

“Bold Prayer and Christ-Followership”

Hebrews 10: 19-38

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, 21 and since we have a great High priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see The Day approaching.

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him (God) who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge His people.” 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (NIV)

Some of what we see here in the passage comes down to one’s view of God and His Son. There is a disparity in our culture and in the modern-day worship

between a holy sense of place and no respect for buildings or place. There is also a disparity between the images of God as daddy and as awesome holy God. There is a tension and a gray area between the two extremes that we must find and hold together. I remember back when I was an intern-Pastor at Open Door Chapel which met in what is now the main sanctuary of Crosswind Community Church (it used to be an RCA church). They had chairs in their sanctuary so that it could be used for a multiple of purposes. They only had one large area and needed to make the most use possible of that one space. Well, the Youth Group decided to meet in the “sanctuary” and we put our chairs in a circle. We had a real nice discussion and then as people were milling about, we played some Contemporary Christian music. It was rock music with Christian lyrics. Two older couples were in church for some reason or other that night and really lost their minds because they felt like we were desecrating sacred space. On the other hand, you have people who don't refer to the worship space in their church as the sanctuary, but as the auditorium. Instead of calling the furniture in the front of church the altar and the pulpit they call the front of the church the stage or platform. There are those that have no sense of sacred place what-so-ever. You could have a township hall meeting in the front of church and it wouldn't phase them a bit.

In the same way you have a crowd of Christians whose favorite thing to do is talk about their buddy Jesus and daddy God. Their respect is no higher than that given to a good friend or their dad. When people hold to that view of God they lose their sense of respect and awe or “fear” or high regard that God deserves and demands from us. On the other hand, you have those people who are so consumed with the awesomeness and holiness of God that they dare not even approach a church building at all because they just know they could never be good enough. We need to have a healthy balance in our lives, but of course, that is not easy. I know that I have swayed back and forth some in my own spiritual life on both the issues that I have used as examples so far this morning. The key is to stay somewhere in the middle by holding on to the importance of both sides. It is important to have a healthy understanding of how awesome and great God is, but equally as important to be able to talk to God in prayer like you talk to a friend.

On the day of my first wedding rehearsal I experienced that as the Pastor performing the ceremony and running the rehearsal told me to have my best man remove his cap in church or he was going to knock it off. To Pastor Bob Murphy wearing a hat in church was disrespecting God and Scripture. To this day, I cannot pray with my hat on ... I always remove it when I pray, but I do not have the same problem with men wearing a hat in church that Pastor Murphy had.

It is very important that we understand something. God is totally perfect and Holy. God cannot tolerate sin. The holy presence of God literally destroys sin with a burning, purifying fire. Therefore, it is obvious that since man is contaminated by sin, mankind would be destroyed instantly in the presence of God. That is why, there was literal fear in the people of the Old Testament, because without the blood of Christ, if they saw God, if they were literally in the presence of God, they would die. God took the amazing first step and solved this problem through the shed blood of Christ. The blood of Christ takes away the sins of the world so that God's presence can visit human beings without destroying them. We are redeemed by the blood of the lamb, Re-deemed, Redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the lamb.

The blood of Jesus is the basis for boldness. Jesus is the new and living way to God, to forgiveness, to eternal life. We have a perfect High Priest to intercede for us. He stands between us and God. Because that is true we should be doing these three things according to Hebrews chapter 10: 1) drawing near to God, 2) holding fast to our confession of faith, and 3) considering one another so as to stir up love and good works.

