

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER 4/9/2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? I thank God for his wisdom in Christ that equips us to walk in his ways with grace and understanding.

Today's encouragement is our last in our series from Hebrews and it is on, "The Finale of Hebrews – A Benediction." This is followed by church matters.

ENCOURAGEMENT: The Finale of Hebrews – A Benediction

Do you know the difference between a "benediction" and a "doxology"? Benediction comes from the Latin to "speak well of" and means to bless. It is the pronouncement of a blessing on God's people, like I might do at the end of a service when I quote 2 Corinthians 13:14 – "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Spirit be with you all." Blessing seeks God to act in the lives of his people and bring to them the good that flows from the gospel.

Doxology comes from the Greek, "a word of glory" and it declares who God is to give glory to him like the doxology from Jude 24-25, which we sing in an upbeat form in the evening service, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen." Often I hear these terms being confused. It is not surprising. Does not his blessing bring God praise? And does not Scripture use blessing and praise interchangeably?

Here in Hebrews, the author finishes with a benediction, the blessing of the gospel upon his readers and himself and those with him,

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-21

The first indicator that this is a benediction is the word "may". It indicates that this statement entreats God to bless his people. It addresses God as "the God of peace". Peace means more than a lack of interpersonal conflict, but wholeness of being in mind and body. God is the source of peace who brings wholeness into our lives as we trust in him. So we see God act to bring us peace. How?

First, we see that “through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus”. The blood of the eternal covenant is the blood Jesus spilt upon the cross to cleanse us from sin. We are brought into covenant relationship with God through the sacrifice of Christ and so now have peace with God. It is then because of the obedience of the eternal Son, that the Father raises him to life to reign as the Lord of all. This is the gospel, Jesus died and risen, defeating sin and death to bring us into right relationship with God. We are blessed by the gospel.

Next, Jesus is identified as the “great Shepherd of the sheep”. A common metaphor for the relationship of God with his people is that of a shepherd leading sheep (eg. Psalm 100). Calling Jesus “the great Shepherd of the sheep” is to give him a divine title, recognising that he is God in the flesh. This a picture of peace too, but not only peace with God and security in our relationship with him, but peace with each other – we, his sheep, together under Christ, our Shepherd. Through the gospel we can find peace in our relationships with each other as the Spirit works among us to love and forgive like Christ.

“Equip” is the first “imperative of petition” and marks what the author implores God to do in blessing his people. “Equip you with everything good for doing his will” that is, to give you what you need to live your life well by faith in Jesus. It is to give you what you need to meet life’s challenges in step with God’s will and purpose for us in Christ. The second petition “work in us what is pleasing to him” seeks the work of the Spirit to change us, empower us and direct us to live in a way that brings glory and honour to him and brings him pleasure and joy.

So the author ends with a doxology, a word of praise, “through Jesus Christ to whom be glory, forever and ever. Amen.” The goal and purpose of our lives is to bring glory to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to whom praise is forever due. It is as we live for Christ that God is glorified in us and we grow to know him more. Our lives are to be a doxology to God.

We, the people of God, those who trust in Christ, are blessed through the gospel of our Lord Jesus. So we should seek to bless people with gospel. This might be to say to someone on a Sunday morning at church, “May the God of grace give you a depth of understanding of every good thing you have in Christ.” You might write a letter or card to someone saying “The God who raised Jesus from the dead give you strength and joy in Christ to live for him” or you could even pen the words of Hebrews 13:20-21 as a blessing to a person. It impacts the way we pray, to not only say in our prayers, “Bless Bob, bless Sally, bless Peter” but to pray the gospel for people that they might be equipped by the gospel according to the work of the Spirit in us to live God’s way.

The author to the letter of the Hebrews ends with a blessing because he seeks God’s work in the people of God. Are we blessing one another with the words of the gospel?

FINAL COMMENTS *Grace be with you all.*
As always, love and prayers, Steve.

Hebrews 13:25