

## God's Great Gift of the Church

Hebrews 10:19-25

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, November 13, 2022

If you would, please open your Bibles with me to the book of Hebrews. I thank our musicians for a wonderful worship music this morning wouldn't agree. And as you're doing that, if you're joining us for the first time today, we are in the middle of a series that we started way back in the month of February, where we're going through the book of Hebrews, verse by verse. We started it back in chapter one, we don't plan on stopping until we get all the way to chapter 13, the very end of it. And the reason we're doing it this way is because we like to practice what is known as expository preaching as a church, which refers to the act of starting in one part of the Bible and explaining it all the way through until the end, so that we don't miss anything. So that we make sure that we cover every word. In fact, if you want to see this for yourself, and you are a visitor, it might help you to go online, we have several good resources on this subject and one of them is called the "What we Believe" document. And it says this about this topic, it says "we believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is verbally inspired, and every word absolutely without error and in the original writings, the sufficient revelation of His will for salvation, and the final authority in all matters of truth. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises." And that was said really well, wasn't it. And that's why we teach the Bible this way. That is why we're so thorough in the study of it and that is because we do believe the Bible is God's revealed Word to us. It is very precious to our hearts as a church.

And as we've done this, we've come this morning to Hebrews chapter 10. If you want to look at this with me, this is our passage for today. I want to read a big section of it so you can get the context. But if you look in Hebrews 10, verse one, says this. It says

For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

"Sacrifice and offering You have not desired,  
But a body You have prepared for Me;  
In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.  
"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come  
(In the scroll of the book it is written of Me)  
To do Your will, O God.'"

After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure *in them*” (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

“This is the covenant that I will make with them  
After those days, says the Lord:  
I will put My laws upon their heart,  
And on their mind I will write them,”  
*He then says*, “And their sins and their lawless deeds  
I will remember no more.”

Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,<sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

We're going to stop the reading there. But as you read that you can tell that there are a lot of references to the Old Testament in here because this here is the theme of the book of Hebrews. It tells you how Jesus replaced the Old Covenant law for us; how He fulfilled the sacrifices and offerings and ceremonies of the people of Israel used to keep under it. Which is why this passage talks about several things in here that Israel would be familiar with, like the covenant and the law and the commandments. If you look back through the text, here, you can see it talking about sacrifices and offerings, and how every priest stands daily ministering and offering them, time after time after time. It talks about the Holy Place, it talks about the veil, it talks about sprinklings and washings, and cleansings, and shadows and forms and things that cannot take away sins. Because verse 20, says this, if you look in your Bibles, when Jesus died, He gave us a way out of that now. The reason it talks about all that is because when

He went to the cross, He did away with the need for those things, because He fulfilled it. The Jews used to worship Yahweh through the law, but not anymore. They used to worship Him through sacrifices and offerings and things like that. Now that's ended, because verse 19, says, He has given us confidence to enter the Holy Place through His blood instead of through the rest of those things anymore. So then now when you want to be saved, as Richard showed us so well, in the kids' lesson, you don't have to go through the veil, you just go through Christ, and that's it.

I mean, I know this is something that we keep saying over and over again in this series, but I don't mind repeating it one more time for the sake of emphasis. But there's a reason why you don't have to be a Jew anymore to get to God. And there's a reason why you don't have to drop whatever you're doing and go to the temple to praise Him. There's a reason why you don't have to change your race. There is a reason why you don't have to change your name, or your identity or your culture. The reason is because of Christ, and that's all. He is the one who made it possible for you to come to God just as you are. That is the great lesson of this book. And it's a point that's really driven home in our text this morning, because now the author says, If you believe all this, there's really only one way to respond to it and that is to join the church. If you understand what Christ has done for you in the book of Hebrews, and you accept that and embrace it and receive it as your own, there's only one thing to do, and that is to get involved in the local body of believers, because Jesus didn't just die for you, He died for others, amen. He didn't just go to the cross for your soul, He did it for the souls of many people and you need to show that you understand that. And we haven't said a lot about this in the book of Hebrews, because it doesn't say a lot about the church. But interestingly, it does say quite a bit about the church this letter was written to, and it would be good to talk about that for a minute because it puts us in perspective. But if you read between the lines of this letter, you find there several things you learn about the church, this letter was given to, for example, you learn it was an older church. It had been around for quite a while. If you look down in your Bibles in Hebrews 10:32, this will tell you a little bit about this congregation. And in Hebrews 10:32, it says, "but remember the former days, when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings." Now an important word there is the phrase "former days" because it implies that this congregation had previous days to it. Their Ministry had been going on for some time, after this writer wrote to them, and not only that, but it says they had a rough journey because it tells us after they started their ministry, they suffered. In fact, they didn't just suffer but they suffered greatly. And it doesn't just say they suffered greatly, but they endured a great conflict of sufferings, plural. Word is multiplied to show that they had a rough go of it. It was just suffering after suffering after suffering for these people and pain after pain after pain. Verse 33, says they were made into a public spectacle, which means they were humiliated and embarrassed. They were reproached, it says, which gives an idea of verbal confrontation. They had their property confiscated. They were thrown in jail. We don't know why that was, but in the early days of Christianity, one reason Christians were arrested is because they were given a charge of being troublemakers. They went against the grain, they offended people, they didn't get on board with all the agendas of the culture. But whatever the case, it was tough, and these people endured it in the beginning. They weren't Fairweather Christians, they weren't cream puffs. They didn't fold at the smallest sign of resistance. They were fighters, they endured because they

