



“The God of Peace”

Hebrews 13:20-25

Today is a little bit of a sad day for me because we are again coming to an end of a study through a sermon series. We started this series in January and now we’re closing it out right before Thanksgiving. In all, this series was a total of 40 sermons! Do you remember them all? I’m sure you haven’t. But, I pray that we remember the main theme of the book: **Jesus is superior to all and is therefore worthy to be followed, no matter what the cost.**

As I think about this church in Rome, and that they were facing another round of persecution, I’m reminded of the story of the greatest small-boat rescue in Coast Guard history. Bear with me for a moment. On February 18, 1952, the coast guard discovered two large vessels that had been split in two due to huge storms in the sea. The coast guard sent out two vessels to go to the two different ships. But one of the boats that was sent out was only a 36-foot wooden motor life boat. It was intended to have a crew maximum of 6, with room for 10 survivors. This boat was being sent out in an intense storm with a crew of 4. But again, this was a death mission. Even making it past the sand bar was seemingly impossible because the waves were so intense. Yet, somehow, they made it past. But then, the compass no longer functioned. Still, the crew continued out into the sea, and they eventually found the ship. This 36-foot boat made it. Then came the next impossibility: getting the people safely onto the boat in the midst of raging waves. Yet, one-by-one, people came on this little boat. While one did die attempting to get onto the boat, it was a miracle that no one else did. To add to that, this little boat was still floating after an additional 32 men came on board. With 36 men total, the boat turned around, without a compass, and made it back to shore. Since then, the Coast Guard tried to mimic putting 36 men on that kind of boat, and they were unsuccessful (see:

<http://www.coastguardfoundation.org/connect/news/593-the-finest-hours-story-behind-the-coast-guards-greatest-small-boat-rescue>).

When you read this story, you see one impossibility after another. A little boat facing those waves, losing its radar and compass, unable to face the storm. Unable to adequately rescue. And yet, somehow it did.

This is what I think of when I think of the Hebrew Christian church in Rome that is facing the sandbar and waves and storm of Roman persecution under Nero. The Christians in Rome could say, “How could we ever make it through *that*? We’re weak humans. We can’t survive, and yet you call us to stop drifting and set sail to Christ – even though that means going through a storm?” Not only this, but the author calls them to minister to one another as they’re going through the difficulties. The reality is that we’re not on our own individual, little boats. We’re all on the same boat. Therefore, we need to care for one

another and point one another to the shore of Christ's glory. But with all of our weaknesses, how is all of this even possible?

Throughout this book, the author of Hebrews gives the answer: Jesus. With the strongest of encouragements and the deepest of warnings, the author brought forth a compelling vision of Jesus and *why* he is worthy of our adoration and obedience. But he also revealed that it's not in our own strength that we're able to continue to pursue the Lord – it's in the strength that God gives to us *because* of Jesus.

Now, we come to the final words of the book. How is the author going to end? He ends with one of the most beautiful benedictions of the New Testament – a benediction that summarizes much of the book itself. It's a benediction that tells this church, on their little boat, that they will miraculously persevere and make it to Heaven's glories because of God's promises to us in the gospel.

With that in mind, please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 13, and after I pray, we will read verses 20-25:

²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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. ²² I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with all of you. ¹

As you see here in these verses, you have a closing Benediction and then a few more words from the author. As I read, it seems a little odd. Why didn't he write verses 22-25 before the benediction? Well, there could be multiple reasons. One could simply be that after he wrote the Benediction, he simply wanted to add some personal notes (kind of like a P.S. to a letter). Others think the letter of Hebrews could have been dictated to and then verses 22-25 were written with the author's own hand. Whatever the reason, we see a brotherly love. And, in putting these six verses, we see main point: **God gives his children peace, perfection, and perseverance.**

This statement of blessing on this struggling church (and for churches throughout the ages, including us here today) is a tremendous encouragement. When the storms rages against us, we can know we have a God of peace. When we feel we're falling under the weight of our imperfection – knowing we cannot do, in our own strength what God calls us to – we can remember that God designs to grow us in maturity until someday we're made complete. When we feel we've lost our radar and compass – we can know we have a God working in us to empower us to persevere!

This, in a nutshell, is how the author strengthens us. But, let's dive into this a little more and first see how:

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:20–25.

