



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 17th November 2019

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 13:18-25

Subject: Part 48 – Jesus: The Final Word

Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honourably. ¹⁹ But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. ²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. ²² And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. ²³ Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. ²⁴ Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. ²⁵ Grace be with you all. Amen.

At the start of this book, we identified three types of people to whom this book was for, all of which were primarily Jews. It was for those who were convinced of the truth intellectually but not had not made Christ Lord of their lives, there were those who had made a profession but were on the edge of turning back, then there was those who were true believers. The last three chapters have been primarily for the Christians, those who had begun the race. Any who have started the race, even today, know of the difficulties and challenges that faces the runner. This is not a sprint but your course has been selected by God and it is a marathon that requires discipline, faithfulness, dedication, perseverance and dependency upon God. Thankfully, while the course that is set before us may be hard, we are not on our own, nor

have we been the only ones that have gone down this road as we've been reminded in Chapter 11.

Now we come to the end of the book and in these closing sentences, the author reminds the readers just about a few things. In verse 18 and again in verse 23, we are told to pray for one another, we are told about being perfected in the Lord Jesus in verses 19 to 21. The writer concludes with a final benediction and farewell in verses 22 to 25. The writer ends by giving an exhortation of *not* just how to live in a fallen and wicked world, and why it matters.

So let's start in Verse 18 - *Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honourably.*

As the author concludes, he asks for prayer. Consider our own individual race, who would not ask for prayer? The author states that he is confident and he has a good conscience, why is that? Could it be that he was under criticism? It is true that, desiring to act honourably in all things, as a genuine Christian friend and mentor should do, he has spoken very frankly of the perils by which he sees their spiritual well-being to be threatened; and he is sure that he has a clear conscience about what he had said to them and also in his way of life, he was well able to stand the scrutiny both of man and of God.

The impulse behind the stern reproving character of much of this letter has not been hostility or an authoritarian desire to inflate his own importance at their expense but in fact, he has spoken the truth in love and compassion which is confirmed by this appeal to them to pray for him. In a similar manner Paul implored the Corinthian Christians for their prayers on his behalf as seen in 2 Corinthians 1:11 and 4:2.

While we don't know too much about the author of Hebrews' life, we know what was written in the last 12 chapters that we've been going through, remember everything that has been said. *Who were his critics? Could it have been the legalists? Could it have been the religious? How could a good Jew have a good conscience if they abandoned the old covenant? Maybe you have been asked that? Think about your own background, have you got your own critics? And could you be so confident as this author was?* In spite of all his confidence, he still asked for prayer. *Why?* Because it's hard. Many people here know that when you come into a right relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, you are challenged by those around you.

'Where are you going?' 'Why did you leave?' 'What makes you so right all of a sudden?' Some are disappointed in you, things can become harder, relationships can become more difficult. No wonder, the writer asked, pray for me!

We know we should pray but we must also be aware that there are a lots of things that can hinder prayer, things that can make prayer difficult never mind the distractions. These things can include: Wrong motives, unconfessed sin, unbelief, pride, robbing God, refusing to submit to God's will, or submit to biblical teaching, a refusal to forgive or be forgiven. You might cry out to God but because there is something wrong, prayer may not be heard, but here, the writer has a good conscience, he's living honourably, he's not apologising for the first 12 chapters, and in verse 19 there's an additional reason for prayer, a reunion, a restoration as it says –

19 But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Was he imprisoned? What was the reason he was hindered from coming to them? We don't know, we can only speculate but what we don't have to speculate on is that we know prayer changes things. We know this as individuals and as a church, *don't we?* Let's not forget, or become somewhat indifferent to prayer. Prayer is not a force that you can use to manipulate God into doing something for you, that maybe He didn't really want to. Prayer isn't laying hold of God's reluctance, but it's about co-operating with God and submitting to His ways and to His purposes. We don't always understand or can even explain His ways. But we know, prayer changes situations, opens up hard hearts, it opens up closed minds, it reveals the truth of the gospel to rebellious people. The writer wanted to be restored to the people he was writing to soon than later. Prayer could do exactly that. James 5 verse 16b tells us –

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Is there restoration required in your life, like the author who wanted fellowship to be restored in this verse? If so Pray! Pray, ask others to pray, join the prayer chain! How often do we need to be reminded of the power of prayer? How often are we reliant on the prayer of others? More important when we pray, do we pray in faith believing? We are only restricted by ourselves and our spiritual condition, if we are desiring what is clearly not of God or for our good. Are we content to wait on God for the answers even if it's not instant? Erwin Lutzer said

“The reason we must ask God for things he already intends to give us is that he wants to teach us dependence, especially our need for himself.”

