The God of Peace

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Preacher: Principal W.J.Cameron

[0:00] Turn with me now to the epistle to the Hebrews chapter 13, that's verse 20.

Hebrews the 13th chapter verses 20 and 21. Now the God of peace, let brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.
To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Several of the New Testament epistles include not only exposition, exhortation and warning, but also prayers.
Here we find a prayer at the end of this great epistle. In other epistles we find them sometimes at the end and sometimes interspersed with the teaching.
Now these prayers show us, for one thing, that the writers of the epistles recognized that although they were writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it was not enough that the people who heard the epistles read, as they would be in the first instance, should hear the words written, should hear the words that were written.
[2:03] They needed also that the Holy Spirit, who had inspired the words, might at the same time bless the words to them, that they would become effectual.

For doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction and righteousness. But again, they would encourage the readers or the hearers of the epistles.
Because they would recognize that the writer not only took time to give them counsel and encouragement in writing, but also prayed for them.
It is a great thing to know that we have a place in the prayers of the Lord's people. The father of the great commentator Matthew Henry said on one occasion, There are three things I would not for the world have against me.
My own conscience, the word of God and the prayers of the Lord's people. But it is of course a far more important thing, that we should have an abiding interest in the prevailing intercession of Jesus Christ himself.
[3:25] And that interest is assured to his people. And they should never pray that they would have for special occasions and special needs, such an interest in that intercession, as that the needed unsuitable blessing would come down to them at the time of need.

But also, these prayers in the epistles, would help them in their own prayers by way of example. If this is what the inspired writer of the epistle desired for them, surely it was right that they should continue to pray along these lines themselves, that this prayer would be answered and answered repeatedly in their experience, throughout the entire earthly pilgrimage.
Anyway, here we have a great comprehensive prayer, closing this epistle to the Hebrews. And there are four points, which I wish to touch upon briefly with you this morning.
And the first is that we have here an attractive view of God. Now I hope that doesn't startle you, for I am not forgetting, that the total character of God is the supreme object of beauty in the entire universe.
The psalmist glimpsed something of it when he prayed that he might abide in the house of God continually, that he might behold and admire the beauty of the Lord.
[5:10] But while that is so, we do not have any single passage of scripture which sets before us the total character of God in all its magnificence and in all its beauty.

But because our capacity for understanding is limited, scripture sets before us at one time one aspect of God's character and at another time another aspect.
And not every aspect of God's character can at all times be attractive to us or encouraging to us. For the unconverted sinner or the man or woman who has come to acknowledge the burden of guilt

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and the peril of sin and reads that God is wroth with ill men or wicked men every day and that his curse rests upon the wicked as he is righteous and holy and hates sin, that view of God cannot be attractive at that time but rather awe-inspiring and repelling to the sinner until he comes to see another side of God's character by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and its relation to him and his need.
But when we see, when we have God set before us as a God of peace that is an attractive view of God a view encouraging to his people and a view encouraging to the sinner also.
For he is a God who is a restorer of peace where there is no peace between him and the wicked. He has provided a way of reconciliation. So then looking at this attractive view of God we see first of all that it is a fitting description of God because God is a God who possesses perfect peace.
[6:52] There has been eternally perfect harmony between the persons of the Trinity. There is perfect peace in the mind of God. He does not suffer disturbance and discord in mind or in heart as we do.

He is a God who possesses peace. And he is a God who purposed peace. When he created his rational creatures he created them in a relationship to himself of trust and obedience in which they would enjoy peace with him and so long as they continued in that relationship would continually have peace.
Perfect peace. He purposed peace but when sin came with its disrupting influence between God and his rational creatures God provided for man passing by fallen angels.
He revealed himself as the restorer of peace and provided a way for reconciliation to those who were alienated from him as I have already said.
He intimated his purpose to restore peace at the very outset. It was dimly hinted at in the promise that he made that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head.
[8:06] And when many centuries later that promise came to fulfilment in the birth of Jesus Christ his son upon the earth the angels proclaimed peace on earth to men of good will or to good will towards men whichever translation you take.

