

8/30/26

A Vision of Glory

*Hebrews 13:18-25***Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

A lot has happened since we began our 18-week series, **Anchored in the Unchanging Christ – A Series on The Letter to the Hebrews**, on April 26. There have been changes in our lives, in our church, and in the world. Some of our families have lost loved ones. Students graduated from high school and started college. Wars continue their destructive impact in Ukraine, Iran, and the Middle East. We experienced the FIFA World Cup, the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of the USA, continuing political turmoil and hard to understand decisions, and AI rapidly becoming a part of life. The Red Sox fired their manager and five coaches the night before we began this series and had the worst record in the American League on June 24, then completely turned their season around in the two months that followed. A lot can change in four months.

What hasn't changed, as we heard last week, is Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Today, we conclude our series on Hebrews, which ends with a blessing that reflects some of the key themes of the Letter.

***Hebrews 13:18-25*, “Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon. Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free; and if he comes in time, he will be with me when I see you. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings. **Grace be with all of you.”**

Today, we're going to look at the end of Hebrews, and what it says about **the Author, about God, and about us. The Author, God, and Us.**

The Author. Let's begin with **two things** about The Author. While we don't know the author, we have reason to respect and appreciate the person the Spirit worked

through to bring us Hebrews. From our final passage, **the first thing** I want to note is an invitation and a plea, **“Pray for us.”** The author of Hebrews is clearly a spiritually mature, intelligent, and encouraging person, with an excellent command of the Christian message. The author almost certainly is a significant person in the church and the Way of Christ. Yet, the author has the humility and openness to **invite the people to “pray for us.”** I wonder if we do that. Do you invite and ask people to pray for you, your situation, your family, the ministry team you serve on, our church? Do you have people who you know are praying regularly for you? In less than five months, from September 2009 to February 2010, both my mother and her older sister, my Aunt Nancy, died, and I lost two people who had been praying for me my entire life. That was hard, and that kind of support is not easily replaced. It takes openness and humility to ask people to pray for us because often, when you ask people to pray for you, the reply you get is, “How can I pray for you?” The answer, in Hebrews, is the second thing to note about the author, which is the prayer request, is to be able to...

Act honorably in all things. I so appreciate this because acting honorably in all things reflects the character of Christ. Jesus acted honorably in all things. It’s what anyone who calls themselves his followers is called to do. Act honorably in all things; always do the right thing. The quote I chose for my high school yearbook was a line by American author, Mark Twain, **“Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”** One of the things I find distressing, disappointing, and discouraging about the times in which we’re living, is that it seems like so many people, from the least to the greatest, don’t care about acting honorably **in anything** – much less, all things. The way people speak and act, the decisions and choices they make, how they treat other people – we’re living in a polluted sea of bad behavior.

This past Monday, Jill and I were at Home Depot in Hyannis, and I was waiting for an employee to return with the item we were picking up. Meanwhile, there were two men waiting for the next person to call them down. One didn’t have anything, and was kind of leaning against the railing; the other had a shopping cart with several items he was clearly returning. When an employee invited the next person in line to come down, both men started moving. The guy with nothing stepped out in front, and immediately began using profanity towards the other man, who hadn’t realized the guy with nothing was in line. There was no, “Excuse me, I was in line.” Just immediately cursing someone

out, calling them names, which was, of course, reciprocated. As the first guy passed me, he made a hand gesture back towards the other guy, which elicited more bad language. I didn't know if I was going to have to prevent a fight over a place in line.

The Author of Hebrews asks for prayer to act honorably in all things because none of us wants to bring dishonor to Christ, or his cause, or ourselves, or our family, because people know that we consider ourselves Christians – yet, we acted in a dishonorable way. If you take nothing else from this message, today, make it your aim in life to **always act honorably in all things**. Everyone around you will benefit, including yourself.

The second thing, as we conclude Hebrews, is – what do we learn about God? A lot. Each phrase that follows, in the benediction of verses 20-21, is loaded with meaning drawn from Hebrews.

