

God Raised Your Great Shepherd From the Dead

by John Piper

God is a great shepherd who raises us from the dead and guides us through the blood of the eternal covenant.

Duration: 40:18

Scripture: Hebrews 13:20

Topics: "Gods Presence", "Easter Reflections"

Description

This sermon reflects on the speaker's journey as a pastor, highlighting key moments from their candidating sermon to their final day of employment. The focus is on the importance of God's presence, the significance of Easter, and the pillars of faith that have sustained the congregation for over three decades. The text from Hebrews 13:20-21 is used to emphasize God's role as the God of peace, the reconciling God, the covenant-keeping God, the shepherding God, the sanctifying God, and the Christ-exalting God.

Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, as you have now a thousand times, grant faithfulness to your Word and a blessing of salvation and sanctification and hope to your people, and be pleased to magnify your Son's name. Through Christ I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

So on January 27, 1980, I preached my candidating sermon from Philippians 1. It is my eager expectation and hope that now as always, Christ might be honored or magnified in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And on February 13, 1980, Bethlehem voted 149 yes, 17 no, to call me as pastor. My official employment began July 1, 1980, and I preached the first sermon as pastor then on July 13, 1980.

So tomorrow is the last day of my employment in this church, and therefore I will have served here 32 years and 9 months. There are many personal things I want to say, and I said 20 of them to the staff on Tuesday. I hope that gets published somewhere.

And I have more that I'll say on the 14th. I hope you can come to Grace Church of Eden Prairie Sunday evening. But this is the Lord's Day, and this is the highest day of the year, Resurrection Sunday.

It is Sunday somewhere in the world. And our commitment from the beginning has been that nobody should go to church to hear the mere sentiments or ideas of a man. You should go to church on Easter weekend and every other weekend to hear the Word of God.

So I invite you to either turn in your Bibles or open your worship folder to this text, and I'll read it. It's very brief, and I'll tell you why I chose it. Hebrews chapter 13, verses 20 and 21.

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. So I have five reasons for why I chose this as my last text as your pastor.

Number one, it is Easter, and it says with great authority, God raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. Number two, it says that Jesus is your great shepherd, and the truth that I want to leave ringing in your ears as I leave is that you have a great shepherd, and it isn't me, and it isn't Jason. It's Christ, risen, reigning.

Number two, it is a benediction. It's a doxology. It has an amen at the end.

It has the ring of Christ's exalting finality about it, and therefore it feels really right. Number four, it contains six great God-centered truths, magnificent, unshakable pillars that have held up our life together for 33 years, and I want to walk among them with you. I want to exult over these six pillars in this text with you.

I want to celebrate them and feel them and test their strength with you one more time. And fifth, this text is in the Bible. We don't choose our text from Emily Dickinson.

There is no reason you should pay any attention to anything I or Jason say or have said or will say if it can't be shown from the book, and this is from the book. So there's my five reasons for choosing them, this text, and now let's look at the pillars. I'll tell you what they are, and then we'll just walk among them one at a time.

One, God is the absolutely existing God. Two, God is a reconciling God. Three, God is a covenant-keeping God.

Four, God is a shepherding God. Five, God is a sanctifying God. Six, God is a Christ-exalting God.

You see them? If you've been here a while, I hope you can see them. I want you to see for yourself what's there so that you don't have to depend on me at all, but I will point to them one at a time. Here we go.

Number one, God is the absolutely existing God. As with so many passages, the benediction begins with God. Now may the God, no apologies, no explanations.

He's just there at the beginning, and it's so fitting that He be there at the beginning because everything that is not God has God at its beginning. Nothing gets started without God. There's nothing before God.

There's nothing above God. God gives an account to no one and no thing. He is measured by nothing.

Nothing sustains Him. Nothing improves Him. Nothing contributes in the least to His value.

All being gets its being from God and all value gets its value from His value. He is absolutely God first. Therefore, I said Thursday night at the Maundy Night service, and most of you weren't there, I said nothing in all the world, nothing in the universe, nothing in the gospel can be rightly known in all of its true proportions and relations until you first know that the worth of God compares to the worth of the universe like the White House compares to a speck of dust on the President's desk.

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as the dust on the scales. Behold, He takes up the coastlands like fine dust. All the nations are as nothing before Him.