paid a price for what they believed. We could use some more of that in the church today, couldn't we? We could use a little pluck in North America right now. These people had pluck.

Brings it to another thing you learn about this church, and that is that they had good leaders as well. They had pluck because their preachers had pluck. They had a backbone because their ministers did the same thing. And if you look over in chapter 13:7, you see this one there. This is where it tells you about their leaders. It says,

remember those who led you who spoke the word of God to you, and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

And that's a passage that should get your attention because it says their pastors were worth remembering. How many churches today have a Pastor that's not worth remembering. How many congregations have a leader that is best to forget? Not these guys. Because it says they spoke the Word of God to them and that means that their leaders knew what their job was. They weren't there to talk about the world or the culture of the news. They weren't there to discuss politics or philosophy, or the latest things going on in Facebook. They were there to preach the Word. It was their job to open the Bible and show them what it says verse by verse by verse. As they did so, it says they lived it out because it tells them to imitate their faith, which means these preachers had a faith that was worth imitating. They had integrity. They lived in such a way that they were the same kind of man wherever they went, in the pulpit or the pew, in the church, or the home in the office, or the hockey rink. They practice what they preach. I was studying this this week and I was thinking, wouldn't it be great if every church in Canada had a man like this? It is my prayer, every congregation all across this country would find a shepherd who would conduct himself this way. Because we often pray for God to change the nation of Canada. But let me tell you something, God won't change Canada until He changes the people, and He won't change the people until He changes the churches, and He won't change the churches until He changes the pulpit, Amen. That is where it starts. So goes the shepherd, so goes the sheep. And these people had good shepherds.

And it brings it to one more thing you learn about them and that's this: they had grown apathetic about it. They didn't care anymore, which is so sad. But due to their age, and the fact they had had good leaders for so long, they did what a lot of people do under those circumstances, and they began to take it for granted. If you look in chapter 5:11, this is where you get a whiff of this. But in chapter 5:11, it says, concerning Him or concerning Christ, "we have much to say, and it's hard to explain, since you have become so dull of hearing." The word dull there, it means dull or slow, or lethargic to something - gives the idea of not making progress, because you have the opportunity to grow and you don't take it. And you have the chance to learn because you have such great leaders and such great preachers and such great men of God, but you ignore them because you're busy, I'm busy, we're all so busy. You're tired, I'm tired, we're also tired, because we have better things to do. And as a result, you begin to dry up and die on the inside. That's what these people were doing. Their soul was withering away to the point that

the preacher was trying to explain something to them, and they just couldn't hear it because they were sound asleep. That is such a common problem today. It happens all over the place. Preacher comes up, preaches - not here, by the way, make that clear. But the preacher comes up and preaches and the people say, "well, I've already heard that before. You said the same thing last week. I've already read that, went to that conference, saw that thing on the YouTube." So, in order to address this attitude, the author says this to these people in chapter 10:25, I gave you all this as a background for what we're going to talk about this morning. But here's how he confronts this issue or tells him to deal with it in chapter 10:25, he says,

not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another;  
And all the more as you see the day, drawing near.

Now, what does that mean? Well, he says this, because this is one of the ways to fight the sin of apathy in the church, and that is to prioritize the assembly of the saints. It says here that the church is there to encourage you, and that means it's there to keep you from getting so lazy. God has provided it in order to keep you from falling asleep, so you won't lose your passion. It also says here, all the more as you see the day drawing near and that means it's there to make you do it in light of Judgment Day. The church has been provided to remind you that the end is coming soon. You are going to die; you need to get ready for it and stop messing around. But the point is that this is what Jesus died for in this passage, He died so you can be part of the church. He did it so you can be part of this great body of believers that will hold you accountable and responsible and alert to the things of God, so you won't fall into a slumber and become dull.

