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## GOD OUR PROVIDER

Hebrews 13:20-21

By

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Easter Sunday

March 27, 2005

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March 27, 2005, Easter Sunday  
Hebrews Lesson 57

God Our Provider  
Hebrews 13:20-21

One of the strange ironies of human existence is that all of us are weak and needy, but we try to project the impression that we're strong and self-sufficient. I'm sure that pride is at the root of this, but it's still strange to observe. We're like the emperor in the familiar story, proudly strutting down the street to show off our new clothes, when in fact we're stark naked.

For example, every one of us is physically frail, but we act as if we're going to live forever. Even if you're young and in good health, there are many ways that you could die before this day is over. When we visit Marla's mother, who lives in a community of mostly retired people, I'm always amazed at the way that all of the old geezers are desperately trying to keep it all together. I'm quickly becoming an old geezer myself, and I'm all for trying to stay in shape as long as I'm able. But watching these people gives me the distinct impression that they're closing their eyes to the fact that they're going to die in just a few years.

Every one of us is financially frail and needy. Again, someone may protest, "I've got adequate investments and properties that I own that will more than meet my future needs. I've got a great job with seniority." I'm sure that Saddam Hussein had similar thoughts about a year before we invaded Iraq! But his investments and job security didn't do him much good then. Jesus warned about the man who thought that he had achieved financial security, but God demanded his soul of him that very night (Luke 12:15-21).

Our bodies and our finances are only two areas, but pick any area of life that you wish, and the conclusions are the same: you are weak, vulnerable, and needy. Emotionally, maybe you're doing great today, but tomorrow a series of tragedies could hit you as they hit Job, and you would be shattered. Nothing in this life is a sure basis for security—except for God! He designed it that way so that we would be driven to trust in Him for every need. But in spite of the obvious truth of this, we madly scramble to find our security in other things.

The church of Laodicea thought that they had it together. They said, "I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing." God had a slightly different opinion: "you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). There could hardly be a greater contrast! How could a church think that they were rich, wealthy, and in need of nothing, and yet God sees them as wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked?

The irony is, when we see ourselves as God sees us, recognizing our desperate need for Him, and cry out to Him, He is ready to flood us with His abundant blessings. As Mary acknowledged, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed" (Luke 1:53). When we come hungry to God, He fills us. When we think we're rich and don't need God, He sends us away empty-handed. This is great news—that the only requirement for receiving God's abundant blessings is to come to Him as a desperate, needy sinner and ask for mercy. He delights to provide for those who rely on Him.

The author of Hebrews has just acknowledged his need by asking his readers for prayer (13:18-19). Now, he returns the favor by praying for his readers in this wonderful benediction. We can sum it up by saying,

God, who has provided everything for our salvation through  
Jesus Christ, through Him will also provide  
all that we need to live for His glory.

God has promised to do everything that is in these two verses, and yet the author prays that it would be so. God has ordained that prayer is the way for us to lay hold of His promises. Prayer acknowledges that we're needy and that God is mighty to provide. When He does provide, He gets the glory because we know that He did it.

1. God has provided everything for our salvation through Jesus Christ (13:20).

The author succinctly gives five aspects of our salvation:

- A. God has provided peace between Himself and fallen sinners.

The author refers to God as “the God of peace.” People desperately seek peace for their souls in many ways, but true peace can only come through being reconciled to God. The Bible teaches that we are born in rebellion against God. Our sins make us enemies of God, who is absolutely holy. Paul writes of those who are outside of Christ, “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8). James (4:4) writes that “friendship with the world is hostility toward God.”

People who are God’s enemies often do not recognize their true spiritual condition, because Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:4). One of the first signs that God is at work in your heart is that you begin to see your sin and guilt before God (2 Cor. 4:6). You recognize that there is no way that you can atone for your own sin. You wonder if there is any way that you can have true peace with God. The great news of the Bible is, Yes! That’s why Jesus Christ came. Paul wrote (2 Cor. 5:19) “that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them....” Before we explore how He did that, note...

- B. God has provided the great Shepherd of the sheep that we needed.

