

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 11 September 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Paul's Last Words (Part 2)

Hebrews 13:22-25

We have finally come to the very end of Paul's letter to the Hebrews! It has been well over a year since we began this series; but I trust that everyone in this room has grown in the Lord as you have come to a deeper understanding of this marvellous book!

Now, as you know, there is no mention of Paul's name in this letter. However, the language, the structure, the mention of Paul's co-workers, and the whole spirit of this letter leave no doubt that Paul *is* the author. Paul's authorship especially comes out in this final portion of the letter. Paul ends this letter with all the same kinds of salutations, exhortations, and blessings that he used in all his other letters.

In last week's message, we covered the first half of this closing portion of this letter; and there was much doctrinal and practical truth that that we gained from it. So we will do today, as we read the very closing words of this epistle.

Now, when we read this Scripture in just a moment, you will probably be thinking, "How can Pastor possibly preach a whole message from just these few words?" Well, that's the miracle of God's Word. Every word of Scripture comes from God, not man: thus, every single word has *power*! Even these closing words, which are addressed to an audience that lived 2,000 years ago, are really for us, too. In fact, these words were written down in *Heaven* (and were eternally in the mind of God) before God even gave the words to Paul to write down! The Psalmist David wrote, "***Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven***" (Psalm 119:89). With that in mind, let us now look at our Scripture, and see what gems of truth God has for us. I've entitled this message ***Paul's Last Words (Part 2)***.

Read Hebrews 13:22-25.

From this Scripture, I would like to point out Paul's **exhortation**; Paul's **information**; Paul's **salutation**; and Paul's **benediction**. First, let's look at...

I. Paul's exhortation (v. 22)

In **verse 22**, Paul has one last exhortation for us. His exhortation is: "***Suffer the word of exhortation***"! Paul is *exhorting* his audience to heed....his exhortation! What "***word of exhortation***" is he talking about? **This entire letter is the exhortation!** Paul is entreating his readers to heed the words that he had written to them in this letter, because they had come not from himself, but from the Lord.

Now, "exhortation" is a word that we often find in the Bible; but what does it mean? The word "exhortation" is translated from the word *paraklesis*, which literally means "to call near," or to "call alongside." It means "to beseech or entreat someone earnestly." It means to "call near to oneself," in order to receive help, comfort, or assistance from that person.

To get an even clearer idea of what this means, let's look at another Scripture, in which the *noun* form of the word *paraklesis* (the word *parakletos*) is used.

Read John 14:26.

As Jesus was speaking to His disciples at the Last Supper, He gave them the disturbing news that He would soon be leaving them, and returning back to Heaven. However, He comforted their hearts with the promise that very soon, the *Parakletos* would come to live inside them. *Parakletos* is translated in this verse as "Comforter." The Holy Spirit is the One whom God's people may "call to their side," so that they might receive counsel and help from Him. The Holy Spirit "comes alongside" believers, so that He might help them to remember and understand God's words. He comes alongside us to give us comfort and solace when we are grieving. He convicts us of sin, brings us to repentance, and helps us to overcome sin, so that we might stay in sweet fellowship with Christ. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He is our *Parakletos*—our "Comforter," or "Exhorter."

There's a lot packed into that phrase "*word of exhortation*," isn't there? "Words of exhortation" are words of comfort and help, combined with an earnest, urgent warning. To "exhort" means to give someone godly counsel. It means to show someone, from the Scripture, that "This is the truth, and this is how you must respond to the truth." It means to give someone a warning in an urgent, compelling, yet kind way.

This is exactly what *preaching* is. Preaching is teaching; but it much more than simply teaching. It is teaching mingled with exhortation. A preacher earnestly pleads with **the lost** to repent of their sin, to believe on Jesus, and be saved. A preacher also pleads with **the saved** to respond to the Holy Spirit's call in their lives. Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit calls the saved to allow Him to "come near," so that He might give them grace and comfort, and help them to live for Christ. A preacher pleads with God's people to heed the Spirit's call, so that He may strengthen and encourage them.