Many people have asked ‘*If God is all knowing, and knows exactly what our needs are even before I ask, why then should I pray?*’ I can see the logic of that question, but the person who asks the question doesn’t understand why we pray. The purpose of prayer isn’t for us to get what we want from God, or even to inform Him of our situation, but it’s the mechanism of relationship with God and it’s about dependency on Him. Once you say, “*Lord can you*”, you are admitting that you can’t or you are acknowledging your submission to Him.

C.H. Spurgeon stated **“Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom”**. Let me just quote a few other people who observed things on prayer.

Thomas Watson wrote: ***Prayer delights God’s ear; it melts His heart; and opens His hand. God cannot deny a praying soul.***

Corrie Ten Boom said: ***Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden.***

Elisabeth Elliot noted: ***Prayer lays hold of God’s plan and becomes the link between His will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit’s prayer.***

Finally, J. Sidlow Baxter remarked: ***Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers.***

Do you agree with these statements? Do you find them encouraging? Now what are you going to do with them? Hopefully, pray. While we need to pray, we also need to preserve, lets read verses 20 and 21:

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

These verses are a beautiful benediction in which he offers praise and glory to God for His person, His provision and His power. It starts off with ‘***May the God of Peace***’. The Lord is known by many names for example, Yahweh, Jehovah, I Am. He’s also known as the Lord of Peace. We can see this right throughout the Bible, including the Old Testament. Peace here

isn't just the absence of conflict but the presence and preservation or return to something that was once lost or broken. The peace here is primarily the peace of the gospel (Ephesians 6:15), the peace which has been established, or re-established, between man and his Creator by the blood of Christ's cross (Colossians 1:20). The bible says you used to be at war with God but now as a believer, you are at peace, you've been restored. You used to be also at war with each other but the God of Peace comes into the midst, establishes peace, and makes peace with you.

The peace of God in Christ Jesus passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Jesus even said "Peace I give you, but not as the world gives". It is the God of this peace, which speaks forgiveness and acceptance to the believer to the very heart of his being. This peace should permeate the whole of the believer's existence, in all relationships as the writer has been addressing early on in the previous verses. The foundation of the believers peace is God and in effect, defined ***by the blood of the eternal covenant***.

What had been plainly torn in two, ripped apart? The curtain of the Holy of Holies. *When?* When Jesus cried out – It is finished and died. *What was finished?* The old covenant and the work on the cross. The emphasis is now placed by God Himself on the new. *By the blood of the eternal covenant that our Lord Jesus was brought again from the dead. To put it in words used earlier in the epistle, that it was in His ascension that He was "crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death"* (Hebrews 2:9)

Matthew Henry said of the Cross the following:

Come, and see the victories of the cross. Christ's wounds are thy healings, His agonies thy repose, His conflicts thy conquests, His groans thy songs, His pains thine ease, His shame thy glory, His death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation.

The price of our peace was the blood of Jesus, that is, the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God on the cross. The proof of the acceptance of this sacrifice on our behalf is His resurrection from the grave and His exaltation to the right hand of the Majesty on High (Hebrews 1:3; 12:2), whereby, he is declared to be Lord of all (Philippians 2:8-10). Had He not shed His blood for us, He could not be our Saviour. Had he not been brought back from the dead, He could be neither Saviour nor Lord. This is the repeated gospel in the new testament, Jesus has been brought back to life and because he is alive, he keeps all His promises. *Remember on the day*

of atonement the Jews had to bring sacrifices year after year, to make atonement for their sins? But God brought Jesus back to life to declare to everyone that the solution to the problem of sin is permanent and eternal and through Jesus alone.

If Jesus just died on the cross without resurrection, it would have been just one more in the long sequence, of sacrifices, having no power over permanent removal of sin (Hebrews 10:11). Death would have had the final word. But the resurrection manifested His glory as the prince of life and conqueror of death and confirmed that His blood is the seal of a covenant that is eternal and that by this single offering of Himself *"He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"* (10:14). Now Jesus is the final word.