The word translated bold in this passage refers to a freedom of speech, a permission to approach one in authority without fear or anxiety, without worry. We are to be bold, be strong, and courageous for the Lord our God is with us and before us. We can be bold and strong because Christ cleanses our consciences so that no vestige of guilt remains to cause us to cower before a holy God. The witness of the Holy Spirit so fills us with the assurance of the love of the Father God that there remains no residue of fear. Instead, we are filled with the joyful freedom and confidence to come into the presence of God as a child running to a Father he/she trusts completely and with whom he/she has shared a warm and tender relationship. ONLY under these conditions of forgiveness and cleansing dare we have such confidence and boldness to enter the Holy Place without being destroyed by the holiness of God. We are to draw near to God with boldness. The sacrifice of Christ has in effect, given each of us a card that gives us free access into the holy presence of the Mighty One, the Creator of the universe. Without Christ as your get in free card, you cannot enter, like those ATM machine booths that you have to stick your card in just to unlock and open the door. Because of what Jesus has done, the price that was paid, we are obligated and privileged to take advantage of this free right-of-access. Don't take it for granted! Jesus is the perfect, eternal, High Priest, our representative, our intercessor, our Savior, our Lord. Jesus is the perfect way to draw near unto God. Because we can have

boldness and courage and because Jesus is the perfect representative, we should make use of the open door! What then is so tragic is that there are so many people who don't know that the way is open and clear. People still think that the detour signs are up and have been traveling out of their way even though the construction was completed months ago.

You know how you get used to going one way to work or to your friends house, because the road has been closed for construction for a long time. You establish a habit and keep driving out of your way even though the shortcut has been open for months. It takes awhile for people to figure out that the work is done, the road completed. People of God, let me tell you something. Listen close, here it comes ...THE WAY to God is OPEN, paved by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus' shed blood has made it possible for every human being to have a personal relationship with the God who created them. But there are people out there who don't know that Jesus completed the way, He was the Way! Use the way, spend time in prayer every day and draw near unto God and He will draw nigh unto you.

So the first part of the application is that we are to draw near to God. The second is to hold fast to our faith, our belief. The Greek word translated "hold fast" has the sense of holding firm, securing or tightening down. We are to get a firm grip on our confessions, our creeds, the things we would die for, and secure them in our minds. The voices of the world and satan will try to erode away our faith. They will try to make us forget God! We must be unwavering in this. We must not go off balance or become unlevel as does a faulty foundation. We must not bend or yield to the winds of pressure that blow upon us from the world. Remember that Jesus never asks us to do anything He doesn't provide the power and strength and resources to accomplish. So we can hold firm, even when the circumstances of your life seem to be laughing at you, even when things seem too difficult, even though at the moment we may feel there is little reason to go on; my friends, the One who made the promise is faithful and HE WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN! Hang tough, God is on His way with resources for endurance. Remember that in the very process of struggling and enduring, discipline and strength will grow as rich fruit in your life and the tragedies of today will become the triumphs and victories of tomorrow. I am certain! Because God says so right here in Hebrews 10. To hold fast to our confession (our faith) we need to keep hope always before us, we need to persevere and finish the race, and we need to remember that in the end, victory is ours! No matter what happens, no matter how rotten your circumstances, no matter how few friends you have, if Jesus

Christ is in your heart as Lord and Savior then you will WIN in the END! We are all victorious. Satan loses. It's in the book.

The third application that the author proposes is to consider one another. Let us make it a priority to take thought of others. That is only one sentence but it is profound and it has so much to do with how we live our lives. Last week we looked at verses 23-25 and focused on encouraging one another. That is key! Listen to how different translations interpret these three verses. We talked about the New Revised Standard Version last week, "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together." The Revised English Bible has it, "Let us be firm and unswerving in the confession of our hope, for the giver of the promise is to be trusted. We ought to see how each of us may best arouse others to love and active goodness. We should not stay away from our meetings, as some do, but rather encourage one another." The New Century Version reads, "We can trust God to do what He promised. Let us think about each other and help each other to show love and good deeds." The Contemporary English Version reads "We should keep on encouraging each other to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since we know that the day of the Lord's coming again is getting closer." Finally Today's English Version reads, "Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and do good." The curious and interesting thing is that all these versions are pretty faithful and true to the Greek. But word order and what English words we use to express what the Greek text is saying can make a big difference.

