

Live It (II)

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[0 : 0 0] Now before turning to that last section of Hebrews that we're going to look at for a few minutes this morning, let's bow our heads again together in prayer. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would bless us as we turn to your word. We thank you that it is not a dead word, that it is a living word, that your spirit will take that word and apply it to our lives and we know that we all come today with different needs, a different spiritual needs, different experiences, different emotions, different levels of faith, sometimes with no faith at all. And we ask and pray that the loveliness of Jesus Christ and the grace of God would be made very clear to us in our lives that we would be able to persevere, that we will be passionate, that we would keep going in our faith. Bless us today we pray. We thank you for this time of year, we thank you for Easter and for all the hope and joy and new life that it represents. We thank you for the children in the church for their being on holiday for this next while. We pray that it would be refreshing and relaxing and reviving for them as kids and also good fun. We pray for their parents and for the families. We pray for all our people today, young and old, our individuals and our families. We pray and ask Lord God that you would bless them all, bless us all. Bless those who are visiting with us today, we thank you for the rich encouragement and blessing that having their presence among us means to us and we pray that they would enjoy their company, the company of God's people with us and we would fellowship together in Jesus' name. We thank you for Joshua today, we thank you for his safe arrival and we rejoice in his presence with us here today and for Andy and Emma being here, we pray your blessing on them that you would protect them and guide them and keep them. We thank you for all the new life that we have seen in the congregation in these last few days and weeks and months and for the wonder of the covenant and of ongoing life and of gifts and talents and grace that we can share and teach and live among our children. We thank you for all the children that we do have, that we have taken vows for both as parents and also within the congregation. May this be like a family to them. Continue with us then, we ask and speak to us from your word and go before us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, we are going to look for a little while this morning to the last section of Hebrews, that section really from verse 20 to the end, so it is a short section and here you all will see that means it will be a short sermon. So let us hope so and we will see how we get on. But conclusions are always really important, aren't they? They are important in letters, they are important in films, they are important generally when we leave people, we like to leave on good terms, we like to say farewell and we want these things to be good. And the conclusion of this letter is no different, it focuses on what is important and what has been important right through the letter. And what is good is it really fits in well with our 750 prayer, which is great because the emphasis of this passage is prayer and so we have been praying together and we are at that stage where does anyone know what day we are on? Could anyone just?

29, well done, I had it in my notes but I just see if anyone... We are on day 29 so we are past half way of 50 days of prayer with our partners and sometimes there is a lull in that middle section and people are away and things are difficult but I hope that the sermon today as well will encourage us to continue praying, to remember that what was the writer to the Hebrews encouragement to that people is an encouragement to us to keep on praying and to know that that is the key for us in the transformation that we are looking for in our lives. So that is important that we recognise that, he finishes this section with prayer. There are two kind of elements here to the prayers, there is personal prayer and there is also spiritual prayer, not that there is such a thing as unspiritual prayer if you know what I mean, but I will explain what I mean when we get to that. But the first thing is it is personal isn't it? When you read this you think, well maybe you don't but sometimes you might think, well I really wonder who this guy was, we actually don't know who the writer to the Hebrews, we are not told who, as many people we conjecture it is Paul but we don't know, it is not told us but he had this relationship with his people, this Jewish,

