

We reach the end of the first half of our summer series called Revive: A Summer of Blessing and Growth. Over the past few weeks, we have looked at six benedictions found in the Bible. Our English word, “benediction” comes from the Latin root, “bene,” which means well. And “diction,” which means speak. Benediction means to speak well of. The idea is to speak a blessing. The Bible contains several blessings, which are used as prayers of benediction for those who hear and read God’s Word.

We began our series six weeks ago looking at a benediction blessing found in Numbers 6 in the Old Testament. Here the Lord gave Moses good words to speak as a blessing from God to the Israelites because the LORD wanted to bless them. God told Moses to say these words to the Israelites, *“The Lord bless you and keep you; and the LORD make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”*

In the weeks that followed, we studied a benediction from Jude and several from the Apostle Paul. In fact, Paul included benedictions in most of his New Testament letters to the churches he planted. To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, *“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17)

He closed his second letter to the church in Corinth, with the words, *“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* (2 Corinthians 13:14)

The book of Hebrews also closes with a benediction. The author of Hebrews also asks the blessing of God upon his readers. As we look at this prayer, we find the author focused his prayer on who God is, what he has done for us, what he is doing for us. In the case of this benediction prayer, he prayed we would hold these blessings in our hearts, and also put them to work to do what is pleasing to God. May these blessings in Hebrews 13:20–21 revive us. Let’s read this together.

**Now 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, 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. (Hebrews 13:20–21)**

As you receive these verses what is your response? What do we see? We see beautiful phrasing describing who God is and what he has done for us. What else do we see? We see the word equip, and we see an exhortation. You might even say, an unrealistic exhortation from God to us. So what is it God is exhorting us to do? We are supposed to do his will because we have been equipped with everything good for doing his will.

Here is where there is a disconnect for me. I don’t do everything well. There are days when I do more to displease him, than please him. Can you relate to this? As I read this benediction, I ask, “How can this benediction ring true for me?” How can this benediction become living words to me that revive me? How can these good words stick to me and not just roll off when I get up and leave a Sunday service? How can these good words, living words, truly soak into me and transform my life?”

If you’re like me, I think you will be glad we are looking more closely at the richness of these living words and what you learn about God will change your life.

**Now 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, (Hebrews 13:20)**

God of Peace—To say God is a God of peace is loaded with meaning. This phrase, “God of Peace,” means God alone is the source of peace. Decent people seek peace. Politicians promise it. World leaders promote it. Beauty pageant contestants wish for it. Peace Treaties are signed, but history tells us most are broken. All humanity has imagined a return to a peaceful world ever since Adam and Eve were dragged out of the Garden of Eden.

The good news is not only is the God of peace the source of peace; he is the dispenser of peace. The God of Peace offers us the gift of peace. I read this week about a Japanese man named Shoichi Yokoi. Yokoi was a sergeant in the Imperial Japanese army fighting against the Americans on the island of Guam. In 1943, word didn’t get to Yokoi that the order had been received to retreat. So he and two others remained in their cave thinking they were to still to engage their enemy. Two years later, the war was over, and peace broke out across the Pacific. But Yokoi and the two others never got word of the surrender. They continued in the state of war, never knowing peace was offered them. The three Japanese soldiers stayed hidden in a cave waging their own private war from the jungle, living off the land, and making

clothes from plants. Yokoi continued to live in a state of war for the next 27 years. His two fellow soldiers died in a flood from a monsoon during this time. One day in 1972, Yokoi came upon two men who were checking their shrimp traps. Yokoi thought he was in danger, so he charged them. The shrimp fishermen were able to subdue Yokoi with only some minor bruises.

For 27 years Yokoi had lived his life, unaware the gift of peace had been offered, and so his life suffered. This seems to fit so many of our stories. Peace is offered, and yet we fail to claim it, we are tricked into living in a cave of distress instead of in a mansion of peace. Whatever happened to Yokoi? He returned to Japan got married, had kids, and wrote a successful book on austere living, and probably hit all the talk shows too!

It's not that we don't try to find peace. We are inclined to look for peace in the wrong places. We look for our culture to give us peace. The culture, or as Jesus calls it, "the world," does offer and give a type of peace to those who seek it, but this kind of peace does not last. Jesus, who is the only one to hold the title of Prince of Peace, said in John 14:27, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

Jesus is saying, "Peace is available in our time, but don't be tricked by the peace culture gives. It is fleeting. It may seem the world is all you need now, but a time will come when each of us will have a dark-night-of-the-soul experience, which will reveal to us the peace we sought to gain from the world did not last.

Paul in Romans 8:6 wrote, *"The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."*

And in Philippians 4:7 Paul wrote, *"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

And how does the God of peace establish peace in us? *"Now 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,"* (Heb. 13:20)

The writer of Hebrews already told his readers without the shedding of blood there could be no covering for sin, and no cleansing from sin. For generations, the people offered the blood of animals for this temporary covering, but anyone who was honest realized this animal blood temporarily covered up their sins. The animal blood did not provide the means to stop the people from sinning or free them from the bondage of sin.