God has not created you to go through this life alone. He wants you to do it with others. And the fact that I've told you before, this is important, because there's an idea floating around in a lot of evangelical circles, that's become very popular in recent years, which says that if you are the only person who ever lived, Jesus would die for you. Remember, we talked about that a couple years ago, we did that in the tent, I don't know if you remember that. But it's this idea that if you were the only person on the planet, He would have come down from heaven and been crucified for you. Now, I want to tell you something, I don't find that anywhere in the Bible. If you read the Bible, you'll find that the vast majority of the time when it speaks about salvation, it uses plural language. Because it tells us that when Jesus died, He died for the world, not just one person, the whole thing, or all those who would believe in it. And when He did that, He did it for the sheep, plural, not just one sheep, but the entire flock, many sheep. He died for his bride, which according to Revelation 19, is a vast multitude. He died for a kingdom with many subjects, He died for a family with many members, He died for a vine with many branches. He died for a building with many stones and a house with many rooms. But He didn't just do it just for you. There was something greater going on in the mind of God when He sent His Son to the earth. There is something much bigger than just you and me. And we need to learn how to look at it that way because yes, Jesus died for you, that's true, and yes, He went to the cross to save you if you're a believer, because He loves you. But at the same time, He did it for other people as well. He was thinking about other

souls, and we need to do the same with how we respond to our lives. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, with four responses you should have to your salvation in this passage.

So, if you're taking notes, this is our outline for today. In Hebrews 10:19-25, we're going to look at four responses you should have to your salvation. And I'm going to tie each one of these into the church because I believe that's what the author is doing here. And the first part, he's talking about salvation, and the next part, he draws that into the church. And the first one is that, you should draw near to God, the first response you should have to your salvation in this passage is that you should draw near to God. Which means that if you're saved this morning, you shouldn't stay away from Him, but you should come close. And if you look in verse 19, it says this. It says,

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is his flesh. And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Now, I don't know if you notice this as you read this, but this passage is set up differently from the other ones that we've looked at so far in the book of Hebrews. And that's because it's beginning a new section in the book. Because so far, the author has been focusing mainly on the issue of doctrine. And he's been talking primarily about the subject of theology and how Christ fulfilled the old covenant for us. But now he's going to shift gears for a moment and start to apply it to our lives. In fact, he says this in verse 18, right above this. He says, "Now, where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin." And that means that this is what we learned from the doctrinal section of the book of Hebrews and that is that there is no point in making sacrifices anymore. You don't have to go to the temple and bring an animal to the priest, because Jesus has taken the place of all that. And after saying that, he writes these words in verse 19, "therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place," now he says that because that's the application, this is how you take the doctrine and apply it. You do it by being confident in the way you approach God now. Not arrogant, but confident, not brazen, but bold, because Jesus has taken care of it all now. This is an interesting thing to say because the Jews didn't think this was possible. They didn't believe you could approach the presence of God with confidence. Because if you remember, the temple was set up in such a way that the ordinary Jew couldn't go in there. I mean, no matter what they did, the only one that could do that was a priest. And the priests could only go into the first room of the temple, it couldn't go into the second it was off limits. And even then, the high priests could go into the second room. That was only one day a year on the Day of Atonement. Other than that, the presence of God was closed off the rest of the time. But now the author says not anymore, all that's changed, because Christ has made it possible for you to enter the holy of holies, beyond the veil.

This phrase, “since we have confidence,” it's in the continuous tense in Greek, in order to remind us and not only can we come into the presence of God like this, but we can do it continually. Now, not only can we approach him with boldness, but we can act this way over and over and over again, anytime you need 24 hours a day, seven days a week, morning, noon, and night, isn't that amazing. Verse 20, says, because we have a new and living way, which He inaugurated for us. And that statement is placed in here to say that Israel had their way to God, we have our way to God. They had their covenant that brought them close to Him. We have ours too, but ours is better because it is inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh. To my knowledge, this is the only time in Scripture that Jesus' flesh is ever referred to as the veil. And it paints an important picture because the word veil, it is a reference to that large curtain, it was much larger than what we saw on the stage here. The large curtain that separated the room where the Holy of Holies was from the rest of the temple. According to the Talmud, it was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. And it was so heavy it took 300 priests to hang it. And the reason it was so massive is because it blocked off the presence of God from the people. It set up this massive barrier to say you can't go in there, because the presence of God is forbidden for you. The interesting thing about the object of the veil is that Matthew 27:51, says, when Christ died, God tore it. And He ripped the veil in two from top to bottom, to demonstrate that the way to God is not forbidden anymore. It's opened because Jesus is your veil now. And if you want to get to God, you go through Him.

I meet a lot of people in Chilliwack, I think who don't understand that. They think you can't get to God. They're so standoffish with Him because they think He's unapproachable now, but this says the opposite. Through Christ, you can approach God. And in order to get this point across further, verse 21 takes another expression when it says

and since we have a great High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with full assurance of faith.

