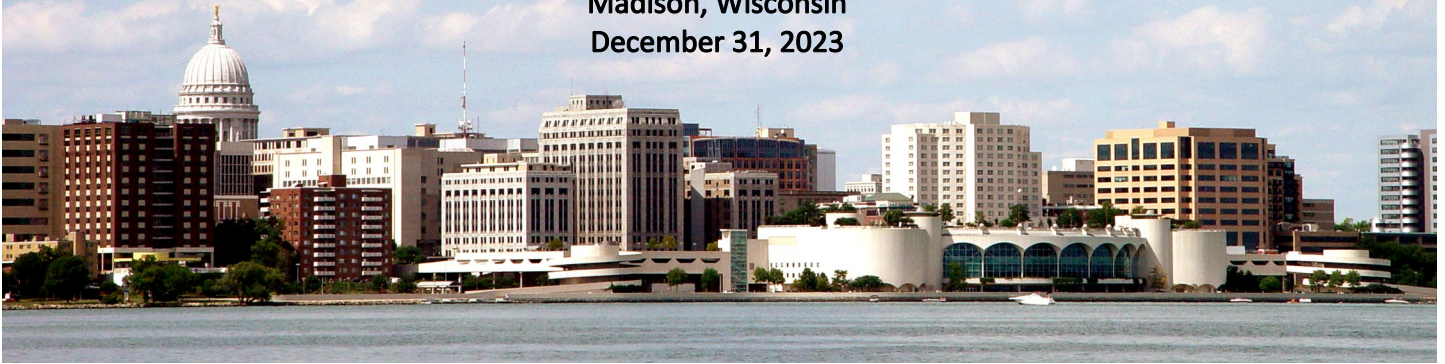


Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-25

Baxter T. Exum (#1718)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning or joining us online or on the phone, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to honor God, and one way we do that is by sharing the good news that he loves us. He sent his only Son to this earth to die in our place; he was buried, he was raised up on the third day, and this is the gospel. We obey the gospel by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And we have an interesting illustration of what it looks like to obey the gospel, coming to us in the form of an update from the VanDyke congregation over in Warren, Michigan (which is a suburb just north of Detroit). They posted online earlier this week and they say, "What a wonderful day! Another precious soul was added to the church. Sadie Williams was baptized into Christ today. And then amazingly, we received a call from the Highland congregation asking if they could baptize someone at our building. When they arrived, we discovered that the young lady being baptized was also named Sadie Williams! So we had the great pleasure of witnessing two souls added to the body of Christ and they are both named Sadie Williams! We rejoice along with the Highland congregation for these two souls. Oh happy day!" What a unique situation over in Michigan this week! And we share these two examples by way of encouragement, and this is our invitation to you to obey the gospel. If you have not yet done what these two have done, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship this morning, or give me a call, send a text, or send an email using the contact information in our bulletin or on the website, and we would love to study together.

This morning, we come to the end of our year-long study of Hebrews, a series that started with a request from one of our young adults! And as you can see, I've put the lessons in this series on the front of today's bulletin, and the lessons are also available on our website as PDF's and text documents as well as the audio (MP3) files, and the videos are all on our YouTube channel. I just thought that listing these like this might save us some review time! As I go through the questions and sermon requests you guys turn in on a regular basis, I often tell myself that we "need more Jesus," and when that request for Hebrews came in, I thought, "This is perfect! Hebrews is all about Jesus!" I was not expecting this to continue on for a year, but here we are! I have been

surprised at how diverse these lessons have been. We've studied one book, but the author has included many subjects in this letter, and for this, I am thankful. Nevertheless, as I said as we started last January, we would take some time off for some guest speakers and some singing along the way, but we have made our way through the entire book, and I have been blessed by it; I hope you have as well. But the theme of the book comes in this constant reminder that "Jesus is Better." He is God's last word, he is the creator of all things, he is the pioneer of our salvation (clearing the way for us to follow), he is better than Moses, a better sacrifice, a better priest, a better tabernacle, he is the author and perfecter of our faith.

It is appropriate, then, that we finish our study on the last day of the year by coming to a final blessing and a final appeal, and much of this comes in the form of what we might refer to as a "benediction." A benediction is a blessing, and it almost looks like a wish, but it's more than a wish; it's almost a prayer in the form of a statement, a request from the one who speaks, a pronouncement of God's favor on behalf of an assembled congregation.

