THE PRAYER OF TRUE PASTORS (Hebrews 13:20-21)

INTRODUCTION*:** Here we are—the last Sunday of October—also known as "Pastor Appreciation" month! What does that mean? That means you don't have to ***appreciate me anymore—and I won't be preaching from Hebrews 13 anymore! On a more ***serious note,*** thank you for the gift…and card…and cake…and kind words.

Take your Bibles and turn once again to Hebrews 13. Three weeks ago, I mentioned that I felt led to preach from verse 17—"Obey Your Pastor"—because it is not an "easy pill to swallow!" ***Why?*** Because we don't like to ***obey anyone***, right?

But you are technically ***not obeying me*** if I am preaching God's Word! I Thessalonians 2:13 "For this cause also **thank we God** without ceasing, because, when ye **received the word of God which ye heard of us**, ye received it not as the word of men, **but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." So a pastor's heart is blessed when God's people take God's Word as God's Word because it "effectually"—meaning effectively—works in the heart of believers. ***How?*** By bringing about ***change and growth*** in your relationship with God—if, of course, you have one!

But verse 17 isn't just about you ***obeying and submitting to*** God's Word—it is also a reminder of the ***very weighty responsibility*** that I have: ***giving an account of how I watched over your souls!*** And that's ***why I need prayer!*** Hopefully you prayed more for me this last week than you have in the past—and that you continue to pray for me. I'm not going to take the time to repeat the ***negative personality traits*** that I gave you last week, but in a nutshell, here is ***what you should pray for***: That I would be a **Christ-like watcher over your souls!** And let's not forget the reminder that I gave you at the end of last week's sermon: the more ***Christ-like I am*** as a Pastor, the ***better it will be*** for all of us!

But the writer of Hebrews did not just ***ask to be prayed for***—he also prayed for those he was writing to! We see that in verses 20-21. For the sake of context, though, I want to again read verses 17-21. The title of my message—from verses 20-21—is simply this: "The Prayer of True Pastors."

So ***why*** am I calling this a prayer? In vs 20, the writer starts out by ***addressing God:*** "Now the God of peace…" and in vs 21 we see the request: "Make you perfect in every good work…" So in its simplest form, prayer is ***asking God to do something***—and that is what we have here.

First, let's look at… ***1. The description of the God we pray to***

--I found it interesting to learn that the phrase "God of"—then ***another word*** (or words)—appears ***456 times*** in our KJ's Bibles! Not surprisingly, the ***vast majority*** are in the ***Old*** Testament. In the New Testament, there are ***only 36.*** Some examples are the God of ***patience and consolation*** in Romans 15:5, the God ***of hope*** in Romans 15:13, the God of ***all comfort*** in II Corinthians 1:3, and the God of ***all grace*** in I Peter 5:10.

--***How*** does the writer ***describe God*** here in verse 20? As "the God ***of peace***."

So the writer describes God first as … A. The peace-giver

--***Why*** "the God of peace" and not some of the others I just read you? We don't really know, although some commentators suggest it may have been because there was ***some tension*** between the ***leaders*** of the church and the ***people*** in the church.

--Or it may have been just because it was one of the ***more common ways*** that letters were ended! Paul refers to God as the ***God of peace*** in Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20; Philippians 4:9; and I Thessalonians 5:23.

--Although we don't know exactly ***why***, the writer used these words because the ***Holy Spirit led him*** to do so! And they certainly are a reminder—to both them and us—that God is the only ***true source*** of peace!

--***What*** is peace? Depends on the context, right, and it's pretty obvious that b/c this verse refers to Jesus—and His death and His blood—that ***peace*** here refers to peace ***with God***—as opposed to the peace ***of God***.

--So what's the difference between peace ***with God*** and the peace ***of God?***
--The ***peace of God***—"which passeth all understanding," we are told in Philippians 4:7—is the ***tranquility of heart*** that comes from knowing all will be well—regardless of the circumstances—because God is control.
--Peace ***with God*** refers to us—the ***one-time enemies of God*** because of our sin—now having a ***harmonious relationship*** with a perfect, holy, sin-hating God. We'll talk about ***how*** that comes about as we go through the rest of the verse.

