

The Benefits of the Empty Tomb

...who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep...(Hebrews 13:20)

What a blessed morning! Not that any given Sunday is not equally blessed, but this morning is different in the keen awareness we all bring to our worship, knowing that today is the day we celebrate the miracle and the benefits of what is called the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Resurrection – defined as “the act of rising from the dead.” Such a definition hardly seems to do justice to the incredible event of rising from the dead. And sometimes, we who believe most intensely in the resurrection hardly do the event justice. Just to think of a loved one who has passed away to come to life again a few days after death – how would you react? What would it be like to see that loved one again, to hug that loved one again; to kiss that loved one again?

Of course, we could go on and on considering such things. However, this morning I would like to address with you some of the benefits of the miracle of empty tomb of which we celebrate. For my thought is this, that while the resurrection is truly remarkable in and of itself – the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was simply the beginning of great and grand benefits for those who believe.

Our text this morning finds us yet again in Hebrews 13. As we come to the closing verses, we find a benediction, in reality a prayer made by the author on behalf of his readers. Let us read this short but pointed prayer beginning in verse 20...

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

From this text, I would offer you four benefits that flow from the miracle of the empty tomb; four great themes of the Christian faith that we can explore as we celebrate the fact that He is not in the tomb, for ***“He is risen, just as He said!”*** Let me summarize these themes for you:

- I. **Reconciliation** – with God
- II. **Resurrection** – of Jesus our Shepherd
- III. **Righteous Living** – by believers
- IV. **Reverence** – for Jesus Christ

Let us begin then by exploring the first benefit that belongs to every believer in Jesus Christ secured by His resurrection. That benefit being – reconciliation with God.

I. Reconciliation – with God (Hebrews 13:20a)

Our text begins with a most wonderful title or description of God. Note there at the beginning of verse 20 what we read... ***“Now the God of peace...”*** O, let us not consider this title with glibness. Let us soak in the full intent of the author in addressing our Father as ***“the God of peace.”*** This is a title of God that only those who have been made right by the sacrifice of Jesus for their sins can claim – reconciled. This particular title is found five times in the NT, the other four being used by Paul (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; and 1

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Thessalonians 5:23). And it might be noted that often Paul associated the sanctification of believers, the fact that they had been made right and holy with God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ with this title “God of peace.” And that is what we find here in Hebrews 13 as well. For in verse 12 we saw how Jesus sanctified His people with His blood and now, here in verse 20, because of this work of Christ, we can speak of being at peace with God. We have been reconciled; made right, have full access and can come before God and His throne boldly because of Christ.

Beloved, nowhere in the OT do we find God being referred to as the “God of peace.” Certainly God is known in the OT by some wonderful names and titles, “The Lord our Righteousness”, “God Almighty” and many more, but never by the description God of peace. Why is this? Because, as we have read in the book of Hebrews 10:4, ***“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”*** In other words, God and man could never be rightly reconciled, never be at peace by anything save one thing, the blood of His Son poured out upon His people. And this is again what we read in Hebrews 10:10...

By this will [the will of God] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...

Remember that according to Hebrews 12:18-21 coming to God via the law, by any means other than by Christ was a frightening and devastating event to the point that the people of Israel cowered in fear and trembling and refused to hear the voice of God much less come near Him. But now, because of Christ, those in Christ do not view God as the terrifying, wrathful executioner of judgment on their sin, but rather as the God of peace. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 it says,

namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them...

And how is that God can be at peace with those in Christ? Because of what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

[God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Let me illustrate it this way. This last week I ordered a camera. The salesman seemed polite and knowledgeable and spoke to me of some better lenses I ought to consider in place of the ones I intended to purchase. Making a long story short, the salesman lied to me, pulling a type of bait and switch. Of course I was livid and not only did I not trust the salesman, but I also did not trust the company. Because of previous conversations with the salesman, I was expecting a real intense fight to get my money back. Then I spoke with a supervisor who patiently listened to my plight, apologized for the salesman behavior and offered to refund everything, but also asked if he could do what he could to make it right. In the end, I am to receive everything I wanted, plus was given a few extras as compensation for my time. The

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point is, that supervisor did everything he could to reconcile me to the company. I am not sure whether or not I would point somebody to them, but the supervisor did what he could to make peace.