The religious practice was good. It came from God. But it was not the answer, only the pointer to the answer. The Old Testament practices were based on a covenant between God and man, which came from God's covenants with Abraham and Noah and was formalized with Moses. But this covenant was not eternal.

It was good but not great. It brought temporary remission but couldn't provide lasting peace.

All of these Old Testament religious practices pointed to something more, something great, something perfect, and something everlasting, which could bring peace. The writer called this the eternal covenant...an everlasting covenant made before the creation of the world. It was a binding, permanent agreement between God the Father and Jesus the Son. A covenant established through blood, not the blood of animals, but the blood of Jesus Christ—the lamb of God. The perfectly sinless, unblemished man who died in the place of all sinners, took the sins of each of us on himself, who's blood not only covers and forgives, it cleanses. It sets people free.

Just a few verses earlier, the writer of Hebrews seems to end his teachings in Hebrews with this picture:

**The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. (Hebrews 13:11–12)**

Jesus died like a sinner. He took on our sin so totally. Paul said he became sin for us. As Jesus said in Luke 22, as he held up the cup of wine at his last supper with his disciples the night before he was crucified on the cross, he said, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."*

And by doing this, Jesus made peace with us. Until we let verse 20 of our benediction grip our hearts, and understand Jesus is our peace and dispensed this peace through his shed blood and sacrificing death on the cross; we will not personally and intimately connect with the exhortation to do his will in verse 21.

Paul said it again and again in different ways. In Colossians 1:19–20 he said, *"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."*

In Ephesians 2:14 Paul said, *"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,"*

Until we understand what Jesus rescued us from, we won't turn our lives over and completely trust him.

Most of the world was tuned in to the amazing story coming out of Thailand these past three weeks. Twelve boys and their coach were trapped two and a half miles back into a network of caves. What started out as a search mission became an incredible rescue mission. Few believed the 12 could be rescued. Dozens of expert divers, both military and civilian, hundreds of men, women, equipment, and medical personnel engaged in this rescue.

There was one particular rescuer, a 38-year-old former Thai Navy Seal Diver named Saman Gunan, who according to a Tai governor, was the “hero of the Tham Luang cave.” Gunan was a triathlete and a happily married husband. His wife said he enjoyed helping people and doing work for charities.

Gunan, who the only one to die through the entire ordeal, died from lack of oxygen as he swam out of the cave after delivering desperately needed extra air tanks inside the cave to keep the boys alive. While making the eight-hour trip back out of the cave, Gunan ran out of oxygen. Just taking one extra tank for himself out of the cave could have saved his life.

He knew the mission was dangerous. But it didn't stop him. He was willing to risk his life to save the lives of young people he didn't even know.

In an emotional interview, his grief-stricken widow told the BBC, “Saman once said we never know when we would die.... We can't control that, so we need to cherish each day,” Gunan made the ultimate sacrifice. He died so others might live. This kind of commitment, courage, and love has the capacity to move us emotionally like nothing else can—if we let it grip our hearts.

Folks, let the sacrifice of Jesus Christ grip our hearts. As the old hymn says: “In my place condemned he stood; Sealed my pardon with his blood.” He took our guilty record, died for it and offers us his sinless record in return—our life in exchange for his.

The work of Christ didn't end there. If the God of peace had not raised Jesus from the dead, then the new covenant would not have been everlasting. Resurrection life is a life that lasts forever. Our God of peace is a God of power. Power enough to raise Jesus from the dead. But what about raising us from the dead?

Paul tells us we have already been raised to a new life in Jesus Christ. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”** Present tense! The writer of Hebrews wanted it to be absolutely clear to us the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to all who put their trust in Christ and surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Trusting God's resurrection power will avail itself in every area of our lives is huge for us. As is faith God has the power to equip us with everything good for doing his will.

And next, the writer of Hebrews wrote a comforting phrase to encourage us to trust in Jesus and live by faith in Jesus. The writer described Jesus as that great Shepherd of the sheep—that great shepherd who cares for His sheep. So the writer not only tells us God is a God of Peace, and he is powerful to raise Jesus from the dead, he then comforts us. He tells us it's okay to trust and live by faith in God because Jesus knows us and cares for us intimately like a shepherd does for his sheep. May this truth bring us comfort when we experience that dark-night-of-the-soul.

A few weeks ago, Julie and I were in Israel with several fellow CPC'rs. I remember our guide took us out into the wilderness,

which was a hot, dry desert. We were somewhere between Jericho and Jerusalem. He led us up a hill, and when we got to the top, we looked down on a steep canyon with jagged walls. He told us this place was given the name, Valley of the Shadow of Death. Many historians believe David fled from Saul and hid in this valley to escape capture and certain death. And it was while David hid in the valley he wrote Psalm 23 about God being his Great Shepherd.

It's too bad the church seems to turn to Psalm 23 only at funerals. Because Psalm 23 describes what the Great Shepherd does for his people, “all the days of their lives as well.” Jesus goes before us and prepares the way. His true sheep recognize his voice (the Word) and follow him where he leads. He protects, and He feeds. He calms fears when we must go through dark and dangerous valleys and at the end of the day; He puts us safely in the fold and guards us throughout the night. Nothing in life or in death need frighten His sheep because the Shepherd is in control.