The writer does not just describe God as the peace-giver, though. He also refers to God as …

B. The power-demonstrator

--***How*** does he say God demonstrated His power? By ***bringing back Jesus from the dead!*** I think you'd agree that God has allowed mankind some incredible ***advances*** in the ***medical field***. There are instances when people are "**clinically dead**"—they stop breathing and their heart has stopped beating—but they have been resuscitated—meaning "brought back to life." What's ***the longest a person*** has been clinically dead—and "brought back to life?" Here's what I found while doing a "Google" search:

> "In 1999, Swedish radiologist **Anna Bågenholm** fell headfirst into a frozen stream in Norway while skiing. She was trapped under the ice for **over an hour**, and by the time rescuers reached her, she had no heartbeat, no breathing, and dilated pupils — she was clinically dead. Her core body temperature had dropped to **13.7 °C (56.7 °F)**, one of the lowest ever recorded in a surviving human. At Tromsø University Hospital, doctors rewarmed her blood and revived her heart. After **approximately six hours of clinical death**, her heart began beating again, and she recovered, though with lasting effects." (https://iere.org/what-is-the-longest-someone-has-died-and-came-back-to-life/)

Six hours is a long time, but ***only God can bring*** a person back to life that was dead for ***3 days!***

Although we don't have the word "**power**" here in this verse—or the next—it is interesting to note how often the Word of God ***connects*** the resurrection ***with power***—and rightly so!
--Romans 1:4 "And declared to be the Son of God **with power**, according to the spirit of holiness, by the **resurrection from the dead**:"
--Ephesians 1:19-20a "And what is the exceeding greatness of **His power** to us-ward who believe, according to the working of **His mighty power**, Which He wrought in Christ, when He **raised Him from the dead**…"
--II Corinthians 13:4a "For though He was crucified through weakness, yet **He liveth** by the **power** of God…"

How does the writer describe the One we pray to? ***First***, the peace-giver. ***Second***, the power-demonstrator. ***Third,*** C. The profound provider

--***Who***—and ***what***—did God provide?

1) The Person God provided is the Great Shepherd. Jesus wasn't just someone God brought back from the dead, He is "that great shepherd of the sheep." And God gave—He provided for us—"that great shepherd." We see that in verses like John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that **He gave** His only begotten Son…"

Here are some others:

--I John 4:9 "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God **sent** His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."
--I John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and **sent** His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
--I John 4:14 "And we have seen and do testify that the Father **sent** the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

So God ***gave***—He provided and sent—His Son to be that great shepherd for us the sheep.
--But what's the ***difference*** between the ***great*** shepherd (what Jesus is ***called here***) and the ***good*** shepherd (what Jesus ***called Himself***)? The "***good*** shepherd"—in Jesus' own words—"giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). I think you'd agree that to be a ***great*** shepherd, you have to be better than a ***good*** shepherd.
--How can you be ***better*** than good? You have to do what the ***good shepherd did***—plus more! And Jesus ***did that***, didn't He? He gave up ***His life*** for the sheep but was brought back from the dead and is now ***forever alive*** to feed…and lead…and intercede for us His sheep!

2) The purpose for which God provided Jesus is the everlasting covenant
--We see that in the end of verse 20: "through the blood of the everlasting covenant."
--But ***what*** does that ***mean? First***, we need to define what a ***covenant*** is.

According to HELPS Word-studies in Biblehub.com, **a covenant is** "a set-agreement having *complete terms* determined by the *initiating party*, which also are fully affirmed by the one entering *the agreement*."
--So ***who*** made an everlasting agreement with ***who***—and what were the "***terms*** of the agreement"?

Charles Simeon—a pastor and bible commentator who died in 1836—makes the rather thought-provoking suggestion that God made a covenant ***with the Son***—and that is why He brought Jesus back from the dead! **Simeon wrote**: "Here he [the author of Hebrews] traces up every thing to a **covenant**; a covenant made **from all eternity between the Father and the Son**, and in due season ratified and confirmed with the Redeemer's blood. In that covenant, the Son of God engaged **to assume our nature**; and in that nature, to **expiate [atone for; cleanse from] our guilt by His own obedience unto death** (Phil 2:8). **The Father promised to accept His vicarious [substitutionary] sacrifice**, and to give Him a people who should be His joy and His glory through eternal ages.