And to be honest, this is the most important verse in the passage. Some even say it might be the most important verse in the book of Hebrews. So, we want to pause for a moment to talk about it. Because if you look in your scripture starting in verse 22, the author gives you three exhortations that all begin with the word “let us,” so, if you want to follow along with me, verse 22, says,

Let us draw near with a sincere heart

Then in verse 23,

let us hold fast that confession of our hope

Then in verse 24,

let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

The reason he does that is because he's getting into the application portion of the letter. And as he does and he wants to give you a list of commands, that get more and more specific as they go. And the first one is the phrase “let us draw near,” which is one word in Greek *proserchomai*. It's a compound word from *pross* “to” and *erchomai* “to come” It means to come towards someone and approach them face to

face. That's what Jesus has allowed us to do now. He has made a way for us to approach God without shame, because He tore the veil down. Interestingly enough, the same word is used in Hebrews 4:16 to say,

therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.

And I love that verse because it tells you why you can approach God in this manner, because Jesus turns God's throne from a throne of judgment into a throne of grace. And He took it from a place of wrath to a place of mercy, because verse 22 here says He sprinkled our hearts clean, free from an evil conscience. That means, to wash our souls off, He took away the stain that was inside. And it says he washed our bodies with pure water, which to be honest, is a hard phrase to interpret because there's a lot of different ideas as to what this refers to. But the simplest one is that it means that He washed us off on the inside and the outside, metaphorically. He cleaned us off in the body and the soul. To the point that if you want to come to God, you can come to God. And if you want to worship Him, you can do it right away just as you are. Because like I said earlier, you don't have to change your race or your name or your identity first. You don't have to redo your culture or your background or your heritage and exchange it for Israel's, you can just come to God with all that intact, because Jesus has removed every obstacle. You don't have to take a bath first, or to get sprinkled first, or go out and make a sacrifice. You don't have to go through a veil or a priest or an old ceremonial way, you can go through the new and living way, because of Him.

If you notice here, the command, it's not "get ready to draw near," it's to "draw near." And the exhortation here is not to try real hard to come, He just wants you to come, because Jesus has made it possible for you. This is something that would have blown the Jews away, because in their way of doing things you couldn't just come to God, there's all kinds of steps you had to take first. And we've been talking about those a lot in this series in Hebrews. But the way it worked was that whenever you wanted to approach Him, you had to go to Jerusalem, walk up to the temple, buy an animal, let the priest inspect the animal, take it to the altar, and sit back while the priest killed it and drain the blood into a bowl, and then took the bowl to the altar and sprinkled it there, going back to the table in order to skin the animal, cut it up and then go back to the altar to place the body parts there to burn, which took forever. I mean, that whole process was very involved and even after that it wasn't over because if you wanted to worship God, you had to go to your own court now and stay there. So, if you were a priest, you went to the court of priests. If you were a man, you went to the court of men, if you were a woman, you went to the court of women, if you were a Gentile, you had to stand far off in the distance in the court of Gentiles, because that's how you approached God. It was just rule after rule after rule, commandment after commandment after commandment. Even if you go there today, and you want to go to the Wailing Wall, they give you a little hat to put on your head, and the men go to one side, women go to another. Now the author of Hebrews says - not anymore because all that has changed for you in Christ. It's not because of you, it's because of Him. It's not because you're smart enough or godly enough or any of those things. It's because He is. And this is why the church is so important because this is the only place where you hear that message. Amen. You don't hear it in the world. Do you?

Anybody hear that on the news this week on C span. You hear it in the body of Christ. Which is why you need to come to church on a regular basis. That's why this is so important to you. Because we all have a tendency to sin and say to ourselves, "I could never come to God after what I did." And we all have a propensity to fail and say, "I know he could never forgive me after the evil that I have given into." That's not true. God can forgive you because of Christ. And you need the church to remind you that or else you'll forget.

As I was studying for the sermon today, I was reminded the time, Martin Luther wanted to teach this lesson to his church in Germany. And he did it in a very unusual way. What he did was he moved the communion table out from behind the pulpit and put it in front of the stage, which shocked everybody. Because for centuries, they'd grown up thinking that you could not take the Lord's Supper unless you went through the priests first. Martin Luther said - not anymore. Because now you can come to God, as you are through the blood of Jesus Christ. He's right. That's what the church is here to show you. And that is that you don't need a priest anymore to get to God, you can do it through Jesus Christ.

