

Main Idea: In a changing world, it's important to affirm three things that never change, as presented in the benediction of Hebrews 13:20-21.

I. Who God is will never change (20a).

- A. He is the God of peace.
- B. Our God delights in bringing wholeness to those who are shattered by sin.

II. What God did will never change (20b).

- A. He brought back Jesus from the dead.
- B. If God could raise Jesus from the dead, don't you think He can take care of any other problem we might face in our lives?

III. What God does will never change (21).

- A. He equips us to demonstrate good works.
- B. He equips us to do His will.
- C. He equips us so we can please Him.
 - 1. Do I want what God wants?
 - 2. What is it that God wants most in my life today?

Response: In light of this benediction...

- 1. We have reason to be encouraged.
- 2. We have incentive to seek great things for God's glory.
- 3. We have no reason to fear.

Lots of things are changing these days. Some of you have faced job changes recently. For all of us, as time passes so do our families. For some, it's new children. For others, it's the emptying nest. And because we live in a broken world, we all battle constant health changes, and challenges at times.

Our church is changing (we currently have ten individuals in our new members class). Our society is certainly changing, with morality taking a nosedive. And it goes without saying that our world is changing, and rapidly so, with the Syrian crisis just the latest turmoil on the horizon.

Some people are threatened by change. I suppose we all are to some degree. Change often unnerves us. It sets us on edge. It's actually a revealer. When change breaks our routine, it shows us what we really believe, about the Lord, about what's important, about what we're living for.

But I don't want to talk about "change" this morning. Just the opposite. I want to talk about what's *not* changing, indeed, what will *never change*. Yes, I want to encourage you this morning. With inevitable change hitting us on all fronts, I want us to see three things that never change in a changing world.

I believe that if, by God's grace, these three realities grip our soul, we'll shine brightly in a sea of humanity that's either, turning to a bottle or a pill or a thrill to deal the changes, or living in denial, or simply living in constant fear and trepidation.

It's in the benediction of Hebrews 13:20-21 that we find the key to confident living in a changing world. In a changing world, it's important to affirm three things that never change.

I. Who God Is will never change (20a).

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For another treatment of this text, see the Hebrews series preached at WBC which finished in 2009.

Today's text, Hebrews 13:20-21, is a benediction. It's a reminder that God has the final say. Tucked away in the pages of Scripture are actually several benedictions, but here's the one we're considering:

"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."

A benediction is an act or pronouncement of blessing. In a benediction the name of the infinite, all sufficient, unchanging God is placed upon His people. A benediction reminds us that though the world is changing, God has the final say.

And we need to know what He has said. In this benediction He informs us of three things that will never change. The first is *Who He is*.

Who is God? The writer of Hebrews calls Him "the God of peace." Isn't it ironic that God is the source of that which people so desperately long these days? Peace. World leaders search for peace. Frustrated spouses look for peace. Teens look for peace.

And of course, if you lose something and you look for it in the *wrong* places, you'll never find it. So where do you find peace? My friends, God is the author of peace. He is the God of peace.

The first recipients of this epistle were Jewish Christians living in the second half of the first century, prior to the destruction of the Jewish temple. The book is anonymous. But the content is powerful. In a word, it's an *exhortation*.

Notice 13:22, "Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of *exhortation*, for I have written you only a short letter." So the book we call Hebrews is a word of exhortation. The author wrote it because the recipients needed to be exhorted.

Why? They had professed allegiance to Jesus as their Messiah. But in time, some, because of persecution, were wavering in their commitment to Jesus. Some were contemplating going back to Judaism. The author spends thirteen chapters showing the superiority of Jesus to the "old ways."

Christ is superior to the angels (chs 1-2). He's superior to Moses (chs 3-4). He's superior to the Aaronic priesthood (chs 5-7). His sacrificial work is superior (chs 8-10), which includes a better covenant (ch 8), a better sanctuary (ch 9), and a better sacrifice (ch 10).

In chapter 11 the writer gives some examples of men and women who in the past persevered through hardship, not by sight, not by figuring things out, but by faith, by trusting in the promises of God who says it will be worth it all.

In the final two chapters the writer calls his readers to exhibit the same kind of unwavering faith. "Don't turn back," he insists. "Hold fast to your faith in Jesus the Messiah!"

But how can you do that when you feel weak and overwhelmed? And the answer is, you need a new perspective. You need to fix your attention on some things that never change. Here's the first. *Who God is*.

Our God is the God of peace. That's who He is. In a world of strife, He offers *shalom*, a Hebrew word which means "wholeness," and depicts the prosperity of the whole person.

The God of the Bible is the God who offers wholeness of life to people who were formerly alienated from Him and separated from His loving fellowship. Through faith in His Son and in His atoning work, He gives new life, eternal life, *shalom*.

Jesus Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He came and preached peace to those who were far from God (Eph. 2:17). He made peace through the blood He shed on His cross (Col. 1:20). He expects us to share this peace with others by communicating the gospel. Ephesians 6:15 indicates our feet are fitted with the "gospel of peace".