1. God gives his children peace (v. 20).

In each of the points, we actually see a contrast between God and us. The author is highlighting our weaknesses with God's strengths. Now, why does that matter? Well, maybe you are like me and you often think of life in terms of what you think you can do or can't do. And when it seems God might be calling you to do something, you think to yourself, "I can't do that." God's response to you is, "But I can!" God's strength is more powerful than any weakness you possess, and in fact, the Bible says that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

So, look again in verse 20 to see God's magnificence in contrast to our weakness: 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. . .²

God doesn't simply act peacefully, but this verse says that he is the God *of* peace. Meaning, he is peace. God is eternal tranquility. Even as we go into the Christmas season, you're going to hear a lot of statements like, "Peace on earth," and yet those statements are separated from God himself. While I'm grateful that God, in his immense goodness, has decided to allow humans to experience times of feelings and situations that are peaceful – you cannot have *peace* on earth without being reconciled with the God of peace.

Now, why do I say be "reconciled with the God of peace?" As most of you in this room would affirm, we know that humans are born sinful. Meaning, we love ourselves and other things around us, more than we love God. And, in fact, we devalue God and thus dishonor him in our hearts, mind, emotions and will. Therefore, we act in ways that are traitorous against God. At times, we might think we're doing ok. Sometimes people even act religious and think it's great that God is their co-pilot or magic genie to give them what they want. But that's not how we are to view God. God is the Creator and Ruler over all – and he created us to worship him and enjoy him forever! Apart from him, while we might have seasons that appear peaceful, we actually are pursuing destruction because you can't have eternal peace and reject eternal peace.

There is no peace apart from God. Now, some could say, "Ok, so I just turn back to God when I want to and all will be fine." But the reality of our sinfulness is that we're bound in our sin. That means that you don't want God. Instead, the Bible says that God, the God of peace, had to initiate the relationship with you or else you would never know peace. That's how broken we are.

But, joy of all joys, God did initiate reconciliation. The author of Hebrews says that God's greatest act of peace is revealed in Jesus' death and ascension. The God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant. When the author says "brought again from the dead," he's clearly referring to Jesus' resurrection, but I don't think that's all he's talking about. I think he's talking about Jesus' ascension as well. Literally, this could say, "brought up" from the dead. This matches when the author talks about Jesus' indestructible life – and the author doesn't stop at resurrection, he goes to the fact that Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God as One who stands on our behalf to ensure we will endure through this life. Praise the God of peace who brought Jesus up from the dead to mediate for us!

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:20.

But there's more here. The word "brought up" mixed with the author's statement of Jesus being the great shepherd of the sheep might have connotations back to Isaiah 63:11, where we read, "where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock?"³ The "shepherds of his flock" is actually referring to Moses. And, as one commentator notes, ". . . in this case the author's addition of 'great' would mark Jesus out as the greater Moses, brought up not merely from Egypt but from death" (Longman, footnote 20, p. 193).

This fits how the author has been talking throughout this book. Jesus is a greater Mediator than Moses was because Jesus doesn't merely get us out of a hostile country. Instead, Jesus' resurrection and ascension affirms to people that Jesus is the greatest rescuer of all. Jesus rescues us from our enslavement to sin and brings us back to the God of peace, in a reconciled relationship.

This is something we simply cannot do! We are without peace. We are at war within ourselves. Yet, Jesus came and rose again and ascended to become a shepherd to people. No longer are we headed for destruction, instead, Jesus is leading us all the way to a new homeland. But notice something here. The phrase "shepherd of the sheep" affirms our weakness again. Sheep are not impressive creatures. I don't know this from experience, but have heard from those who have cared for sheep that sheep are not intelligent creatures. They also scare easily, are finicky and they're easy prey. That's why sheep need a shepherd.

This is encouragement to all of us who recognize and admit our weakness. Even as Christians, we don't say that we're not weak any more. NO! We're still sheep. BUT, as sheep, we have the greatest, strongest, most glorious Shepherd of all. A shepherd who actually gives us strength to endure through things sheep shouldn't be able to handle – even persecution.

But, how can we be so sure that Jesus is that great of a shepherd? The author of Hebrews bases the blessings we receive from Jesus all in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. He says that Jesus is the great shepherd *by* the blood of the eternal covenant. Listen, Jesus' resurrection and ascension is good news *only* to those who have trusted in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to satisfy God's wrath.

