

April 6/7, 2019

Equipped to do His Will

Christ is Enough Series

Hebrews 13:17-25

Pastor Bryan Clark

This morning we want to finish up our study of the book of Hebrews. There's one final reminder that this is a race we run as the people of God...together. There's your part; there's my part, and there's our part. That's what we want to talk about, so if you have a Bible, turn to Hebrews, Chapter 13. The writer of Hebrews is just going to finish up a few details, then a benediction and close the book. We pick it up in chapter 13, verse 17. That's where we left off last week:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (*NASB, Hebrews 13:17)

I would suggest to you that's a verse that's fairly familiar, but I think often misunderstood. When I say misunderstood, it often is reflected, especially by preachers, as, "I'm the boss. Do what you're told," and that's not the tone of the verse at all. As a matter of fact, if your translation has the word *authority*—submit to one in authority—something like that, that is a mistranslation. That term *authority*, there's no term like that in the Greek, and the problem is that completely changes the tone of the verse. The verse is not kind of a top-down, authoritative verse. It's actually a very warm kind of shepherding tone to the passage.

So, let's define the terms a little bit. The word **obey** is a Greek word that means to *persuade* or to be persuaded. So, if it's an active-voice verb, it means to persuade. If it's passive, it means to be persuaded. But this is what's called the middle voice, which is unique in the Greek language, and basically means you choose to be persuaded. It's the idea that you're willingly coming to learn and be persuaded or convinced of the truth.

The word **submit**, most of the time when you see the word submit in the New Testament, it's a military term—and it's pretty clear this is not that term. This is a term that's much softer. It means to *yield*. So it's the idea of yielding or surrendering to the truth. So you're being persuaded by the truth and you choose, as an act of your will, to surrender to that truth that's being presented by your spiritual leader. And that's what it says. Why? **For they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.** That word **watch**, the Greek word literally means to *stay awake*. It means to stay awake all night. It's a word that would have been used to describe a night watchman, probably more likely in this context, a shepherd. The shepherd had the responsibility to guard the sheep. The shepherd would give account for that, and so when they were in an environment where they were concerned about predators, it was the job of the shepherd to stay awake all night long and make sure no sheep were lost to the predator. That's the term that's used here.

So, essentially what the text is saying is that is my calling as your pastor—and this would be true of all the ministry staff. I'm just going to make it personal; it makes it easier to talk about. *My* calling is to understand and present to you the truth. *My* job is basically to exegete the biblical text and then to exegete the culture and try to understand how this truth relates to this culture. I do that as a calling, knowing one day I'm going to stand before God and I'm going to give an account for whether or not I stayed awake to try to see the predators, to try to warn you, and to try to help us

walk a path that is pleasing to God. So, I can't control whether you listen or not. It's just my job to do my best to try to alert you and warn you. Your job, according to the verse, is you willingly choose to come and listen, to be persuaded, and to submit or surrender yourself to the truth.

So think of it like this. All week long you have a calling, and your calling is *out there*. Your calling is out to the marketplace; it's out to the school; it's out to the dorm; it's to your neighborhood. There are all these things that consume your time all week long. That's your calling. My calling is to help you faithfully fulfill your calling. And so my job is to study the Scriptures. It's to understand the culture, to help you understand what's true and how it relates to the culture in order that, when you go out there, you can effectively fulfill your calling. In a sense it's a partnership. You're going to answer for your calling; I'm going to answer for my calling. But if we all work together, we can do this better. That's the idea of verse 17. It's actually kind of a warm, shepherding tone.

The second part of the verse is interesting. It says **Let them do this with joy and not with grief**. In other words, the preacher, the shepherd, the pastor, the minister, should do this with a heart of joy, not as a burden, not out of frustration, not out of anger. That's basically what it's saying. Because, if it's done as a burden, done out of anger or frustration, this would be unprofitable for you. You're the one that gets beat up when the preacher is mad or frustrated. What the text is ultimately saying is how you choose to respond and listen sets the tone as to whether your shepherd's going to come to you with joy or whether he's going to come to you with frustration and anger. Churches are full of conflict between the spiritual leaders and their people, and everybody loses in that context. So, the idea is: if we do this together, if we partner together, then it's better for everybody.