In accordance with this covenant, **Christ had laid down His life:** and in agreement with it, the **Father had now raised Him from the dead**, and empowered Him to perfect the work He had undertaken."
(https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews_1320-21#13:20)

--But there's another aspect of this everlasting ***covenant***—also called the ***new covenant***—whereby God makes an agreement not with His Son, but ***with sinners! What*** is the agreement—and what are the ***terms?***
--The ***agreement*** is that God will ***forgive us***…and ***adopt us*** into His family… and make ***us His children!***
--But what are the ***terms?*** What do we ***need to do*** to receive forgiveness and adoption?
--We need to ***humble ourselves*** before God and acknowledge our sinfulness—and our need for mercy!
--We also need to agree with God that nothing we can do will pay for the penalty we deserve for our sins! But it's ***not enough*** to agree with God that we are ***helpless and hopeless!*** We also need to believe that ***God provided for our payment for us***—through the shed blood of the Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus!
--And we need to put our faith and trust ***in Jesus alone and receive Him*** as God's gift to us for the payment of our sins! When we do that, we have this wonderful promise in **John 1:12** "But as many as received Him [Jesus], to them gave He power [authority, the right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His [Jesus'] name."

What about you? Have you personally done that? Notice again what the verse says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead… ***what's*** the next word? "***Our***" Lord Jesus. Is the Lord Jesus ***yours?*** Do you ***have*** Him; do you ***possess*** Him? If not, God has not made this covenant—this agreement and promise—with you!

How is God the profound provider?
1) The Person God provided is the Great Shepherd.
2) The purpose for which God provided Jesus is the everlasting covenant.
3) The promise God makes is everlasting peace because of the covenant.

How long will this covenant between God and sinful man ***last? Forever***—it is everlasting! That means the peace we've made ***with God***—and the adoption into His family—will ***never end!*** It is an ***everlasting promise*** made by God—not a probationary or temporary one ***dependent upon us***.

God ***initiated*** the covenant…and ***set the terms*** of the covenant…and ***met the terms*** of the covenant. And because God ***will always and forever*** be satisfied with the sacrifice His Son made; we ***will always and forever be forgiven*** on the basis of what Jesus the Son did for us!

How do we know we will ***always and forever be*** forgiven? Because three times—all in reference to the ***new covenant***—we read this promise: "And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more!" (Jer 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 10:17). And all God's people ought to say, "Amen!"

So we have—in vs 20—the description of the God that pastors pray to: the peace-giver, the power-demonstrator, and the profound provider.

And that brings us to verse 21 where we have…

2. The desire for God's people that pastors pray for

Notice again what it says in vs 21.

--Of these two verses, theologian Simon J. Kistemaker wrote: "The first part of the benediction consists of a summary of what **God has done in Christ**; the second reveals what **God is doing in Christ's people**."

As I thought about these two verses—and Kistemaker's statement that I just read—I couldn't help but think of two ***other*** verses. One is Philippians 2:13—which we'll get to in a little bit. The other is **II Peter 1:3a** "According as His divine power hath **given unto us all things** that pertain unto **life** and godliness…"

--In verse 20—the verse we just looked at—we see what God has provided for us to have ***eternal life.***

--Here in verse 21, we see what God has provided for our ***godliness***—meaning our growth in Christ-likeness.

A. The request—for God to equip them

--"Now the God of peace…make you perfect in every good work…"

--Is the writer asking God to make them "perfect" in the sense of ***sin-free?*** No! The word "perfect" here means to "**equip; to make one what he ought to be**" (Biblehub.com).

--***What*** is the writer—in his prayer—asking God to equip them ***for? To do*** His will—meaning, of course, ***God's*** will! But let's not hurry past those ***two little*** words "to do." He's not asking God to merely ***show them*** God's will so they ***can decide if they want*** to do it or not! He is praying that God will equip them ***to do***—to carry out and obey and perform—God's will!