And the Bible is full of statements like this. For those of you who were able to attend KT's wedding, you may remember that right before the meal I gave KT and Ben the blessing given by God through Moses in Numbers 6:24-26, ***"The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance on you, and give you peace."*** This blessing is actually found on one of the earliest pieces of scripture we've ever found – we found this blessing on a tiny silver scroll wrapped up in an ancient piece of jewelry, going back hundreds of years before Christ. But we also have blessings at the end of most of the letters in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 16:23-24, for example, Paul says, ***"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."*** At the end of 2 Corinthians, he says, ***"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."*** At the end of Galatians he says, ***"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen."*** At the end of Philippians he says, ***"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."*** At the end of Jude, Jude says, ***"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."*** Well, so also in Hebrews. In last week's study, the author of Hebrews is asking his readers to pray for him; now he prays for them (in a sense).

But here we are, at the end of Hebrews, and today we come to Hebrews 13:20-25,

²⁰ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, ²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ²² But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. ²⁴ Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. ²⁵ Grace be with you all.

This morning, I'd like to divide our thoughts by noting the OBJECT of this blessing (God, to whom this prayer is addressed, the one who will be doing the blessing), we'll then move on to the SUBJECT (the people who will benefit from this blessing). And then we'll close by briefly noting the closing words and greetings in this passage.

I. But let's start by noting the description of GOD in this passage.

And I hope we notice that this statement is far more than a wish. This isn't some pagan superstition. The author of Hebrews is not summoning good vibes from the universe here. He's not appealing to karma or any such nonsense. No, the author is calling on God. He's asking God to bless these people.

A. And he starts by referring to God as the "GOD OF PEACE."

God, in fact, is referred to as the *"God of peace"* at least six times in the New Testament, and (other than this one) all of those references come from Paul, which reminds us that although Paul was almost certainly not the author of Hebrews, these two men probably knew each other and perhaps even traveled together. But God is described here as being the *"God of peace."* And we should note here that peace is so much more than an absence of war. Biblically speaking, peace may be the absence of conflict, but more importantly, peace may involve a sense of well-being. We might compare it to the word "health." Today, we know that health may involve the lack of sickness, but health is so much more than that. So also with peace.

Well, God is a God who loves to make peace, and we can have that peace (we can have that sense of spiritual well-being) when we submit our will to his. As Paul says in Philippians 4:9, *"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."* We live in chaotic times, but thankfully, God has made peace with us. And God being a God of peace certainly doesn't mean that he's wimpy. In Romans 16:20, in fact, Paul says that *"...the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."* Sometimes peace involves crushing. But God is, by nature, a God of *"peace."*

And this would have been so comforting to these people who were hearing this or reading this for the very first time. They were just starting to face persecution. They were losing their homes and their property, and their jobs, and they were facing some intense pressure from their own families, and it was about to get worse. But they were at peace with God.

The author, then, is calling on the God of peace to bless these people. But, does the God of peace have the power to bless these people? This leads us to the next description of God, as we find that...

B. ...God is now described as the God who "BROUGHT [JESUS] UP FROM THE DEAD."

God, then, is a God who has the power to raise the dead, and nobody else can say this. When Jesus died on the cross, he was buried later that day, but on the third day God brought him back. And again, we go to Paul who refers to God and the *"...working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead"* (Ephesians 1:19). The resurrection of Jesus was a demonstration of God's power. Nobody else can raise the dead. This surpasses all political power, all physical power, all financial power, all intellectual power, all military power. Nobody but God can raise the dead. The author, then, issues this blessing by calling on the God of peace and the God who had the power to raise Jesus from the dead.

By the way, do you know how many times the author of Hebrews has referred to the resurrection of Jesus? Once! And it's right here at the very end of the message. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, then he can also respond to this blessing.

C. And this leads us to the fact that the author brings Jesus into the blessing by referring to the "GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP."

He certainly could have just referred to "Jesus" here, but he doesn't; instead, he describes Jesus as *"the great shepherd of the sheep."* A few notes here, starting with the reminder that we are sheep. It's not a flattering

reference, is it? But it's accurate. Sheep have a way of wandering. I asked Michael if we could sing "O Thou Fount of Every Blessing" this morning, because the second verse says, "Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God; He to rescue me from danger interposed his precious blood." And in the last verse the author refers to God's "goodness like a fetter, bind[ing] our wandering hearts to [his]." As sheep, we need a shepherd, because we are "prone to wander" (as the song says). So, he is our great high priest, but Jesus is also the "**great shepherd**." How can we possibly expect to stay faithful? Because we have a "**great shepherd**" to guide us and feed us and protect us. He is "**great**," because after his resurrection, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth, before he ascended back into heaven he promised to be with us until the end of the age. So, he has compassion for us, and he also has the power to do something about it.

D. The last phrase in verse 20 describes Jesus as "LORD" and says that he can do all of this "THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE ETERNAL COVENANT."

