

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	62		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Hebrews 13:20-21		
Date:	June 9, 2019 (a.m.)		

GLORIOUS THINGS OF THEE ARE SPOKEN

This past week marked the 75th anniversary of the Allied invasion of German-occupied France on the beaches of Normandy. There have been a number of memorable movies made about this historic event, *i.e.*, *The Longest Day* and *Band of Brothers* are among the best, but Steven Spielberg's now-classic film from 1993, *Saving Private Ryan*, tops the list. The battle scenes – in particular the D-Day beach landings, captured the realism and horrors of combat. The terrible, blood-soaked cost of liberation is made clear in the film's famous opening sequence – a relentless, 25-minute depiction of Allied soldiers landing in the Dog Green Sector of Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. From the horror of anticipation (trembling hands, vomiting, men crossing themselves) to the hellish chaos on the beach (flamethrowers engulfing bodies, men picking up their own severed arms, a soldier with exposed entrails crying for his mother, medics working to dress wounds as blood sprays from arteries and bullets zing by), the D-Day sequence launches the film's thesis with a bang that resonates theologically: Our liberation comes at a significant and violent cost. Central to the tension of *Ryan* is the asymmetry of the cost (many men dying) verses the mission (one man being saved). To many characters in the film, the former outweighs the latter. In a memorable scene that takes place – notably, inside a church – Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks, himself expresses doubts about the cost-benefit logic of the mission. “This Ryan (Matt Damon) better be worth it,” he says. “He'd better go home and cure some disease, or invent the longer-lasting light bulb or something.” As if the burden of Ryan's undeserved rescue isn't heavy enough on him already, Captain Miller's dying words to him are a devastating call to worthiness: “Earn this. Earn it.” The film ends as it began, with a sepia-toned shot of an American flag waving over a military cemetery, with a now-aged Ryan kneeling at the grave of Captain Miller, begging his family to tell him he is a good man and has fulfilled Miller's charge to *earn this*.¹ For me, this sounded a very sour theological note. I am so glad Jesus did *all* of the earning for me!

“The epistle began by telling us that in all that Christ is and does, it is God speaking in us. The great work of Christ is to bring us to God. His death and His blood, His ascension and sitting on the throne – all mean one thing: our being brought near to dwell in God's presence. And with what object? That God may have us, to perfect us, and to work in us what is well pleasing in His sight. Let no one think that the entrance into the Holiest is the end; it is only the beginning of the true Christian life. It brings us into the right place and the right position, in which God now, in His divine power, can work out His own power in us, can make us in full truth one with Christ, can work the likeness of Christ into us. We have reached the close of the epistle. The writer gathered up all his teaching in the two verses of this beautiful closing prayer.”² “Prayer,” wrote the great Puritan preacher William Gouge, “is the means of obtaining all manner of good things, not for ourselves only, but for others also; and prayer is very powerful for these and other like ends. Let such ministers as desire the prayers of their people for themselves, imitate this and other faithful ministers of God in praying for their people earnestly, frequently, in public and private, ordinarily and extraordinarily. Thus

will their watching and painstaking for their people be more acceptable to God, and profitable to their people. A greater part of the apostle's prayer is spent in describing him to whom he makes his prayer, and that by two of his eminent properties – namely, his goodness, in this phrase, *the God of peace*; and his greatness, in this, *which brought again from the dead*. So as a serious consideration of his excellencies on whom we call, and particularly of his goodness and greatness, is an especial means to quicken up the spirit unto due prayer.”³

I. **THE FOUNTAIN OF BLESSING.** Three things are stated.

- A. **God is the God of peace.** The Greek text has peace with an article (*tēs eirēnēs*). “The *peace* here of which God is the author is primarily the peace of the gospel (Eph. 6:15), the peace which has been established, or re-established, between man and his Creator by the blood of Christ's cross (Col. 1:20), the peace of God in Christ Jesus which passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7), peace, in short, in its deepest and fullest sense. It is the God of this peace, which speaks forgiveness and acceptance to man at the very heart of his being and which should permeate the whole of his existence in all its relationships and vicissitudes, whom our author invokes here.”⁴ Pink underscores this point, “The great controversy between God and His people has been settled. The fearful breach which their sins occasioned has been repaired. The Prince of peace has silenced the accusations of the law and removed our sins from before God's face. Peace has been made – not a peace at any price, not at the cost of righteousness flouted; no, an *honourable* peace. *The God of peace* then signifies, first, the Judge of all is pacified; second, the King of Heaven has been reconciled to us; third, Jehovah, by virtue of His covenant-promises, has received us to His favour – for while He continued offended, we could not receive any gifts of grace from Him. Just as surely as Christ turned away God's wrath from His elect, so does He in due time send the Holy Spirit into their hearts to destroy *their* enmity against God, this being a consequence of the former.”⁵
- B. **God is the God of life.** This is demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ. John Owen spells this out when he observes, “The second thing in the words is the *work that is ascribed unto God*, as the God of peace. And this is, that *he brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant*. Wherein we must consider, (1) The person who is the *object* of this work; who is described, [1] By his *relation* unto us, *Our Lord Jesus Christ*; [2] By his *office*, *That great shepherd of the sheep*. (2) The *work* itself towards him, *He brought him again from the dead*. (3) The *way* whereby this work was wrought; it was *through the blood of the everlasting covenant*.”⁶
- C. **God is the God who both declares his will but equips His people to do it.** Lenski points out that expression, “Make you perfect” (KJV) or “equip you” (ESV) translates *katarisai*, “the optative of wish: this God, *may he fit you out* (effective aorist) *in every good thing* (good in the sense of being beneficial for you) *to do his will, he doing in you the thing well-pleasing before him or in his sight* (Phil. 2:13), and do all this *through Jesus Christ*. To do God's will should not be restricted to doing what are called good works; it includes, above all, faith in Christ (John 6:40). To do his will (effective aorist infinitive) is not a matter which we are able to accomplish. All the admonitions that are addressed to the readers in this epistle are not to be understood in this way. God must fit us out in an effective manner (aorist), in fact, he must then continue doing (present participle) in us the thing that is well-pleasing in his eyes. We are to do, yet all the while God is doing. This is the blessed concursus of grace.”⁷