This is the only time in Hebrews that the author refers to Jesus as our Shepherd, but that metaphor is used often of Him. Jesus referred to Himself as “the good shepherd,” who “lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Here, the author has just referred to the leaders of the congregation as those who “keep watch over your souls” (Heb. 13:17). But even the best of leaders are imperfect shepherds at best. Jesus is “the great Shepherd,” who does not lose any of the sheep that the Father has given to Him. He said (John 10:28-30), “I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

Phillip Keller, in his excellent *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* [Zondervan], shows that domestic sheep are some of the most helpless animals in the world. They literally cannot survive without a shepherd. They need him to guard them from predators, to lead

them to pasture, to provide quiet sources of pure water, and many other necessities. In fact, they can even get stuck on their backs, with their legs flailing the air, and die in that position, if the shepherd does not come along and set them upright! Someone has humorously pointed out that domestic sheep disprove the evolutionary dogma of the survival of the fittest! The Bible calls us "sheep" to point out what should be obvious, but what we often deny, that we cannot survive without the good Shepherd. God graciously sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our good Shepherd.

C. God has provided by putting that Shepherd to death for our sins.

Our verse mentions "death" and "blood." As the author has shown, in His death Jesus fulfilled all that the Old Testament sacrifices pointed toward. God instituted those sacrifices to provide a temporary solution for the sins of the Jewish people. The wages of sin is death, and because He is just, God cannot simply forgive sins without the penalty being paid. "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). The blood of animals could never totally atone for sins (Heb. 10:1-4). What those sacrifices could not do, Jesus did. As the eternal Son of God, He took on human flesh, perfectly obeyed God's law, and then offered Himself as the just payment for the sins of His people. Isaiah 53:4-6 prophesied of Jesus' death on our behalf:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

Thus the God of peace has provided the way for us to have peace with Him by sending the great Shepherd and putting Him to death for our sins. But He did not remain in the grave:

D. God has provided by raising that Shepherd from the dead, thus confirming His covenant.

There is a sense in which Jesus laid down His life and took it up again by His own authority (John 10:18). But in another sense, the Father raised Jesus from the dead by His mighty power (Acts 2:24; 3:15, 4:10, 26; 5:30; Eph. 1:20). The phrase, "through [or, *by*] the blood of the eternal covenant" is connected with God's bringing Jesus up from the dead. The resurrection confirmed God's acceptance of Jesus' death as ratification of the new covenant, in which He said, "I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12). The covenant is eternal in the sense that it never will be invalidated or superseded. Jesus' shed blood is the final, complete sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 10:14-18).

The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the solid foundation of the Christian faith. If you can disprove it, there is no basis for Christianity, and you should live for all the pleasure you can get in this life (1 Cor. 15:12-19, 32). But the uniform witness of the apostles, who were transformed from dejected and disillusioned men after the crucifixion into bold witnesses, was that Jesus is risen bodily. They saw Him, they touched Him, they ate with Him, and He taught them for 40 days before He ascended into heaven. He promised to return bodily. If these things are just the wish fulfillments of a bunch of deluded men, then Christianity is false. If these witnesses spoke the truth, then Jesus is the risen Lord.

E. God has provided Jesus, who is our Lord.

The last phrase of 13:20 identifies the great Shepherd of the sheep as "Jesus our Lord." This shows both the humanity and deity of the Savior. Jesus is His human name, born of the virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a man, He could die on the cross as the substitute for *human* sinners. "Lord" is a title for the sovereign God. As God in human flesh, Jesus' death could do what the death of animals never could do: permanently take away our sins (10:10, 14, 18).

The author uses the first person plural pronoun, "*our* Lord." The Bible is clear that while Jesus is Lord of all, He is not the Lord of all in the same way. He is the Lord of some in the sense that He is their Judge, who will condemn them. He is Lord of others in the sense of being their Savior. Those are the only two options. If Jesus is not your Lord personally, because you have trusted in Him as your Savior from sin, and submitted to Him as the rightful Sover-

eign of your life, then you will face Him someday as the Judge who will impose the just penalty of eternal separation from Him because of your sins.

Now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2), when every sinner may find mercy at the cross. At death or when Jesus returns will be the day of judgment, when those who have not submitted to Jesus as Lord will cry out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).

So the first part of the author's benediction shows that God has provided everything for our salvation through Jesus our Lord. But, He does not just save us from His judgment and then leave us to fend for ourselves.

2. God will also provide all that we need to live for His glory (13:21).

The verb, *equip*, is in the Greek optative mood, which expresses a desire or wish. The sense is, "May the God of peace equip you...." There are four facets to this:

A. God will equip us in every good thing to do His will.

Imagine the parents of a newborn bringing their little bundle home from the hospital. They carry him from room to room, explaining, "There's the refrigerator. Help yourself when you're hungry. There's the bathroom. It's all there for you: toilet, shower, sink. Your bedroom is in here. Just make sure that you change the sheets each week and make your bed. If you ever need anything, let us know. We'll see what we can do."