The New Covenant is "**eternal**" because there will be no end to it, and there is no other covenant still to come. This is it. It's this covenant that was ratified by Jesus' blood and commemorated BEFORE it went into effect. To the best of my knowledge, the Lord's Supper is the first and only memorial in human history to be established BEFORE the event to be remembered. Imagine building a WWII Memorial before WWII, or imagine building a memorial to 9-11 before 9-11. It makes no sense. The Lord's death, though, was so certain and so important that Jesus himself established the memorial to his death...the night before his death. "***This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood,***" Jesus said in Luke 22:20. We now remember, or in a sense "renew" our commitment to this covenant on the first day of every week when we partake of the Lord's Supper. And how do we know that God will uphold his end of the covenant? He sealed it with the blood of his Son.

And this makes him "**Jesus our Lord**." This blessing is made in his name, by his authority. So, what is the blessing? What is the prayer itself? This brings us to the second half of the benediction...

II. ...as the author now comes to the request that's being made on OUR BEHALF. **PPT******

Ultimately, the whole point of this blessing is that we "**do His will**." That's the goal here. Based on what we've studied up until now, we know what his will is; now it is time to "**do His will**." His will is that we "**pay much closer attention to what we have heard**" (2:1). His will is that we "**hold fast our confession**" (4:14). His will is that we "**draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith**" (10:22). His will is that we "**consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together**" (10:24-25). His will is that we "**lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us**" (Hebrews 12:1). His will is that we "**fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith**" (Hebrews 12:2). His will is that we "**let the love of the brethren continue,**" that we "**show hospitality to strangers,**" that we "**remember those in prison,**" that we keep the "**marriage bed undefiled,**" that we "**keep ourselves free from the love of money**" (Hebrews 13:1-5), and so on. The goal here, then, is that we "**do his will**."

A. We can do this, first of all, through this blessing, because he "EQUIPS US IN EVERY GOOD THING."

The word translated here as "**equip**" (in the NASB) is a word that refers to being made ready or complete; to prepare. The word is used in Matthew 4 with reference to fishermen mending their nets. They were making those nets ready or complete to do the job they were intended to do. The word was used by physicians in the ancient world with reference to setting broken bones. The word was used in the ancient world with reference to armies being supplied with sufficient armor and weaponry. The word was used in the ancient world to refer

to sailors supplying a ship before setting sail on a long journey. They were equipped by gathering what they needed to be successful on their journey.

I think about this in terms of having the right tools for the job. Our washing machine broke this week, so I watched a few YouTube videos and diagnosed the problem and ordered the part for about \$10 on Amazon. Based on the videos, I knew I needed a 5/16" nut driver, a flat-head screwdriver, a Phillips screwdriver, and a pair of needle-nosed pliers. I grabbed those from our garage, went to the basement, and got it done because I was equipped to get it done, and it would have been impossible to do without the proper tools. So also, God equips us. God doesn't just say, "Welcome to the family! You're on your own, now go do the best you can!" No, he ***"equips us in every good thing."*** With every command, he gives us the tools that are needed to obey each command. Above all, we have the inspired word of God, which (according to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17) is ***"...inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*** But I believe God may also equip us in every good thing by providing us with Christian friends, by placing us in a faithful congregation like the one we have here. He equips us by providing elders, and teachers, and preachers. He's provided many of us with godly parents and other good examples. He equips us. The way I see this is that there will never be a time where we can say, "Well, I know what God wants me to do, but it's impossible for me to do it because I don't have what I need to do it." That will never happen. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead has promised to equip us. And that's the blessing here. The author is saying: May God ***"...equip you in every good thing to do His will."*** God may never make us rich and famous, but he will give us what we need to ***"do his will."***

B. Another aspect of this blessing is closely related to this one, and that is, the writer of Hebrews is praying for God to "WORK IN US."

When we obey, there is a sense in which God is truly ***"working in us."*** We obey, and God empowers. I'm thinking of what Paul wrote in Philippians 2:12-13, ***"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*** So, there is a sense in which we work out our own salvation, but there is also a sense in which God is at work in us. We are equipped, but we are also empowered. But just because God is at ***"work in us,"*** doesn't mean that God will do our work FOR us! God won't be coming down and serving as a greeter. He won't be shoveling the snow or cleaning the building. He won't be packing gift bags for seniors. But he will work through us. He will supply us with what we need. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, ***"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."*** I hope we notice: Paul worked harder than anybody, but it was actually the grace of God that was working through the apostle Paul. So also with us. One commentary said, "Whatever you fail to do that God has commanded, you alone are to blame; and whatever you fulfill that God has commanded, God alone is to be praised." I like that.

C. And this leads us to the last part of the blessing, where the author says (referring to Jesus Christ), "TO WHOM BE THE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN."

