

Title: What a Prayer!
Text: Hebrews 13.20-21
Theme: power to do the will of God
Series: Hebrews #62
Prop Stmt: God equips you to please him.
Aim: I aim to move my people to call upon God for grace for each other in order that we will carry out his will for the glory of Christ.

If, in coming to the end of this letter, you are tempted to gloss over these final verses, because, well...you want to get on to the next thing, you will miss a gold mine sitting right here. This is a benediction. It is part prayer, part plea, part praise, part promise, and part petition. And in this case, it also summarizes some of the main points of this letter. But notice that he just requested them to pray for him and now he turns around and prays for them.

Read Text:

I have a book of puritan prayers that I have recommended to you from time to time. It is called "The Valley of Vision." One of the things that I love about these prayers is that they are so biblical. Therefore, they are theological. They are doctrinal. They are meaty. They are God-centered. They are Christ-exalting. They are mind-stretching and heart-warming, and ego-smashing. They are, in reality, very, very different than how we tend to pray.

Let me give you an example. Here is a prayer called, "The Infinite and the Finite."

*Thou Great I Am,
Fill my mind with elevation and grandeur at the thought of a Being
with whom one day is as a thousand years,
and a thousand years as one day,
A mighty God, who, amidst the lapse of worlds,
And the revolutions of empires,
Feels no variableness,
But is glorious in immortality.
May I rejoice that, while men die, the Lord lives;
that, while all creatures are broken reeds,
empty cisterns,
fading flowers,
he is the Rock of Ages, the Fountain of living waters.*

*Turn my heart from vanity,
from dissatisfactions,
from uncertainties of the present state,
to an eternal interest in Christ.
Let me remember that life is short and unforeseen,
and is only an opportunity for usefulness;*

*Give me a holy avarice to redeem the time,
to awake at every call to charity and piety,
so that I may feed the hungry,
clothe the naked,
instruct the ignorant,
reclaim the vicious,
forgive the offender,
diffuse the gospel,
show neighborly love to all.
Let me live a life of self-distrust,
dependence upon thyself,
mortification,
crucifixion,
prayer.*

Here is an example of a prayer that, if you were to cut it, it would bleed the Bible. It not only bleeds the Bible, but it references many specific passages from the Bible. The Scriptures are all throughout this prayer. And because of that, there is a God-centeredness, a Christ-glorifying, a soul-anchoring and heart-filling dynamic to this prayer. This prayer is not like most of the prayers that we pray or hear – is it? Our prayers tend to be more self-centered and comfort-driven don't they? But this prayer is doxological and we need to pray doxologically. That is, we need to pray to the glory of God.

1. **Pray**

A. **God reveals himself to us so that we will pray.**

When I say that God reveals himself to us, what do I mean by that? The revelation of God is the work of God to make himself known to us. God has ordained and carried out his plan for us to have this Bible. This Bible tells us about the character of God and the accomplishments of God, the plans of God, the purposes of God and even speaks to some of the mysteries of God. That is called theology. Theo (God) ology (study of). Now, just stop for a second and look at where this prayer is. It comes at the end of one of this gloriously rich, theologically thick, doctrinally deep book on the supremacy of Christ who accomplished our salvation, who made an end to our sin, who was the final, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins, who died that death would die, who rose again that we might live forever. What does the author of Hebrews do at the end of this sermon (this letter really is a sermon.)? He prays! He worships. That is what theology is supposed to do. When you really consider, I mean with your heart consider the accomplishments of Christ for you, then your heart will fill up with such amazement at his beauty and splendor that you will burst with praying and singing. What about those accusations that theology makes your heart cold? What about those assumptions that doctrine divides and only generates arguments? What do we have here? Here is a heart that is singing! Here is a soul that is rejoicing! His prayer is deep because his thoughts of God are high. His prayer is

passionate because his heart is engaged with and gripped by the great works of Christ. If theology does not make your heart burst, then you don't understand it. We pray shallow because our thoughts of God are anemic. We pray puny prayers because our theology is anorexic. God reveals himself to us so that we will pray.

