

United by Coming Together

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[0:00] And if you would open up to Hebrews chapter 10 in your Bibles, it's on 1194 of your pew Bibles. I'm going to read for us Hebrews 10, 19 through 25.

I'm actually going to be reaching back into verse 19 for the sermon this morning. So you can see on your bulletin, I'm going to be preaching 10, 19 through 25. Hear God's word.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another in all the more as you see the day drawing near.

May God bless the hearing of his word. Hey, let me ask you a question. How does something become a recurring commitment on your weekly schedule?

[1:41] Whether that's your personal schedule or whether that is your family schedule, how does something get on your family schedule on a weekly basis?

Maybe it's you are committed to eating together as a family every week. Why is that so important to you? Maybe you and your significant other are committed to a weekly date night.

Why is that so important to you? Maybe you're exercising weekly. Why does that matter so much to you? Maybe this is about children's activities, sports, theater, music.

You're saying no to some things to say yes to those things. Why is that so important? Maybe like me, you block off three to four hours every weekend to watch a football game.

Why is that so important? You know, when we're evaluating some of these things that we commit our time to on a weekly basis, there's a couple questions you can ask. Like, okay, what is the long-term good that comes out of this weekly commitment?

[2:54] What is it producing? Another question you can do to ask about weekly commitments is this. When Jesus comes back, what will he think about that commitment?

When it comes to our Sunday-by-Sunday gathering as a church, we all have a sense that it's important.

Have you ever asked the question, why? Why is this so important? Should a Christian do all that they can to gather weekly with their local church?

When I bring these topics up with brothers and sisters, members of our church who have been inconsistent, chronically inconsistent, attending on a Sunday morning, when I bring it up, it's usually met with some kind of defensiveness or bristling.

Because they think this is a matter of attendance. Like they're not following through with their commitment. That's not why I'm bringing it up.

[4:06] I'm bringing it up because God's word brings it up. You see, what I'm concerned about, what God's concerned about, is your long-term spiritual health and well-being.

This is not a matter of attendance. This is a matter of God's grace. In order for us to persevere to the end, we need weekly infusions of God's grace.

We need to be encouraged by God's grace together to persevere. At our weekly grace gathering, God encourages us to endure to the end.

We need to meet weekly for the grace so that we can hold fast to the end. That's the point of Hebrews 10, 19-25.

And this is an argument that the author of Hebrews is making. And it's a three-step argument. Step one, verses 19-21, what God has done, He has given us unlimited access and an unlimited abundance of grace.

[5:26] It's amazing what He's done. Step two, how we together respond to that. Three exhortations. And then step three, how we together lay hold of that by meeting together.

We gather weekly for the grace to persevere all the way to the end. So let's look at this first step in this argument. Now, I realize I'm jumping right into like the last third of the book of Hebrews.

And I just want to let you know, this is a little bit of preview because I'm going to start preaching through the book of Hebrews as a whole come February. The book of Hebrews was written to encourage Christians who were drifting, who would be tempting to walk away.

And this book of Hebrews is one long 13-chapter encouragement to hold fast, to press on and persevere and endure.

And to that end, the book of Hebrews over and over again fixes our eyes on Jesus. What He has done.

[6:49] And in this passage, the author of Hebrews points us to the strategy of our local gathering unto that end. In verses 19-21, we have this first step in the argument.

And what the author of Hebrew does is he points us to two motivations. And they're marked by the word since. Verse 19, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.

Verse 21, And since we have a great high priest, great priest over the house of God. Here's what He's doing. He's saying, Since this is true and since this is true, then we must do this and let us do this and let us do this.

It's an argument. Trying to persuade us of the importance of something. So let's just look at this first sense real quick. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened to us through the curtain, that is through His flesh.

This first grace motivation is access. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, through His blood and the living way, His resurrection, the new is a new covenant.

[8:13] Through these things that Jesus has done, He has given us unlimited access to the holy place of God. The heavenly holy place.

What we'll see in Hebrews 4 is the throne room of God. Back in the old covenant, the Holy of Holies was this place in the temple in Jerusalem that only one man could enter once a year on Yom Kippur.