Obviously on a far grander and more significant scale, this is what Jesus has accomplished for us. Like the salesman, we have sinned and erred against the living God. Like the supervisor, our Lord Jesus Christ made the necessary sacrifice to make peace between our offended God and ourselves.

And notice one last thing here then in our text. We read, ***“Now...the God of peace”*** Before the blood of Christ, no true lasting peace. But “now” as we consider Christ, we can know God in terms of peace, rest, safety and confidence. Now we can approach the throne of grace boldly, not in fear of our sin, but in full assurance that Jesus has reconciled us to God.

II. Resurrection – of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:20b)

If our first benefit of the empty tomb is reconciliation with God, we might be curious as to the means by which this peace with God was secured. Of course we have been alluding to it already, but we find in the statement, ***“who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord...”*** our second benefit of the empty tomb is the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. And the resurrection of Jesus serves as the very means by which reconciliation with God, righteous living and right reverence for Christ flows. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, this bringing Him up from the dead becomes our evidence that we truly do have peace with God.

Beloved, so pleased was God the Father with the sacrifice of His Son on the cross that to demonstrate this – He raised Jesus from the dead. Now, if we are to rightly consider this statement in the rest of verse 20, we need to understand that the author is drawing from or at least alluding to various teachings from both the mouth of Jesus Himself as well as from the Old Testament. Let us see this.

We first read that it is God the Father ***“who brought up from the dead [resurrection] the great Shepherd of the sheep...”*** In John’s gospel, chapter 10, you may recall the words of Jesus who called Himself in verse 11, ***“the good shepherd [who would] lay down His life for the sheep.”*** Consider that statement. What, do you suppose would happen to the sheep if the shepherd were to die? It could be disastrous. And yet Jesus tells us that He would purposely lay down His life, but also, according to verse 17, He would also, ***“take it up again.”*** Beloved, I am sure that in the course of history there have been a number of shepherds who have laid down their lives for their flocks. What makes Jesus most unique is not that He was willing to die, but that He said would take it up again. Such an act would certainly demonstrate that this sacrifice was not only valuable for His sheep, but also then that it was most acceptable to God, for of God did not accept it, He would not have brought Him up from the dead. So then, we have the benefit of knowing that God was pleased with the sacrifice of Christ.

But in addition to God’s being pleased with Christ’s sacrifice for our sin, that fact that Jesus rose again also reveals to us that it is His intention to continue to shepherd His flock. Jesus not only was the good shepherd, but because of His victory over death will forever continue to be the good shepherd. What a blessing to have so great a Shepherd, who can never be removed from His position. I believe this is at the heart this statement, ***“who***

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brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep...” We have one who will forever guide us so that we might always declare:

Psalm 23:1-3

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

So, we have this allusion to Jesus as the great Shepherd from John 10, but in addition we might see a parallel between the ministry of Moses and that of Jesus from Isaiah 63. Please turn to Isaiah 63:7-14 where we have a picture of Israel's being called and redeemed by God from Egypt only to have them rebel. Let us read the text:

7 I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, According to all that the Lord has granted us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has granted them according to His compassion And according to the abundance of His lovingkindnesses. 8 For He said, "Surely, they are My people, Sons who will not deal falsely." So He became their Savior. 9 In all their affliction He was afflicted [their hardship in Egypt] And the angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old. 10 But they rebelled And grieved His Holy Spirit; Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them. 11 Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them, 12 Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, 13 Who led them through the depths? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble; 14 As the cattle which go down into the valley, The Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. So You led Your people, To make for Yourself a glorious name.

We all know the story of the Exodus to some degree or another; that Israel was oppressed in Egypt, and that God set Israel free from bondage to Pharaoh. We have all heard the story of how Moses led the people through the desert behind God's pillar of fire and smoke. But where did this divine cloud lead them? It led them cornered with the Red Sea to their backs and the entire army of Egypt pressing behind them in. Do you know the questions of many of the people? Is Moses a reliable shepherd for us? Isn't that the essence of the question, "Is it because there were not graves in Egypt that you [Moses] have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" But then God did something extraordinary. With a mighty hand and an outstretch arm, God opened the way down the middle of the sea. The children of Israel quickly went down, being towered on either side with incredible walls of water. How long would the water be held back? How long would the laws of gravity prevail? And yet how glorious was this work of God to sovereignly and mercifully bring up from the sea Moses and all the host of Israel. One of the lessons we might miss from this episode is that rather than being an inept guide, Moses was proved by God to be a good shepherd to the flock of Israel. And in Isaiah

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63:9, we see this, that “In His love and in His mercy, [God] redeemed them and [God] lifted them and carried them..” Also, in verse 11 it was God “who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd [Moses] of His flock.” The reputation of Moses was established and the grace of God to save His people was revealed.