And then as Jesus' career upon earth came to its culmination upon the cross we find Paul giving this interpretation of God's purpose.
It pleased the Father he said that in him all fullness should dwell and by him to make peace by the blood of his cross reconciling all things to himself whether things in heaven or things on earth.
And in the epistle to the Ephesians Paul says this of the preaching of the gospel through the apostles and the others who cooperated with them that Christ came preaching peace to those who were afar off and to those that were nigh.
the peace of reconciliation to God through himself. God is the restorer of peace but it is not peace on any terms but peace on God's own terms.
[9:22] For we read in the epistle to the Romans what these terms are. therefore being justified by faith trusting in Christ having his righteousness imputed to us being justified by faith we have peace with God peace of state through our Lord Jesus Christ.

peace of state so long as a person does not come to him by way of Christ there is no peace saith my God to the wicked but by comfort to the one who comes by way of Christ peace is offered through the pardon of sin and peace progressive and peace is offered as we shall see through the work of the Holy Spirit.
That then in the first place an attractive view of God the God of peace but we are not going to lose our hold of this description of God right through because the next thing that we come to is an encouraging act of the God of peace and what is that encouraging act?
He is described as the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant.
First of all we have here one of the few references to the resurrection in this epistle. You see the writer of this epistle because he is writing mainly about the priesthood of Christ is concerned with the ascension of Christ and his heavenly work there.
[11:07] That corresponds in his view to the Holy of Holies in the old tabernacle or the old temple the place where the high priest of the Aaronic Order was permitted to go only once a year as the representative of the people.

Christ in heaven is the fulfilment of what was typified by the work of the old high priest and therefore attention is focused more on the ascension than on the resurrection.

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You see the resurrection was a stage towards the ascension but here he comes to mention the resurrection itself. Now of course it was a physical resurrection that he was thinking of not the spiritual or the airy fairy resurrection that pleases some people today and with which they pervert the scriptures.
It was the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead. Now the resurrection of Christ from the dead has a place of prime importance in the teaching of the New Testament and there are three things in particular that it teaches us.
first of all when Christ before he suffered spoke of his resurrection at times he pointed to the resurrection as the supreme miracle the supreme mighty work that would attest all that he claimed for himself in his teaching and in the mighty works that he did.
[12:34] When he was asked to show a sign beyond his miracles and other mighty works he said there would be no sign given them but the sign of the prophet Jonas and he went on to draw the parallel between Jonas being three days and three nights in the belly of the whale and he's been three days and three nights in the heart of the earth and there would be the resurrection following.

The resurrection then attests all that Christ claimed to be the son of God the promised savior the one who was mighty to save the only way of salvation.
But then again the resurrection attests God's acceptance of the once for all sacrifice of Christ at Calvary on behalf of every sinner who will trust in him for salvation.
He was delivered says Paul for our offenses and raised again for our justification. when Christ had done everything that God required of him on the cross he permitted him also to go into the grave that he might rise as the conqueror of death the last enemy and he rose from the grave in proof that he had fully satisfied God on behalf of every sinner who will trust in him to the end of time.
it attests God's perfect satisfaction with Christ's finished work his sacrifice upon the cross. But furthermore Christ's resurrection is said by Paul to be the first fruits the first fruits of the great harvest of all his believing people who will rise to a blessed resurrection through him in due time.
[14:27] And so important did Paul reckon the truth of the resurrection to be in his teaching that he said to the Corinthians that if Christ was not risen from the dead they had been false witnesses of God and the faith they professed was vain but now he said is Christ risen.