The God of Peace. God is a God of peace. God longs for us to be at peace with God, ourselves, and others. God desires peace in a church, where “mutual love” continues and grows. God has created the possibility of peace between Jews and Gentiles, and people of different nations, thanks to the ministry of Jesus, the Great High priest, that we heard about in *Hebrews 7-10*. When we seek to be instruments of peace, we're fulfilling our calling, and God's desire for our lives, relationships, and for the world.

Who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus – the resurrection changed everything. The Author uses an unusual Greek verb in describing the resurrection. Instead of the typical “raised,” the verb is a word meaning, “led out” or “led up.” So, the benediction of Hebrews speaks of the God “who led up Jesus from the dead.” That phrase is significant, in Hebrews, because we heard, repeatedly, how Jesus traveled downward in time and space into the place of suffering on this earth, and then is “led up” by God, while holding fast – like an anchor – to his brothers and sisters, whom he brings with him into the heavenly sanctuary.

The great shepherd of the sheep – Jesus is the great shepherd who leads, protects, and knows his sheep by name. Just as God leads Jesus up from death, Jesus leads his followers. As in *Psalms 23*, *Isaiah 40*, and *John 10*, the shepherd imagery conveys the idea of the faithful, who persevere, being led to the safety and nourishment of green pastures, and eventually to heaven.

By the blood of the eternal covenant – Jesus is the lamb of God whose blood cleanses us from our sin. This phrase reminds us of the great high priestly ministry of Jesus, and the new eternal covenant he established, by his perfect, final sacrifice, which we heard about, significantly, in *Hebrews 8-9*.

Having asked for prayer, and reminded the congregation of what God has done for them in Christ, the Author offers a prayer and blessing for the people.

What about us?

Make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will – God's goal is to make you whole, so you may do God's good will in every aspect of your life. This is yet another reminder of the sacrifice of Jesus, which makes us whole, complete, and sanctified. We were created in the image of God, and those who are joined to Jesus, by faith, are empowered to do his will, in offering praise and worship to God, and compassionate, loving, generous service to others.

On August 25, singer, songwriter, actor, and philanthropist, Dolly Parton, died at age 80. Among the stories being shared about her generosity is the remarkable way she invested royalties she earned from Whitney Houston's 1992 rendition of Parton's song, "I Will Always Love You", featured on the soundtrack of the movie, "The Bodyguard". Forbes estimated that Parton earned at least \$10 million from Houston's version – during the 1990s, alone. In 1997, Parton used some of those royalties to purchase a commercial complex in Nashville's Sevier Park/12 South area – a neighborhood that, at the time, was home to predominantly Black families and businesses. In a 2021 interview with Andy Cohen on "Watch What Happens Live", Parton explained that the location felt especially meaningful because of its connection to Houston. "So I just thought this was the perfect place for me to be, considering it was Whitney. I'm just going to be down here with her people, who are my people as well." Parton added that she loved having spent the money on the complex, and thought of it as "the house that Whitney built." The remark became a memorable expression of Parton's appreciation for Houston, and of the lasting financial and cultural impact Houston's recording had on Parton's song.

Working among us that which is pleasing in his sight – God is at work in our midst to bring about good that is pleasing to God. I think this is a delightful picture. What's being communicated is that God is at work in human life, doing things to please himself. When you've had the experience of doing something

kind, thoughtful, or generous for someone else, how does it make you feel? It's pleasing. It makes us feel good. Last week, Bill Harwood, Ben Gregson, Dave Hill, and David Wilcock kindly came to our house, while we were in Pennsylvania for Jill's Aunt Ann's memorial service, and they put together some deck furniture, as a surprise for Jill when we got home on Monday. We greatly appreciated their help, but I'm also confident it made them feel good to be able to help us – and, though it may seem like a small thing, I'm sure it was pleasing to God to see them putting their faith into action. *Hebrews 11:6* tells us, “*Without faith it is impossible to please God,*” and all our works of kindness, mercy, and helpfulness, acts of courage, expressions of hope, and risks of love – all things that proceed from faith – are gifts from God, and signs that God is “*working among us.*”

Through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

All that we've heard and learned from Hebrews is possible through Jesus, who is worthy of all glory and praise, forever. The benediction ends where Hebrews began, with Jesus in glory. ***Hebrews 1:3 (NIV), “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”***

The last line of Hebrews tells everything – Grace be with you all. That's the ultimate message of Hebrews, of the Gospel. Because of the ministry of Jesus, the great high priest, the great shepherd of the sheep, we are loved and reconciled to God, and grace is with all God's people everywhere.