The God of Peace who brought Jesus back to life is the Great Shepherd of the sheep which we see in verse 20. It's an interesting title. He, and He alone, is the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep, as seen in John 10v11 and Psalm 23 . Here in verse 20 He is described as the great shepherd who perfects the sheep. He is called the chief shepherd who will come for His sheep in 1 Peter 5v4. The high Priest of the saints is the Great shepherd and helper, He works on our behalf and in us, to perfect us and gives us grace and power to live for Him, to service Him. When the Bible talks about Him being the good shepherd who died, that's in the past, when the bible talks about Him being the great shepherd who perfects is in the present, and when the bible talks about Him being the chief shepherd who will come for us , that's in the future. Remember verse 8, Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever!

It is against this rich redemptive background that our author can say that God makes you complete in every good work. The New English Bible translates has it as "make you perfect in all goodness". The new man in Christ is a man restored to the harmonious integrity of his humanity. The bible teaches us here that there are things that only God can do. Only God is the source of grace, faith and salvation. Only God can make a way for you to be saved but the Bible isn't silent about the things we can do. As a saved people, the bible tells us what God does for us, and through us and things that we do based on what God has done for us and through us – Matthew 5v16.

God works in you and through you according to His good pleasure. God can use you, and wants to use you for His glory and purpose. It could be to comfort someone, or encourage someone, but you can be that light in that moment if you choose to submit to God's will. This is the way of genuine Christ-likeness; it is the true following of the Master. For when the Son came into the world it was with the affirmation, "*Lo, I have come to do Thy will, O God*" (Hebrews 10:7). His testimony was, "*I always do what is pleasing to Him*" (John 8:29). And it is by virtue of that divine will that "*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (Hebrews 10:10). No wonder our author breaks into the doxology: *to whom be glory for ever and ever!*— what a glorification of our Redeemer God. The sanctification process through Jesus is evidence of the union of the will of man with the will of his Creator. *How could a none believer begin to understand this without the indwelling Holy Spirit of God?* They would not and cannot find sense or meaning or joy in these truths of God. The Gospel to us is the power of God unto Salvation and one day we will be glorified with Him forever. William MacDonald had a great observation:

"There is a curious mingling here of the divine and the human. God equips us with everything good. God works in us what is pleasing in His sight. He does it through Jesus Christ. Then we do His will. In other words, He places the desire in us; He gives us the power to do it; then we do it; and He reward us"

That's amazing isn't it. What could be more incredibly satisfying than the believer to be identified as someone who is united with the will and the work of God?

Accordingly, Paul urges the Philippians to "**work out**" that is, to give practical expression to, the salvation that is theirs, but to do so with the assurance that "*God is at work in them, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:12.); and he reminded the Ephesians that "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). The Christian's service for God therefore, is not passive submission but willing, joyful, and cooperative obedience. So in Christ the lifeline which connects the creature to the Creator and His eternal purposes is restored. And we are rewarded for our obedience. How great is our God!

One thing that God longs for you is to mature you. When God uses the word perfection, it doesn't mean that you will be perfect, without flaw or sin, morally perfect. No, in the Greek it means to be made complete. Here the words speaks about preparation. It is about

believers being moulded, framed, shaped, edited. It's a word that describes the construction that is taking place inside of your life, heart and mind. As God equips you, he's adjust you, mends you, edifies you and He restores you. It is God who furnishes and equips you. In chapter 6 we look at this perfection, and if you remember it was maturity. It's time to grow up, *how do we grow and mature?*

Maturity doesn't occur because we pretend that we are grown up, nor does it occur because of our chronological year have increased, nor does it happen because we belong to a particular church or do particular practices that ticks a lot off the list in other people's eyes nor does striving in our own strength make you mature. Just because my grand-daughter Amelia likes to put on her mammy's make-up, does not make her an adult. She's 6 and that will only change in time but it does show you her heart doesn't it. Just as much as you see some adults who are trying to wear make-up but it's all over the place, they should know better but they don't, why? They are not even trying or asking for the right help. Maturity doesn't come by pretending you are a Christian, or any other means but only comes when you allow God, through Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit to develop you into Jesus' likeness through the power of the word of God.

Warren Wiersbe said it like this -

“God cannot work through us until first He works in us and He works in us through His word (1 Thessalonians 3v17&18). We are saved by grace, by faith, by Jesus.”