I remember a few years ago having a conversation with someone once who said that the gospel was that Jesus rose from the dead and is the ascended Messiah. He said *that* was the good news. I then said something like this: How is Jesus ascension the heart of the good news? If Jesus simply died and rose from the dead, the message would be "Watch out! Jesus is coming to get you!" If you don't have the cross as central to the good news, then you have no good news to share because it's in the cross that Jesus actually reconciled people to God. Or, as the author of Hebrews stated, it was at the cross that the temple veil was torn in two, and people could come to God with unrestricted, complete, free access! And, Jesus' sacrifice wasn't shed merely to get you peace for a day, a year or even 1,000 years, but Jesus' sacrifice secures your peace with God for *eternity*. How do we know this? Because Jesus' blood is God's eternal promise. And, does God break any of his promises? *Never!*

So, even here in these verses, we see that it's the fact that Jesus took the punishment you and I deserved that is central to the gospel. The resurrection and ascension and even Jesus' mediation is all based in the fact that God is satisfied in what Jesus did at the cross. God is satisfied with what Jesus has done. Oh, think of this, Ventura!

³ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Is 63:11.

This past week, at the Thanksgiving Banquet, I was talking with Dan Beath and he was telling me about what he's been studying in the Bible. God has been overwhelming him with the thought that someday, he will enter into God's presence with complete boldness – no cowering shame. As we were talking about that, he was saying that we can be tempted to enter into God's presence timidly. But that's not what Jesus gave us! Jesus gave us *his* righteousness so that we can come straight into God's sight and God is pleased with all of us who have entrusted ourselves to Jesus. This is all because of Jesus' sacrifice. And, Ventura, this is a greater peace than freedom from slavery to Egypt. This is a greater peace than *not* experiencing persecution.

Apply this even to our own lives today. What stresses you out? What scares you? What causes internal turmoil? We can be fearful in very small things and in large things. Whether it's simply thinking about the stress of the Christmas season to pondering a surgery of a loved one, our peace can seem to disappear. In any and every circumstance, the author of Hebrews calls us to focus our minds and hearts on what Jesus has done for us. Don't forget that you're weak. Don't forget what you deserve left to yourself. But don't stop there. Now, gaze on the glories of Jesus, what he did for you and now what he is doing on your behalf. You may feel inadequate and unable to move forward. You may be wanting to know the answers to certain struggles. But know this, **if God raised up Jesus on your behalf – and Jesus is greater than Moses – then you have the peace you were created for. You have peace with God!**

Now, you could hear this and say, "Great, but what if I still don't *feel* the peace." Well, first, I need to say that sometimes when we think of God giving us peace, we think of God giving us what we want. We might pray something like, "God, you said you'd give me peace, why hasn't it happened yet?" And what we're really saying is, "God, make my circumstances better and back to normal." But that's not peace. That's finding peace and security in circumstances, not in God.

Sometimes we don't feel peace because we're looking for peace in circumstances. And, if God is teaching and growing us, he doesn't want us to find our security in circumstances. Instead, our security is in God and his promises. Therefore, when you're feelings are wavering, turn to the promises of God and preach the gospel to yourself over and over and over again.

We all know that our feelings can lie to us. Don't believe your feelings over God's promises. Instead of giving your ear to wavering, fickle emotions; give your undivided attention to God's steadfast, secure promises. And, with the psalmist, preach truth to your soul. Tell yourself, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Memorize this verse and remind yourself that God's strength is more powerful than your weaknesses.

But don't let God's peace only apply to your emotions. The word for peace here is the word for "shalom." This means that there is not merely an absence of problem, but there's a presence of wholeness and well-being. Someday we will be in a world where there is *only* shalom. We will be in the presence of the God of peace, and his peace will reign forever, leading to welfare, well-being, wholeness for all who live with him. And, guess what? All of us here who have turned to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation *will* be there! In light of these trusts then, tell your soul that he *has* given you eternal peace; therefore, live in the reality of this peace today. But what does that look like to live in that reality? Well, the text moves on with another blessing of God. God gives peace, and:

2. God gives his children perfection (v. 21a).

Ok, I need to qualify that phrase quite a bit, but bear with me while I do. Just know this, I don't believe that God makes any one of us perfect in this life. Now, look with me back in the text: Now may the God of peace. . . [verse 21] equip you with everything good that you may do his will. . .⁴

The author of Hebrews has certain words that are more prominent than other words in this book. Perfection and completeness is one idea that the author highlights. But you could say, "Where is the word 'perfection' here?" Well, the word "equip" (in the Greek language being used here) actually "implies making good what was previously imperfect" (Longman, p. 193).