And it brings us to another response you should have to your salvation, and that is that you should hold fast your confession. We're just going along in the text here. But the first one is that you should draw near to God. But secondly, you should hold fast your confession, which means you should hold unswervingly to the gospel you first believed, instead of being so wishy washy. And if you read on here it says this, start in verse 22, it says

let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water and let us hold fast that confession of our faith without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Now as you go on through this passage here, you're going to tell that the author is going to get briefer and briefer as he goes. Because once he gives the first exhortation, "let us draw near," he doesn't waste a lot of time, because he just starts laying out these other ones quickly. Because all these points don't require a lot of explanation. And then this next one, he says, "let us hold fast the confession of our hope," which is a Greek term that means to hold on to something with a firm grip or to clutch it tightly. And interestingly enough, this word is used often in literature to describe the act of a person who holds on to a ship amidst the storm. And he grips it so tightly that his knuckles turned white, so he doesn't fall overboard when the winds and the waves and troubles come crashing in. And that's the image here. Because apparently, these Jews were in trouble. They are in some kind of storm, where the winds and the waves are coming at them and so the author tells him that there's only one way to deal with that now, and that is to hold fast. Don't quit, don't give up, don't stop, don't lose your nerve, don't throw in the towel, don't get wishy washy or compromise your faith in Christ. You need to cling tightly to it, to the confession of our hope. And that phrase refers to the confession you made when you first believed or the proclamation these Jews gave to their friends and family, when they first became a Christian, and told them that they weren't going to make the sacrifices anymore. You imagine how much courage that

would have taken. They told them we're not going back to the Old Covenant. Reminds me of a time a Catholic friend told me that he got saved and his brother came up to him and said, "Richie, why don't you take the mass anymore, you're making your mama cry." That's what these guys are doing. They were going to follow Christ instead of that, which was a bold thing to do, it took a lot of courage, could have lost their lives for that. But the author tells them to do it anyway, because it says, "He who promised is faithful." And that means that even though that action greatly offended their relatives, it didn't offend God, it pleased Him. And they should do it knowing that He will reward them for it because He's trustworthy. God will take care of them. If you just want to write this verse down next to this in your notes, in Matthew 19:29, Jesus said that "everyone who has left houses, or brothers or sisters or father or mother, on account of My Name, will receive a hundred times as much in eternal life." Which means that no matter what you lose for Christ, you will always gain something more. And no matter what you give up for His Name, He will always pay you back tenfold. At another time, in Matthew 10:37, He said that "he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." But "whoever loses his life, for My sake will find it." And that tells you that the only way to save your life is to lose it for Christ, despite what happens around you, and that's the same idea here. Apparently, these Jews were getting pressure from someone to buckle. Someone was trying to get them to break, and the author says you can't do that, because God will be faithful to reward you if you just keep clinging to His name. And to be honest, I'd like to say more about that, but I can't because the verse is so short. There's only just a few words on this. But it reminds us that this is another area where the church can help you and that is in the area of holding fast. Because I don't have to tell you, this world is putting pressure on us to buckle nowadays. I don't have to remind you, it's making it harder to be a Christian. But the good news is that the Lord has given you the church to remind you that you can make it if you all stick together.

We just had a midterm election in the States. And I don't know about you, but every time that happens, I cringe. Because so many of the candidates just have an evil agenda. All they want to talk about is sin. They don't want to create jobs for the economy. They don't want to create more stability for the nation. They don't want to talk about some kind of good reform or something like that. They just want to talk about homosexuality. They want to make it easier to get an abortion or change your gender, or practice euthanasia, which can be so frustrating, right? I mean, the whole thing can be so discouraging at times because you don't know what to do. Which is why the church is there to remind you that in times like that you're not alone. You're not the only Christian on the planet who feels that way, there's other ones too. I can't tell you how many times I've been discouraged by something I saw on the news until I came to church and talk to you guys and it lifted my spirit. Does anybody know what that's like? Anybody say Amen to that? Or how many times I wanted to give up the fight and throw in the towel until I showed up in the parking lot and I saw one of our ushers setting up a sign and I realized that God hasn't given up on us. He's still at work here. Just look at what the people are doing. He's not putting a sign up there for himself, he's doing it for the Lord. In fact, if somebody asked me, "do you believe in God, I would say yes, I do, just come with me to church on Sunday and I'll show you what He's up to." That's what the body of Christ is here for. It tells me that I can hold fast because you're holding fast, I can

stand firm because you're doing the same. In fact, this command to hold fast is at the end of the rest of this material in verses 19 - 22, for a reason. And that's because there's a progression of thought here. And that is that if you lose your confidence in verse 19, because you don't hold fast, and you lose your assurance in verse 22, because you don't hold fast. And you forget the fact that Christ has made a new and living way for you and torn the veil and sprinkled your hearts, because you don't hold on to that either because you compromise, you're going to regret it one day. Eventually, there'll be nothing left for you because this world is not going to back down in its assault of Christians, it's not going to get any better. If anything, the Bible says it'll get worse, so, you're going to have to learn how to resist it, with the help of the church.