Christian people and we can see that and when we read it, you know it is personal, he is using the first person, I particularly urge you to pray, pray for me, he talks about another friend Timothy who is coming along and it is very personal. It is this letter, this book to the Hebrew people and this end section reminds us that it is not an academic treatise, what you have here is not just something theological that has been given from the academy, from the educational hierarchy, this is a pastoral letter and it is a pastoral letter where the writer asks for prayer as well as promises prayer, so it is very important to him because prayer is significant, you know that is why we read 18 again, pray for us he says, pray for me particularly that I may be restored to you soon, so it is personal prayer and as part of 750 prayer, as leaders we are looking for prayer from you guys for us, we would make the same play as the writer to the Hebrews, pray for us, pray for us in our leadership because we will be praying for you, it is part of some of the themes from the bookmarks that we pray for one another as a church and so he then also gives a little bit of news so the letter really I guess it ends with a benediction verses 20 and 21, that would really be the benediction, that would be what you would regard to be the end and he says amen, but then he gives some personal information, you know stick with it he says, stick with it, stick with what I have told you it is important and I am telling you about Timothy, he has been in prison but he is hoping to be released and will come in, he is giving them a plan for the future, a strategy for what they might do and then he brings greetings, asks for, sends greetings and also brings greetings for the church in Italy, probably the church in Rome, grace be with you all, so it is personal, he is informing them so that their prayers will be informed so that the people would have got together and say oh that is great, let us pray that Timothy gets out of prison and let us pray that the writer who we do not know will be restored soon and they shared these pieces of information so that they could pray for one another and that is a great thing is not that we do for one another, that we are able to share our own lives with one another, it is what we are driving towards here all the time that we can share our lives so that we will have the confidence to pray with one another, we will come back to that in a moment, so it is not an academic treatise that we have here, it is very real, it is very tangible, I know it is a long time ago but it is God's living word that has been breathed into this letter that remains relevant and significant for us as God's living word for us, so it is a personal prayer and as a personal prayer the language of that prayer is the language of grace, grace be with you all, he says at the very end of that section and the whole letter that we have looked at which is focused on Jesus Christ has been in the language of grace, now that is very interesting because it is a new language that you learn that I have to learn and you have to learn, I do not know how good you are at languages, I am terrible at languages, you may be very good at languages but this is a different language, this is the language of grace and you do not know this language by nature, you are not born with this language, this language is something that we begin to learn, we begin to speak it when we are born again, when we are reborn, when we become Christians, we begin to speak differently, now that I mean that physically, well I do not mean in the

intonation of it, well maybe sometimes in the intonation but I mean the type of things we say, the way we respond, the way we speak to people, the way we correspond is different because we have a new language in this new kingdom of which we are citizens and it is the language of grace and it is a language we share often through prayer, how can we pray for grace in someone else's life if we do not know it ourselves, can that be strange, is that a challenge to you today, you are praying for someone else and for grace in their lives but do you know that language, would it be like speaking in tongues that you do not know what you are saying, how can it be that we speak of grace or pray of grace if we do not know it and pray for it in others, if we are prayerless, we are graceless because grace and prayer come together, it is the first language of the community of grace, sorry the community of prayer, the community of the gospel is the language of grace, we speak to one another but we also pray for and pray with one another, it is one of the key elements of the Christian faith is that move from isolation and independence towards community and towards fellowship, so move away from loneliness towards fellowship in

[11 : 05] Christ and grace is the language, it is the mark of prayer for and with and to one another, to Christ for one another is the mark of grace, that is why 750 is not a gimmick, it is not just something to do around this time of year or any time of year, it is something that we hope will imbibe within us a huge sense of this language of grace which is prayer for and with one another, sets us apart, so a new language, so this personal prayer is language of grace, it is real and it is also shared, it is a real shared adventure together here, the writer is sharing with, not only is he sharing with this people his requests and his movements so that they can pray for him and what he hopes to do but he is also sharing with him Christ centred truth, so he gives this benediction which will come on to you just in a second and it is a God focused sharing, so often our sharing in prayer for one another is absolutely practical and that is a good thing, I am wrong with that of course but it is also good to share biblical truth and biblical reality about Jesus Christ with one another saying I am praying for you, I am praying that you might know the God of peace in your heart and so on as we will come on to look at, so it is shared, it is something that is vocalised and shared and I have said this a lot from here because I have known it is probably the most encouraging thing in my own life when people will say to me,