That is why Peter counsels us in 1 Peter 5 to **“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”**

It helped me to break out verses 20 and 21 like this.

Our God of peace, who is powerful, and who provides for us, equips us to do His purposes.

Our work in verse 21 is only possible because of the work of God in verse 20. Verse 21 will not ring true without verse 20. Let's look closely at verse 21. The writer said,

**... [May God] 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. (Hebrews 13:21)**

The word equip, literally means to “perfect,” to make fit or complete and repair what is faulty. The idea is it is only the God of peace who is powerful and provides for his sheep who can bring out the full potential of any follower of Christ to do his will and empower them to do what is pleasing to him.

Paul says in Philippians 2:13, **“For it is God who works (energizes) in you both to will (In other words, God works in us so we want to do His will) and to do (actually to do his will) and to do it for His good pleasure.”**

This word equip (*Katarizo* in the Greek) was a common word in New Testament times. To the soldier, it meant to equip an army for battle. To a sailor, it meant to rig a ship for a voyage. To a physician, to equip meant to set a broken bone. To a fisherman, it meant to mend the nets. To a teacher, equipped meant a student was fully trained.

An encouraging picture for us is *katarizo* carries the idea of God providing what is needed. Equipped Christians are adequately prepared for whatever God has for them. Equipped Christians put away childish things so they might live only for the things, which matter most.

What is He equipping us for? I will answer this with one broad stroke. The God of peace wants to make us more like Jesus Christ because when we become more like him, we glorify him by using our time, talents, and treasures generously for the building and beautifying of the church.

Paul says to the Ephesian Church in Eph. 2:10, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

And to make this blessing in Hebrews a reality, He gives us the discipline of Scripture, which is inspired, profitable for teaching, for correcting, for training in righteousness so the follower of Christ may be equipped for every good work.

And to make this blessing in Hebrews a reality, He gives us the discipline of prayer. Our motive for prayer is at it’s greatest when we realize how weak we are, and how much we need God.

And to make the blessing in Hebrews a reality, He gives us the discipline of community. It’s been my experience; it’s almost impossible to look more and more like Christ doing the Christian life alone. We need other believers to interact with. As we spend time together and receive this blessing and exhortation to be equipped to do his will, we need each other. I met a person this week, who has been attending CPC for two years. We had a wonderful conversation. This person has many gifts and talents to offer God through CPC. But I learned this person hadn’t gotten to know anyone at CPC. Well, this person knows me now, and I need this person. CPC needs this person, and this person needs CPC to be equipped with everything for doing his will and then be encouraged to do what is pleasing to Him.

So where does this take us? It takes us back to Jesus. Remember Hebrews 13:11–12, which I read earlier? Remember the writer telling us Jesus willingly left the comfort of the camp and suffered on the cross outside the city gate like a common criminal?

This benediction leads us to follow Jesus. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Look at verses 13–14 of Hebrews chapter 13.

**Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Hebrews 13:13–14)**

We are to follow Jesus, even when he takes us outside the camp to thoughtfully and graciously engage those living outside the camp... those without Jesus. Even when it means risk, hardship, and even ridicule.

When we engage our culture, we can trust Jesus and have faith Jesus is equipping us for the task. So we advance, following Jesus into these hard places to serve him, knowing the culture as we know it is temporary. We can advance, following Jesus into these hard places to serve him, with one eye on the city God has called us to reach, knowing full well that this city is temporary. And with our other eye on that future city, the permanent glorious city, which will last forever. The city God is building with one changed life at a time.

I heard a story this week about a woman at CPC, who God has equipped to make monthly trips outside the camp and into the Tenderloin to serve her neighbors in need. Her own life is a miracle because the great Shepherd, the God of peace and power, rescued her from a life of drug addiction and protects her and equips her with everything good to do what is pleasing to him.

She would tell you God met her at her lowest times. He reached out to her when she was in a jail cell, and he reached out to her on a bed in a rehab facility, and God changed her life. Now for the past nine years, this woman makes monthly trips to the Tenderloin and distributes clothing, which she collects and hygiene bags CPC helps to provide.

This week, the woman was serving the least among us like she does every month, and she walked up to an older woman, who had a crack pipe in her hand. She gave her toothpaste, and a toothbrush and the woman started to cry. The older woman asked her why she was doing this, and she told her, “Because I would be where you are right now if it wasn’t for Jesus.” And then she prayed with her.

The evidence of God equipping this woman is profound. When we asked her permission to share her story to encourage our CPC family she said, “Certainly, God saved me from the disease of addiction, and for that I am truly grateful and if there is someone at CPC on Sunday or someone who has a child that is battling the disease, if they just rely on God and have faith, God will pull them through any adversity or break the chains that bind them”. And then she said, “Do you know how I know that? I know because I am living proof.”

If God’s people, that is you and I, can let the work of God on our behalf grip our hearts, it will change our lives and change the lives of those God has called us to reach. As the benediction ends: for His glory forever and ever.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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