I read somewhere that the church has always sailed on stormy waters. If you look at its history, there's never been a time when the church has not been fighting something. A lot of people today are really upset about the sexual sins that are in the culture, and they should be. But it wasn't too long ago, at least where I grew up in where every everybody was racist. The church fought that battle too. It's fighting this battle as well. And God will preserve it, if we hold fast, which brings us to another response you should have to your salvation. And that is that you should consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

So, a third response you should have to your salvation here is to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. And I like this one because the phrase "hold fast," it's a little bit of a maybe a negative connotation to it, but this one's very positive, because it says you should think about others now. Jesus' work on the cross should lift your eyes off yourself and put it on your neighbor. And if you look in verse 23, it says,

Let us hold fast that confession of our hope without wavering for He who promises is faithful.  
And let us consider how to stimulate one another, to love and good deeds.

This is another short verse in the passage, I counted up only about 14 words in the English version of my Bible. But they're pretty astonishing because this is the first time that the author says anything specifically about the church and the book, or the issue of how the church should conduct itself. He said a little bit about that in chapter six, but not much. Because the like I said earlier, the vast majority of this book has been devoted to the issue of doctrine. But now in order to take the doctrine and apply it and bring it down to earth, he says this is what you need to do: consider how to stimulate one another, to love. In other words, since you've all been saved by Christ now and been placed into the New Covenant, you need to treat each other that way and love one another. And I really love this because to be honest, most Christians today seem to fall into two categories, the extroverts, and the introverts, those who like to love people and those who don't. They just want to sit by themselves and read a book all day and be left alone, right? While everybody else wants to talk for 16 hours over the weekend. And the author says that both of those approaches are wrong. If you love the Bible, you'll love others. And if you love others, you'll love the Bible, they go together. And when he says "let us consider how to stimulate"

the word stimulate, can be translated to spur or stir or motivate someone but it literally means to sharpen them by taking out your knife and giving them a poke. Or by taking out your blade and giving them a little jab not to hurt them but to help them, not to harm them but to build them up and point them in the right direction because maybe they were going over here and this was the wrong way and your jab is going to take them back in the opposite direction. This is like the person who calls someone the phone and says, "Hey, brother, I haven't seen you at the men's Bible study in a while. Would you mind if I picked you up and gave you a ride? I promise I won't come empty handed. I will bring doughnuts and your wife won't have to know. We'll tell her that we had bagels and celery for breakfast." Or it's like the older mom who contacts a younger mom in the church and says "Hey, I know you had a new baby and I can't imagine how hard that is. Can I bring you a meal so you can read your Bible? Can I do a load of laundry for you?" Well, that's the kind of poking this is describing here. Because the idea is that some of these people in the church had gotten lazy, and they had become apathetic. So, the author says it's up to the people in the pew to do something about it. He doesn't just say it's the preachers job, he doesn't say it's the elders or the deacons job, it's everybody's job. We're all in this together. And if you look back at the verse, just to show you the thoughtfulness of this, He even tells you to consider how you can do this, which means you need to give some serious thought to how to help each other.

So far, you've been giving serious thought to your doctrine. And so far, you've been giving a lot of consideration to your theology, rightfully so in the book of Hebrews. But now you need to turn your attention on to something else that's far more practical, because that's what the church does. We help our people in the areas of life and doctrine, theology, and practice. It's not just one or the other. It says here, we got to do this. Consider how to stimulate one another to love that means to show compassion and kindness and grace to one another and to good deeds, that means living out the works of the faith. And if you're wondering what this looks like, I read somewhere this week, there's several things you can do in order to apply this. For example, you can pray for people. One way you can poke them and prod them and stimulate them to love and good deeds is to bring their name before the throne and ask God to help them. You can also clear up your schedule and make yourself available to do so that one of the greatest hindrances we have to ministry is the fact that we're also busy and distracted all the time. So, one way to stop that is to cut out a few things in the agenda. And another way is simply just to go to church. And I know that sounds simple, but it goes without saying you can't help people in the church if you're not in the church. So, one way to help love each other is to show up and be ready to do it. But however, you do it, the point here is to make this a priority.

One pastor said that this way, so we are the Bibles that people are reading, we are the truths that people are needing, and we are the sermons that people are heeding, and we need to act like it. We have to stop being so selfish and think about others. I don't know if you've heard the name Francis Fenelon before, but he was a preacher from the 1600s, who was so godly that it was said that a lost pagan stayed with him one night in a hotel but he was seen the next morning running out of the room and saying "if I spend one more night with that man, he will make me a Christian." When I first heard that story, I remember thinking wouldn't be great if people said that about us. Wouldn't it be great if you made someone run

out of the room because they were afraid they would be converted just by being with you. That's what this passage is calling us to do.