I have prayed, I am praying for you about this, I am praying that you will know a little bit more about Christ in this way, I am praying for your plans, I prayed for you this morning, always good isn't it, to know that people are praying for us, isn't it a great step out of individualism and out of self-centredness, that we take that step and we move out of it and we move into this place where we are serving one another by praying for one another and telling each other we are doing so, it is a big cultural shift for us, it is not a great shift in some places but it is for us, I think it is a great, we are closed books, our heart, we do not share much from ourselves. Last Saturday at the missions conference we were in a seminar together and Rosie was speaking about being in Peru and being in the church there and how different it was from here where people were very open about prayer and people prayed very passionately but very ordinarily, it was just part of everyday life, it was part of everyday life in the school and in the church and it was people prayed for one another and it is this great language that it would be good for us to learn more openly with one another, so it was a personal prayer but it was also a spiritual prayer, that is there was biblical theological content in the prayer okay and there is nothing wrong with that, that is a good thing because you come to that little section in the middle 20 and 21, now it is a benediction, that is offered up here, invocation, it is asking God to bless the people, sometimes what we do at the end of the service is a benediction but it is still a prayer but it is focused on God blessing others, may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will and may his work in us, may he work sorry in us what is pleasing to him through

Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever, amen. So it is this benediction, this good intention that is offered to the people of God prayerfully and it is important isn't it because it tells us what the writer to the Hebrews wants to leave with this people, this is what I want to leave you with, you know that is significant isn't it, if you have got one, what is the last thing you want to say before you leave, if you have only one thing left to say what will it be, if you might never see this people again by in God's purpose and plan something that happened you never see them, what would it be that you want to leave them with, you want to leave them with this personal relationship and also these amazing truths about God, significant truth about God and isn't that important that he wants us also to have that same significant truth

I think I will come on to that, yeah. So the first thing he says is that God is a God of peace then he says God is a God of power and then he says that God is a God of provision and that is what he wants to leave, sorry I know I don't usually alliterate my three points nor do I usually have deliberately three points but it just came in a flash and so I had to go with it so I didn't twist things just to make it start with a P, so it is a God of peace okay, may the God of peace who threw the blood of the eternal covenant and so on and what is important here is what the writer is meaning when he speaks about the God of peace, he's not primarily saying that you're going to have an easy peaceful life, a God who brings peace at a, can I say a horizontal level, that's not primarily what he's speaking of here, this was a people in turmoil, this was a people who were being persecuted and martyred for their faith, it's not so much that peace which is a blessing of God nonetheless but he's speaking here not so much of horizontal peace but the fundamental and deeper vertical relationship that they know through Jesus Christ that's been re-established between God and his people, you see the God of peace through the blood of the covenant brought back through our Lord Jesus Christ, it's pointing forward, it's pointing to what Jesus or pointing back to what Jesus has done and that's the peace he's speaking about, it's the peace that's been re-established, sin brought dis-peace into your life and into man, you were born with dis-peace, I was born with dis-peace so a separation from God and problems and difficulties and conflict with one another, that's the world in which we live isn't it and that's the world that God comes into to re-establish peace between vertically between ourselves and God, dealing with the thing that primary nature, rebellious nature against God that we have, dealing with it, that sets us against God, that makes us recipients of God's anger and God's just wrath and he deals with that through Jesus Christ, so when he speaks about the God of peace he's getting to the very heart of our lives, the very heart of your life, the very heart of your life and mine is this need to be one with God through Jesus Christ, to be forgiven and to be renewed and to be dealing with the remaining dis-peace that's there, the remaining rebellion that says I'm not have you to rule over me God, I want to do my own thing, the remaining rebellion that says I'm not interested in other people and in the gospel of grace I want to be Lord of my own life, these things he comes to deal with and he is the God of peace, you know we see that dis-peace don't we, from the very beginning the