The high priest. To make sacrifice for the people. And on the 364 days outside of Yom Kippur, there was like a sign on the curtain separating us, separating them from the Holy of Holies.

It said, no admittance, no access. What we're being talked about here is a heavenly holy place.

A heavenly throne room. And what Jesus has done through the good news of His death and resurrection is His life, the curtain, has been opened to us so that we can enter in to the holy place, God's very presence.

[9:34] We have unlimited access to the very presence of God. There was a time when we couldn't because we were in our sins.

But now there's a time we can because we're in Christ now. It's through Christ's death and resurrection that we have unlimited access to the Holy of Holies, the very throne room of God's grace.

And since we have been given this unlimited access to the throne of grace, we do something now. But that's just the first sense.

There's a second sense. And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, the book of Hebrews makes this phenomenal claim that Jesus is the great high priest who has superseded and made obsolete the Jewish priesthood.

because he's made a better sacrifice once and for all himself. It's a once for all payment that has forgiven us forever.

[10:55] He's a high priest with a better ministry. He is constantly making intercession for us because he's alive. He's a better person.

All of the priests of the Old Testament are dead. Their bodies have wasted away. Not our high priest. His is an indestructible life.

He lives to make intercession for us. And this great high priest, do you know what he's saying to us? Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you grace.

You see, what this great high priest is pointing us to is not just we have unlimited access to him, we have an unlimited abundance to the grace that he gives.

Unlimited abundance. It's not like we only get three servings every day. We can go to him whenever we want for the grace. Listen to this. This is Hebrews chapter 4, 14 through 16.

[12:07] Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What is grace? Many of you who have been raised in the church have an answer. It's God's unmerited favor. It's a posture of God towards us where a holy God is his posture towards us is not dependent on our posture towards him.

It's unconditional love for us. And that is one aspect of grace because when I read Hebrews 4.16, I read about a throne of grace that provides help in time of need.

Do you know what that is? Power. Unconditional love, unlimited power. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 has been praying that God would remove this throne, this thorn of his flesh and Jesus speaks to him.

[13:29] My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness. He equates grace and power. So here's how I want you to think about God's grace and what we have access to in unlimited fashion and what is available to us in unlimited abundance.

grace. It's God's unconditional love driving his unlimited power towards us. It's all about grace. And you know what?

You need that grace to persevere to the end. You can't do it on your own. You can't flesh it out. You can't muscle it out. And this is what God has done.

Unlimited access, unlimited availability to his grace at his throne. This is what God has done. And this is where this little argument starts.

Since God has made a way to his unlimited grace. Step two. How do we respond? How do you respond to that kind of unlimited access and unlimited availability of grace?

[14:40] Well, there's three exhortations in verses 22 through 24. Let's just take them off one at a time. God's grace is available to us, brothers and sisters. So look at verse 22.

Since this, since that, let us draw near. Let us draw near. Draw near to what? He doesn't say. He's already said to the throne of grace. Let us draw near into God's presence.

grace. And we're to do that with confidence. With a true heart and full assurance of faith. Sprinkled clean. Bodies washed.

That's talking about the cleansing work of God through Christ. His death and His resurrection.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So now, because you're in Christ, you can enter the very presence of God without any fear whatsoever.

Come to me. Come to me for grace. Anytime you want, you've got full access. Draw near to me.

Draw near to my throne.

[15:49] Did you notice the word us? Let us draw near.

How does that happen? Where and when does that take place? Exhortation 2 is in verse 23. Since God has made available His grace, we're to draw near to Him together.

And exhortation 2, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. Hold fast the confession of our hope.

A confession is this verbal acknowledgement, verbal announcement of what you believe to be true. It's out of your heart.

The mouth speaks. You're saying, we're saying together, this is what I believe about Jesus. Hope is a theme throughout the book of Hebrews and our hope is the one who's gone before us.

[16:58] Jesus. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. Wavering in terms of wavering of your faith, wavering of your pursuit of our Lord.

Here's what causes us to waver. Distraction. Spiritual dullness. Doubting. These are the things that get in the way.