So, for a storm-tossed church that has been drifting, they could say to God, "But I'll never make it through the perfection. Look what I've done!" Oh, by the way, have you ever said things like that to God? God, I'm too weak. Or, God, I've failed so miserably, how can you use me?" Well, here's an answer to that. In this benediction, we read the blessing that God promises to make you perfect.

And, get this, God already knows you're not perfect. That's why he's promised to *make you perfect*. At this point, someone could have an objection and say, "Hold on. I'm righteous with Jesus' righteousness. I'm already perfect! I don't need to be made perfect." And my response is that, "Yes, you are declared righteous because of Jesus' righteousness, but God doesn't stop there." God doesn't give you righteousness and then say, "I'm just going to let you wallow in sin." No! He's growing you to become what you are in Christ. That's what it means for God to *perfect*.

But notice here that the statement isn't simply individualistic. God is *perfecting* his church. He's perfecting us. He's equipping us to function on the boat together through whatever circumstances God ordains to grow us. This fits how the Apostle Paul talks about the church when he says that God gave leadership to the church in order **"¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. . ."**⁵

Jesus Christ is perfection – and God is conforming us corporately into the image of Christ. The effulgence of Jesus' glory is going to shine through *us* someday. And, even today, God is shaping us and preparing us for that day. Therefore, the author says the God of peace will perfect us with everything good today. Ponder the greatness and goodness of God in this! Ponder his power and love in doing this. Rejoice in God! Jesus is the glory of God and we will be like him because he gives us all good.

Now, this might sound confusing because sometimes things don't look good. But, while we do not understand what is going on in this fallen world and we can experience trials from within and without, we can trust God. Romans 8:28 says, **"²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."⁶** Everything, every single thing that happens in our lives is being orchestrated by God and everything – even all the hardships – are being woven into a greater tapestry for the good of all of God's children! This is God's plan, and whatever he plans, he accomplishes. No hardship will thwart God's plan for me and you. No amount of imperfection on our part today will keep God from changing and growing us.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:20–21.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 4:12–13.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:28.

In fact, the benediction says that God perfects us with good so that we will do his will. Oh, please hear this. Some people think that they can trust Jesus to save them from Hell and not care about following Jesus in this life. That is not salvation. Part of God rescuing us is also empowering us to obey. While God calls us to come to him as we are, he doesn't say he's going to leave us as we are! He promises to declare us righteous in Christ and then progressively change us to become what we are in Christ until someday we are absolutely, through and through, radiantly perfect! This is God's plan, and everything submits to his sovereign decree to make his children *perfect*. Praise God! The God of peace gives us peace and promises perfection. And finally,

3. God gives his children perseverance (v. 21)

Look at the end of verse 21 again: working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.⁷

In the 17th century catechism, called the Westminster Catechism, it asks the question, "What is the chief end of man?" In other words, what is the reason for humanity's existence. And the answer is "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." We were created to delight in, worship, love, adore, serve, praise, enjoy God! God's design for his glory is our good – and in him we find eternity delight.

I say this because verse 21 says that God is working in us what's pleasing to God. You could say, "Well, how selfish of God! Why can't he give me what I want?" But the Scriptures tell us that what we want can often be what is bad for us. Instead, what we need and what we will find eternally pleasurable is God himself – and doing what pleases him.

So, the author says that because of Jesus, we're also empowered to do what God calls us to do. And, we begin to act in ways that please the Lord. As I think about that, I'm amazed. How can God delight in me? I'm so weak. I'm imperfect. Yet, God has planned to work in me and all of us who trust Jesus. And God isn't just going to give us just enough to kind of make it through this life. No. This verse says that God gives us exactly what's pleasing in God's sight.