Any believer who has been saved, empowered by the word of God and the Holy Spirit is going to want to do some simple things and that's to pray for the lost, encourage one another in Christ and grow-up. If you haven't grown or changed in any way, maybe you are very comfortable, or if you don't feel more hungry for the things of God today then yesterday, then let me encourage to seek God and talk to him about it. I'm here if you need me also, but asking God to reveal your heart is a good way to start. We pray in faith, we persevere in faith, we perform acts of grace in faith. John Wesley said

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, in all the places you can, as long as ever you can”. He was right.

This brings us to verse 22 -

And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

I must say I had to smile at this in relation to his remarks to the briefness of his letter. *13 chapters are just a few words?* Just imagine what he considered a lot! Thankfully it is a very detailed and bears all the hall marks of its Divine Author, in relation to its been inspired.

In this verse he is appealing to the reader to remember all that has been written in this letter and based on every word with the words of exhortation. He's basically saying, receive the message with an open heart and an open mind. Why is this important, remember the context of who he is writing to? I believe that it's also important to us today. The Jewish people then were undergoing pressures, difficult times, some were torn in heart whether to go back or not, there was no middle ground, and there is still no middle ground in case there's any on the fence. There were dangers, never mind returning to Judaism, but some may resist the sound doctrine.

What's the doctrine in question? It's that Jesus is Superior in every way, in everything, and to everyone. The doctrine of Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Also the great doctrine of reconciliation with God, sins being completely forgiven. How the guilt, the eternal consequences and punishment be taken care of. The exhortation here is don't abandon Christ, don't give up, don't walk away from Jesus. Preserve even through suffering, go through the hardship. Understand that persecution will take place. It's true, you will experience suffering, difficulties, hardships, persecution, intimidation, but even though you do, don't abandon your faith, don't give up, don't walk away from Jesus.

Throughout the book of Hebrews the persuasive arguments, backed by amazing evidences, the supremacy of Jesus and His superiority had been presented and established. Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, to the Priests - Chapters 1 to 3. He the superior High Priest. We've got a superior tabernacle in Heaven, where God lives and Jesus is King Ch 9. A Superior sacrifice in Christ Chapter 9v13,10. Remember what we've seen under the Levitical system. There were all kinds of offerings from grain, to thanksgiving to peace to sin offerings. But this book of Hebrews laid it out for us, that there is but one offering that will only satisfy God and it fulfils all the offerings.

We must persevere, be faithful, exercise discipline because Jesus is the fulfilment of every single prophesy in the Old Testament, Jesus is better than the angels ch1-2, Then Moses Ch3, Then Joshua, Ch4, Aaron Ch4 to 7. *So what does the cross of Calvary provide?* Everything. Absolutely everything. The sacrifice of Jesus provides everything. *What is it that you need? Hope?* Well there's hope in Jesus. *Peace?* There's peace in Jesus also. *Forgiveness?* There's complete forgiveness in Jesus. *A New Beginning?* There's one in Jesus.

What does the cross of Calvary provide? The writer of Hebrew tells us what it provides – It provides a

- Better Position Ch4:14
- Better Hope Ch7v19
- Better Deliverer Ch1-7
- Better Covenant Ch7v22
- Better Promises Ch8v6
- Better Sacrifice Ch9v23
- Better Sanctuary Ch 9
- Better Possession Ch10v29
- Better Country Ch11v16
- Better Resurrection Ch11v35
- Better Provision Ch11v40

Since we have a Better mediator, Better promises, a Better homeland, a Better possession, the best that Judaism could ever offer is never going, and could never be, better than Jesus. *Why would you return to that, what for?* You may not be considering heading back into Judaism, but it could be Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Atheism, Hedonism, A particular lifestyle.. whatever is it, *why would you want to return to it?* The darkness, *does that really appeal to you? Does imprisonment appeal to you?* Maybe its addictions that appeals to you. *What is it that you think you need? What is it that you feel you need that could possibly be the satisfying solution to fix everything that you need to be fixed?* Have you come up with an answer *other than Jesus?* If so, then you have missed the whole point of not just this passage, but also the book of Hebrews.