Preaching is exhortation. To preach means to explain God's Word thoroughly and systematically, and to present it in an urgent, compelling, yet loving manner. Preaching is *not* stomping, snorting, screaming, verbally "kicking people in the teeth," and dogmatically giving people man-made commands, with no Scripture to back up the command. On the other hand, preaching is not getting up and reading a verse or two, but never really expounding on it, and then spending the rest of the time cracking jokes, telling nice little personal stories, and saying soft, non-confrontational words. The purpose of preaching is *not* to get lost people to think, "Oh, these Christians are such nice guys. I want to be part of them, so that I can feel accepted the way I am." (People who "get saved" because they want to feel "accepted the way they are," but who have no intention of turning from their sin, are not truly saved!) The purpose of preaching is *not* to get saved people to think, "You know...maybe I *could* give the Lord a *few* more scraps of my time. After all, the pastor doesn't get on my case too much. He doesn't preach against worldly things that I like to do, or tell me that I must get overly involved in church things. My lifestyle isn't being cramped too much. Plus, they have plenty of fun programmes around here to keep me busy. So, I suppose I can give a small contribution."

Folks, there is a *lot* of that kind of “preaching” going on today; but it is not the kind of preaching that the Apostles did. Let’s look at an example of a “*word of exhortation*” that Paul gave on one occasion when he was in the city of Antioch, in Pisidia.

Read Acts 13:14-48.

When the rulers of the synagogue asked Paul and Barnabas to give them a “*word of exhortation,*” they got what they’d bargained for, didn’t they? Paul declared the Gospel kindly and lovingly, with an earnest desire that the people would be saved. Yet, he was deadly serious about it. He didn’t leave them with the impression that if they wanted to “try out” Jesus, it would be great; but if they didn’t, that was O.K., too. No, he put his finger on the people’s sin and guilt. He brought them to a point of conviction from God’s Word—a point of decision. He left them with no choice but either to receive God’s Word, and to receive Jesus as their Messiah, God, and Saviour, or to reject God’s Word, and to reject Jesus. And what was the result of Paul’s “word of exhortation?” The result is that some of the people believed on Christ, and were saved. However, most of them vehemently rejected it, and blasphemed the name of Jesus. This is *always* the way that people respond to “words of exhortation” from the Lord! Some people receive God’s words; but most will reject them.

Even those who are genuinely saved are constantly faced with the decision of whether to receive *all* God’s words, or to reject the ones they don’t like. When a Christian is yielding to the Holy Spirit, he will heed “*the word of exhortation,*” even if it should mean making an uneasy change in his life. When a Christian is *not* yielding to the Holy Spirit, he will *not* heed “*the word of exhortation.*” He will dig in his heels, and decide to keep doing “What *I* want to do.” However, you may be sure of this: when a Christian does not heed God’s Word, there will be a price to pay. A Christian can’t lose his salvation: but failure to obey God in any area of your life will bring heartache in the end. That is why Paul entreats his readers to “*suffer the word of exhortation.*” The Greek word for “suffer” means to “bear with.” This is the same word that is used in **2 Timothy**, when Paul prophesied of a future day when professing Christians will *not* “bear with” the word of exhortation. Let’s take a look at this Scripture.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

Does this sound like the day in which we are living? I believe it fits the bill perfectly. We live in a day when the vast majority of people who profess the name of Christ do not want to “bear with” sound doctrine. They do not want to listen to the Holy Spirit when He entreats them, from God’s Word, to do things that go against the way *they* want to live their lives. Many such professing “Christians” are not truly saved. Heeding God’s Word *should* be characteristic of a true believer; and when a professing Christian has never demonstrated a submission to God’s Word or His ways, I can only assume that that person is not saved.

