

Prayer - Hebrews 13:20, 21, Part 2

by A.W. Pink

The sermon explores the significance of Christ's resurrection as a declaration of peace between God and humanity, and it highlights the importance of Christ's role as mediator of the everlasting covenant for the salvation of His elect.

Scripture: Hebrews 13:20

Topics: "Resurrection", "Covenant of Grace"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of Christ's resurrection as a legal act of divine justice, highlighting that God the Father, as the supreme Judge, acquitted Christ after He bore the sins of His people. The resurrection is portrayed not merely as a display of divine power but as a fulfillment of the everlasting covenant, confirming that Christ's sacrifice was accepted and peace established between God and humanity. Pink explains that through Christ's resurrection, believers are assured of their own deliverance and the fulfillment of God's promises, as Christ serves as the great shepherd of the sheep. The sermon encourages believers to approach God with confidence, knowing that the God of peace is committed to their spiritual growth and well-being. Ultimately, Pink calls for a faith that rests on the objective truth of God's promises, which are guaranteed by Christ's resurrection.

Transcript

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." We must now carefully consider the particular act of God toward our Savior that the Apostle Paul here uses as his plea for the petition that follows. In the great mystery of redemption, God the Father sustains the office of supreme Judge (Heb. 12:23). He it was who laid upon their Surety the sins of His people. He it was who called for the sword of vengeance to smite the Shepherd (Zech. 13:7). He it was who richly rewarded and highly honored Him (Phil. 2:9). "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36; cf. 10:36). So it is in the text now before us: the restoring of Christ from the grave is here viewed not as an act of Divine power but of Divine justice. That God is here seen exercising His judicial authority is clear from the term used. We are ever the losers if, in our carelessness, we fail to note and duly weigh every single variation in the language of Holy Writ. Our text does not say that God "raised," but rather that He "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." This sets before us a strikingly different yet most blessed aspect of truth, namely, the legal discharge of the body of our Surety from the prison of death.

Christ's Resurrection, Part of a Legal Process

There was a formal legal process against Christ. Jehovah laid on Him all the iniquities of His elect, and thereby He was rendered guilty in the sight of the Divine Law. Thus He was justly condemned by Divine justice. Accordingly, He was cast into prison. God was wroth with Him as the Sinbearer. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, to exact full satisfaction from Him. But the debt being paid, the penalty of the Law having been inflicted, justice was satisfied and God was pacified. In consequence, God the Father became "the God of peace" both toward Christ and toward those whom He represented (Eph. 2:15-17). God's anger being assuaged and His Law magnified and made honorable (Isa. 42:21), He then exonerated the Surety, setting Him free and justifying Him (Isa. 50:8; 1 Tim. 3:16). Thus it was foretold, "He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?" (Isa. 53:8). In his most excellent exposition of Isaiah 53--virtually unobtainable today--James Durham (1682) showed conclusively that verse 8 described Christ's exaltation following His humiliation. He demonstrated that the term generation there has reference to His duration or continuance (as it does in Josh. 22:27). "As His humiliation was low, so His exaltation was ineffable: it cannot be declared, nor adequately conceived, the continuance of it being for ever."

Condensing it into a few words, Durham gave the following as his analysis of Isaiah 53:8.

1. Something is here asserted of Christ: "he was taken (or "lifted up") from prison and from judgment." 2. Something is hinted which cannot be expressed: "Who shall declare his generation [continuance]?" 3. A reason is given in reference to both: "for he was cut off out of the land of the living."