- II. **THE CHANNEL OF BLESSING.** Three things are stated about the Lord Jesus.
- A. **He is the great shepherd of the sheep.** “*Shepherd of the sheep.* The words *the great Shepherd of the sheep* remind us of Jesus’ teaching that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11; also see Isa. 63:11). In effect, the metaphor of the shepherd who dies for his sheep is equivalent to that of the high priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for his people. Especially the adjective *great* is telling, for the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus the great high priest (4:14). The two concepts, then, complement each other, although as Guthrie observes, ‘There is a tender aspect to the shepherd figure which is not as vivid in the high priest.’ Peter depicts Jesus as the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). This great shepherd shed his blood and laid down his life for his sheep – in other words, his people – to obtain for them eternal redemption and to establish with them the eternal covenant that God had promised.”⁸
- B. **He is the one who established the Eternal Covenant.** Richard Phillips says verse 20: “sees all this as the result of a covenant between the Father and the Son: it was *through the blood of the eternal covenant* that God *brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus*. This is a remarkable and instructive statement. A covenant is a binding agreement; it provides the terms according to which two parties come together in a relationship. In the ancient world, a conquering lord would impose terms upon his new vassals who, by accepting the terms, entered into a covenant with certain specified obligations. The covenant relationship we are most familiar with is marriage, a relationship that comes into being through the solemn swearing of formal vows. The parties in this covenant are quite evidently God the Father and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called an eternal covenant, which means its effects reach forward everlastingly. Christ was raised from the dead once for all into an eternal life he is able to give to his own. Hebrews 7:25 tells us, *He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them*. Because Jesus lives and reigns forever, he is able to offer a secure and eternal salvation. Through faith we are made *heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ* (Rom. 8:17), and this inheritance is thus an eternal one. Paul writes to Titus that God has poured out his Spirit on us so that *being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life* (Titus 3:7). It is through Christ, therefore, that God makes covenant with us, saying in Ezekiel 37:26, *I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant*. The new covenant in Jesus’ blood, which the writer of Hebrews outlined in chapter 8, is eternal, and its benefits – namely, forgiveness of sin, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and fellowship with God – last forever.”⁹
- C. **His blood is the meritorious cause for the covenant.** This covenant is ratified by the blood of Christ. Spurgeon proclaimed long ago: “You will please to remark, my dear friends, that the covenant is, on one side, perfectly fulfilled. God the Son has paid the debts of all the elect. He has, for us men and for our redemption, suffered the whole of wrath divine. Nothing remaineth now on this side of the question, except that he shall continue to intercede, that he may safely bring all his redeemed to glory. On the side of the Father this part of the covenant has been fulfilled to countless myriads. God the Father and God the Spirit, have not been behindhand in their divine contract. And mark you, this side shall be as fully and as completely finished and carried out as the other. Christ can say of what he promised to do, *It is finished!* And the like shall be said by all the glorious covenanters. All for whom Christ died shall be pardoned, all justified, all adopted. The Spirit shall quicken them all, shall give them all faith, shall bring them all to heaven, and they shall, every one of them, without let or hindrance, stand accepted in the beloved, in the day when the people shall be numbered, and Jesus shall be glorified.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION: Jesus earned our salvation, and so we sing:

Jesus paid it all,
all to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

ENDNOTES

¹ A full account of this is found over at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/saving-private-ryan-d-day-75-liberations-cost/>

² Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All* (rpt. Whitakar House, 1996), p. 552. This is one of the best devotional commentaries on Hebrews.

³ Wm. Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (rpt. Kregel, 1980), p. 1112.

⁴ Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 589.

⁵ A. W. Pink, *Exposition of Hebrews* (Baker, 1954), p. 1271.

⁶ *The Works of John Owen XXIII* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1991), p. 473.

⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Wartburg Press, 1937), p. 495.

⁸ Simon Kistemaker, *Hebrews: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1984), p. 430.

⁹ Richard Phillips, *Hebrews: Reformed Expository Commentary* (P&R, 2006), p. 625.

¹⁰ *Spurgeon's Sermons VII* (rpt. Hendrickson, 2013), P. 217.