B. God reveals himself to us so that we will pray better for others.

This is a prayer for others. The same thing takes place in Ephesians. Ephesians 1 is the explosion of the heart of Paul. He says in verse 3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places....*" Why? Why is Paul's heart exploding with joy? What is it that is the cause of this epistolary fist-pump? He tells us. You have been chosen, predestined, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven to the praise of God's glorious grace. The wisdom and insight of God has been lavished upon you. You have obtained an inheritance because you were predestined and sealed with the Holy Spirit. Then, then (in response to all of this) Paul says, "For this reason" (for what reason? Because of all that God has done for us through Christ, because of all that Christ has secured for us) For this reason, I cannot stop giving thanks for you and remembering you in my prayers. And what does Paul pray? He prays that they would know the hope to which they have been called. He does the same thing in Ephesians 3. Paul is once again overwhelmed, but this time it is at God's plan to raise up a people from all over the world to be his people, called the church. And these people are going to put the manifold wisdom of God on display to the angels. God is using us to teach theology to the angels. God is using us to amaze the angels by showing them the magnificence of his grace. Again Paul says, "For this reason (3.14) I bow my knees before the Father...." He prays that they would be able to comprehend the length and height and depth and to personally know the love of Christ and to be filled with the fullness of God. That is why we study theology best on our knees. That is why if you read a good book on systematic theology you had better keep your hymnal close at hand.

This prayer in Hebrews 13 is a great summary of this book while at the same time a great prayer. Even in scanning this we see that he prays to God, through Christ. He prays like the Lord's Prayer. There is great compatibility here with the same pattern that Christ used to teach his disciples to pray. Here he prays about the big stuff. He prays the Bible. He prays good doctrine. He prays with humility. And he prays in such a way, that it brings these believers right to the very heart of their struggle.

These believers, living in Rome, of Jewish heritage were facing persecution from the Romans and rejection from the Jews. It was a lonely place to be. At this point, the persecution from Rome had subsided, for a time, but the pressure from the Jews was intense. It was very tempting for these believers to go back to the Jewish ceremonies. But, the Jewish system by this time was built upon the premise that you have to follow the Old Testament ceremonies in order to be "right." As we have seen, their view of "right" was wrong. They viewed the ceremonies as the end. They viewed their participation in the ceremonies as earning them favor as the "chosen

ones” or the “right ones.” But, those Old Testament, ceremonies were not the end. Those ceremonies were intended by God to be a preview of the ultimate sacrifice that would come. The ceremonies pointed to Christ. But, the Jews, as a whole, rejected Christ. They had the Law. They had the revelation of God but missed the whole point of it! And instead of being “right” they are actually wrong. And not only were they wrong, but they were persecuting and pressuring these Hebrew believers who had the right view of Christ. So, listen to this prayer now. Listen with your heart to all that he prays about and to all that he tells them that he prays about, because it is a great encouragement and a great source of strength to press on as pilgrims with joy! Listen carefully because this is a great prayer to pray for others and yourself. How does he speak of God?

2. To God

A. Of Peace

He prays to the God of peace. Isn't that fitting? Peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the favor of God. But, even more than that, peace, as it is viewed here, is the confident assurance that comes to those who have trusted in Christ alone that they are safe and secure in the arms of God. No matter what happens to them on this earth, or in this body, they are finally and forever safe in God.

Thus far, the Tigers have treated us to an exciting season. But, it is not like they have simply gone out and dominated. Particularly in the ninth, when Jose Valverde comes in to close out the game, I am not at peace. The guy is 32 for 32 in save situations (as of the time of writing this sermon), which should make me confident, but I am not. I wonder if he doesn't like to get the third out unless he loads the bases or at least gets someone into scoring position. Sometimes I cannot even watch. What I am describing is the exact opposite of what the AH is speaking of. And seriously, these dear people were facing circumstances that were far from peaceful and some of you know exactly what this is like. You have people who are pressuring you to do something that is wrong and they are relentless. You would really like for them to stop. At times you wonder, if I just give in, then maybe I will have some peace. But it won't be true peace. It won't be the peace that God gives. But there is more. God is not only the God of peace; he is the God of power.

B. Of Power

The resurrection of Christ is often associated with the ascension of Christ. He was raised up from the dead and raised up to the right hand of the Father, where he reigns, until the Father puts all of his enemies under his feet. Back in chapter 2 we were treated to the author's exposition of Psalm 8 that points to Christ. Christ is the one who subjected himself to death, who lowered himself to the grave, by his death on the cross, whom the Father raised up to life and raised up to glory, so that now, this same Jesus who subjected himself to death for us, is now the One to whom all the world is subject to. The One who gave it all up and gave it all over, is the one who

is now crowned with glory and honor and in securing our salvation is now leading many sons to glory by raising them up from spiritual death and will raise them up from physical death to be with him forever and ever. The point here in the prayer is that if God is so powerful to raise Jesus up from the dead and so powerful to put all of the world under his authority, then He can do anything that needs to be done and will do everything that ought to be done. This is the One to whom the author of Hebrews is praying. This is the One to whom we pray. We are not dealing with his assistant are we? Notice that author of Hebrews refers to Christ as “the great shepherd of the sheep.” This book which champions Christ as the great Prophet, the great Priest and the great King now says that he is the great shepherd of the sheep. What a description! What a Savior! He is the great, that is the incomparably powerful, Shepherd, that is the one who cares for his flock. He is altogether powerful and personal. He is strong and loving and is in full cooperation with his Father for the accomplishment and completion of our salvation. This God of peace and power is also a God of promise.