The clause "He was taken from prison and from judgment" does not merely call to mind the fact that Christ was arrested, held in custody, and brought to trial before the Sanhedrin and the civil magistrates. Rather, it primarily reminds us that the straits of humiliation and suffering into which Christ was brought were on account of His arraignment before God's tribunal as the Husband and legal Surety of His people (His sheep, John 10:14, 15), the penalty of whose sin debts against God He was lawfully bound to pay (since He had voluntarily agreed to become their Husband). "For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isa. 53:8). The envious Jewish leaders (and their followers), who with wicked hands crucified and slew the Prince of life (Acts 2:23; 3:15) had not the slightest awareness of the great transactions between the Father and the Son now being legally enforced by their instrumentality. They were merely pursuing their rebellion against the Son of David, the popularly acclaimed King of Israel (John 1:49; 12:13), in a way consistent with the preservation of their own selfish interests as men of power, wealth, and prestige among the Jews. Yet in their high treason against the Lord of glory, whom they knew not (1 Cor. 2:8) they did God's bidding (Acts 2:23; 4:25-28; cf. Gen. 50:19, 20) in bringing the appointed Substitute to justice as though He were a common criminal.

The word prison may be taken more largely for those straits and pressures of spirit that the Lord Jesus endured while suffering the curse of the Law, and judgment for the awful sentence inflicted upon Him.

It was to His impending judgment that Christ referred when He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). And it is to the pains and confinement of prison that His agony in the Garden and His cry of anguish on the Cross are to be attributed. Ultimately, the grave became His prison.

The Significance of Christ's Release from Death's Prison

The Hebrew word *laqach* rendered taken in the clause "He was taken from prison and from judgment" sometimes signifies to deliver or to free, as a captive is liberated (see Isa. 49:24, 25; cf. Jer. 37:17; 38:14; 39:14). From both prison and judgment the Surety was taken or freed, so that "death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). Christ received the sentence of Divine absolution, just as one who is adjudged as having paid his debt is discharged by the court. Christ not only received absolution but was actually delivered from prison, having paid the utmost farthing demanded of Him. Though He was brought into prison and judgment, when the full demands of justice had been met He could no longer be detained. The Apostle Peter expressed it this way: "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains [or "cords"] of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24, ital. and brackets mine). Matthew Henry declares, "He was by an extraordinary order of Heaven taken out of the prison of the grave; an angel was sent on purpose to roll away the stone and set Him at liberty, by which the judgment against Him was reversed, and taken off." In this vein Thomas Manton insists that the clause "who shall declare His generation?" (Isa. 53:8) means who shall "declare the glory of His resurrection, as the previous words do His humiliation, suffering, and death"?

Manton rightly states, "While Christ was in the state of death He was in effect a prisoner, under the arrest of Divine vengeance; but when He rose again then was our Surety let out of prison." In a most helpful way he goes on to show that the peculiar force of the phrase "brought again from the dead" is best explained by the dignified carriage of the apostles when they were unlawfully cast into prison. The next day the magistrates sent sergeants to the prison, bidding their keeper to let them go. But Paul refused to be "thrust...out privily" and remained there until the magistrates themselves formally "brought them out" (Acts 16:35-39, ital. mine). So it was with Christ: He did not break out of prison. As God had "delivered him up" to death (Rom. 8:32), so He "brought [Him] again from the dead." Says Manton,

It was as it were an acquittal from those debts of ours which He undertook to pay: as Simeon was dismissed when the conditions were performed, and Joseph was satisfied with a sight of his brother, he "brought Simeon out unto them" (Gen. 43:23).

It was God, in His official character as the Judge of all, who righteously freed our Substitute. Though Christ, as our Surety, was officially guilty and thus condemned (Isa. 53:4-8), He was personally innocent and was thus acquitted by His resurrection (Isa. 53:9-11; Heb. 4:15; 7:26-28; 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19). By bringing His son forth from the grave God was saying that this Jesus, the true Messiah, did not die for His own sins but for the sins of others.