--But the verse doesn't end there, does it? It goes on to say: "working in you that which is **well pleasing in His sight**." I ***don't*** believe the author is ***making a distinction*** between ***doing God's will*** and doing ***what is pleasing*** in God's sight! But he is encouraging them to get their eyes off themselves! The Christian life is ***not about us***—it's about obeying and pleasing God! Not exactly a newsflash, is it? We ***know the words*** "Not my will, but thine be done"—and yet too many times that is ***not our desire!***

--So the request is for God to equip them to do what God wants them to do and live a life pleasing to Him.

But we also see in this verse… B. The reminder—God is at work in them

--We see that in the phrase "**working in you**…"

--So even though the praying pastor/writer is requesting for God to ***equip*** them, he is reminding them that God is ***working*** in them. And although different Greek words are used in **Philippians 2:13**, Paul writes almost the exact same thing: "For it is **God which worketh** in you both to will and **to do** of His good pleasure."

--In other words, God gives you ***the desire*** to do His will—and ***the ability*** to do it!

--And that is why the verse ends: "to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

--Is the "**whom**" that is to be given glory God—or Jesus? And the answer is… "Yes!"

--And even though it's not mentioned in this verse, what "person" of the Trinity ***indwells*** us and ***works*** in us? God the ***Holy Spirit***, right? So all three should be honored and praised and thanked—not just one!

So the prayer of a true pastor is for you to be equipped to do God's will—and live a life that is pleasing to Him—with the reminder that God is the One working in you. But even though it is not stated in this prayer, we must remember… C. The responsibility—we have an active part in our growth

--I've said this multiple times before, but here it is again.

--We "get it" that we cannot ***save ourselves*** from the penalty of our sins and make ourselves right in the sight of God. We call that ***justification***—and only God can do that.

--And we "get it" that we cannot take our current body—and make it a resurrected body like Jesus has now. We call that ***glorification***—and only God can do that.

--But ***sanctification***—the word used for our growth in Christ-likeness—does require that we ***do something***. The garden doesn't plant itself—we must plant the seeds—but we ultimately cannot make the seeds germinate and the plants grow.

In the same way, we cannot "make ourselves holy"—only God can do that! But we have a part in the process!

What is ***our*** part?

--We must ***want to do*** God's will—and ***take in God's Word*** so that we know His will—and ***strive to do*** God's will.

--And then we need to realize that we ***can't do His will*** in our own strength—we must ***ask for*** and ***count on*** God doing it in and through us.

--Can I adequately explain that? No, I can't—at least ***not as well as I'd like to!*** But there are verses that teach this truth, many of which I've given you before. For the sake of space, I only gave you the reference for some of them.

--In I Peter 2:2, we see the necessity of taking in God's Word. **I Peter 2:2** "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"

--In II Corinthians 3:18, we see that as we take in God's Word, God the Holy Spirit changes us! "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

--In **I Corinthians 15:10**, Paul says it was God's grace that made him what he was—and that he labored more abundantly than others. But then he goes on to say it was ***not him*** that labored, but the grace of God ***in him***. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

--And then we have the familiar words of Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

All these verses—and more—remind us that we can't live for God in our own strength, but we are not passive in the process either. Our part is to take in God's word, yield ourselves to Him, and live with the attitude that His strength is made perfect in our weakness!

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First and foremost, Jesus is the great shepherd—but not to everyone!

--Is Jesus your shepherd? He died in your place—to pay the penalty for your sin—so that a holy God could extend to you an invitation of forgiveness—and adoption.

--That is a gift—but it is not yours if you don't receive it for yourself. Have you done that?

2. Second, do you want to do God's will and do what is pleasing in His sight? Based on what Jesus did for us, that is what we should want to do. It is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1).

3. If you are a true believer, God the Holy Spirit is in you—and working to make you like Christ. But we have a part in that growth, don't we? Are you taking in God's Word and asking Him to make you more like Jesus?

4. Lastly, are you giving God honor and praise?

--God saves us…then indwells us so we have the desire and ability to please Him…and in the end rewards us for doing what He actually did in and through us!

--Is that not an amazing thing?

--And is that not a reason to give glory to Him—for ever and ever?