Bible makes that clear, right from the beginning bang we have that clearly till Adam blames Eve there's dis-peace never having been dis-peace before then Cain kills Abel, murder right from the very beginning, testing problems, difficulties, violence, hatred, bitterness, lying, cheating, it's all the dis-peace that comes from not being right with God and being forgiven by God, so whatever else is wrong in this world, whoever else is wrong in your life today that you may come to church with and complain about your poverty or the way other people in the church have treated or the rubbish ministry you're used to or whatever it might be in your life whatever it is there's a more fundamental peace that needs to be focused on that God of peace whatever else is wrong whatever injustice we see and in poverty we see and suffering and I'm not belittling these things still the primary answer is the blood of the eternal covenant because until we deal with our sins before God we remain at enmity with God and Jesus Christ has come to offer us his peace his forgiveness his life and his transformation now that is relevant for all of us the transformation that comes from the the peace that God brings in our hearts when I said that it's primarily a vertical peace I didn't mean it was impractical and I didn't mean it was just theoretical it has major implications but unless our heart is right with God everything else we're doing is on the surface everything else we're doing is not transforming what we are like from the inside out we need our hearts changed I was reading an interesting article this week by a guy called Jared Wilson who was talking about poverty and there's a movement in a lot of well there's there's Christian movements to alleviating poverty as the gospel that the gospel is the alleviation of poverty good news for the poor now that may be a result of the gospel and it may be a practical outworking of the gospel but it isn't the gospel and what he says is interesting he says justice for the poor is in revealing that poverty is no hindrance to gaining the treasure of all surpassing worth so even if we alleviate people's poverty and I'm not saying that's not a laudable thing to do it is not the gospel the gospel is that even in people's poverty and lostness they can find the all-surpassing treasure and worth of Jesus Christ that is for them the good news the good news isn't that they will become rich if they believe in this gospel the good news is that in their poverty even they can know spiritual riches by faith and that's a very important truth because if we simply just say to people that the good news for the poor is that they no longer need to be poor then we there's no need for faith in that that's simply a sociological movement there's no need for the gospel in that the gospel is that even in the most dire circumstances people can know the surpassing wealth of Christ and of forgiveness and of hope but of course that means that we in our gospel and with our grace seek to share with and help and ultimately alleviate poverty also good news is this peace vertically with God nothing material is the answer to people's spiritual needs

[23 : 15] so when we struggle maybe you're struggling today with material issues health issues career issues relationship issues money issues none of them are insignificant but none of them are fundamentally what you need you need and I need to know the peace of God that transcends understanding through the eternal the blood of the eternal covenant that is good news that is peace with God as we get old and as life passes quickly that is great good news do you know that peace you've maybe said you're a Christian for a long time do you know that peace the relationship with God the forgiveness the hope and the future is a god of peace and the writer wants to stress that it's also a god of power maybe there's god of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead the Lord Jesus Christ so the resurrection morning

Sunday morning is always resurrection morning it's when what we do and how we listen and how we listen and how we worship and how we sing and how we pray it should be full of power and life because it's on this resurrection day it's not a dead faith we have and it's not a dead savior this Sunday morning is always a reminder that God is more powerful than the grave and more powerful than death and he is given and shown victory over death by raising or shown his acceptance and his delight with what Jesus achieved on the cross by raising him from the dead and setting him at the right hand of the Father it's never any doubt that that would be the case it's never any doubt in the power of God and in the pleasure of God at his own purpose in his own plans but it's revealed to us and the resurrection is living power of God life is power isn't it you think you have life you think you have power when you have life don't we if I take out the battery of this and it's dead it's because there's no life in it it's useless the power the judicial power is in the life that it gives power is in life isn't it and we long to be alive and to always be alive and yet the irony of this world in which we live is that we live in an arena of death all around us and it has destructive power far more power than you're able to or I am able to deal with we can stave off the effects of death we can delay it humanly speaking but it's coming to us all and it will be relentless in its power in the history of mankind with all the sophistication we have we have never been able to break the power and the relentlessness of death