Throughout this book, the reader conscience, intellect, emotions and will have all been appealed to by the writer. There have been warnings about the danger of drifting in Ch2, The

danger of disobedience in Ch3, The peril of being dull of hearing and not progressing towards maturity in Ch5 and 6, the danger of wilful sin in Ch10, the warning against indifference in Ch 12. They've been warned about apostasy and drawing back. He's given them examples of others, that have ran the race, gone before them and reminded them of their great reward of heaven.

The readers have been invited to consider it all in relation to the glorious acquisition of knowing and loving God, through the Lord Jesus Christ and every glory that awaits us in heaven even in the light of their current hardships. The bible is very clear about the hard times and the difficult times, but it encourages us, that those times are truly nothing in comparison to what you have been saved from and what you have been saved unto, the rewards that awaits us in Christ. We have absolute assurance of a steadfast eternal Salvation, an eternal covenant and an eternal inheritance. With these special privileges, comes special responsibilities. But the difference between the old testament and the new testament laws is God's grace and also our motivation. *Are we motivated to follow God out of fear or legalism? Or is it out of love and gratitude for the Saviour who died for us and set us free?* It is mostly definitely the latter. We have been greatly saved and we have much to be grateful for. Then we come to verse 23 which says -

23 Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

They needed to know that one of God's choice servants, our brother, Timothy (who must have been well known to them) had been released. Although the term *apolud* (released) has a variety of meanings, it is most frequently used in the New Testament in relation to releasing from custody, prisoners who were under arrest or in prison. The historical detail of Timothy's imprisonment is unknown, most likely for the gospel sake like his teacher Paul. The writer's hope was that Timothy would soon join him, and that together they would visit the readers. Here we see a clear illustration of the importance of following up with personal ministry.

Moving on to verse 24 -

24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

The readers had already been exhorted to obey their leaders in verse 17, and now they are asked to convey greetings to them and to all the saints who were part of that fellowship in

Christ. It's very simple and very true, isn't it. We are reminded of common courtesies and civilities, they are important, especially as believers. When he wrote this he may have been in Italy, or he may have been simply fellowshiping with a group of Italian Christians, who were also interested in this group of readers.

What does it matter? Well it points out that Jew and Gentile are bound together by the love of Christ. We should care about what is going on within the body of Christ. Are we aware of what's going on, do we care? Are you praying? Are you being practical? Are you giving your time? Let me encourage you to get on the prayer chain and go to prayer meetings, take the time to spend time with each other. We are God's family and we are bestowed with God's grace, so show it to others.

Now this letter ends in verse 25 - ***25 Grace be with you all. Amen.***

How appropriate that this letter ends with grace while our friendship and fellowship with God begins with Grace. John Phillips wrote –

“Grace brings us together in the family; Grace keeps us moving in the faith. Grace!”

Charles Finny seen maturity as

“A state of mind that sees God in everything is evidence of growth in grace and a thankful heart.”

Grace is God's undeserved favour, unmerited favour towards us. This is what the writer is blessing them with. The Jewish people were known by many names, one was the Chosen people. You, if you are found in Christ, and a believer in Him, you are chosen too. You are chosen to walk with Him, to be in friendship and fellowship with Him. Though-out this, the writer has exhorted both Jew and Gentile to consider Jesus.

Consider Jesus our great high Priest. Consider Jesus when the fires of your heart grow cold, when you feel like you are beginning to drift away or you are comfortable with mere religion. Consider Jesus when you are thinking about walking away and returning to the prison of your previous life. Consider Jesus if you are looking for rest, looking for hope, looking for eternal security. Consider Jesus when you are lazy, or not thinking things through. Consider Jesus

when you continue in sin and disobedience, when circumstances have overtaken you and you are trying to figure out a way to get back to God.

Consider Jesus when the poisonous lies pollute your mind and heart into thinking you need something or someone other than Jesus. Consider Jesus, Our great Priest, our divine priest, our royal priest, our redeemer priest, our apostle priest, our eternal priest, when you are looking at a temporal earthly priest, a fallible priest, a mortal priest. Consider Jesus, draw near to him. Believe Him, endure in Him.

Samuel Ruitherfore wrote –

“In our fluctuations of feeling, it is well to remember that Jesus admits no change in his affections; your heart is not the compass Jesus saileth by”

Feelings come and go, they are hard task masters, but no matter how high, low, dark, light, dirty, clean, distant, close. No matter what you feel. Jesus’ feelings towards you never change because he is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Consider Jesus. This concludes the book of Hebrews.

Amen.