This is absolutely phenomenal. As I think about this, I think about a master painter who completes his work, signs it and then says, "Perfect." Or, maybe a master chef, creating a sumptuous meal and declares it "Perfect." Christian, do you know you're not alone in your pursuit of God? God's not saying to you, "Prove to me you love me." Instead, God is saying, "I'm going to prove to you I love you." Ephesians 2:10 says that ". . . **we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**"⁸

What God commands of us to do, he works in us to actually do. And God says we are his workmanship. And can God make anything less than perfection? No. Will God throw away what he began? No.

What an encouragement to the storm-tossed church as they look at the waves of persecution coming at them. Will they endure? Will they be able to love one another and worship God in the storm? Will they stay committed to the local church and exhort one another daily? How can they even do this? Because Jesus is their mediator. Jesus is Lord and he is the promised Messiah who is the rescuer. Therefore, God has promised to work in us because of Jesus.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:21.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 2:10.

Is God worthy of our praise, Ventura? Absolutely. In the end, when we reach Heaven's shores and see God face-to-face, we won't say, "Look what we've done, God." Instead, God will show us all that he has done, and we will be all the more amazed with his work through weak, imperfect, incomplete, needy people – transforming us into peace-filled, perfected, whole people; shining forth the image of our Superior Savior, Jesus!

Praise God! Praise Jesus! And, that's how this benediction ends: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.⁹ To whom be glory forever and ever. Who is the "whom" in this verse? Some might say God the Father. Others might say God the Son, Jesus. From a grammatical perspective, I think the author is referencing Jesus. And, as a result, in this benediction, the author is putting Jesus and the Father on the same plane as God. In God's glorious wisdom, he has planned our salvation, secured our salvation, involves himself in our salvation. Praise God the Father and God the Son!

What we see here is that understanding who God is should lead to praise. Listen, theology should always lead to doxology. Reading Hebrews (or any other part of the Bible) should lead our hearts to worship God. If our hearts are kindled to worship, pray and reread it. But I will add – if we understand more of God and we are drawn to worship him, then that should cause us to want to know him more.

God is the God who gives us peace, perfection and perseverance. Therefore, the author goes on and gives some final words in verses 22-25: ²²I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. ²⁴Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵Grace be with all of you.¹⁰

He's speaking to what I believe is his church family. And he asks them to bear with this written sermon (i.e. – word of exhortation). They might have smirked by reading that it was a brief sermon. Or maybe this was simply a humble statement of the author. He could have written more, but he sought to bring out what was necessary and move past what wasn't necessary for the moment.

Because God is so great and Jesus is superior, take to heart what's written in this letter. Ventura, this is what we need to hear. Don't drift. Keep repenting. Cling to Jesus. Run with endurance. Walk by faith. Worship our Consuming-Fire God. Don't forsake the assembling of ourselves together. All of these things, and more should be taken to heart because our God is so great and so good. Just because the sermon series is over doesn't mean that we can walk away unaffected. Continue to apply the truths of Hebrews to your heart.

Now, at this point, the author talks about some joys he shares with the church. Timothy, probably *the* Timothy who was Paul's son in the faith, has been released (probably from imprisonment). He plans to visit them. And the author is hoping to see Timothy with the church, too. Then, the author is calling the church to greet the leaders and saints. This phrase seems to indicate that there might be leaders and other believers they may be estranged from. If so, this is a call to reunify.

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:21.

¹⁰ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:22–25.

Then the author says that those from Italy send greetings. This phrase sometimes was used to specifically reference Rome. And probably speaks of those who used to live there are sending greetings back to the church – people like Aquilla and Priscilla.

These words about the fellowship amongst believers is so beautiful to me because it illustrates practically how the benediction applies. Because God promised to give *us* peace, perfection and perseverance. It's not just me. It's *us*. Therefore, we have a love for one another and should work for greater unity with one another and seek out relationships with one another. And, if there are issues between brothers and sisters, we should seek to make it right.

But how are we going to do this? Well, that's the last verse of Hebrews: ²⁵ **Grace be with all of you.** ¹¹

The entire book is full of what it means to have God's grace. Through storms or through joys, we have Jesus, and by God's grace, we can cling to him and worship him. So, even this morning, as we close this book, let's pray that we would revel in the grace he's given to us in Christ and grow in obeying him in that grace.

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¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 13:25.