

July 3, 2018
KIBC Sunday Worship Service
Message by Pastor Teiichiro Kuroda
Title of the Message: "Grace from the God of Peace"
—Blessings of Benediction—

Text: Hebrews 13:20~25

13:20 Now 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,

13:21 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.

13:22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.

13:23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

13:24 Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

13:25 Grace be with you all.

Introduction

We have studied the Epistle to the Hebrews for a long time. Now we are studying the last part of the epistle. The author concludes the epistle with a wonderful benediction. Before we study the benediction, let's consider why the author finishes the epistle in the form of a benediction.

You attended Sunday worship service today. Then, what do you think (understand) about worship? Do you think it is a time to hear the praising team sing and you also sing together? Or do you come to the church to listen to pastor's sermon? Some people may think it a rest day so they come to have a quiet time.

However, some other people say that they leave busy days and come to attend worship to receive the Word of Peace from God.

Then, what are Sunday worship services like? Generally, protestant churches have worship according to the following outline. (They may have slight differences.)

1. Welcome to the Service (Introduction, Calling, Confession, and Praise)
2. Scripture (The Bible, Prayer, Praise, Sermon, Communion)
3. Response and Thanksgiving (Praise, Prayer, Money Offering)
4. Benediction (A Doxology, Benediction, Closing Music) and Response (Amen)

Our worship service usually follows the form above. When we look the worship program in detail, we understand what our worship service is like. Let's look one by one and consider them well.

The doxology and benediction, the final parts, are very important.

A "doxology" is usually praise. It means that those who worship God glorify Father, Son and the Spirit (the Trinity) with all their existence. It also means that our lives in this world finish with a doxology.

A "benediction" is given by a pastor who is God's priest. It means that God blesses us at the end of our lives and the history of the world is also completed with God's blessings. Therefore, we meet the living God at worship service. And as we receive God's Word, we give thanks to Him and respond Him and receive His blessings. The saints respond together with "amen" in chorus.

Kitahama Church gives a prayer, "Aaron's Prayer" (Numbers 6) that is said to be the first priestly blessing in the Bible. And at the end of worship service, we kneel down before the Lord and receive His blessings and respond by saying "Amen" (It is true, indeed.) We glorify the Lord in this way.

**Numbers 6:24 "May the LORD bless you and keep you;
6:25 the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
6:26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."**

By the way, the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 13 concludes with two benedictions (13:20-21, 25). The latter is short so let's study the former first.

Main Points

1 . Exhortations to the Saints of God

1) The Word of Exhortation

13:22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.

"**My word of exhortation**" refers to the Epistle to the Hebrews and it can be translated into a sermon. Therefore, we read the epistle as the sermon.

If we consider the epistle as a long letter of 13 chapters, its content may not be very deep and meaningful. However, those who have a background in Hebrew don't think it like us. The author records, "**I have written to you quite briefly.**" The author says that he writes the points briefly, therefore, he wants them to read it carefully.

We are able to understand that some believers of that time seemed to be lacking in patience like us. If they were not, the author would not write it.

We need to have perseverance if we want to learn the important truth. Paul records the importance of Christian lives as below—

Romans 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

5:3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance,

5:4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

2) Greetings to the Saints

Hebrews 13:23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

When Paul made a second missionary journey, he took Timothy, a young believer, who he met in Lystra. Later he became a great evangelist by Paul's training.

It is written in the Epistle to Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon that Timothy was imprisoned together with Paul. He seemed to be freed at that time. We understand that Timothy was in a close relationship with the author of the epistle. The author continues,

13:24 Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

We Christians are given wonderful privilege to share joy and sorrow together.

{Illustration}

Generally, people shake hands when they greet in European and American society. Japanese people greet each other by bowing and bending. Greetings of the Europeans and Americans must have some meaning. It is very happy if we have a relationship to greet each other. If we have a cat-and-dog relationship, we will rarely greet each other. Christians have the kind of relationship to greet each other, "Greet all the saints!" (Very important). What kind of greetings do you do?