To me, it is pretty clear that the author of Hebrews is careful to not let us separate works from worship. Worship is the event in which we become radioactive for God. When we are not in the collective worship with God's people we have missed an exposure to God, and having missed it, we lose some of our radiance. Our light shines a little more dimly. If we get away from the corporate worship of God with other saints, our radioactivity dissipates quickly and we lose our effective radiance. But let us encourage one another. We are to inspire, spur on, stimulate, arouse, stir up our brothers and sisters in Christ to love and active goodness. We can not do that if we don't spend time together. It is really pretty simple.

While I was spending a week in a wall tent in the Adirondack Mountains this was illustrated very clearly to me. One night I got up around 3 am to stoke the fire. It was my turn. I was there 11 miles from the nearest pavement of any kind

with five other guys. When I opened the door to the stove which was basically an oil drum on it's side with some modifications, the fire was basically out except for some slightly reddish coals. They were spread out some though. So I took our fire stick and pushed them all together. To my surprise, without any blowing, without any encouragement of any kind, a flame ignited in only seconds. When those coals were spread out they were fading and dying out and within a few more hours they would have been cold like that ember Dwight L Moody took out of the coal fire in his home in the story I told at the end of last week's sermon. Put the coals together in fellowship with one another and a flame rekindled. When we spend time with one another we keep each other hot for God by setting a good example. People will be able to confess their hope more courageously and unhesitatingly if they encourage one another.

Without the fellowship and encouragement of fellow Christ-followers our faith fades in brilliance as sure as a pair of indigo jeans in the washing machine. Christian faith and witness can only flourish in the atmosphere of Christian fellowship. I am reminded of a saying that leadership guru John Maxwell uses often, "What gets celebrated gets repeated!" Please, make it a priority to notice when people do good things and tell them you have noticed. Let's lift one another up and spur one another on to love and active goodness. If we do that we can ignite a flame that will shine to our community, to our friends, to our neighbors, our relatives, and even the world.

We need to continue to focus on Jesus and realize that in the workaday world we may be the only Jesus some people will ever see. People need Jesus. People need Christian fellowship to keep their fire hot, to keep their radiance bright. If we keep on doing what we've always done, we will keep on getting what we have always gotten. What are you going to do about it? Write an "I will ..." statement that expresses how you might spur someone on to love and active goodness, provoke your church family to a higher level of Christ followership. How's that for a new word?

Jesus is coming back again. When he does, may each of us be found striving to be more like Jesus, encouraging one another, and serving others. There will be a judgement day. So keep your eyes focused on Jesus! Leave revenge to God and find a way to love the people God has put in your sphere of influence, the people you come into contact with, during the day. What is God calling you to change? Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Bold Prayer and Christ-Followership”
based on Hebrews 10: 19-38
Given at Doster Community Church on February 19, 2023

- I. Do you have a healthy balance in your mind, your heart, and soul between Jesus as your friend and a respect or awe for God as the Creator of the Universe and King of Kings and Lord of Lords?
- II. God is perfectly holy and sin literally burns up when it comes in contact with God. Jesus’ blood and righteousness covers our sins so that we might enter God’s presence with boldness.
- III. We should be filled with the joyful freedom and confidence to come into the presence of God as a child running to a Father he/she trusts completely and with whom he/she has shared a warm and tender relationship. Draw near to God with boldness!
- IV. Hold fast to your faith. Trust in God’s promises and know that God is always faithful! Jesus will not let you down! Remember that in the very process of struggling and enduring, discipline and strength will grow as rich fruit in your life and the tragedies of today will become the triumphs and victories of tomorrow.
- V. Consider one another; let us think about one another and how we might encourage one another toward love and active goodness. Let us be concerned for one another.
- VI. Without the fellowship and encouragement of fellow Christ-followers our faith fades in brilliance as sure as a pair of indigo jeans in the washing machine. Christian faith and witness can only flourish in the atmosphere of Christian fellowship.
- VII. What are you going to do about it? Pray for God’s blessing on 5 different people for 5 minutes every day. See if God doesn’t provide you with an opportunity to minister, to encourage, to serve ...