So let that sink in. Who is our God?

A. He is the God of peace. Beloved, this is tremendous news.

B. Our God delights in bringing wholeness to those who are shattered by sin.

He offers a peace that passes all understanding. He alone can give us peace with Himself, peace with others, and peace within ourselves.

And that will never change. Why not? Because who He is will never change.

II. What God Did will never change (20b).

What did He do? Verse 20 tells us, "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."

There's what God did...

A. He brought back Jesus from the dead.

Notice that the price of our peace was costly. It was "through the blood of the eternal covenant." To bring us peace, it required blood. God sacrificed His own Son on the cross. The blood of Jesus was shed.

This was a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy in Ezekiel 37:26, "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever."

And through Jesus, that's what He did. Whereas God's chosen people kept failing, God took action and succeeded. He established a covenant of peace, an everlasting covenant, which resulted in His dwelling in the midst of His people.

But how do we know that what Jesus did was enough? How do we know the Father was satisfied with His Son's blood sacrifice? The answer is what God did *after* the blood was shed. The writer of Hebrews says that He "brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus."

So the price of peace was the blood. The proof of peace was the empty tomb, the resurrection.

The writer offered this exhortation back in Hebrews 12:2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and *perfecter* [finisher] of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and *sat down at the right hand* of the throne of God."

So Jesus did His work and then *sat down*. He died, conquered death, returned to heaven, and then *sat down* on heaven's royal throne. Is that significant?

Yes. It indicates there was nothing left to be done. He finished His work.

But just who is this One who shed His blood and rose victoriously? The writer refers to Him in verse 20 as "that great Shepherd of the sheep." So He's not only the Lamb of God, but the Shepherd, too.

By His own claim in John 10, He's the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). But according to Hebrews, He's also the *great* Shepherd. Why is He great? Because there's no one who compares with Him. He did what no one else could ever do. He not only lay down His life but He took it up again. In fact, He lay down His life *intentionally* so that He might take it up again. Through His sacrifice, He established an eternal covenant.

Are you looking for security in your life? Then look no further. Are you searching for something stable in an unstable world? Here it is. Affirm what God did for you. He sacrificed and then brought back Jesus from the dead.

My friend, think of the implications...

B. If God could raise Jesus from the dead, don't you think He can take care of any other problem we might face in our lives?

If death itself was no obstacle to Him, why would we ever doubt His ability to care for us in our present challenges?

Do you know who pronounced the benediction in Jewish temple services? That task belonged to the Aaronites (Num. 6:24-26). All Aaronites of proper age were entitled to perform this service of blessing the people of God.

All except for a few. An Aaronite could disqualify himself by inappropriate conduct in his life. And not only that. One who was guilty of unrighteous conduct was required to leave the assembly before it came time for the benediction in the service.

That meant an Aaronite priest could let you down. And you might miss out on a blessing. Brothers and sisters, that will *never* happen to us. We need never miss out on the benediction. Why not? Because this blessing comes to us through One who is spotless, who never fails, and who established an eternal covenant, Jesus the Christ.

This, too, will never change. *Who God is* will never change. *What God did* will never change. Thirdly...

III. What God Does will never change (21).

"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."

According to verse 21, God has a plan for His people. He didn't give His Son for us with the outcome left to chance. He had a purpose on mind. And He's committed to seeing that purpose fulfilled in our lives.

What is His purpose? Verse 21 says it is to "equip" us [KJV, "make you perfect"]. That's a fascinating word in the NT, *katartidzo*. The Greeks used it to refer to setting a broken bone. In Hebrews 11:3 it's translated "formed" ["framed," KJV]. In Hebrews 10:5, it's "prepared." In Galatians 6:1, the word is "restore."

If you were to trace the verb through the NT you'd discover three things. First, we are commanded to be perfect (2 Cor. 13:11). Second, we are responsible to perfect others (1 Thes. 3:10). And third, God is the one who makes it possible!

You see, God is in the mending business. That's how the word *katartidzo* is used in Matthew 4:21, for fishermen who "mended" their nets. Ripped nets are useless for fishing, aren't they? They're no good *until* they are what? Repaired. Mended.

That's what God does. He's in the repair business. His goal is to restore lives that have been ripped apart by sin. He recreates. He renews (2 Cor. 5:17). He redeems.

And how does He do that? In the blueprint text of Ephesians 4:11-12, we learn that He does it in the context of His church. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

So the Lord mends broken lives through the equipping ministry of His church. He uses pastor-teachers who faithfully proclaim His Word to restore and mobilize broken lives. But it's not just pastors. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." As *you* teach and admonish one another. That's not referring to pastors, but to every believer.

So the mending work, which by God's design takes place in the church, starts with pastor-teachers, and then moves out to the rest of the members. We are all to ministry the Word to each other, for it's His Word that mends, repairs, and equips.

But for what? What purpose does God have in mind as He repairs our lives? Indeed, He has a goal, and agenda, and it will never change. It's something He is doing right now. He's equipping us to do three things mentioned in verse 21.