These things then are set forth in the truth of the resurrection. but we have here you will notice a twofold description of Christ.
He is described as our Lord Jesus and then as that great shepherd of the sheep. Now the words our Lord Jesus show his relationship to the church to every believer.
every believer claims Jesus as saviour personal saviour but every believer also should claim and acknowledge Christ as Lord.
The sinner coming in flight from the wrath and curse of God that is due to sin flying to Christ as the refuge set before him or her in the gospel should come to Christ not only for deliverance from the guilt of past sin but to surrender to him entirely as the Lord of life that hence forward his will may be done by the power of his grace in the surrendered life and that there may be complete liberation from sin.
[16:06] Not only the guilt of sin past but the power of sin present all the days of life until at last there is perfect perfect holiness when the soul passes into glory but then we have this further description applicable of course to the church but not bringing out the same points that great shepherd of the sheep now we know that in the Old Testament there are descriptions of God as the shepherd of his people we have it in the Psalms in more Psalms than one but there are also descriptions in the Old Testament prophecies of Christ as the shepherd and in the New Testament you will remember that Christ called himself the good shepherd and that Peter calls him the chief shepherd but here the emphasis is upon the greatness he is the great shepherd now looking back at the Old Testament prophecies we find that he is great great in respect of his person we find

Zacharias saying prophesying of Christ's death awake oh sword against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow saith the Lord how could a man be the fellow of the Lord only because in Christ's case he was from all eternity very God of very God as well as and he became when he assumed human nature very man of very man he united a true manhood to his eternal deity but then Micah brings that out more clearly in the famous passage to which Herod was directed to which Herod was directed when the wise men came asking where he was to be born that was to be the savior of Israel the expected savior and he was directed to the fifth chapter of Micah and there it was found that out of Bethlehem would come one whose goings forth were of old from everlasting

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and a little further on using shepherd language it is said that he would stand and feed in the majesty of the Lord his God the greatness of his person very God of very God and very man of very man unless our savior would not have accomplished salvation he would be too small for us we must hold on to the deity of Jesus Christ and to his perfect humanity his true humanity these two united in the one person but then again he is great in respect of his sacrificial love for he said of himself as we find in John chapter 10 the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep and later on he said in another passage greater love than this hath no man that a man laid down his life for his friends the greatness of his sacrificial love no one had such a valuable life on earth no one had so much to give no one could meet the situation that he came to deal with but Jesus Christ and he gave his holy manhood united to his deity in sacrifice to God for our sins the greatness of his sacrificial love you know the grace of our Lord

Jesus Christ says Paul how that he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor that you through his poverty might be made rich he was born in a stable cradled in a manger in his earthly days frequently had not where to lay his head he died upon a cross and was laid in a borrowed grave he gave himself in the uttermost sacrifice says the prophet he poured out his soul unto death on behalf of his people great in his sacrificial love but also he is great in his discriminating care for Isaiah for Isaiah for Isaiah using shepherd language talks of him as gathering the lambs in his arms and gently leading those that are with young he has a discriminating care for his people he knows them individually he knows their temperament he knows their circumstances he knows their temptations and according to their individual needs and he has made no individual

God has made no individuality exactly like that of another Christ knows every separate individual and according to individual needs and circumstances trials and temptations he adapts his grace and gives more grace in time of special need he gathers the lambs with his arms and tenderly leads those that are with young he is great in his discriminating care he counts the number of the stars it is said of God he names them everyone and so he would have us believe he knows individually all his people throughout the wide world the Lord knoweth them who are his his discriminating care but he is great in his saving condescension for he says using shepherd language also in that chapter in which he does it I am the door by me if any man or any person enters in he or she shall be saved it doesn't matter who he is or who she is it doesn't matter what he or she has been it doesn't matter how great the guilt and the estrangement they may feel only let the sinner draw near and put his trust in Christ who said him who comes

I will in no was cast out and salvation will be hers or his great in his saving condescension but further we find here that there is mention made of the everlasting covenant now when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper he spoke of the new covenant he said of the cup this cup is the new covenant in my blood or you have certain translations the new testament it is the same Greek word the new covenant now this new covenant is mentioned at length in Hebrews chapter 8 there the writer to the Hebrews lifts a passage out of Jeremiah chapter 21 8 31 at verse 31 where Jeremiah was foretelling that

