

BENEDICTION
Hebrews 13:18-24

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While in college, I would sometimes get together with a boyhood friend – a fellow named Gene. I was a student at Moody and he was a student at nearby Wheaton College. Gene would eventually serve as my "best man" at my wedding. Well, one time while getting together, Gene and I got to talking about idiom's of speech: cliché's... those trite statements that while quite familiar to those whose first language is English are a huge stumbling block to those trying to learn English. You know these statements...cliché's like...

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink
(Though my favorite variant on that one was Stan Laurel's of the famed comedy duo Laurel and Hardy. Laurel's variant was:
You can lead a horse to water, but a pencil must be lead)
Or how about this one: Three strikes and you're...out
These would all be very common cliché's

Some of the more difficult to explain to someone whose first language is not English would be...

It's a Duesy
That's just pie in the sky
(And my all time favorite): That really wet my whistle

In the end, we made a written collection of over 250 cliches. Well, as I have looked over this text before us again and again and again the cliché that comes to my mind is "Don't beat a dead horse," meaning, don't waste your time or try and overdo it with this text.

There are a few good points we can readily make from this text, but there is simply **no point in trying to draw this out** into a multiple week series.

The author is here bringing his letter to an end, and just as he is bringing things to an end we would do well to do likewise.

Now, if at the beginning of the letter the author gave their name, that part of the Hebrews manuscript must have been lost, early on. As for nearly 2,000 years now we have been reading this self-described "brief" (see v. 22) letter or treatise, wondering just who might have written it. But regardless as to who wrote it this is the conclusion...the benediction...the good-bye. And so at the end of this sermon we will ourselves say

"good-bye" to this book we call Hebrews. We'll come by it again, Lord willing, in passing in future sermons. But beginning next Sunday we'll be heading down a different direction until around August we get into the book of Acts.

So, let's finish out our study of the book of Hebrews by simply considering some of the phrases we find in these final verses....

1. (From verse 18) **A clear conscience.**

That's what the author in verse 18 says of himself: that he (or she...whoever wrote this book) had a clear conscience.

Only you and God know about your conscience. Your conscience is the realm of your **secret thoughts**. A person with a clear conscience is one who need not ever look away, or blink, or feel put on the spot. They can be transparent for they have nothing to be ashamed of and nothing to hide.

Number 5:11-30

If I understand what is going on in this ritual, long before the woman's stomach would become enlarged (or not enlarged) the TENSION brought on by the ritual was, I think, intended to bring out the truth of the matter. For if the woman was indeed guilty of being unfaithful to her husband (as suspected by the husband) then by placing such a BURDEN UPON THE WOMAN'S CONSCIENCE, the woman would be certain to break down and confess. For the threat of her NOT CONFESSING (if in fact she was guilty) sounded so terrible (with its bitter pain, swelling of the womb, her thigh falling away (whatever that means), etc) that her conscience would simply CRY OUT to be free.

Well, it is good to have a clear conscience.

When I was growing up, my dad could fall to sleep in a moment. When this was remarked upon he would say, "It helps to have a clear conscience." He meant that in jest, but there is real truth to it.

Now, the answer to a guilty conscience is to confess one's sin.

James 5:13-16a

Here we have the clear suggestion that, at least at times, there may be a LINK between sickness and unconfessed sin. And the remedy for both is confession...coming clean... seeking to be made right with God and man. This is not to suggest that EVERY illness is rooted in unconfessed sin nor that a confession of some known sin is certain to secure

good health for the confessor. But these verses in James are certainly supportive of what most medical doctors openly acknowledge and that is that a great percent of those seeking physical health from medical doctors would not be seeing them if things were right in the patient's moral, emotional and spiritual life.

2. (From verse 20) **Our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep.**

Shepherds watch over their sheep to make certain they are safe and well fed. Pastors, by definition, are shepherds (or at least they are SUPPOSED to be). Indeed the word "pastor" comes from the Latin, "pastor," meaning "to feed." Sheep feed in the PASTURE...a word that is directly related to the word PASTOR.

So pastors and shepherds do the same thing: they make certain that the sheep are safe and well fed.

Are you being protected and well fed? If so, then I have done my duty and done it well.

But if you are constantly going away spiritually hungry, or if you feel as though you or this church body has been threatened by those who while dressed in sheep's clothing are inwardly ravenous wolves, then I have NOT done my duty or done it well.

Yet many people go to churches, week after week, month after month and even year after year and they are **neither protected nor well fed**. Why they continue to attend such churches is a mystery to me...particularly if there is good food nearby. But for some people there simply IS NOT a good church to be found nearby.

I received a phone call from a man named Joseph, two weeks ago, calling me from near Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. He was inquiring about Burning Hearts because he is so desperately longing for a church where God's word is taught without compromise. Stroudsburg is roughly 100 miles from here! Yet he was wondering if he should just bite the bullet and start making the drive all the way to Burning Hearts...either that or move near here! I told him that I was certain there had to be a good church closer to his home. And so after some research, I found a couple churches much closer to his home for him to check out. I called him about those churches, gave him their contact information and told him I sincerely hope one of them works for him.

It was a bit difficult to relate to Joseph's situation but if you feel like you are spiritually STARVING I guess one would go quite a distance to find some good edible food!