In the Old Testament, the word ***"glory"*** conveyed the idea of "weight" or "value." Today, we might think of the term "gravitas." To be glorious is to have weight, to be worthy of praise. In the Old Testament, we think of the Israelites being led by the Lord's ***"glory"*** in the cloud. In the New Testament, we think of John's statement in John 1:14, ***"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** And when we sin, Paul says that we ***"fall short of the glory of God."*** We fail to live up to God's glory. But here, the prayer, the hope, the blessing, is that these people

would glorify God through their willingness to ***“do his will.”*** We glorify God by living for him. And thankfully, Michael will be leading us a song before the Lord’s Supper, where we sing about glorifying God’s name.

Conclusion:

****PPT**** As we come to the end, we have just a few closing remarks. As we look at these in order, let’s start with verse 22, ***“But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”*** I laughed this week when I remembered some advice my dad has given me about preaching. If you’re sick, never start out a sermon by saying, “Bear with me.” I remember him talking about worshiping somewhere and the preacher started out by apologizing for his scratchy voice, and the phlegm, and he just kept going on and on, and I remember my dad saying, “From that point on, all I could think about was how sick this guy was; whereas, if he hadn’t said anything, I might not have ever known.” My dad, then, would say, “Never say ‘bear with me.’ Just preach, and if it’s bad, they’ll know.” So, when the author of Hebrews pretty much says ***“Bear with me,”*** I smile at that.

But I really want us to notice that he says ***“...bear with this word of exhortation.”*** The only other time this exact phrase is used anywhere else in scripture is used with reference to a sermon. In Acts 13:15, the synagogue officials sent for Paul and his companions and said, ***“Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”*** At that moment, Paul got up and started to preach. A ***“word of exhortation,”*** then, is a sermon, and this is one of those reasons why we think Hebrews might have started out as a sermon. And as with any sermon, time can be a factor. As they say, “The mind can absorb only as much as the seat can stand.” We see it here, but we also see this concern for the clock in 5:11 and in 9:5. We have ***“much to say”*** and ***“of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”*** He was restraining himself time-wise. This preacher had his eye on the clock. He was mindful of his audience.

And yet the other thing I hope we notice here is that he refers back over this whole book and says, ***“for I have written to you briefly.”*** A week or two ago, I mentioned that it takes about 50 minutes to read the entire book of Hebrews from cover to cover. So, I hope you realize what this means: According to the inspired word of God, any sermon that comes in under about an hour qualifies as being brief! But I also laugh at the fact that we have taken a ***“brief”*** sermon and have spread it out over 40 sermons throughout an entire year! I’m a little proud of myself! I’m glad that you have been bearing with me over the past year!

A ***“word of exhortation,”*** though, is a reference to calling somebody to your side for encouragement. And that is what the book of Hebrews has been, a word of encouragement, a word of exhortation. And as we noted last week: The author might have been in prison himself. He wanted to come there to preach in person, but he was prevented from doing so, so he wrote a letter instead.

In verse 23, he refers to Timothy being released. Other than this, the last time we hear about Timothy in scripture (in time sequence) is in the book of 2 Timothy (written in the early 60’s), where Paul encourages Timothy not to be timid (2 Timothy 1:7), and in the next two verses Paul even encouraged Timothy, ***“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel....”*** It seems, then, that after Paul’s execution, Timothy perhaps steps up and accepts that invitation and gets himself arrested for preaching the gospel, which is why we have this reference here: A reminder that others are facing similar persecution.

In verse 24, ***“Greet all of your leaders and all the saints,”*** (the second reference to ***“leaders”*** in this book), and then, ***“Those from Italy greet you.”*** Two main possibilities here: 1.) The author is writing from Rome to somewhere else (to Ephesus or perhaps even Jerusalem), and he’s saying, “The people from here in Italy greet

you.” Or, 2.) The second possibility is that the author is writing TO Italy from somewhere else, and he’s saying, “Some people from Italy who are here with me now told me to tell those of you back home in Italy ‘hello.’” Either way, I love how personal this is.

And then we end with, ***“Grace be with you all,”*** with grace, of course, being mentioned a number of times throughout this message. We ***“draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,”*** for example (from 4:16). Or, from 12:15, ***“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”*** Grace has been important in this book, so it’s appropriate to end with a word of ***“grace.”***

Closing words are hard, especially at the end of a sermon. But the theme of the whole book is that “Jesus is Better,” and the message is: Because of this, do not give up and certainly do not turn back. In fact, get to work! Hang in there, because Jesus is better!

Let’s go to God in prayer and then Michael will lead us in a song as we think about what we’ve learned this morning:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the God of peace and God of glory. You have raised your Son from the dead, and we have assembled here this morning to thank you for saving us and to praise you equipping and empowering us to live in this world as your children. Bless us, Father, as we encourage each other today.

We love you, Father, and we come to you today through Jesus, our priest and shepherd. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com