Now I've told you this before, but I often get asked the question, "What makes Lincoln Berean special?" And I always start with the same answer. "Always," I say, "it's the people...it's the people!" God, over the years, has brought amazing people to Lincoln Berean. I believe this with all my heart. It's the people that makes this place special. This is a wonderful place to be a pastor. People are loving; they're caring; they're encouraging; they're supportive. It's not hard to do this with a spirit of joy because of the heart of the people involved. Just think of it this way. In fifty-seven years, there have been two senior pastors. I think that speaks for itself. There's lots of churches that crank out pastors every couple of years because there's just such a spirit of divisiveness that they come and they go and they come and they go. It's not been our history. It's not a tribute to the pastors; it's a tribute to the people and how they treat their pastors. And so I think this is something we do very well. Verse 18 is connected. It's important we don't disconnect verse 18 from this conversation. The writer says:

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring (*That's a strong term.*) **to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you sooner.** (Vs. 18-19)

Now nobody knows quite what the background was. Obviously the writer is caught up in something, and until that something gets resolved, he's not free to come visit them, which is what he wants to do. Most scholars think it's some sort of a mess somewhere that they're trying to get worked out before he can come visit. And perhaps there's been some word that's traveled that maybe there's been some sort of an attack. So what he's doing is reaffirming that they are doing everything possible to conduct themselves with honor and integrity, because if verse 17 is going to be taken seriously, then spiritual leaders must be people of integrity. They must be people that can

be trusted. They must genuinely, publicly and privately, be seeking to live a life of honor before God if we're going to trust them. So that's the basic idea there.

It's interesting that several times in the book of Acts, the Apostle Paul does the exact same thing. He assures the people that he's seeking to live a life of integrity and character in order that they might trust him as a shepherd. So, in this day and age of Christian celebrities, in this day and age of so many spiritual leaders with so many scandals and so many character issues, this is a big problem! I understand that; people feel it deeply. But there's great accountability in a local church. It's helpful to know, like, my wife goes here; my children go here. My friends go here. You're free to ask them. You know, I would tell you I'm the same person I am at home as I am here. I don't have things I'm hiding at home. I don't have an addiction. I don't go home and watch pornography. I don't have a financial crisis. I take this very seriously. I seek to live my life with character and integrity in order that you might trust me, in order that we might fulfill this partnership. In order that you might do better at your calling, I need to be faithful at my calling. That's essentially what he's saying there.

Starting in Verse 20, then, is the benediction. Some refer to it as the doxology. It's a little bit of a review of the book of Hebrews. He says:

Now the God of peace...

This is the Greek word that's the closest we have to the Hebrew word *shalom*, the idea of wholeness, the idea of flourishing. Now stop and think about this: These people—the first readers—they are already in the beginnings of persecution. They are about to experience dramatic persecution, and yet what the writer is saying is, “You can flourish, because flourishing has nothing to do with whether or not all your circumstances are easy. It has to do with your understanding that, no matter what you're going through, *Christ is enough*. Even if you're headed into persecution, you can flourish, because *Christ is enough*.” So...

Now the God of peace (the God of flourishing) **who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep** (So the one who raised Jesus from the dead; we are His sheep) **through the blood of the eternal covenant...**

This has been a huge part of the conversation in Hebrews, that Jesus has fulfilled the promise of Genesis 3:15 and on, that God would send His Son to be the Savior of the world. He was the ultimate High Priest that offered the ultimate sacrifice, which was His own blood, in payment for sin. And God made an oath and a promise that that payment for sin would be adequate. It would be satisfactory for the rest of eternity. There would never be a moment in the rest of eternity where God would ever say, “That's not enough.” Therefore, Christ is enough forever! So it's an eternal covenant. It's the eternal promise. And then, he identifies this great Shepherd:

Even Jesus our Lord.

Verse 21, basically says that God may:

...equip you in every good thing to do His will...

That word **equip** actually is a word that means *to mend or to fix or to heal*. It kind of goes back to what we talked about in chapter 12—that part of the message of the gospel is that God brings

healing to what is broken and fractured and wounded, that we, together as the body of Christ, come together and we experience the healing and the hope that we need in order to fulfill our calling, in order to live a life of purpose. So, that's the idea there, that He may:

...equip you in every good thing to do His will (in other words to fulfill your purpose) **working in us** (So it's not our power; it's His power.) **that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen**

At the end of the story it's always about Jesus, and Jesus taking sinners and misfits and losers and, through His power, making us something beautiful before God so that we stand righteous before a holy God. But He also empowers us to fulfill a calling that will matter forever for His glory.