Well the Lord Jesus Christ is our great shepherd. He is your shepherd and he is mine as well. And what he has to offer us is food that can nourish our souls and carry us through life. Meditate on his word, my friends. Take it in. I'll do what I can to help dish his food your way, but there is nothing preventing you from eating it on your own.

So rise up early in the morning and feed on Him!
And then, late at night, have a bedtime snack.

For what you think upon as you lay down to sleep will help
carry you through the night.

His meat is good meat
Let us feed on the Word of God...every word that comes
from the mouth of God.

3. (Also from verse 20) **The blood of the eternal covenant**

Covenants, in scripture, are by definition contracts or agreements entered into by 2 or more parties which have been initiated by the shedding of blood. (Repeat)

And so, for example, **the Abrahamic covenant**, between God and Abraham, was initiated by having Abraham kill a bunch of animals in half, and then spread them on the ground so that God, by His Spirit, might, as a light, pass between those bloody pieces (Genesis 15).

Or **the Mosaic covenant**, between God and the nation of Israel, was initiated when Moses took blood and sprinkled (or threw) the blood on the people who had said they would keep their end of the agreement (Exodus 24).

Well, the covenant to end all covenants was the covenant that Jeremiah predicted in Jeremiah chapter 31 and that Jesus brought into being when he went to the cross and there shed his own blood. And unlike all those previous covenants, this covenant (what we call **the New Covenant** or New Testament) supplants all others and it remains ETERNAL. For how can one ever even imagine TOPPING or BETTERING or IMPROVING upon this **final covenant** between God and man?

4. (From verse 21) **That you may do his will**

Verse 21 makes clear that because of the eternal covenant that was brought to us by Jesus' blood **we have been EQUIPPED** to do God's will...namely, everything that is pleasing in God's sight.

Sometimes I hear of Christians...they may even have been Christians for a long time... but I learn of them and their inward dissatisfaction. It is as if "they have (indeed) tasted that the Lord is good," and they have been feeding on him, but they have grown tired of the taste...as if there must be something more, something sweeter, tastier, or more exciting that God has for them. They believe in Jesus. They believe they have been born again. But **they are looking for something more.** And because of this longing they will seek out God (at least that is who they will say they are seeking) in the most strange ways: as if God is more likely to be found while they **writhe on the ground, or bark like a dog**, or act in ways that any normal person would consider as an evidence of insanity.

This is too bad.

In Acts 17 Paul said to the pagan people of Athens that God is not far from any of us. And if that is true of Pagans it is most certainly true of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So instead of **going on a search** for God in strange ways, I would recommend that we return to a meditation upon our Lord Jesus Christ and the blood of the eternal covenant. For it is in THAT (and not in writhing on the ground or barking like a dog) that the writer here says that we are "equipped...with everything good...that we may do God's will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight."

Instead of seeking out the strange, the different, the bizarre, we would do well to seek out Christ.

You know it says of the Lord Jesus that...well...let's read it...

Mark 1:35

Luke 5:16

Luke 6:12

This was the practice of our Savior: seeking out **quiet places, alone places**, spending long times in prayer. Yet some Christians have been deceived into thinking that the place where they will find strength, or a renewed filling of God's holy spirit is only when they come into an assembly, sing songs, sway with the music, and have someone lay their hands on them...so that they may then writhe on the ground or bark like a dog. Really? My friends, don't be deceived!

Isaiah had a much better suggestion of how we should seek the presence of God. In Isaiah 55 (verses 6-7) he wrote,

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;

*let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."*

5. (From verse 25, the last verse of this book) **Grace be with all of you.**

We who have been in the church for awhile have likely heard the statement that the word GRACE can be taken as an acronym, wherein each letter stands for a word. So the word grace, spelled G. R. A. C. E. stands for God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Sometimes we hear things like that and they're just a bit **too corny** or even misdirected. But I don't think that is the case here. For truly God's grace is best seen to us in what has been shown to us in Jesus: God's Riches at Christ's Expense.

And this grace, while very costly or expensive for our Lord, has been offered to us freely. We can't buy it; we can't repay Him for it. If God has forgiven you for your sins, then what you CAN DO is say "Thank you!"

God has shown great grace to us. We didn't deserve it, yet we were shown it. And if God did that for us, the challenge is that we should do that for others. We are to become people who exude grace, meaning we are people who are to be forgiving, and kind...not difficult. If our lives were compared to a jagged rock, **our sharp edges should be coming off more and more as we go through life.** We may be very conscious of the rough edges that we still bear, BUT COMPARED TO HOW WE USED TO BE, the difference should be amazing. If we could but only see what we will look like in the future, we may be in awe of how smooth we will become. For we have been spending our life in the rotary rock tumbler of God's grace, and the longer we spend in that tumbler the smoother we are getting.

(Turn to the person next to you and say, "You're looking smoother today!")

That's GRACE: knocking off the edges, the ridges, the sharp jagged points.

Yes, the prayer is for grace to be with all of us: that we might live in grace, knowing the grace of God in Christ, and being ourselves remade into his likeness and image.

And so ends this great book of Hebrews – a book meant to tell us that **Jesus is greater than everyone so we better be careful** how we live. So walk in faith and don't ever quit, my friends.

- Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus
- Run the race that has been set before you
- And run it well.