They are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness. Isaiah 40, 13-15 Twenty years ago I preached a sermon. It was at a hotel in St. Paul.

God is a very important person, was the title. And I pleaded with pastors and I pleaded with leaders and I pleaded with editors that they stop thinking of God mainly, merely in terms of the foundation of their lives because foundations of buildings are hidden and forgotten, not praised. They're in the basement and they're out of sight and they're assumed and taken for granted while we love the food in the kitchen and we love the sex in the bedroom and we love the kids and the family and the games in the den are God's.

While in the basement, holding everything up, forgotten, uncelebrated, unhonored is God Almighty. It's not a good way to think about God. God did not declare the glory of God through the heavens because He likes to be taken for granted.

My thesis of that sermon was God does not like to be taken for granted. And therefore, class after class is taught and sermon after sermon is given and seminar after seminar is held where He is just assumed. Not here.

When I read 22 years ago what fired up that sermon, namely an article about Albert Einstein, I trembled. As a young pastor, I dreaded this indictment. I'll read it to you.

Charles Meisner writing about Einstein. Einstein must have looked at what the preacher said about God, what the preacher said about God, and felt they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined.

And they were just not talking about the real thing. He simply felt that religions he had run into did not have a proper respect for the author of the universe. I read that as a pastor.

And I bowed my head and I said, and I say it today, I fear this today. I feared for us. I feared for me.

Oh God, never, never, never, never let me speak of you in such a way so that if Albert Einstein were listening, he would say he doesn't know the real thing. He's never seen the majesty I've seen. Protect me from that, oh God.

I pray 22 years ago, if you've been around here and you hear words like God word, God centered, God besotted, there's a reason. He doesn't like to be taken for granted. Number two, God is a reconciling God.

Verse 20 again, now may the God of peace. This absolutely existing God is a peace-filled and a peacemaking God. Behind the beauty of his peacemaking, there's this horrible reality called sin.

Your iniquities, Isaiah says, have made a separation between you and God. That's true for many of you in this room and it hasn't been remedied yet and I pray that God will now, now in the next five minutes, save

you. That's the way it happens.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. So sin has made a chasm between holy God and sinful me and this book Hebrews that we've taken our text from rings with the action of God to reconcile us, to make peace with us. It just rings with it.

Chapter 1, verse 3, purification for sins. Chapter 2, verse 17, propitiation of sins. Chapter 5, verse 1, sacrifice for sins.

Chapter 9, verse 22, forgiveness of sins. Chapter 9, verse 28, bearing sins. Chapter 10, verse 4, taking away our sins.

Chapter 10, verse 19, offering for sin. God is moving, moving in the world to reconcile the world to Himself through the blood shedding of His only Son. That's what He does to make peace.

He is the God of peace. Romans 5, verse 10, if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by His life. And when God makes peace with a person, a church, so they can relax, know they're accepted, know they're loved, justified, forgiven, children of God now, not as enemies anymore.

When that happens, He gives them the ability to be peacemakers, to live in peace as a church. Ephesians 2, He Himself is our peace. Who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility to reconcile us both, both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

We have known our breakdowns. We have known our breakdowns in these 33 years of peace. We have had our squabbles, our tough and rough business meetings.

And my heart is overflowing and rejoicing and filled with thanks as I look back on the amazing measure of peace we have enjoyed. Even in the breakdowns of peace, God has preserved us. And He's preserved our souls because the soul is destroyed by bitterness and unforgiveness.

I have no bitterness toward anyone. As far as I know, I have nothing to forgive that you have wronged me with. It is a sweet memory.

I don't expect it to be any better anywhere. I praise God for it. And I want to stress that measure of peace that we've enjoyed is the work of God because warm fuzzies is not in John Piper's reservoir.

That isn't the right word. Repertoire. That's what I meant to say.

It's not in the reservoir either. I didn't do this. God did.

You have been very tolerant. You don't know. You just don't know.

Number three. God is a covenant-keeping God. Getting very near the center now.

You thought we were at the center with peace. Not yet. This is really it.

Hebrews 13.20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant. That's the right way to translate it. And stop right there.

Period. Because by the blood of the eternal covenant does modify He brought Jesus from the dead. It really does.

Sounds very strange. The blood brought about the resurrection. By the blood of the covenant God raised Him from the dead.