C. Of Promise

Notice the phrase “*by the blood of the eternal covenant*”. What does that mean? It does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. The Old Testament (old covenant) was the foundation, the primer, the lead-in to the New Covenant. The old covenant is like part 1 and the new covenant is part 2. You can’t understand part two without understanding part 1. But, part 1 is not the point. Part 1 is preparation for part 2. If, you embrace part 1 to the exclusion of part 2, then you have missed the whole point of part 1. The Old Testament (covenant) was temporary. The new covenant is eternal. The new covenant is what God had planned from the very beginning. The promise to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, and to David was all fulfilled in Christ. And when Christ died on the cross, the terms of our pardon was set. God had promised that a Savior would come and he sent us a Savior. He sent us the One who is Might to Save, and look at what he accomplished. His death was so perfect, so final, and so complete that it forever satisfied the terms that God had established for our salvation. The covenant is eternal! And the reason why we know that is because God raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead. There is nothing left for you to pay. God keeps his promises! There is no, “oh by the way.”

Have you followed this debt ceiling fiasco in Washington these past couple of weeks? Congress voted to raise the debt ceiling by 2.4 trillion dollars. Does anyone have any concept of how much money that is? If you spent a million dollars a day from the day that Jesus was born until now, you would have spent only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a trillion. You would have to live another 4000 years, spending a million dollars a day to get close to 2.4 trillion. If you had one trillion one dollar bills and you lined them up end to end, you could make a chain to the moon and back 200 times. So, the debt ceiling is raised by 2.4 trillion and people are supposed to be happy because it averts the government shutting down. But there is more. The 2.4 trillion in debt is supposed to be offset by spending cuts. Ok, so, what are the cuts? The answer is, “oh by the way, we haven’t worked that out yet.”

Beloved, our King will never make a promise that he does not fulfill. When you trust in Christ, you are secure. There is no, "oh by the way." That is why we pray to the God of peace, power and promise for enabling.

3. To Equip us and work in us

The author of Hebrews is appealing to God to equip these believers with everything good so that they can press on with joy. The appeal that God would equip them is further explained by the next phrase, "working in us." The only way that these believers can stand strong in the face of such adversity and press on with joy is if God enables them with fresh grace for this battle. They are not, and we are not sufficient by ourselves to be able to live as we are called. Just as we cannot save ourselves we cannot sanctify ourselves. We cannot do what we are called to do on our own. We need God to equip us. We are desperate for God to be working in us. And this is the beautiful picture that this prayer paints. We need to wake up every day and realize that if God were to leave us on our own, that we would be absolutely destitute of anything. We are completely impoverished. We have no strength, no wisdom, no sight, no resources, and no hope. We need to think, "God, if I don't have you, I die. I cannot exist with you." But realize that Christ not only secured our pardon, but Christ secured every gift, every grace, every promise, every bit of power that I will ever need. So, because of Christ, God is going to answer this prayer. God can come through because he has the power and the resources, and God will come through because that is what he has promised. But God uses the prayers of his people as the means to bring this about.

So, we live in Christ, the way we come to Christ; needy. And just as he meets our ultimate need with his saving grace, he meets our daily needs with daily grace. He is there for the asking. We honor him the most when we depend on him the most. He is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in him. God's will for you to think of others, forgive others, serve others, love others, be spent for others, is impossible to do on your own. But, God does not leave you on your own. He equips you with everything that you need. He has given you an advocate, a High Priest, the Holy Spirit and great and precious promises. He has given you brothers and sisters, the church to encourage you and remind you and pray for you. He has given you a heritage of men and women who have walked before you and have finished their race with joy. He has given you children and students who are being influenced and molded by your testimony and missionaries encouraged by your faithfulness. All of these, God uses together to form the testimony of this church, the reputation of His Son, the adornment of the gospel and the advertisement for His kingdom.

"to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen"