

Let us draw near to God

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[0 : 00] So please turn to Hebrews 10, verse 19. 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 priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with 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 stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Well, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Dave. If I haven't met you before, I'm one of the pastors here. Well, what can draw you away from God?

Let me start by asking, do you feel close to God? Even framing the question like that, do you feel close to God, I think makes us all look inside ourselves and see whether we feel it or not.

And what are we looking for? I wonder if you're like me, and you assume that feeling close to God must be something like just that excitement of falling in love.

[1 : 51] That kind of feeling, is it that white hot passion for God? Is that what we should be looking for? If we assume that, and then if you're like me, you know that you don't desire to know God as much as you should desire it.

You don't desire to live for God as much as you should desire to live. Then we can convince ourselves, I mustn't be close to God.

I don't feel that way. I think another barrier to drawing close to God is a troubled conscience.

As we heard last week, if God is so pure, so holy, the author of Hebrews describes God as a consuming fire, no wonder we don't want to get too close.

If he is that holy, how can I pray to him if I know I've committed the same sin today as I did yesterday? When I'm so angry, so lustful, so impatient, so self-centered, how can I with integrity then consider myself to be worthy to come near to God?

[3 : 17] When we have a good week, we haven't committed that particular sin and we read our Bible, we come to church, we might feel confident in approaching God, but then when we have a bad week, we do commit that sin, we neglect meeting with God's people, then we can just feel really discouraged, unworthy to be in God's presence.

Our troubled conscience can drive us away from God. So one last thing I'll mention that can draw us away from God is when we face suffering and hardship, when it's so intensely painful, we can either conclude, God is punishing me for my sin or God's not as good as he claims to be.

So there's just a few things that can keep us from drawing near to God.

But this afternoon, let's hear from Hebrews chapter 10, how we can draw near to God no matter what our personal experience is.

We can draw near to him. So have a look with me, Hebrews 10, starting at verse 19. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places, God's immediate presence, his heavenly presence, we have confidence to enter, then let us draw near.

[4 : 57] Now, our immediate gut reaction might be, well, I don't feel confident. I don't have that confidence you're talking about. But the author isn't talking about what's going on inside you.

He's talking about something outside of us, something objective. Notice that the whole section hinges on that first word, therefore.

The author says, remember what I've just said in chapters 7 to 10. And I know we've only looked at the first part of chapter 10. But remember what I've said in chapters 7 to 10 about Christ being our

great high priest, who by his once for all sacrifice for sin has abolished the old religious way of coming to God and has brought a new way, an open way to come to God.

Remember that. Therefore, we have confidence to draw near. We're not told to become confident. We're told we have it. The word confidence can mean something like authorization. Since you are authorized to enter the holy places, then let us draw near.

[6 : 21] So that begs the question, what is the basis of our authorization? And it's clear that it's not our moral or religious efforts.

It's not our subjective sense of feeling close to God. Nothing you do or feel today for the rest of the day can make you more or any less authorized.

The good news in God's word to us this afternoon is it's not about us and what we have or haven't done. So sticking with the image of the Jewish temple that we looked at last week, the author reminds us of the three critical aspects of what Christ has already accomplished on our behalf. How can we draw near to God? It's by his blood, through the curtain, his body and belonging to the forever priest.

The blood, the curtain, the priest. So let's have a quick look at each of those things. So by his blood, as we saw last week, where a person sins against God, for God to be just, there must be punishment.

[7 : 48] But in God's mercy, he provides a substitute. He transfers my sin away from me and puts it on the head of another.

It's no longer on me. And the priest takes the blood behind the curtain into God's presence and sprinkles it to atone for sin.

So in John's gospel, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, the Roman soldier pierces Jesus' side and as the spear comes out, John notices something.

And he tells us that he saw a sudden flow of blood, which is to be expected, blood and water. Blood and water came out of Jesus when he died.

Now, more than just proving that he was actually dead, John has, he's a Jew, he understands the theological significance of that. Instead of the priest washing in the basin with water and the blood of animals to approach God, true cleansing has now come through the death of Jesus, his blood.

[9 : 10] And this cleansing isn't just external, it's internal cleansing. Have a look at verse 21. It is our hearts that are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

It is by his blood, verse 19, that is the means, by his blood, that we are clean and that we have confidence to enter God's presence.

We are clean. This doesn't mean that we are instantly perfect or sinless, but it does mean the basis of our guilt and shame has actually been dealt with.

It's taken away. We may not feel that way, but it has happened. It is an objective reality that happened 2,000 years ago.

It is done. The blood has been shed. So there is one means by which you and I can enter God's presence and that is by Jesus' atoning blood, his cleansing blood.

[10 : 27] And the picture of the temple continues with the author saying that the curtain into the most holy place, so in the temple, in God's presence, pictured in the temple, you've got the holy place and then the most holy place, there was one way to enter.

That's the curtain. But the curtain isn't a literal curtain anymore. That was just a picture of the real thing. The real thing is Jesus' flesh, his body.

which he gave up when he died on the cross. Now don't try and picture this literally. It's obviously a metaphor. The curtain was the only way to come in to God's presence.

The only way. The old way of approaching God under the old covenant law with the animal sacrifices and the human priests, that is done.

That was just a picture. The new way. The real entrance into God's heavenly presence is now here through Jesus' death.

[11 : 37] There is one way. Buddhist meditation, Muslim submission and prayer, Catholic tradition and ritual, being considered by others as a good person.

You cannot have peace with God through these means. There is one way. Through the curtain, which is his body given for us on the cross. There is one way.

All people are invited all over the world, but there is one way in to God's presence. So it's by his blood shed for us through the curtain, his body, and the final basis of our authorization to enter

God's presence is belonging to our forever priest.

We're not represented by a sinful priest, one whose service must end when they die. We are represented by the only obedient son, the only person who has the right to enter the father's presence whenever he wants.

That is who represents us. And he has conquered death and lives forever seated at God's right hand. And because he lives forever, it means his priesthood is forever.

[13:09] His sacrifice is constantly applied. It will never fail. Hebrews 7.25 tells us the significance of Jesus being our forever priest.

The verse says this, Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Christ is our forever priest sitting at God's right hand. You can't get any closer to God. He's applying the promise of the new covenant always.

That promise in verse 18 is always applied to you and me. I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

If you look at your own worthiness to enter God's presence, then you should be afraid. But if you look at the worthiness of what Christ has done on your behalf, then you have every right to enter.

[14:30] We are called to have peace with God through Christ's finished priestly work on our behalf. So what's our role? How do we enter by what Christ has done for us?

I think at this point it's helpful to consider what we're not meant to do. And to do that, let's consider the Catholic idea of mass.

I'm going to read a section of a book by a man who grew up Catholic. So I didn't grow up Catholic, but this man named Ray Gilear, he's a pastor in Sydney, evangelical pastor now, but he grew up Catholic and he explains the significance of mass and why it doesn't add up to what we're learning about here in Hebrews.

So the book is called Nothing in My Hand I Bring to God. So he says this, Even as a young adult, I couldn't have told you exactly what was going on during the mass.

I knew that the bread was somehow the body of Christ and that eating it was supposed to be good for my soul, but I couldn't have explained very clearly what it was all about.

[15:49] It was just something I did three times a week. If you were to ask a Catholic priest to explain the mass, you would discover that the mass is essentially a sacrifice.

The high point is when the priest calls down the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine, turning them into the actual body and blood of Christ.

That's when the bells ring. The newly present body and blood of Christ are lifted up and worshipped and adored by the congregation as Christ himself. The priest then offers Christ as the sacrificial victim or host to God on behalf of the people.

In that bloodless sacrifice, God's anger is turned away and forgiveness of sins is obtained. So what I read in the Bible about Christ's sacrifice didn't seem to sit too well with what was going on in the mass.

Without a priest, there can be no mass. The bread and wine cannot change into the body and blood of Christ without a priest. The sacrifice of Christ cannot be offered without a priest.

[17:09] Sins cannot be forgiven without a priest. That's end quote. Hebrews says, Jesus is our priest.

We don't need a human priest. We shouldn't have a human priest. Jesus is our human priest. His sacrifice for sin was once and for all.

Through him alone, not through any other person, can you receive forgiveness and peace with God. So here's how we're told to respond in verse 22.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. So what is a true heart?

In chapter three, the opposite of a true heart is a sinful unbelieving heart. A true heart listens to God's words here in Hebrews and the rest of the Bible.

[18:20] A true heart believes God's promises that through Christ we are completely washed inside and out. The way to God is fully open.

It is done. A true heart believes what God says. God is done. God is done. God is done. God is done.

God is done. God is done. So I've been asked a few times now since Samuel was born. What's the best thing about being a dad?

God at first I thought it was that Samuel seems to have some of my physical features. I reckon he's got a pointy chin like mine.

I'm probably just vain and seeing things that aren't there. But at first I thought that's what it was. He's kind of in my image. But then I thought about it some more. That doesn't even come close to the best thing about being a dad so far.

[19 : 22] The best thing about being a dad so far is those rare moments when I'm holding Sam against my chest and his entire body weight is being held by me.

And yet here he is limp with his head against my chest, mouth over, fast asleep. They're the best. That's the best thing about being a dad so far.

Sam feels safe in my arm. That's safe. His whole body weight is held by me.

We can think God wants us to perform to earn his love. He doesn't. God wants us to feel so safe in his arms that we totally rest on him, mouth open.

having faith in what Christ has already done, God wants us to live fully assured as his children.

[20 : 36] So where is that in the passage? It's a little word in verse 19. Don't lightly skip over words. Verse 19, therefore brothers.

This isn't just a nice way of greeting them. This is a theological statement. This is a changed identity. Chapter 2 of Hebrews goes into great detail that Christ is not ashamed to call us his brothers, his sisters.