The God of Peace Brought Christ from the Dead

Let us now briefly observe that it was as the God of peace that the Father acted when He "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." The perfect obedience and atoning oblation of Christ had met every requirement of the Law, had put away the iniquities of those for whom it was offered, and had placated God and reconciled Him to them. While sin remained there could be no peace; but when sin was blotted out by the blood of the Lamb, God was propitiated. Christ had "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20), but so long as He continued in the grave there was no open proclamation thereof. It was by His bringing of Christ forth from the dead that God made it known to the universe that His sacrifice had been accepted. By the resurrection of His Son did God the Father publicly declare that enmity was at an end and peace established. There was the grand evidence and proof that God was pacified toward His people. Christ had made an honorable peace, so that God could be both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). Take note also of the relation Christ sustained when God delivered

Him from the dead: it was not as a private person but as the federal Head of His people that the Father dealt with Him, as "that great shepherd of the sheep," so that His people were then legally delivered from the prison of death with Him (Eph. 2:5, 6).

Christ's Petitions for His Own Deliverance

It is very blessed to learn from the Psalms--where much light, not given in the New Testament, is cast upon the heart exercises of the Mediator--that Christ supplicated God for deliverance from the tomb. In Psalm 88 (the prophetic subject matter of which is the passion of the Lord Jesus) we find Him saying, "Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave:" (vv. 2, 3). Since the transgressions of His people had been imputed to Him, those "troubles" were the sorrows and anguish that He experienced when the wages that were due to the sins of His people were inflicted and executed upon Him. He went on to exclaim to God, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" (vv. 6, 7). There we are granted an insight into what the Savior felt in His soul under the stroke of God, as He endured all that was contained in the Father's just and holy curse upon sin. He could not have been brought into a lower state. He was in total darkness, the sun for a season refusing to shine upon Him, as God hid His face from Him. The sufferings of Christ's soul were tantamount to "the second death." He suffered the whole of what was for Him, as the God-man, the equivalent of an eternity in hell.

The smitten Redeemer went on to say, "I am shut up, and I cannot come forth" (v. 8). None but the Judge could lawfully deliver Him. "Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee?" (v. 10). In his remarkable exposition, S. E. Pierce declared:

Those questions contain the most powerful plea Christ Himself could urge before the Father for His own emerging out of His present state of suffering and for His resurrection from the power of death. "Shall the dead arise and praise Thee?" Yet in Me Thou wilt show wonders in raising My body from the grave, or the salvation of Thine elect cannot be completed, nor Thy glory in the same fully shine forth. Thy wonders cannot be declared; the elect dead cannot rise again and praise Thee, as they must, but on the footing of My being raised up.

"But unto Thee have I cried, O LORD" (v. 13). What light this Psalm casts upon these words of the apostle concerning Christ: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard. . . ." (Heb. 5:7). In the prophetic language of Psalm 2:8, God the Father says to His Son, "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." (ital. mine) In like manner, our Lord first cried for His deliverance from the prison of the tomb, and then the Father "brought him forth" in answer to His cry. Behold how perfectly the Son of man is conformed to our utter dependence on God. He, too, though the Sinless One, must pray for those blessings that God had already promised Him!

Through the Blood of the Everlasting Covenant

In the last place, consider that the great act of God here spoken of is said to be "through the blood of the everlasting covenant." As to the exact meaning of these words there has been no little confusion in the minds of different writers on this Epistle; and while a full canvassing of this interesting question is really outside the scope of the present article, yet some of the more erudite of our readers would be displeased if we failed to make a few remarks thereon. So I shall ask others kindly to bear with me while I deal with a

somewhat technical detail. A careful reading through of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that mention is made therein of "the covenant" (10:29), "a better covenant" (8:6), "a new covenant" (8:8), and here to "the everlasting covenant." Not a few able men have concluded that reference is made to the same thing throughout, but with them I cannot agree. It is quite clear from Hebrews 8:6-13 that the new and better covenant made with the spiritual Israel and Judah (that is, the Church) stands in opposition to the first (v. 7) or old (v. 13) covenant made with the nation of Israel at Sinai (that is "Israel after the flesh"). In other words, the contrast is between Judaism and Christianity under two different covenants or economies, whereas "the everlasting covenant" is the antitheses of that covenant of works made with Adam as the federal head of the human race.

Though the covenant of works was first in manifestation, the everlasting covenant, or covenant of grace, was first in origination. In all things Christ must have the preeminence (Col. 1:18), and thus God entered into compact with Him before Adam was created. That compact has been variously designated as the "covenant of redemption" and the "covenant of grace." In it God made full arrangements and provisions for the salvation of His elect. That everlasting covenant has been administered, under different economies, throughout human history, the blessings of the same being bestowed on favored individuals all through the ages. Under the Old Covenant, or Judaism, the requirements and provisions of the everlasting covenant were typified or foreshadowed particularly by means of the moral and ceremonial law; under the New Covenant, or Christianity, its requirements and provisions are set forth and proclaimed in and by the Gospel. In every generation repentance, faith, and obedience have been required of those who would (and do) partake of its inestimable blessings (Isa. 55:3). In his Outlines of Theology, the renowned theologian A. A. Hodge says this:

The phrase "mediator of the covenant" is applied to Christ three times in the New Testament (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), but as in each case the term for covenant is qualified by either the adjective "new" or "better," it evidently here is used to designate not the covenant of grace properly, but that new dispensation of that eternal covenant which Christ introduced in person in contrast with the less perfect administration of it which was instrumentally introduced by Moses.

Christ, the Mediator of an Everlasting Covenant

Thus we take those words "the blood of the everlasting covenant" at their face value, as referring to the eternal compact that God entered into with Christ. In the light of the preceding phrases of Hebrews 13:20, it is evident that "the blood of the everlasting covenant" has a threefold connection. First, it is connected to the Divine title here employed. God became historically "the God of peace" when Christ made propitiation and confirmed the eternal compact with His own blood (Col. 1:20). From before the foundation of the world God had purposed and planned that peace between Himself and sinful men (Luke 2:13, 14) that Christ was to make; everything connected with the same had been eternally agreed upon between Them. Secondly, it points to the fact of Christ's death. As the righteous Judge of all, God the Father was moved by the shedding of Christ's precious blood to restore Him from the grave and to exalt Him to a place of supreme honor and authority (Matthew 28:18; Phil. 2:5-11). Since the Surety had fully carried out His part of the contract, it behooved the Ruler of this world to deliver Him from prison as that which was righteously due to Him. Thirdly, this blessed phrase is connected to Christ's office. It was by the shedding of His blood for them, according to covenant agreement, that our Lord Jesus became "that great shepherd of the sheep," the One who would seek out God's elect, bring them into the fold, and there minister to, provide for, and protect them (John 10:11, 15).

God's bringing back our Lord Jesus from the dead was not done simply by contract, but also on account of His merits, and therefore it is attributed not barely to "the covenant" but to "the blood" of it. As God the Son, He merited or purchased it not, for honor and glory were His due; but as the God-man Mediator He earned His deliverance from the grave as a just reward for His obedience and sufferings. Moreover, it was not as a private person but as the Head of His people that He was delivered, and that ensured their deliverance also. If He was restored from the tomb "through the blood of the everlasting covenant," equally so must they be. Scripture ascribes our deliverance from the grave not only to the death of Christ but to His resurrection as well. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him:" (1 Thess. 4:14; cf. Rom. 4:25). Thus assurance is given to the Church of its full and final redemption. God expressly made promise to the Shepherd of old: "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water [that is, the grave]" (Zech. 9:11, brackets mine). As it was "by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place" (Heb. 9:12), so also on the ground of the infinite value of that blood we also enter the heavenly throne room (Heb. 10:19). As He declared, "because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

The Well-grounded Petition

We turn now to the petition itself. "Now the God of peace . . . Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." This verse is intimately related to the whole of the preceding one, and the blessed connection between them inculcates a lesson of great practical importance. It may be stated, simply, as follows: God's wondrous working in the past should deepen our confidence in Him and make us to seek at His hands blessings and mercies for the present. Since He so graciously provided such a Shepherd for the sheep, since He has been pacified toward us and not a frown now remains upon His face, since He has so gloriously displayed both His power and His righteousness in bringing back Christ from the dead, a continuance of His favor may be safely counted upon. We should expectantly look to Him day by day for all needed supplies of grace. The One who raised our Savior is well able to quicken us and make us fruitful to every good work. Let us therefore eye "the God of peace" and plead "the blood of the everlasting covenant" in every approach to the mercyseat.

More specifically, God's bringing back Christ from the dead is His infallible guarantee to us that He will fulfill all His promises to the elect, even all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. This is clear from Acts 13:32-34: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again...and as concerning that He raised Him from the dead. . . He said [by that action], I will give you the sure mercies of David." (brackets mine) By restoring Christ from the dead, God fulfilled the grand promise made to the Old Testament saints (in which all His promises were virtually contained) and gave pledge for the performance and accomplishment of all future ones, thereby giving virtue to them. The "sure mercies of David" are the blessings that God swore to in the everlasting covenant (Isa. 55:3). The shedding of Christ's blood ratified, sealed, and established forever every article in that covenant. By bringing Him back from the dead God has ensured to His people that He will infallibly bestow upon them all those benefits which Christ obtained for them by His sacrifice. All those blessings of regeneration, pardon, cleansing, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, preservation, and glorification were given to Christ for His redeemed, and are safe in His hand.

By His mediatorial work Christ has opened a way whereby God can bestow, consistently with all the glory of His perfections, all the good things that flow from those Divine perfections. As Christ's death was

necessary that believers might receive those "sure mercies" according to the Divine counsels, so His resurrection was equally indispensable, so that living in heaven He might impart them to us as the fruits of His travail and the reward of His victory. God has fulfilled to Christ every article for which He engaged in the everlasting covenant: He has brought Him from the dead, exalted Him to His own right hand, invested Him with honor and glory, seated Him upon the mediatorial throne, and given Him that Name which is above every name. And what God has done for Christ, the Head, is the guarantee that He will perform all that He has promised to Christ's members. It is a most glorious and blessed consideration that our all, both for time and eternity, depends wholly upon what passed between the Father and Jesus Christ: that God the Father remembers and is faithful to His engagements to the Son, and that we are in His hand (John 10:27-30). When faith truly apprehends that grand fact, all fear and uncertainty is at an end; all legality and talking about our unworthiness silenced. "Worthy is the Lamb" becomes our theme and song!

This Kind of Praying Produces Spiritual Stability

How tranquilizing and stabilizing it is to us when we consider that we have a personal interest in all the eternal acts that passed between God the Father and the Lord Christ on our behalf even before man was created, as well as in all those acts that were transacted between the Father and the Son in and throughout the whole of His mediatorial work that He wrought and finished here below. It is this covenant salvation, in its full blessedness and efficacy, apprehended by faith, that alone can lift us out of ourselves and above our spiritual enemies, that can enable us to triumph over our present corruptions, sins, and miseries. It is wholly a subject for faith to be engaged with, for feelings can never provide the basis for spiritual stability and peace. Such can only be obtained by a consistent feeding upon objective truth, the Divine counsels of wisdom and grace made known in the Scriptures. As faith is exercised thereon, as the record of the eternal engagements of the Father and Son are received into the spiritual mind, peace and joy will be our experience. And the more faith feeds upon objective truth, the more are we strengthened subjectively, that is, emotionally. Faith regards every past fulfillment of God's promises as a certain evidence of His fulfilling all the rest of His promises to us, in His own good time and way. Especially will faith regard God's fulfillment of His promise to bring back our Lord Jesus from the grave in this light. Has the Shepherd Himself been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father? Just as surely, then, will all His sheep be delivered from death in sin, quickened to newness of life, sanctified by the Spirit, received into Paradise when their warfare is ended, and raised bodily to immortality at the last day.

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