Thankfully, no earthly parents would ever think of doing that, and God does not do that, either. As Paul explains in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" There is one sense in which evil men killed Jesus. But in another sense, *God* put His own Son to death for us (Ps. 22:15; Isa. 53:4, 10; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). If God made that greatest provision for us while we were yet sinners, won't He now provide all that we need to live for Him and serve Him for His glory?

“To do God’s will” is to be like Jesus, because He came to do God’s will (Heb. 10:7). This is a lifelong process that is never complete in this life. But the point here is that the same mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead equips us to do God’s will and to live for His glory.

The King James Version translated *equip* as *make you perfect*, but that conveys a wrong sense. The Greek verb is used of mending torn nets (Matt. 4:21). It was used outside of the Bible to describe putting a bone back into place. It means to restore something so that it can realize its intended purpose. As sinners, we’re wounded and broken. By our own efforts, we could never put our lives back together so that they would be useful to the holy God. But what we cannot do, God does! He mends the torn places in our lives. He sets the broken bones, so that they will heal. He does not do this so that we can live for ourselves, but rather so that we can “in every good thing . . . do His will.” His Word shows us the things that “are pleasing in His sight,” so that we can walk in them.

B. God will work in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

God equips or restores us, and then He works in us. But this does not mean that we are completely passive in the process. Our text conveys what Paul wrote (Phil. 2:12b-13), “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” God saves us by His sovereign grace, not by anything we do. Both saving faith and repentance are His gift, not something that comes from within us (Phil. 1:29; Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Having saved us, He blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). He works in us, motivating and empowering us to do His will. And yet at the same time, we must work in cooperation with Him. Ephesians 2:8-10 puts it all together,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God saved us by His grace, and He prepared the very works that we should do for Him beforehand. But, we have to walk in

them. Our aim every day, beginning on the thought level, should be, "God, I want to please You because of Your abundant grace that You have shown me. Empower me today to do that which is pleasing in Your sight."

Thus God will equip us in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

C. God works these things through Jesus Christ.

The author adds (13:21), "through Jesus Christ." As we saw in our study of 13:15, everything in the Christian life is "through Him." We are saved because "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). He "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Someone has added up the phrase "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus" in Paul's writings and found that it occurs 169 times (cited by Kent Hughes, *Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul* [Crossway], 2:247). What a glorious truth, that if you have trusted Christ, everything that is true of Him is true of you! All of His riches are yours to enjoy!

Imagine that you were a poor orphan in Africa and the billionaire, Bill Gates, adopted you and included you in his will as the only heir. Suddenly, all of the riches of the richest man in the world are yours because you are in his family. Far better than the riches of Bill Gates, which will perish, are God's riches in Jesus Christ, which endure throughout eternity! And they are yours in Him!

D. God and the Lord Jesus Christ get all of the glory.

Grammatically, "to whom" may refer either to God or to Jesus Christ, and scholars are divided over which is preferable. But since the Father and the Son are one, they both get the glory in our salvation. As Revelation 5:13 puts it, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." Salvation is not about us. The Christian life is not about us. It's all about God's glory and the glory of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who gave Himself for our sins. If you are not living daily to glorify God for His great salvation in Jesus Christ, you are living for an insignificant purpose. God created you so that you would live to glorify Him by enjoying Him forever. "Amen" means, "So be it!"

## Conclusion

Someone has written (source unknown),

Empty hands I lifted to Him and He filled them with a store  
Of His own transcendent riches till my hands could hold no  
more.

And at last I comprehended, with my mind so slow and dull  
That God could not pour His riches into hands already full.

Has God opened your eyes to your need for Christ? If so, let go of everything else and lay hold of Jesus Christ. He is that "treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44). He is that pearl of great value for which a merchant "sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:45-46). In Him, God has provided all that you need for salvation from His judgment. In Him, God has provided all that you need to live in a manner that is pleasing unto Him, for His glory. Make sure that your faith rests in the risen great Shepherd, even Jesus our Lord!

## Discussion Questions

1. Why are people who are headed for judgment blind to their desperate need for Christ (2 Cor. 4:4)? Other than prayer, how can we help them to see the truth?
2. "Good" people are often the most difficult to reach with the gospel. Agree/disagree? Why? (See Luke 18:18-27.)
3. How can we know the balance between God's power and our own efforts in serving Him (Phil. 2:12-13)?
4. Why must pleasing God begin on the thought level? See Heb. 4:13; 1 Thess. 2:4.

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