I want to close by returning to the song I mentioned earlier. Dolly Parton released “I Will Always Love You” in 1974, eighteen years before Whitney Houston's number one smash rendition. Dolly wrote it as a professional farewell and tribute to her longtime mentor, duet partner, and business partner, Porter Wagoner. Though many mistake it for a romantic breakup song, it was written to resolve a major professional impasse. In 1967, Wagoner invited a young, up-and-coming Parton to join his popular syndicated television program, “The Porter Wagoner Show”. The exposure skyrocketed her career, and they became one of the most successful duos in country music history. By 1973, Parton was ready to leave the show to focus fully on her solo career. Wagoner was

fiercely protective of the brand they'd built, and resisted letting her go, leading to deep professional tension and constant arguments between the two headstrong artists.

Realizing she couldn't win the argument with words, Parton went home and decided to do what she did best. She wrote the song in a single afternoon. The next morning, she walked into Wagoner's office and asked him to sit down. She played "I Will Always Love You" for him, with just her acoustic guitar. Hearing the lyrics, Wagoner burst into tears. He told her it was the best song she had ever written, and agreed to let her leave the show. The song went on to hit number one on the country charts, when it was released in 1974. Despite the rocky transition, the song preserved their lifelong bond. Decades later, in May of 2007, Parton performed the song for Wagoner one final time at the Grand Ole Opry – just months before he passed away.

Hebrews is like a love song from God to God's people, affirming God's love for all of us, and reminding us how God brought forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and wholeness through Jesus Christ. **Revelation 7:9-17** provides a picture of heaven that sounds like it was influenced by Hebrews. There's *"a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before **the Lamb**, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to **the Lamb**.' ...[The multitude in heaven] 'are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in **the blood of the Lamb**. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; **for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd**, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

The power of the ending of Hebrews is that it gathers everything into a prayer: **the God who raised Jesus, the Great Shepherd who is also the lamb, is still at work in His people, enabling us by faith to do God's will, for God's glory.**

Blessing (*Hebrews 13:20-21, 25*): “Now may **the God of peace**, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, **the great shepherd of the sheep**, by **the blood of the eternal covenant**, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Grace be with all of you.”

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Looking back over Hebrews, what is one truth, image, or passage that has stayed with you or changed the way you understand Jesus? Why do you think that truth remains with you?
2. Hebrews ends by calling Jesus “*the great shepherd of the sheep*.” After everything we have heard about Jesus – true high Priest, sacrifice, mediator of the new covenant, Son of God, and author and perfecter of our faith — what does it add to our understanding of Jesus to see him as our great shepherd?
3. Hebrews repeatedly calls us to persevere in faith — to hold fast, run the race, endure discipline, encourage one another, and not turn or drift away. As you reflect on the letter, what helps us keep going when faith becomes difficult?
4. *Hebrews 13:21* says that God will “*make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will*.” How does that impact the way we think about growing as followers of Christ, and allowing God to shape us into people who can participate in God’s work in the world?
5. *Hebrews 13:20-21* gives us a vision of what God is doing “*among us*.” After 19 weeks studying The Letter to the Hebrews together, what do you hope God is doing among us as a congregation? What kind of church would we become if we truly lived out the vision Hebrews gives us?
6. The letter closes with the words “*to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen*.” If *giving God glory* is the destination toward which the whole letter points, what would it look like for us to carry that vision of glory into the next chapter of our lives — both individually and as a church?
7. After walking through Hebrews together for 19 weeks, what is God calling you to hold onto, what is God calling you to let go of, and what is God calling you to move toward?