God alone is able to do that and he has reversed its effects and he is showing his power finally on the cross death separates us finally from God unless we recognize the power of God so your Christian life today and mine is a miracle it's a wonderful thing don't breeze into the Christian life and breeze into the Christian worship thinking your ordinary your playing that nothing really special has happened when you came to faith in Jesus Christ the power of God transformed you and me from death to life radically moving where we were from a desperate place a place of this peace to a place of peace and life and whatever turmoil we are in today please remember that because that's what the writer wants to focus on he's he doesn't focus on he doesn't even focus on the persecution and the impending martyrdom there he focuses on what they have that nothing including martyrdom will take away from them it's april maybe you maybe you're tempted to give up the Christian faith in april it's been a long hard winter nothing's happening and it's much easier just to spend hours on facebook you're tempted just to give up praying and thinking and tempted to give up following because it seems that God's so powerless and i think that is because we have a 21st century idol here in scotland in the christian church and it's an idol which is that god is absolutely impotent god is powerless that is the idol that we worship we worship a powerless god we don't believe that he's able to change our lives or other people's lives and we need to break that by reminding ourselves on this resurrection day that he's a god of power god of peace god of power and lastly very briefly a god of provision who brought back from the dead the lord jesus christ that great shepherd of the sheep who will equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through jesus christ to whom be glory for i never i never am in it's great isn't it this is a god who gives us peace who is a god who provides power to transform our lives and to change our circumstances and he's a god of provision he provides for us christ it's interesting that the spirit isn't mentioned here because i think they're interchangeably recognized christ and the spirit and the father recognized in trinitarian terms but here we're told that christ is the one who works in us and who is our great high sorry our great shepherd the great shepherd of the sheep so god in his provision remember jesus in john 17 when he says i'll not leave you as orphans i will come back among you and he dwells in us and he's called you the great shepherd he loves this picture of the shepherd i don't know if it's your picture of jesus it's your picture of god shepherd who loves us who cares for us who feeds us who leads us who rebukes us who corrects us who trains us in righteousness but who ultimately lays down his life for us that is the motive that is the god that we have the god who is our great shepherd and our life in him is protected so you've come to church today and jesus has been watching over you as you've walked to church because he is the shepherd he's your loving shepherd he's listened to your cries today he's listened to your sense of injustice he's listened to your doubts and fears

he's the great shepherd of the sheep he cares and will bring you home that is our saviour and as we were told there he is tasked with perfecting us so you might not think there's any change in your life since last week because i might not think there's any change in mine but he is equipping us that is the word there for equipping is really the word that you would use of a master craftsman restoring something repairing something bringing something back to its pristine condition so what he's doing is he is giving us all that we need to be the people that we were created to be that we were lost and broken and distant from him now it's a lifelong restoration it's an immediate adoption and it's an immediate belonging and it's immediate forgiveness and peace but it's a lifelong process that he works with us in bringing us equipping us and bringing us back to pristine condition to doing the kind of things he wants us to do that will make our life pleasing to him isn't that great that he molds and transforms us so that we will want to do what he wants we will please him you know when you love someone it's such a great thing isn't it when we please them because we love doing that and he is saying that's my task i'm restoring you i'm repairing you i'm bringing you back to that condition where you're beautiful to me and where you do the things because you want to do the things that i want you to do and i think that's a wonderful thing so we look for these same truths to share in our own prayer lives for one another but primarily to think about for ourselves to know there's god of peace there's god of power and there's god who provides for us in most remarkable ways to keep on going you christ is much better that's been the theme of hebrus theme of hebrus is that there is there's a better country that we belong to as citizens and we're heading to as christians life is very short even for the youngest of us here it's very short and god wants us to have that eternal perspective that reminds us of keeping on keeping on and if you don't know jesus that you will you will not go to bed one more time without finding him that you will plead with him to reveal himself that you will ask him to show you your own heart and to show you your need and that you will make your peace with god today there is nothing greater than you than that that you need to do today i'm not sure what you're on agenda for the rest of the day by guarantee absolutely 100 there's nothing more important if you're not a christian then for you to make your peace with god through jesus christ through his gift of salvation through the eternal the blood of the eternal covenant that is revealed in the gospel please consider that i beg you to consider making your peace with god today and as believers for us to live out what it means to know god's forgiveness and god's friendship and love in our day-to-day lives let's bow our heads and pray together father god help us we pray teachers we pray leaders we ask grant us that knowledge of

your peace when maybe like the the top of the ocean the surface of the ocean may seem to be wild in our lives it may seem to be stormy and and crazy may we remember as we dive deep into that ocean how calm and peaceful it is down below may our lives be like that even though sometimes there may be storms and sense of wildness on on the surface that we can't necessarily understand may we know that deep-seated peace and forgiveness and transformation and hope that comes from knowing this great savior jesus who loves us and who laid down his life for us may these spiritual truths be the foundation of our lives may we not be tossed around with every wind of doctrine or every change in our circumstances but may christ be given the honor the praise and the glory help us to live out these things and know the difference they make to us and may we be persevering and persevering in prayer for one another in our partners and there's a congregation on this 27th day of prayer enable us to do so we pray in jesus name amen