[23:20] God was going to make with his people in the latter days a new covenant in the place of the old covenant he had made with Moses which was made only for a period this is a new and an everlasting covenant and we read of it this covenant in the prophecy of Isaiah that 54th chapter that we read where it is where God says this of his covenant with his people that the mountains may depart and the hills be removed familiar objects that we have considered to be essential and continuous and stable and necessary these things may be removed from our environment familiar relationships may go great changes may take place in our life he says my kindness shall not be removed neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee and this covenant is an everlasting covenant we find in one of the chapters of

Isaiah chapter 51 how he contrasts it with the things that are passing away and he says my coming my righteousness shall be forever and my salvation to the ends of the earth very well then here is the everlasting covenant you see the benefit of God's gifts of grace is stressed often by the word everlasting it comes in repeatedly in this epistle eternal or everlasting so much that we know in this present time is transitory and passing but the things of God's spiritual blessing are forever the salvation of his people is forever the kindness of the Lord to his people is forever no changes in their circumstances however distressing however depressing however desolating can separate them from the love of Christ the love of God in Jesus Christ no power in heaven or on earth can separate them from it an everlasting covenant and then it is said that he has brought him again from

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the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant that is to say it is the blood of Christ shed that paid the price that was necessary in order that such a covenant might be established with the ill deserving the undeserving the hell deserving through the merit of Jesus Christ so then we have this encouraging act of God that he brought the God of peace that he brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant therein he laid the foundation for the approach to him as the God of peace for those who believe in Jesus thirdly we have an essential work of the God of peace and that we get in verse 21 make you perfect he says in every good work to do his will working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ now we are at the work of sanctification the initial work of grace on the part of
God reconciling to the sinner to himself following upon regeneration is justification where peace of state with God is granted but so long as sin remains in the believer there can be no perfect harmony between himself or herself and God there is disharmony in the believer soul so long as sin remains and this is the essential work of the God of peace that he should sanctify the soul that is of the believer until it is perfectly sanctified perfectly sin is driven out and the soul is brought into perfect unity with the will and purpose of God and is perfected in holiness and that is what we have referred to here make you perfect in every good work to do his will now as we read also in Isaiah 54 it is said there that all thy children that is all the children of
God all those who are believers and members of the church of God will be taught of God and the teacher is the Holy Spirit and it is said great shall be their peace now I heard a worthy minister many years ago talking on this verse in Isaiah that the people of God children would all be taught of God and he said the Holy Spirit has different classrooms one obvious classroom is the classroom of the reading of the word or the reading of the word or it may be at the Lord's table but another classroom may be the classroom of the discipline to which God subjects his people the discipline sanctified by the Holy Spirit no chastisement says the writer to the Hebrews they were suffering persecution they knew what it was they knew other sorrows no chastisement for the time being is pleasant we may practice it that way but afterwards he said it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them who are exercised thereby a good man once said
[28:58] I am not so much afraid of trouble coming as that trouble may go away unblessed here we have then reference to the work of God by his spirit this is what has been prayed for that they would be made perfect in every good work to do his will now it is part of the terms of the new covenant not only that sins and iniquities will be remembered no more but that God will put his law in the mind and write it in the inward parts that is that there will be inward conformity to the law of God inward obedience brought about so that there will be what the psalmist describes of running in the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart says the psalmist I will run I will go willingly readily in the way of thy commandments apart from the work of God's liberty and spirit we cannot do that this is what is prayed for and

John Calvin points out with regard to this verse that we must we should not confine it simply to the keeping of God's commandments the Ten commandments he said it should embrace every good work that is according to the will of God which he gives us opportunity and occasion to perform that we should be ready to do it every good work this then is what is asked for here and as this work goes on peace with God will be promoted there will be inner harmony the conscience will cease to be so accusing there will of course be a consciousness of sin to the end for there will never be perfection so long as we live in this world but this work is going on and where God has begun the good work he will continue it by the means that the spirit sees best whether by the teaching of the world or whether by personal affliction or bereavement or whatever it may be he sanctifies not only through the truth but through the dealings of his providence but he will never suffer his people to be tested or tried above that they are able but will always with a trial or temptation provide a way of escape that they may be able to bear it
Peter comforts those who are experiencing persecution and going to experience more of it by saying that they should remember that the trials to which they were subjected were not special trials that they themselves had and that there was no corresponding trial to but that all over the world the trials of these and all things says the word work together for good to them that love God who are called according to his purpose but then notice before we pass from this part that he says through Jesus Christ let us not forget that Christ is the channel through which we receive forgiveness Christ is the channel through which we receive the Holy Spirit Christ is the channel through which we