What causes us to waver and what was causing this first group of Christians to waver is what the world says. What the world prioritizes.

We can't prioritize what the world prioritizes because they don't confess Jesus as their king. We confess Jesus and hold fast to the fact that he's the controlling center of our lives.

All of us together. You know what the opposite of holding fast is? There are words for it throughout the book of Hebrews.

[18:14] In Hebrews 2.1 it's drifting away. Hebrews 2.3 it's neglecting this great salvation. In verse 5.11 it's pointing to a dullness of hearing.

In 10.39 it's a shrinking back. And in verses 3 chapter 3 verse 12 and 6 and 6 it's actually apostasy.

It's a falling away. these are the things that this book is written to help us fight against to not get pulled into.

And so when we talk about holding fast it's the very opposite of drifting away. It's about persevering. It's striving to enter his rest. It's about enduring just as the great hall of fame all of these brothers and sisters they persevere to the end just as Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith has gone before us enduring the cross.

We're called to hold fast together. To press on to endure hold fast this confession and so together when we come together let us hold fast the confession of our hope.

[19:45] Let us hold fast we do this together. We're saying things like when we sing we're singing to Jesus we're singing great things about our God we're confessing what's true together.

We do this together. The third exhortation is in verse 24 it says and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Technically the exhortation is to think carefully. It's on that verb consider but what we're being told to consider is how to stir one another up to love and good works to love one another to do good deeds and do you know why we are to do that?

Because we drift from that. We gravitate to people who are like us who are familiar with and what we're being told here is to stir up one another to give careful thought of how to stir one another up to love one another to do good to one another.

That little verb that little word stir up in the ESV it's a little stronger than that.

[21:07] It's stir up is good but it's it's missing some force. At the end of Acts 15 the same word is used to describe the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas.

It's a strong word. In fact the NIV the New International Version translated this way consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Maybe you've read a version that talks about provoking one another to love and good deeds. This kind of word it carries the sense of causing discomfort of confrontation even of being able to come to one another and say come on let's go.

You know cowboys have spurs on their boots. You know what they're for? Spur the horse inflict some discomfort so that beast moves.

and so the idea here of stirring one another up is we're being in love willing to say things to one another to help each other persevere to love and to good deeds.

[22:34] peace. You see these three exhortations did you notice let us consider how to stir up one another?

Let us hold fast? Let us draw near? These exhortations are means by which we encourage one another in light of God's grace.

In light of what he's done. Because of his grace we draw near together we hold fast together we spur each other on. Where do you think this happens?

Week by week. Brings us to the last step in the argument. Verse 25 we're shown where this happens.

Not neglecting to meet together as in the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. The primary way we draw near to God together, the primary way we hold fast the good confession of Jesus together, the primary way in which we spur one another on to love and good deeds is by meeting together in person Sunday after Sunday.

[24:05] We meet together because we are in desperate need of God's grace to persevere to the end together. Quick technicality, grammatical technicality.

You can check out, I'll check you back in in a minute. Technically, verse 25 is a subordinate clause of verse 24. And one can think that verse 25 is therefore kind of operationalizing verse 24, but check back in.

Follow the flow of the argument. In verse 21, since we have a great high priest over the house of God, the house of God, flip back in Hebrews, to Hebrews chapter 3, verse 6.

But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house.

If indeed we hold fast our confidence in our boasting, in our hope. Here's the point I'm trying to make, help you see here. The writer of Hebrews is talking about the church, talking about us, talking about the people of God in a particular place, in a particular time.

[25:37] He's saying over the house of God, the church, and then verse 22, the us is the house of God. Verse 23, the house, the us is the house of God, the people of God.

24 is the people of God. And so when we get to 25, it is the people of God meeting together, or not. All of these exhortations happen, they come to fruition when we meet together in person Sunday by Sunday.

I'm not sure if you know this, but Zach and I have the privilege of every week on our Wednesday staff meeting, and we usually have a blast doing it. We create an order of our service.

It's what guides us when we gather together as God's people, as the house of God. It's what some people call a liturgy. And what it is is basically a process by which we draw near to God, hold fast our confession, and spur one another on.

