paul writes, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." (1 Timothy 5:17)

3. Attitude to the Word (22) – "But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly."

- a. the writer has had some difficult things to say to his readers
 - (A) the hard lessons given by the Israelites who died in the wilderness because they hardened their hearts against God's commands
 - (B) warnings of their falling away from Jesus Christ and the dire consequences of such an action
 - (C) words to Jews that they must be willing to forego their Jewish heritage and go outside the camp to bear Christ's reproach
- b. for the gospel of salvation through faith is not to be lightly ignored
- c. and now he gently asks that they accept these things which have been written for their own good, and as he has previously said in the book, there was much more he could have said, but did not
- d. so they must be willing to receive and to apply these words to their lives: it is intended to encourage them to be steadfast in the faith

C. The Blessing

- 1. Of Spiritual Health (20-21) – "20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

- a. I believe that this was the favourite benediction of our brother, Lewis Willard – a favourite closing prayer indeed of many a pastor
 - (A) it is a verse that is brim full of theology – the truth of the gospel
 - (B) so to conclude any service with it is profitable, that God's people can go home thinking upon its marvellous truths
 - b. we need to remember that we are people of the new covenant
 - (A) the Lord Yahweh was the Shepherd of the old covenant people
 - (B) "You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron." (Psalms 77:20), and is addressed as such
 - (C) "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; ..." (Psalms 80:1)
 - (D) so the Lord Jesus is the Shepherd, the good and great One of His people – the good shepherd who gave His life for His sheep
 - (E) so also Jesus Christ is made Lord and ruler of His people
 - c. Jesus the Son of God said, "17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. ..." (John 10:17-18)
 - (A) but here the corresponding truth is given, that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead and taken up to Heaven by God
 - (B) the reason why God did is here stated: it was 'through the blood of the eternal covenant' – it was because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – it is the proof of God's accepting His sacrifice for us
 - d. verse 21, continues the prayer '... may this God equip you ...'
 - (A) the word 'equip' has as its meaning 'furnish, restore, put in order' and the prayer is that God may work in Christians – all of us – to furnish us perfectly thereby enabling us to do God's will
 - (B) "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)
 - (C) , "... because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:5)
 - (D) what a tremendous encouragement, the thought that as Christians we can indeed be pleasing to God by his equipping us
 - (E) but this is only possible through Jesus Christ our Savior
2. Of Spiritual Friends (24) – "Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you."
- a. these are another spiritual blessing that God gives to believers

- b. greet is not the mere saying of 'hello', but rather the reaching out with one's heart and welcoming another person kindly
 - c. it is the expression of genuine appreciation
 - d. so the writer reminds them of his appreciation for each of them – the letter may have been addressed to one or two, but the greeting is given to all of them – and comes not only from the writer but from those who are with him
 - e. let us never diminish this aspect of Christian fellowship
3. Of God's Grace (25) – "Grace be with you all."
- a. this final blessing is given in the book, that grace should attend them
 - b. the gracious work of God on our behalf that took place at the cross does not cease once we have been rounded up into His flock
 - c. rather the blessing is that it continues throughout our lives
 - He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater
 - He sendeth more strength as our labours increase
 - To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
 - To multiplied trials He multiplies peace. ^{—{2}}.
 - d. from blessing, let us turn more specifically to the ...

D. Prayers for Workers

1. Their Conduct (18) – "Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honourably in all things."
 - a. how we need to pray for those in Christian service
 - b. in a very special way they are targets for the devil's attacks
 - c. although having the very best of intentions, seeking to follow the good prompting of conscience, yet, like the Lord's disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, they find that they are in need of the Lord's reminder: "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)
 - d. and how easily to be deceived by Satan the great deceiver
 - e. so we especially ask you to persevere in praying for God's servants
2. Their Freedom (19) – "And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner."

- a. what obstacle kept the writer from reunion with them is not stated
 - (A) it could have been imprisonment
 - (B) it could have been sickness; or something else
 - b. but there was a special need for prayer on his behalf, the aim of which was to give him liberty to join them
 - c. sometimes in requesting prayer we need to be reticent about details that are edifying to no one, but never reticent about our need
3. Their Fellowship (23) – “Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.”
- a. from what Timothy had been released is not said – the most natural assumption was that it was from imprisonment
 - b. in any case this is first a cause for rejoicing and thanksgiving to God
 - c. and an implied prayer that nothing should interfere with their both coming to be with the readers
 - d. because the joining together in fellowship is such a precious thing for both the people of God’s church and their leaders
 - e. so never let us grow weary of upholding one another at God’s throne of grace

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC – *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan
Hebrews, by Leon Morris
EGT – *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton
Hebrews, by Marcus Dods
Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.
NICNT – *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*
The Epistle to the Hebrew, by F. F. Bruce
RWP – *Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN – *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
Hebrews, by Donald Guthrie

2. 'He Giveth More Grace,' by Annie Johnson Flint (1856-1932), © 1941, renewed 1969, by Lillenas Publishing Co.