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receive all needed grace communicated by the Spirit and Christ is the way by which our works as they are prompted and developed and produced under the influence of the
Spirit are acceptable to God for as I was saying last night no work of a sinner is ever perfect in this world but the works of the true believer promoted by the Holy Spirit are acceptable Christ sake when George Herbert the well known poet preacher was dying a chaplain at his bedside reminded him of all the good works that he had done to which he immediately replied no work is good in God's sight except as it is cleansed by the blood of Christ our persons our works are only acceptable to God through the merit of Jesus Christ but there is one thing more and this is the last point the glory that is due to the God of peace to whom be glory forever and ever amen now by the proximity of this last phrase to the words
Jesus Christ it may seem that the words are applicable to Christ but I think John Calvin is right when he refers looking at the structure of the sentence he refers the words back to God the God of peace with whom the sentence begins now the God of peace to whom be glory forever and ever amen you may have noticed that the apostles and the writers of the New Testament frequently break out into praise when they have before their minds the great and wonderful works of God in his grace for sinful men we have Paul doing that from time to time praise in the wonder of God's wisdom the wonder of God's grace and here we have this writer ascribing glory to God forever and ever the New Testament is full of exhortations to thankfulness why because we are so ready to take for granted the gifts and providence and grace that we receive from
[34:39] God and to forget to be thankful when one out of ten cleansed lepers came back to give thanks to God through Christ Jesus said were there not ten cleansed but where are the nine so then let us remember that we should give thanks and glory to God for all his gifts in providence and in grace after he has finished setting forth the great doctrines in the epistle to the Romans Paul says this I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God as reasonable service or perhaps as reasonable worship as words may be rendered we should give thanks to God not only by word of mouth by prayer by singing his praise but by consecrating our lives laying our lives at his disposal for his glory seeking that we would be enabled day by day and hour by hour to do his will and to glorify him with our bodies and with our spirits which are the

Lord's there's something very beautiful said about the Macedonian believers by Paul when he was exhorting the Corinthians to be ready and liberal with their collection for the poor saints he says of the Macedonian believers that their method of giving to the Lord was this they first gave themselves to the Lord and afterwards to us they laid themselves out at the Lord's disposal and he directed them to the liberal giving to the poor saints Lord we should seek to have the Lord's direction for his glory in all that we do in the ordinary business of life and in all our relationships and it is only as the Holy Spirit keeps us alert to this and enables us to do it that we will rightly and helpfully express our thankfulness to God in a practical as well as a way praise and prayer may he had his blessing let us pray Oh Lord our God thou has set before us the great truths and revelation of thy grace in Christ may we not belittle it may we not belittle the revelation thou has given us may we not think lightly of the great thing that there was done may we not neglect the great salvation may we not forget that we are under serious obligation to render thanks to the Lord by the dedication of our persons to him for his service and glory and by coming to him continually praising and thanking him and giving grace giving thanks to him and praise to him for all that he has done for us in
Providence and in grace and for all that we hope he will yet do we thank thee that thy servant was able to say when he thought of the state into which the believer had been brought now are we the sons of God but we do not and we do not know what we shall yet be but we know that when he comes we will be when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is carry on to this glorious fruition the work that thou has begun for thy people and where thou has not begun the good work we entreat thee of thy great mercy begin it continue it perfected to the glory of thy great name now in days to come and when the whole master of thy redeemed people stands before the great white throne and are welcome to the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world take us into thy care and keeping now watch over us for good throughout the remainder of this day prepare us for thy will on the morrow and if it be thy goodwill bring us up prepared of thy spirit to profit by the service of the sanctuary by the observance of the sacrament and remove from us all it is hindering for Jesus sake amen

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