It appears that the author of Hebrews borrows this language from Isaiah 63. For just as Isaiah mentions the shepherd and being brought up from the sea, so we in our text that Jesus, the superior Shepherd of the sheep, went down into the grave after His crucifixion and early on the third day, the God of peace “brought up from the dead” our Lord Jesus. And so, just as the reputation of Moses was established by his coming up from the Red Sea, so the reputation and credibility of our Lord Jesus was enhanced by His rising from the dead. And now, this greater Shepherd is more than able to provide everything necessary for life, for an abundant life (so says John 10:10).

But what exactly is it that made the author of Hebrews refer to Jesus as the “great shepherd?” Was Jesus just being humble to only refer to Himself as the “good shepherd?” Turn with me to Matthew 26:31. There we read these words of Jesus –

You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written [Zechariah 13:7], “I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.”

We know that this was fulfilled in Jesus as He was arrested, mocked, false accused, struck, poked, whipped, beaten and the like. And what happened to the disciples? They fled, they scattered and even Peter himself denied Christ three times. I would say that was a scattering. But now, look at Matthew 26:32, the rest of the story as it were:

But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee

Don’t miss the words, ***“I will go ahead of you...”*** Jesus not only foretold the scattering, but also promised He would continue to shepherd. The shepherd is the one who goes before the sheep, whom the sheep are to follow. Beloved, this statement is a prophecy of the resurrection, that He will be around to lead and guide His people. And what happens in Matthew 28:16? Listen:

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

No longer were the disciples scattered. Jesus has gathered His flock (and they followed in obedience) and will encourage them and even commission them to spread the news of His resurrection and make disciples. This, beloved, makes Jesus a great shepherd who was brought up from the dead.

III. Righteous Living – by believers (Hebrews 13:21a)

So, we have seen the benefit of reconciliation with God as well as the benefits of the resurrection of Christ. Now, beginning in verse 21, we see our third benefit – that of righteous

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living. In order to grasp the plea of this prayer for righteous living, let us read Hebrews 13:20-21 in a way that puts the subject and verb together:

Now the God of peace...equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

Here is the petition of the author's prayer that comes on the heels of remembering the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the resurrection is to be the motivation for the believer's right living. Some of these first readers had forgotten the greatness of Christ and had looked to return to the bondage of their former lives, living according to some other standard than that of Christ. Remember that this entire letter had been written to reveal Jesus alone as better than the angels (Hebrews 1,2), is better than Moses (3,4), is better than the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood (5,6). In chapters 9-10, Jesus is better than the Old Testament and fulfills the shadows depicted in tabernacle worship.

And with all the pressures of life caving in upon these believers addressed in the letter, the author of Hebrews prays, "May the God of peace...equip you..." or more literally, "may He repair you, mend you, prepare you and make you complete, ready for service." The word translated as "equip" in our text was used in the ancient world to describe the work of the doctor in setting a broken bone. It is the same word used in Matthew 4 to describe the labors of John and James with their father's nets as they were "mending" them – getting them ready for use the next day. It is the same word used in Ephesians 4:12 to describe the work of pastors and teachers who are to be "equipping the saints" – that is mending them, preparing them, completing them in the Word of God to be fit in the service of God. The implication of the word "equip" each of its uses is that there is a some kind of deficiency, or something broken that needs to be set right, or something that needs to be fixed up and completed for service.