And it brings us to one more response we should have to our salvation. I'll just review these other ones: The first one is that you should draw nearer to God, and secondly, you should hold fast to your confession. Thirdly, you should consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, which is convicting, because who is adequate for this, we all fall short of this one somewhere. And it brings us to one more response to your salvation in this passage, and that is that you should not forsake the assembling together. A fourth response you should have to your salvation and Hebrews 10 is to not forsake the assembling together, which means you should not forsake going to church. Because if all these other things are commanded, then this one is as well because it's just the overflow of everything else we're talking about. And if you read on in verse 24, it says and

let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Not forsaking your own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing nearer.

As the author goes on in the text, this last statement, "not forsaking the assembling" it's worded differently from the other ones, because it doesn't begin with the phrase "let us" but that doesn't mean it should be treated differently. Because when it says and "let us consider how to stimulate one another, not forsaking the assembling" the word "forsaking" it's what's known as a participle or verbal adjective, it modifies the word "let us consider," because this is one of the ways we can do this, you could consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds by not forsaking the assembly. The two things coincide, they go hand in hand, because the church is the venue by which you love one another. And the term not forsaking it can be rendered a lot of ways, can be translated, do not abandon the assembly, do not leave the assembly, do not give up the assembly, do not desert the assembly, do not renounce the assembly, do not discard, vacate, ditch or dump or turn your back on the body of Christ, because that's where ministry happens. It happens other places as well. You can minister to the saints anywhere you go, but this is where the saints come every week. And so this is why it's so important.

The term assembly here, it's a word from which we get the word synagogue, which was very familiar to the Jewish audience. because once the temple was destroyed and 587 BC, and the Jews were taken off into exile, one thing they did in all the lands they went to, was to create their own place of worship called the Synagogue, or "The Gathering Place" in Hebrew. And the way it worked is that if you had 10 Jewish men in a town, in order to preserve their heritage, they would come together every Sabbath, to read the Torah, and sing and pray and listen to the words of the Rabbi. And the author uses that here to relate it to the church and remind the people that you don't have to go back to that now, this is your new Synagogue, this is your new Gathering Place, and you need to treat it that way. Instead of forsaking it, as is the habit of some. He says that here because apparently some people in the church were in danger of doing that. They had started to forsake the church, either through their apathy or indifference or some

other reason. Which was a terrible mistake to make because the passage says the church provides encouragement for you, not forsaking our own assembling together, but encouraging one another. That's the job of the church - it's in the encouragement business, not the discouragement business. It is there to pick people up, not tear them down. Someone told me the other day, they said, "I'm really blown away with your church, because you guys are so positive all the time." Well, this is why - that's our goal as a ministry. The text also says, "and all the more as you see the day drawing near." And that means the church is there to encourage you in light of judgment day. It is there to pick you up and provide help in light of the fact that the end is coming soon. One day, you're going to die, you're not going to live forever. So, you have to get ready for it. But the point here in the past is that the church can do that if you don't show up for church. And the body of Christ can't help you in this department if you don't come to the body of Christ, you need to do that; otherwise, all these wonderful things that can be yours, will be lost on you.

And just to make a clarification on what this says here to shepherd you a little bit. When it tells us not to forsake the assembly, I want to point out, this is not referring to a person who stays away from church because they're sick or because they're ill or not feeling well. This is referring to someone who stays away from church because they don't care. They don't come because they don't want to come. They're not here because they don't have a mind to, they would rather just stay at home and sleep. And I'll tell you this, because we have people in our congregation right now who are sick, and they're not physically able to come to church. But every time I talk to them, they tell me that they want to, they remind me every moment I see them that they can't wait to get better so they can come back here again. They're not hoping they can get better so they can go fishing. They don't tell me they want to get well so they can go play golf. They want to come to church. We have other people as well who from time to time have to be called away on business or some kind of family emergency and they can't come to church for that reason, too. But they tell us the moment they're back in town, they're going to be sitting right here in the pew with us. That's not what this is referring to. See, that's okay, because that's not a habit for them. And that's all right, because they don't do it all the time. This is describing someone who does. This is what we would call this CEO Christian are the "Christmas and Easter only Christian." They only show up two times a year for one holiday and then the next and other than that you never see them. They're like a ghost. Or this is what we would call the "I don't know" Christian, because every time you ask him, are you going to come to church? They say, "I don't know."