That is what it says. Which means that when He purchased the terms and the promises of the covenant for us so that they became secure, the first one was you get raised. My son gets raised.

That's my covenant commitment to my son. And when he paid for the covenant I raise him. That's what he gets for paying all the price that needed to be paid for all the promises of the covenant.

And now all the promises are yes in this risen Christ. Amazing. Amazing.

So what is the covenant? It's been the bedrock of our life together. What is the covenant? Hebrews chapter 8 just a few verses starting at verse 8. I will establish a new covenant. I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people.

They shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest for I will be merciful to their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. That's our covenant. That's God's promise in the new covenant.

Forgiving sins, knowing God, God being our God, the law of God written on our hearts so that we do it naturally not under constraint in some legal, duty driven way. And the blood of the covenant is the blood of Jesus securing those promises. Why do I say that? Luke 22 20 Jesus lifting up the cup.

This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. So this is clear. The blood of the covenant is the blood of Jesus securing and guaranteeing for everyone who is in him all the promises of the covenant.

They will come true. My favorite expression of this in all the Bible is Jeremiah 32 40 which I preached on at the 125th anniversary of this church in 1996. And it goes like this.

June 16 1996 I will make with them if you're in Christ, it's true for you. I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them. Now that's spectacular.

That's spectacular. God will never, never, never, never, never turn away from doing good to you. That's the covenant promise.

Breathtaking. But it gets better. And with all my heart and with all my soul, I will put the fear of me in their hearts so that they will never turn away from me.

He will never stop doing us good. He will never glance away from us. And he won't let us depart into destruction.

We have celebrated together glorious security. We are a safe people, which is why we can be so risky. We love to say around here, go for it.

You can only be killed. That's one of our mantras. It has been for 30 years.

People leave the church because of that mantra. And many, many get life. Okay, I get it.

I get it. He's totally for me. He's just 110% for me.

And he won't let me leave. I can do anything in this world and it would be okay. Go for it.

67, go for it. 27, 17, 57, do your dream. I love to revel in the promise of the covenant that God will never turn away from doing me good.

All future grace is guaranteed. He did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. Will he not then with him give us all things? Every need met according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

No good thing withheld from those who walk uprightly even if you or she dies. All things working together for good over every calamity that has entered into your life in the last lifetime or week is written this word to Satan and to your adversaries. You meant it for evil.

I meant it for good. Jesus bought that when he died. This is why there's so many hundreds of testimonies in this church of surviving tragedy because of this.

He's a covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God and the seal over every promise is the blood of Jesus. Number four, he is a shepherding God. Let's read verse 20 again.

Now, may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, stop. This is where the message started several weeks ago. This is how I chose the message.

We could not choose a better day on which to end our ministry. Easter. This is awesome.

It's a dream come true. I mean, the only better day would have been my death day and that could still happen. In fact, I was thinking the farewell service that we have planned could be a funeral.

You don't want me to go there. I'm sorry. That's the kind of imagination you're dealing with here.

It's so morose. Happy morose. Look at this.

Make my day. Death. This is my last day as pastor.

Perhaps not last day of life. And what better day than resurrection day? He raised your shepherd from the dead and it isn't me. Isn't that a glorious thing that God would say to us on this weekend? Because the most important any human, earthly, present shepherd could do is to point you to your great shepherd week after week after week.

So Bethlehem, know this. I have loved being your shepherd. Feeding you.

Interceding for you. Protecting you. Caring for you.

And leading your leaders to dream after dream. There have been books here and there and there have been conferences here and there. But Bethlehem has been my life.

And it has been so good. Christ has been to me a merciful chief shepherd. Very, very merciful.

But now the point is not about me. It's about Jesus. Verse 20.

God brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. And surely the point is clear. You have a great shepherd.

Not me, not Jason, but Jesus. And he is more alive and he is more present than we are. More alive because he's the source of life and because he cannot die, which we will.

More present because by his spirit he's always with you. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. We visit you in the hospital.

He never leaves your bedside. Never. We grieve with you over the loss of your children.

He carries them to himself and heals your broken heart. We tell you how to be born again and he witnesses by his spirit, in your spirit, that you are the child of God. We give you precious promises of everlasting joy and he seals you for the day of redemption.