2. God's Benediction to the Saints

13:25 Grace be with you all.

The author finishes the Epistle with benediction above. It is the latter benediction. This is a very short one, therefore, let's study the former one first.

1) Benediction that God gives

13:20 Now 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, 13:21 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.

When we read the Scripture above, we come to know that the benediction is written in verses 20 and 21a. And "**through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever**" is a doxology. We know that blessing comes from God and the God is the God of peace. Peace doesn't only mean a situation without conflicts or wars, but also means conformity, harmony, prosperity and health. There are no grudges or hatreds there. Only love and satisfaction are in peace.

Therefore, peace solves all sorts of problems and makes all sorts of things sound. It means that peace refers to salvation. The God of peace gives us His blessings. Then, what is the God like?

2) God Who is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep

13:20 Now 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,

We human beings are sinners by birth since Adam has committed sin. Therefore, we will finally be judged and perish. However, the merciful God sent Jesus Christ, His only, precious Son, to this world to save us. The Son became a man like us and experienced all sorts of worries and sufferings. Finally, He took our sins and was punished and died on the cross.

Jesus Christ is the only One who saves us. Therefore the author records that He is "**the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant.**" Blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross testifies the eternal covenant of God to redeem us from our sin.

The author records in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 9 as below—

Hebrews 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

As the verse above records, God completely fulfilled it through blood that Jesus, His only Son, shed on the cross. A shepherd works so hard to protect sheep. If sheep are attacked by a wolf, the shepherd protects them at the risk of his life.

Jesus said,

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the

sheep.

When God the Father saw Jesus Christ His Son who completed eternal redemption on the cross He was pleased with him. It means that "He brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus." The God of peace prepared us salvation through His death on the cross and resurrection.

What did the One fulfill for us?

13:21 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.

3) Blessings of God's Benediction

Two blessings are pointed out as below.

- We are pleading to God.

"May he work in us what is pleasing to him," 13:21

God Himself works in us what is pleasing Him before we do what He is pleased with. And the Son of God helps;

- He equips us with everything for doing His will.

"...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him," 13:21

God helps us to do His will. He prepares everything for us to do His will. We try hard to do His will as Christians. However, if we really think about it, we come to understand that God's will has already been fulfilled. It means that fulfillment of His will is in His hand. It is an amazing fact.

When we meet trials and when we think as if the whole world is against us, what prayer do you give? Some says, "I have no choice but to pray" Some says, "There is no use in doing prayer." However, another says, "Yes, prayer is power indeed!" He who says so knows the living God. He is under the protection of God. Which side do you belong to?

Paul records as below—

Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will

Paul teaches us, **"to be transformed by the renewing of your mind."**

What does it mean to renew one's mind? It means the way to understand God's will; to know what is good and the way God accepts. ⇒ When we change our selfish attitudes into thinking about God's will, then, we come to know His will and live according to His will.

Our selfish I-centered attitude changes into a God-centered one. It is done **"by the renewing of your mind."** Therefore, we are willingly able to live according to God's will. It isn't fulfilled by our effort or decision. The benediction proclaims it.

13:21 "equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him,"

We expect God's blessings and we are encouraged by declaration of benediction, because the God of peace who is the great Shepherd makes us live according to His will. Therefore, we give thanks to God and receive the benediction that declares His blessings. And we glorify God together in the chorus of "Amen". We receive great power there.

Conclusion

Title of the Message: "Grace from the God of Peace"

—Blessings of Benediction—

We studied the benediction and God's blessings that we are given at today's worship service. How about today's message? Does your attitude of worship change starting today?

Let's remember the significance of God's benediction with the following two points.

1. The God of Peace who is the great Shepherd gives us his benediction.
2. Benediction is given to fulfill God's will.

* God Bless You!