That having been said, there *are* true Christians who balk at many of the things that God calls them to do. If this were not the case, Paul would not have had to urge these believers to “*suffer*” his word of exhortation. Paul is telling these weak and fainting Christians, “Yes, I’ve had to be stern with you in this letter. I’ve had to inform some of you that you are still babes in Christ, and that you must move on from spiritual milk to spiritual meat. But bear with me. I am writing these things for your help and edification. There is a real spiritual battle going

on; and you need to be resting in the complete work of your Messiah and High Priest, Jesus Christ, so that you will be able to stand fast in the face of persecution.”

Paul urged his readers to “*suffer*” the word of exhortation. But that’s not all. Paul further adds, “*For I have written a letter unto you in few words.*” He’s saying, “I could have written *much more* than what I’ve written here. I’ve not given you more than you can digest. This is *not* more than you can handle. You *need* every word that has been written in this letter!”

I’ll put the question to *you*, Christian. If *you* were a member of one of the churches to whom Paul wrote this letter, would *you* regard this letter as just a “few words?” In Paul’s estimation, it *was* “few words.” In light of the profound, eternal consequence of what he was writing about, it truly was brief.

Whether you view this book as “long and tedious” or “short, but powerful” depends on what kind of relationship you have with God. If you aren’t saved, then this book will not make sense to you at all! Not only will it seem long and tedious to you: it will seem like ancient Mayan hieroglyphs! Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:14**, “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” If you are not saved, the things we’re talking about do *not* make sense to you. They *cannot* make sense to you, because they are spiritually discerned. Yet, there is hope for you. The Holy Spirit is here today; and He is knocking on your heart’s door. He is not going to explain every doctrine in the Bible to you all at once: but He *will* help you to understand God’s simple plan of salvation, if you will only listen to Him. He will give you light, if you will respond to it. If you are not sure that you are on your way to Heaven, please listen to this “word of exhortation.” In **Hebrews 7:24**, Paul said this about the Lord Jesus: “*But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.*” If you will listen to this simple message—this message that Jesus has paid for your sins in full, and that He therefore can save you to the “*uttermost*”—then the Holy Spirit will help you to understand more. If you will listen to His plea to draw nigh to Jesus, He will help you to understand the words of this Book, so that you can know exactly how to be saved!

If you *are* saved, you have the Holy Spirit living within you; and you have the ability, through the Spirit, to understand everything that God has written. **First John 2:20** says, “*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*” However, if you are not walking closely with the Lord, and are not yielding to the Spirit, His words will seem tedious to you.

Unfortunately, this is true for far too many Christians. A century ago, sermons were *not* thirty minutes long, as many sermons are today. Most sermons were an hour to an hour and a half long. Two hundred years ago, sermons were *two to three hours* long (or more)! The average Christian back then had a deep knowledge and grasp of the Scriptures; and the Sunday sermon was central in his life! Am I announcing that I am about to change my sermon lengths to 3 hours? No. However, I *am* saying that those of us who know Christ need to “*suffer the word of exhortation.*” If you can sit down to watch a movie for 1 ½ hours, 2 hours, or even 3 hours, but can’t stomach God’s Word for 45 minutes, there is something wrong! If you can watch a football match for three hours, but can’t take in the precious Word of Life for an hour, there is something wrong! Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*”

Don't balk at God's Word when it requires that you change something in your life. God isn't trying to give you something to do that will be grievous to you. He wants you to live a life that is pleasing to Him; and He wants *you* to be complete and fulfilled in your life. However, the only way that is possible is when you are obeying Him.

II. Paul's information (v. 23)

(**Read verse 23.**) In this verse, we are given a piece of information that doesn't appear in any other part of the New Testament. Paul informs his readers that his partner in the Gospel, Timothy, was now "***set at liberty.***" This expression "***set at liberty***" rarely has any other meaning than "released from prison." We know, for a fact, that Timothy was *with* Paul while Paul was in prison in Rome, because Paul *mentions* that Timothy was with him in his letters to the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon. All these letters were written while Paul was in prison. That's why we call them "the prison epistles." Take **Philippians**, for example.

Read Philippians 1:1-7.