Verse 22:

But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

Now we kind of smile at that statement because it's been thirteen chapters. We started this in September, so it's like, "It doesn't seem so *brief* to me." But brief is kind of, you know, relative and apparently, relative to other things, he considers it a brief exhortation. But the language kind of reflects this idea that, "This hasn't been easy; this has been tough. There have been some pretty serious warnings all along the way." He wants them to believe he cares for them, that he's living his life with integrity, that he's trying to shepherd them, and to just listen to what he's had to say and to choose to submit to that. Verse 23:

Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. (Vs. 23-25)

So, Timothy must have been incarcerated. He's been **released**. He's going to go to the writer—we aren't sure who that is—and together, hopefully they can come and visit. Then he ends with this message of **grace**, which has been the theme of the book of Hebrews. That in Genesis 3:15 and on, God made a promise that He would send a Savior to save us from our sins. The old covenant—the Old Testament law—was meant to be a picture of that. It was a shadow and a picture that one day God would fulfill this promise, but it was never meant to be some religious activity that could save someone. It was always a *picture* of the promise to come. Jesus, God's eternal Son, took on human flesh, entered this world, allowed Himself to be crucified on the cross—the ultimate High Priest making the ultimate sacrifice for sin, shedding His blood for sin, that would be shed once for all time—and that that payment would be good to satisfy God's wrath for eternity. He was buried; He rose again, and He offers that salvation freely as a gift to those who would receive it. The writer has said repeatedly, "This is the new covenant, which is a better covenant, built on better promises, that brings a better hope, that leads us to a better city."

And all of that is a gift of His **grace**. The challenge we all face is there is a tendency to think that somehow religion can make us right before a holy God—that a bunch of religious activity, a bunch of religious rituals, trying to be good, trying to do more good than bad—all of this is an attempt at self-righteousness, which is reflective of the old covenant and their attempts to somehow make themselves right before God. The message of the new covenant is, "You simply cannot make yourself right before God." That's why Jesus had to come and do it for you—to make payment for your sin and to offer you salvation freely as a gift because He has covered your debt. It doesn't

matter who you are...doesn't matter what you've done...doesn't matter what's been done to you. There's nobody too far for God's grace. There's nobody too far gone for God's salvation. He offers it freely as a gift to those who would receive it. The message from the beginning to the end has been: No matter what, you don't need anything else. *Christ is enough!*

This morning we gather to celebrate these amazing stories of people who have experienced salvation through the grace of God. Their lives have been changed because they have believed with all their heart that *Christ is enough!*

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that salvation is freely offered to anyone who will choose to receive it. We don't have to be good enough. We don't have to be religious. We don't have to go through a bunch of rituals. It just comes down to whether or not we're willing, by faith, to believe Jesus died for our sins. Lord, we celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus this morning and His power to change lives forever. Lord, this we celebrate in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What are some practical things we can do to prevent our works flowing out of our salvation from becoming works we think merit “more” from God? In other words, how do we prevent our freedom in Christ from becoming more religious bondage?
2. What is the role of a spiritual leader in your life?

Bible Study

1. Review what the writer of Hebrews meant by Mount Zion and the idea of being “Outside the Camp.” What is his concern?
2. Read Hebrews 13:17-19. The tone of verse 17 is not militant but warm and inviting like a family. What is the spiritual leader’s job and what is your job? Compare Jesus words in Mark 10:42, 43.
3. Compare the words of the writer in verse 18 to Acts 24:16. What should you expect from those in spiritual leadership? See also I Timothy 3:1-7.
4. Read Hebrews 13:20-25. The “God of Peace” could be the God of flourishing or wholeness. What has God done for you that you might flourish (and those around you) for His glory?
5. Review what you’ve learned about a new and better covenant, built on better promises, with a better hope, headed to a better city. What have been the most significant learnings or reminders for you in this study?

Application

1. What has God called you to (purpose) and how does the truth in Hebrews equip you to fulfill that purpose? You may want to just spend a week wrestling with the question of purpose. What is that for you at this season of your life?

2. What does it look like for you to celebrate the new covenant in your life on a daily basis?