Will you be at the service this weekend? I don't know. Can I count on you to be a greeter? I don't know. They never commit, never agree, never promised to do anything. This passage is warning you not to be like that. Don't judge those who are like that, you don't be like that. It's very dangerous.

Charles Spurgeon once said that there's a great misunderstanding among Christians today. And that is that we can be solitary pilgrims on the road to heaven, or lone sheep out on the pasture. But that's not true, because lone sheep get eaten by wolves and solitary pilgrims get attacked, with no one there to defend them. And the Lord did not intend his people to be that way. He wants us to be part of the great multitude that He has provided to protect us in the church. He's right. You can't make it on your own as

a sheep. You can't make it on your own as a pilgrim you are not intended to. God wants you to stay with the flock because that's where your protection is. I don't know if you've seen those, one of those videos of a lion hunting an elephant in Africa. But if you have, you'll know that a lion won't do that if an elephant stays in the herd, because there's strength in numbers. So, what the lion does is they try to get the elephant away from the herd by scratching his legs and pawing on its back and just being a nuisance until the elephant wanders off. And the moment they do that they kill it. Friends, it's the same way with you in the Christian life. That's what the devil wants you to do. He wants you to be alone so he can kill you and you can't let him do that.

And just to show you how relevant this is for our world, right now, Lifeway Christian research, recently did a survey in which they discovered that after the COVID 19 virus, about one out of every four Christians who stopped going to church never came back. They stayed home, watched online. And I understand there's reasons for that and some of them may be legitimate. I mean, they may be sick and they may have health concerns. But I would venture to say that a lot of them stayed home, just because they were lazy. And as a result, it had a devastating impact on their spiritual lives because they missed out on so many things that you could only get in the church; for example, they missed out on the blessing of corporate prayer, because they had no one to pray for them. They had no one to bring their request before the throne. And they miss out on the blessing of the Lord supper because they had no one to give it to them. There were no elders and deacons present to distribute the elements and guide them in how to take it in a God honoring way. They missed out on the blessing of baptism because there was no one there to immerse them if they wanted to do that. They miss out on the blessing of church discipline because there was no one there to hold them accountable. They missed out on the blessing of music because they couldn't lift their voice with the saints, because they weren't with the saints. And we could go on and on and on. And what happened as a result, well, many of them just stopped doing all those things. They stopped singing because no one encouraged them to sing. They stopped praying because no one encouraged them to pray. stopped taking the Lord's Supper because no one encouraged them in that. And as a result, they just dried up and died.

The Lord wants something better for you friends. You need the church. Without it everything falls apart from us. In fact, it might be worth mentioning that some of Jesus' last words to His disciples were on the subject of the church. Because right before He died, the Lord talked about the importance of it. When He said this in John 15, I just want to read this to you. He said

This is My Commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. And you are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves for the slave does not know what his master is doing. But I call you friends. And this I command you that you love one another. If the world hates you remember that a hated me first. And remember the words I said to you that a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

But the way you will get through it is if you stick together. There's a common theme in that passage. Persecution is coming, love one another. The world is going to hate you, love one another. It's the only way you'll get through it. Jesus didn't just die for you are me, He did it for the whole world. And we see that in the church.

Next week, we're going to look at the rest of Hebrews 10 and finish off the chapter. And after that, we're going to get into the Hall of Faith, which I'm really looking forward to because so many of you keep asking me, when are we going to talk about the Hall of Faith? Pastor Jeremy, how long before we get to Hebrews 11? Well, it's coming, just be patient. I have one more sermon, and then we'll get there. But for now, let's close in a word of prayer and thank the Lord for his gift of the church.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for what you've provided for us in the body of Christ. Not only have you given us Salvation in Christ and all these wonderful things, like a new and living way, and a torn veil, or your Son who, who gives us access to you. You sprinkled our hearts, you've washed us off but you've also given us a whole family of people to enjoy that with. Lord, I pray for those who were here this morning, I know many of them, love the church with all their hearts and I thank you for that I pray their love would just grow as the days go on. I pray that their involvement in this body of Christ would continue and you'll be glorified in it. But for some if they're being convicted this morning of the fact that their commitment to the body of Christ has been limited. Lord, I pray this would not discourage them, but encourage them to change. Let them know that the doors the church are open for them to plug into and minister to one another in love and good deeds. Father, I also pray for those who are lost this morning, who don't know Christ, they would get a glimpse this morning of what they're missing in His blood. They're missing a family of God. They're missing a Kingdom. They're missing a vine with many branches. They're missing a house with many rooms. They're missing a community. They're going through life alone, and there's no reason to do that. So, would you draw them to the Savior and bring them into the church this morning? Father, please take these words and drive them home to our lives, that Christ would be glorified as we apply them and pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.