When we compare all Paul's letters, it appears that Paul spent a couple years under house arrest in Rome; stood trial before Nero, but was acquitted, and set free, in A.D. 66; travelled around for a short time, preaching the Gospel and visiting churches; but was arrested again, and was sent back to Rome, where he was tried by Nero for a second time, and executed. Timothy was with Paul for much of this time, helping and assisting him. However, from this verse, it appears that *Timothy himself* spent some time in prison because of his "criminal" activities. We don't know how long Timothy spent in prison; but we do know that Timothy was eventually *released* from prison, and went back to Asia Minor to strengthen the churches. Paul (who was still in prison) was telling his readers that he himself hoped to be released soon from prison, so that he could join Timothy, and be an encouragement to them.

We don't know all the details of what happened during Paul's imprisonment in Rome; but one thing *is* clear: the Apostles and their co-workers spent a lot of time in prison! What would you think if *your* pastor were a "jailbird?" Would you be ashamed? Apparently, some Christians *were* ashamed of Paul's "jailbird" status, because Paul entreated even *Timothy* not to be "ashamed" of him.

Read 2 Timothy 1:7-8.

As far as Paul was concerned, being ashamed of *God's ministers*, who suffer for the Lord, is the same as being ashamed of the "***testimony of the Lord***" Himself! That's a powerful statement! Brethren, we need to get used to the fact that suffering for the name of Christ "comes with the territory" of being a Christian. If you have believed the Gospel, there will be afflictions for you to endure on account of the Gospel. We live in a rare window of history in which there is not a great price to be paid for being a Christian. But prepare yourself. That window may not be open much longer! Paul wrote, "***For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek***" (Romans 1:16).

III. Paul's salutation (v. 24)

(Read verse 24.) In this verse, Paul asked his readers to send greetings on his behalf. First, he asked them to send his greetings to *“them that have the rule over you”* (in other words, the pastors). Next, he asked them to send his greetings to *“all the saints”* in the churches. Lastly, Paul says that *“they of Italy”* extended *their* greetings to his readers, as well. By the way, isn't it amazing that Saul of Tarsus, the “Hebrew of the Hebrews,” who had once been steeped in hatred against the Gentiles, was now sending greetings to his Jewish brethren on behalf of his Gentile brethren? The Gospel of Jesus Christ removes *all* prejudice and hatred! We don't need communist “social justice warriors” to go around making people feel guilty about their skin colour. We don't need to redistribute wealth in order to fix the “inequalities” of society. People of certain ethnicities don't need to receive “forgiveness” from the “victims” of endemic racism for the sins that their ancestors may or may not have been guilty of. The “victims” will never forgive them, anyway! “Social justice” does *not* heal wounds; it rips open the old wounds, and throws salt on them! It keeps old hatreds alive, and fuels them, and leads to division, violence, and societal chaos. There is only one cure to racism and bigotry; and that is the transformational power of the Gospel. We must *all* come to the cross of Christ, admit that we are unworthy sinners, and receive forgiveness from *Him*. *He* then removes hatred and bigotry from our hearts. In Christ, there is no Jew or Gentile, Greek or Barbarian!

Read Galatians 3:26-29.

Sometimes, even Christians can have a hard time letting go of the prejudices with which they were brought up; but this is not God's fault. It's *ours*. The old, fleshly thinking must be put to death! The Bible says that there is *“no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him”* (Romans 10:12).

Now, I would call your attention to one more truth. Please note that Paul extended his greeting to *“all the saints.”* This word “saints” reminds us, once more, of what our position is in Christ. The Greek word for “saint” (*hagios*) means “clean, pure, chaste, innocent.” It is the basis of the word “sanctified” (*hagiazō*).