To be sure, many of the first readers of this letter, the first hearers of this prayer were broken and needed to be set straight again. Some had become discouraged, some wearied, some lethargic. Some need to be encouraged not to fall away from the fellowship of the saints (Hebrews 10:25). Some needed to be exhorted to respect one another in the Lord as we saw in Hebrews 13:7, 17. Some needed to simply fix their eyes on Jesus as the one and only author and completer of salvation (Hebrews 12:2). These and so many other pressures were found in their lives. How might such righteous living be accomplished? PRAYER. Beseech the Lord. Is there any brokenness, any trial, any difficulty too grand for God to fix? No. We are to see here that God alone sets straight the broken bone, that God alone mends the ripped nets of our lives, that God alone equips us for pleasing service to Him. The prayer that we must all pray is this, "Lord fix us so that we might be able to do every good work according to Your will. Lord, work in us that we might bring you pleasure, for surely on our own we cannot – You must work in us, act in us, enable us. Lord, make us the congregation You would delight in." This is the essence of the prayer, a prayer that we know we can ask because Jesus is risen and sits at the right hand of God the Father, hearing and answering such prayers. And then, as we pray for this equipping, this fixing, this enabling, we ought to see our lives characterized by those things that please God; of a constant looking to and speaking of the glories of Christ; of a constant desire for fellowship with the saints; of a constant delight in doing good and sharing with one another (13:16).

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And how can we know such a power of God in us is at work? Because it is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection becomes our motivation to righteous living, knowing that we now have been reconciled to God. We see this same thing in Ephesians 2:8-10 –

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith [made right with God by the blood of Christ - reconciliation]; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast [for it is God alone who brought up Jesus from the dead - resurrection]. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them [the result of God's working; first in bring up Jesus from the dead and the second in working in us – righteous living – performing good works that please God].

IV. Reverence – for Christ

So, the benefit of the empty tomb has included reconciliation with God, the resurrection glories of Christ and righteous living by the saints. The final benefit I would bring to your attention that flows from the empty tomb is found at the end of Hebrews 13:21 where we read, ***“to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”*** Here we see a proper reverence – a right worship of Jesus.

One of the purposes of Jesus rising from the dead was to manifest the glory of the Son of God. What we must take away from this statement is that *glory* belongs to Christ alone! This is what the angels sang at the birth of Jesus, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men...”*** (Luke 2:14).

The empty tomb reminds us that this great Shepherd of the sheep is in fact God Himself, to whom belongs all glory, honor and praise. Jesus is He who has a better reputation than Moses, who will continually shepherd His flock, regardless of circumstances; regardless of foes and so to Him belongs simply because all glory belongs to Him. Let us remember that because of the resurrection, Jesus has not redeemed a people in order to desert them when the going gets tough but rather to bring them peace with God, holiness of life and fervency of worship. Let me allow Spurgeon to put this into words far better than I can:

“To glorify God is the object of it all. Praise is the flower for which the stalk of prayer exists. It would be a very difficult question to decide to whom the last clause alludes, whether to “the God of peace,” or to “our Lord Jesus,” and, therefore, I think, the safer way is to take them both together, for they are one. “To whom,” that is to God; “To whom,” that is to the Lord Jesus, “be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Let it be so; it ought to be so, it must be so, it shall be so. Amen. Amen. Tarry just a minute while we give glory unto the Three-One-God. He is the God of peace; approach Him with holy delight; adore Him; glorify His name evermore. Then magnify Him next, because He found for us a Shepherd. And then adore Him because the power which He exerted upon Christ He is now exerting upon you. Bless Him for every grace received, for faith however little, for love, even though it burn not as you would desire; bless Him for every conquered sin, bless Him for every implanted grace, bless Him evermore. Bless Him that He deals with you through Jesus Christ. Through the Mediator all good has come to

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us, and through the Mediator it will still come, until that day when He shall deliver up the throne to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all."

Let us praise God! Let us praise Father, Son and Spirit! For in the great council and will of God, the blessed Trinity has made and revealed the way of reconciliation, by which we call the Father the God of peace. By the power of the Triune God, our Lord Jesus Christ was brought up from the dead to forever be our blessed Savior. And with that same power that resurrected Jesus, we are being work in and through to righteously live for God. And the result of all of this is the reverence, the worship and homage due to Jesus Christ – to Christ the Lord let every tongue its noblest tribute bring! Why, because the tomb is empty – He has risen, just as He said!

Soli Deo Gloria

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**The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ
Hebrews 13:20-21 – The Benefits of the Empty Tomb
March 23, 2008**