A. He equips us to demonstrate good works. The NIV says "equip you with everything good." The KJV says "make you perfect in every good work." Titus 2:14 elaborates, "Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

That's what God wants to accomplish in our lives. He wants to enable us to demonstrate good works. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The next phrase indicates a second divine agenda, which is related to the first.

B. He equips us to do His will. "Equip you with everything good *for doing His will.*"

Do you ever get the sense that God's will is like a carrot dangling on a string out in front of you, always there but just beyond your grasp? We may feel that way at times, but the truth is, God wants us to know and do His will. In fact, He's committed Himself to give us everything we need do His will. He's *for* us. He *wants* us to succeed.

And what does success in God's world look like? Thirdly...

C. He equips us so we can please Him. "And may He work in us what is pleasing to Him." The word "pleasing" means "acceptable." It's used in Romans 12:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 5:9. Some things are acceptable to God. Some things aren't. Some things please Him. Some things don't.

Do you want to live a life that pleases God? God wants you to. And He's committed Himself to working in us so we will please Him. Our task is to work out what He's working in us.

Notice the emphasis on *doing* here. God equips us so we may *do* His will. There's no room for passivity here on our part. Yes, God is working, but He works so that we can too. Because of what Christ has done for us, because we are redeemed through His shed blood, we are to *do* good works. God has equipped us to be *doers* of His Word.

We simply *work out* what He is *working in*. He's done everything for us. He sent His Son to rescue us. He sent His Spirit to empower us to please Him. He's given us His Word so we know how to do that. He's given us the church to train us, to equip us, to mobilize us, to hold us accountable.

When you read Hebrews you quickly discover that it's a book, not of talk, but of *action*. The author used a special type of Greek verb called the hortatory subjunctive thirteen times in this letter. They are "let us" commands.

- 4:1 "Let us fear."
- 4:11 "Let us labor to enter that rest."
- 4:14 "Let us hold fast our profession."
- 4:16 "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."
- 6:1 "Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity."
- 10:24 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."
- 13:15 "Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."

These are things we are to *do*. And we can do them, not because we are so strong, but because God is equipping us with everything good so we can do His will.

What makes it possible? How does He do all this? Lest we miss the point, He gives us the answer again at the close of the benediction, "Through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever."

It's through Jesus Christ. That's how God works. That's how we can work out what God is working in. It's all through Jesus Christ, and therefore, He deserves the glory forever and ever.

So ask yourself a couple of critical questions.

1. *Do I want what God wants?* Is God's desire for your life *your* desire? Is it your consuming passion in life to allow God to have His way with you? Is that your goal, your purpose for living?

You see, that's one of the reasons He allows us to experience the frustrating seasons of change. It forces us to face this question. Do I want what God wants?

Let's get more specific, with this question.

2. *What is it that God wants most in my life today?*

Last week I went to the hospice house to visit a couple that used to be our neighbors. I was so thrilled when the man, who was not a believer when we were neighbors, said to me, "We both were saved and baptized last year." And then he told me how the Lord had brought them to Himself, and how he was now burdened to see others come to know the Lord, too.

Dear friends, it makes all the difference in the world when you know where you're going to spend eternity. Do you?

Perhaps you've been talking about putting your trust in Jesus Christ for a long time. Now it's time to do it.

Or maybe it's time to make your faith public through baptism. Or to get involved in a ministry. Or to repair a broken relationship. What is it that the Living God wants most in your life today?

We've considered three bedrock truths this morning, truths that will never change. One, who God is; two, what God did, and three, what God does. We've pondered what it is that God wants to do in our lives, to perfect us, to equip us to do His will.

This is the final word, the benediction. And because it is, three things follow.

Response: In light of this benediction...

1. *We have reason to be encouraged.* Let me give you a practical suggestion for this week. Begin your day by affirming these three unchanging truths. Who God is, what God did, and what God is doing. And when you find yourself becoming anxious, affirm them again...

"Lord, You are the God of peace. That's who You are, and it will never change. And You through the blood of the eternal covenant raised Your Son from the dead. That's what You did, and that too will never change. And You are equipping me and those who love You with everything good for doing Your will, and You're working in us to do what pleases Yourself, and that likewise will never change. Thank You! How wonderful You are!"

Yes, we have reason to be encouraged. And by affirming the truth, we will be.

2. *We have incentive to seek great things for God's glory.* He's for us. He's committed to doing things for His glory in and through us. Forbid that we should be either passive or paralyzed by our circumstances. Let's step out in faith and trust Him and seek, by His gracious help, to accomplish great things for His glory.

3. *We have no reason to fear.* If God is sovereign, and He is, then nothing surprises Him. What's changing to us is not changing to Him. He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. So there's no reason to fear.

Do you want God's benediction on your life? Let's spend some time in silence before Him. Let's talk to the Lord and invite Him to have His way in our lives. Let's tell Him that we want what He wants for our lives. After a time of prayer, I'll lead us in a congregational prayer, and then pronounce the benediction:

"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."