That's what we do. That's one of my most favorite moments of the week. And so when we kind of put things in place, we're looking to our Bibles to give us kind of like, what do we need to have together when we gather?

[27:12] So there's always a call to worship. It's God calling us to worship. And then we always have a benediction, God kind of wrapping us up. And then the songs that we sing and that we choose, they are designed to unite us in our confession.

When we pray, like Zach prayed a prayer of confession this morning, it's very intentional. Do you know why? We're drawing near to God. It's to serve us, to serve our gathering.

It's to help us lay hold of God's grace together. And of course, the preaching of the word, we preach Christ and we preach so that you would be spurred on to love and good deeds.

That's what God's word gets done. You can think about it as Zach and me being curators. Like an art curator of an art museum who designs a show from beginning to end in which you, when you come out, you're like, that was great.

What Zach and I do is to curate a gathering in order to draw near to God, hold fast the confession of Jesus and spur one another on.

[28:32] But it's not all formalities. You know one of my favorite things? Before and after service? Is this informal spurring one another on.

It's watching people pray together, talk together. It happens when we come together. It is so good. So when we come together, there is this outpouring of God's grace, both formal and informal, in

order to encourage us to persevere to the end.

There is a rebuke in this passage. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some. A rebuke is when someone says, that's not right.

You shouldn't be doing that. The original audience, if you're wondering, if you're in your pew right now thinking, okay, I'm not sure if he's talking about the Sunday gathering of God's people.

Maybe he's just talking about meeting together with someone over coffee. My life group getting together. I've got an accountability group. I've got a Bible study on Monday night. Let me just help you understand something. When the original audience read this letter, there's no doubt how they would have interpreted that.

[29:59] The meeting together was the meeting together of their church for worship and exhortation with God's word. And some people had gotten into a bad habit of not gathering together.

And here's how that pattern shows up. Hey, where is so and so? We haven't seen so and so for a couple weeks. That's how you know that there's a bad habit going on.

Hey, where is so and so? Why aren't they here? Why aren't they benefiting from God's grace?

When someone gets in the bad habit of not coming to church, gathering with God's people, they are denying themselves a primary means of grace. and they're opening themselves to potential drift, to potential dullness, and apostasy.

Did you see what follows this in chapter 10? a warning against apostasy. There's a rebuke, and it's a loving rebuke, because those who neglect the gathering of the church, they're missing out on God's grace.

[31:28] But there's also a correction. But encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near, the day drawing near is the second advent of Jesus.

When he comes back to judge, make all things right, and we're all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ someday, and we're one day closer. So we encourage one another.

By drawing near, by holding fast, by spurring one another on, that's how we encourage one another, and it's not all the less. It's all the more.

He's talking about gathering. That's the immediate context. Don't neglect meeting together. Meet together all the more as you see the day approaching.

You need God's grace to persevere together. How do you draw near? How do we hold fast? How do we spur each other on?

[32:31] How do we hold each other together? How do we hold each other by meeting together in person week by week? It's not the only way. It's a primary way.

So what this means for us? So what? What difference does this make?

I've been praying for you that God's word would have an effect that would make you reconsider your schedule, your priorities.

If this is true, then it's going to be reflected in your weekly schedule because we all need God's grace together.

So why is the Sunday morning gathering of our church so important? So that you can persevere to the end.

[33:33] It's not about attendance for attendance sake. It's about God's grace that we experience when we gather together in person. Are you able to articulate that argument to yourself and others?

Can you make a case for that? Are you convinced of that? Do you see our gathering as essential to persevering to the end?

These are weekly infusions of grace to ward off unbelief, drift, and dullness, and to strengthen us to hold fast to the end.

Do you buy it? Is that what the author of Hebrews is saying? Is that what God's saying? Is that what he's calling on you? Second, in light of that, does something need to change?

Your work schedule. Is it within your power to shift around your schedule so that you can be here on a Sunday morning? youth sports, I hope what this is doing is compelling you to have a family conversation.