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

How can a holy God view people who had committed the kind of sins that these Corinthians had committed as “clean, innocent, pure, and chaste?” How can He continue to view *you* as “clean, innocent, pure, and chaste,” Christian? You may not sin continually, as you did before you were saved; but you do still sin. God does not view you as “innocent” because you *are, in fact*, innocent; He views you as innocent because of the once-for-all transaction that took place on the day when you placed your faith in Christ. Because Christ has paid for your sins in full, and because you, by faith, received that free gift, God imputed to you the perfect righteousness of His Son. That is your position: and it is *forever!*

A “saint” isn't a dead person who lived an exceptionally good life. A “saint” isn't someone who did enough good deeds to wipe out all his bad deeds, and who thus got to go straight to Heaven. No such person ever existed! The Bible says that we are *“all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”* The “saints” to whom Paul and the Apostles

wrote their letters were *living* people, not dead people! They were unworthy sinners who had been saved by the grace of God. They had been declared “sanctified.” They were “saints.”

In the letter to the **Romans**, Paul wrote “*To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.*” In **1 Corinthians**, Paul wrote “*to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.*” In **Ephesians**, Paul wrote to “*the saints which are at Ephesus.*” In **Philippians**, Paul wrote to “*all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.*” In **Colossians**, Paul wrote to “*the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.*” Christian, you are a “saint.” That is your position. Now, God wants that *position* to become “*practice.*” He wants you to live a pure, righteous life. In your own flesh, you do not have the power to do this; but through Christ, you have all the power you need to live the way God wants you to live. Let him change you into the kind of saint that He wants you to be!

IV. Paul’s benediction (v. 25)

(**Read verse 25.**) In this last verse, Paul reminds his followers, in one word, of the message of his letter: “*grace.*” It is the grace of God—that unearned, undeserved favour of God—that saves sinners. It is also the grace of God that enables the “*saints*” to live holy lives.

In a way, the day in which we are living is very much like the day in which the Apostle Paul lived. Everything that *can* be shaken *is* being shaken. For Jewish Christians in Paul’s day, the relics of the old dispensation (the Old Testament) were quickly fading away. The Temple, and all its rituals, which they had revered all their lives, were only a few years away from being utterly destroyed. Similarly, we are living very near the end of this church age. Please don’t misunderstand me: until the Rapture happens, and the Tribulation begins, the church *will not* cease to exist. The gates of hell cannot prevail against her. Christ’s churches will continue until that day when Christ appears in the clouds and says, “***Come up hither!***” However, it seems that many churches (at least in our Western world) are becoming weak, ineffective, and compromised by love of the world. It *seems* that the kingdom of darkness is overtaking us. Society is crumbling; the worldwide economy is crumbling; morals are crumbling; freedom to practice the Bible is crumbling; the *earth itself* is crumbling; and the demonic is manifesting itself everywhere. Many churches in the Western world, which used to be strong and influential in their communities, are now either weak and compromising, or have given way to complete apostasy; and the apostasy is increasing more every day.

What are we to do, then? Despair? Pine over the “good old days”? Should we throw up our hands and give up the fight, and just “try to cope” until the Lord returns? No! We must be strong! We must continue the good fight of faith. However, if we are going to fight that good fight, our lives must be firmly grounded upon the grace of God! When everything starts falling apart at the seams, and it *appears* that the “lights are going out,” remember the grace of God. When you labour and pray for lost souls, but they won’t listen to you, remember the grace of God. Should there come a day when it becomes necessary to suffer in a real way for Christ, as the first-century Christians did, remember the grace of God.

Conclusion: The grace of God has provided us with everything we need. The prophets of old are dead. The Apostles are dead. The “heroes of the faith” of olden times are dead. But Jesus Christ, our High Priest, lives forever! He is our risen Messiah. He is our God. He is our Saviour. He is our Rock. He is

our Redeemer. He is our Anchor. He is our High Tower. He is our Refuge. **Trust in Him, Christian!** Cling to Him. He will never fail you! **Perhaps you are not sure that you *are* “in Christ.”** Perhaps you are not sure that you are saved. If so, I am here to tell you that Jesus Christ is all you need. He is the only Way to Heaven. He has shed His blood for you, and provided an everlasting salvation. Your part is simply to come to Him in faith, acknowledge your sin, and ask Him to forgive you for Christ’s sake. Won’t you come to Him today?