We counsel you with fallible wisdom and he guides you personally with his eye upon you. We warn you to fight sin. He knows your frame and fights for you, fights in you.

So, do not grieve at my departure because not only has God unmistakably raised up Jason Meyer, he has, more importantly, raised up forever Jesus Christ as your great shepherd. Number five. God is a sanctifying God.

Now may the God of peace, now skip to verse 21, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. In one sense, I view all of my ministry as an attempt to help you live in that mystery. That's a great mystery.

I've been working on it all these years, trying to figure it out biblically and trying to live it, trying to teach it. Notice, God does these things. He equips you with everything good that you may do his will.

That's what I mean by he sanctifies you. To do God's will is to be holy, pure, beautiful, and God is working to equip you with everything good to do his will. He doesn't expect you to make bricks without straw.

He doesn't require of you anything for which he doesn't provide you. It says that in 2 Corinthians 9.8, one of Kenny's favorite verses. But there's more, and here's where the mystery intensifies.

Working, are you with me near the end there? Working in us, that which is pleasing in his sight. So he equips us with everything good to do his will, but more. That seems to be external, kind of like equipping, give you what you need.

And then he goes inside, goes inside and works in us what is pleasing to God. And translating it that way just misses the mystery a little bit because literally it goes like this. May he equip you with everything good that you may do his will, doing, it's the same word, doing in us that which is pleasing in his sight.

We do it because he's doing it. No, no, no, no, no. That's not the right word.

Because is not the right word. Let me say that wrong sentence again. We do, we do the will of God, we do what is pleasing to God because he first did it in us.

Wrong. Our doing it is his doing it. When I do righteousness, God is at work in that, not before that, merely.

He's doing my doing. And when I do what's right, God is at work doing what's right. How many times over the years have we enjoyed together 1 Corinthians 15 10.

I love it. By the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace toward me was not in vain, but I worked harder than any of them.

Nevertheless, it was not I, but Christ, the grace of Christ that was with me. Not I. Well, I'm doing it. I'm preaching.

You think you're preaching? You see the mystery here? This is a great mystery. This is the Christian life. Take the next 32 years to figure this out.

Every day, ask for more light on what it means to be done in so that your doing is his doing. And he gets the glory, which is where we're going last, because the text goes there. Don't leave this mystery, Bethlehem.

Spend the rest of your life going deep with it. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, Philippians 2. For God is the one who is at work in you to will and to do. Do, not just will, but do.

He's doing. He's doing your doing in you. Finally, number six.

God is a Christ-exalting God. Hebrews 13, 21. May God equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. All of God's sanctifying work, that is, all of his equipping us to do his will and working in us to do what's pleasing to him, all of that sanctifying work he does through Jesus Christ. It says so.

Jesus purchased that work. God would not do that for us if Jesus hadn't justified us, forgiven us, cleansed us, and now God is, by his Spirit, doing these things, and Jesus is alive as our shepherd, doing it in and through us. He is a risen shepherd, and he is a blood-shedding substitute, and both of those are the grounds for how God works in us his will.

And God planned it that way, and that's why I call him a God, a Christ-exalting God. God planned that he would sanctify us through Jesus so that Jesus would get the glory. God is a very Christ-exalting God.

So that's where I began my ministry. That's where we'll end. Philippians chapter 1, verse 20, 21.

It is my eager expectation and hope, 33 years ago, it is my eager expectation and hope that I might not at all be ashamed, but that Christ might be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And now the text ends. God does everything through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever.

Father, I ask that you would be for Bethlehem the absolute, unshakable, existing God. Indeed, I pray that in Jesus Christ, Bethlehem would be fully reconciled. Indeed, any visitors among us who are not reconciled to you but still have sin, unforgiven between them and God would be reconciled by the God of peace.

I ask, Lord, that you would keep your covenant with us and fulfill all your promises because of the blood of Christ. I pray that you would sanctify us wholly and work in us what is pleasing in your sight through Jesus,

your Son. And I pray that this people would experience the precious, unhindered, ever-present shepherding of the risen Lord Jesus.

And I ask that this experience would produce in them so much joy in you that they would be deeply satisfied in all that you offer them in Jesus and that being satisfied in all that you offer them in Jesus, you would be glorified in them fully. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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