[34:52] As a family, mom, dad, engage your children over Hebrews 10 and say, okay, we see this in our Bibles. We need to be gathering together as a church in order to persevere to the end.

What do you think, gang? What do you think this looks like? What does this mean for what we say no to and what we say yes to? What effect will this have over the course of our lives?

It doesn't stop when your kids are just young. Our daughter marries in cheer. This past fall, we learned that there was a cheer practice called on a Sunday morning around 10 a.m.

We had to prepare our daughter for that. She's so committed. She is a tremendous team member. And we had to let her know, no, sweetheart, this is a conflict of values.

And what we value more than cheer is our gathering as a church. And so we got her to a point where she was okay with it. And then I called the coach.

[36:04] I have deep respect for the coach. Coach is a believer. I said, hey, we're not going to be coming. Mary's not going to be there. We have a commitment to gathering as a church that we're seeking to train our daughter in week after week.

And it's more important than a cheer practice. And you know what I said? Coach, is this what you want to do? Do you want to open the door to this?

The coach responded so well. They canceled it. You know what? Maybe, parents, if you're in youth sports, maybe the thing that you need to do is get on sports league boards and be able to say this.

Hey, you know what? We'll come to anything except Sunday morning. Let's schedule our league around that. Does something need to change?

Livestream. If you're watching on Livestream right now, or if you've watched on Livestream, Livestream is a good thing. It helps people who have legitimate reasons not to be able to make it on a Sunday morning.

[37:21] But what we have found is that the Livestream becomes a crutch. It makes it easy for people not to come. But the argument that we're making, I'm making here this morning, is it's actually being here in person, that there's this fullness of God's grace.

So Livestream is at best a lesser grace of God. And if you're watching on Livestream and thinking that you're part of our gathering, you are in one respect, but you're just kind of like watching in. It's when we gather as people together, God is meeting us in a unique way. Let's say what's best and go after that.

And what's best is gathering together in person, week by week. Another thing that needs to change, are you avoiding someone? Are you not coming to our gathering because you're avoiding someone or avoiding something?

Consider how to stir up one another in love and good deeds. Do you need to get right with someone? That's the way to deal with that. Or do you only come on a Sunday when it's your Sunday to serve?

[38:44] Will you come on Sundays you're not serving? Because you need God's grace to persevere to the end. Does something need to change?

I want to make one little point right now and then I'm going to move on to one more thing. Do you know what is one of the most loving things you can do, brother and sister in Christ, week by week? Show up. Be present. Your being here is an encouragement. It is good.

It's good for the saints when we gather together to see one another and hear our voices as we confess our Lord together. It's good. Let's add. Let's make it a priority. It's good.

It's good. We love one another by showing up. One last question. How are you preparing yourself to come on a Sunday morning?

[39:52] What's your process? How are you getting ready? I would encourage you to pray. Oh God, would you pour out your grace upon our church gathering this morning that we would draw near to you, that we'd hold fast to Jesus together and that we would spur one another on to love and good deeds.

And then you can pray this. God, would you encourage me? And then you can pray this. God, would you make me an encouragement to someone else in the room? Would you give me eyes to see others?

Would you help me to see someone who needs some kind of encouragement, some kind of prayer?
And so now you come as a participant, not as someone who's just watching.

Should a Christian do all they can do to gather in person Sunday after Sunday with their local church? On the authority of God's word, absolutely.

Yes. Yes. We need God's grace to persevere to the end and Sunday, our Sunday meeting is God's primary means of God's grace to run the race marked out for us.

[41:06] The more we gather, the more we'll be encouraged by God's grace and the more likely to hold fast. The less we gather, the less we'll be encouraged by God's grace and the more likely we open ourselves up to drift.

But this weekly grace gathering encourages us to hold fast to the end together following Jesus Sunday after Sunday.

Let's pray together. God in heaven, we want to want to be here together.

Those of us who may not want it, God, would you change our want? Would you incline our hearts? Would you make us courageous with our calendars?

Would you help us to say no to good things, to say yes to best things, your things, your good design, your grace? Father, would you unite us together in our gathering week by week?

[42:16] Amen.