He's not ashamed to. This isn't anyone calling us brothers and sisters. This is the Son of God calling us brothers, sisters. God wants us to feel safe in his arms.

So what does that look like? What does it look like to come near him, faith in Christ? What does that look like on the outside? I just want to spend the rest of our time looking at four ways that faith resting in Christ, what that looks like.

The first thing that that assured faith looks like is wanting to live all of life in God's presence. So chapter 13 of Hebrews has practical instructions for those in Christ from brotherly love to caring for those who are mistreated to sexual expression to trusting God rather than loving money to having good order in the church family.

[22 : 15] A child of God by faith will see all of life as an opportunity to worship God. Whether you're peeling potatoes, hanging out the washing, watching Netflix, taking someone a meal or praying with a friend, you are always in the heavenly presence of God.

Always. It's always an opportunity to worship. Not that we are sinless, we're going to come to that in a moment, but we see all of life as in God's presence.

things. The second way that drawing near to God through Christ will be seen is in times of suffering and hardship.

A child of God by faith won't interpret hardship as God's punishment for sin, since Christ has already paid for it. For me, this truth hit home one night when I was doing the washing up and I cut my finger on a pair of tongs.

I don't know how tongs cut me, but I cut my finger, a little bit of pain, but I was bleeding and for some reason it just hit home to me that I will never experience pain or bleeding because God is punishing me for my sin.

[23 : 42] Christ has already paid. It's his blood, not mine. I don't know why that hit home to me, but it was just that moment. Hebrews 12, 10 to 11 says this, Our human fathers disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness.

For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Resting in Christ changes the way you look at hardship. It's not punishment for sins, it's discipline. God's got a good goal in mind.

God's love. God's got a good goal in life. So another time that this hit home for me was when I bought a car, which is a Subaru Forester, and I'd taken it home, and one afternoon I was sitting on the lounge and I heard a crash, a smash, and I jumped out of my seat worried that the car was damaged.

This hadn't happened yet. And I was like, why don't I care so much? Why did I react like that? And I prayed to God, God, I love this car way too much.

[25 : 23] Please help me not love this car. Help me love you. Now that very night I heard another smash. And I went outside and found this, like someone had intentionally smashed it.

Now \$400 later, replacing it, a friend who I was living with asked me, aren't you annoyed? But I wasn't annoyed.

It was too much of a coincidence. I saw it as an answer to prayer. This is how God helped me let go of the car so that I could love him more.

He loved me by breaking it. And I have this sitting in my office to remind me of it. Emma won't let me put it in the living room anymore. It was so ugly.

Resting assured in Christ just changes the way we look at hardship. Now I know that's a very minor thing. Secure in the love of God.

[26 : 28] Instead of suffering pushing us away, from God, we can receive it as the loving discipline from our Father in Heaven who has a good goal to make us holy, ready for Heaven.

So a third way that drawing near to God through Christ will be seen is when we sin, when we feel ashamed. Instead of hiding in fear from God, we can pray to him for mercy and help.

Listen to Hebrews 4, 14 to 16. 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. But 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.

[27 : 48] God. Your constant struggle with sin isn't proof that you're not near to God. But knowing our temptation firsthand, our priest Christ calls us to make use of that permanent access that we have.

Come to him when we're struggling, when we are just so low in our guilt and shame. Come to him. his throne of grace to find mercy and to receive help.

So one last way that we can express our nearness to God through Christ is not counting Newcastle as our home, but we're longing for our true home with God.

In chapter 11, there is a mirage of people characterized by faith in the Old Testament from Abel to Abraham to Moses. Have a listen of verses 13 to 16.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

[29 : 08] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return, but as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. And Newcastle is a really lovely place, Lonely Planet in 2011 rated it in the top ten places to live and visit.

It's not bad. But it's nothing on the heavenly city God has prepared for us. So are you willing to not fit in here and now to endure hardship for the sake of waiting for that promised heavenly city?

That city where we are with God, with one another permanently in peace. The grounds of our confidence to draw near to God has nothing to do with us.

It's all of Christ. It's all by grace. grace. We come by his blood through his body given for us, belonging to our forever priest.

[30 : 39] Our God wants us to feel safe in his arms, to come to him with nothing in our hands, only faith in Christ's finished work.

And if we do, then Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers, sisters. We are God's children. Now this isn't easy to come to God in faith.

To persevere in faith is not easy. We need to hold fast to the hope we have and we desperately need each other to spur one another on in the faith.

And we're going to look at those two aspects the next two Sundays. But for now, let me finish by asking you to consider, have you fully rested in what Christ has done for you?

In the Father's arms, mouth open, rest in God. And as we rest in him more and more and we learn to rest in him more and more, let's see all of life as belonging to him, lived in his presence.

[31 : 53] Let's receive hardship as the loving discipline of our Father who treats us as his children. Let's come to the throne of grace to keep fighting sin.

And let's not settle down here and now. Let's keep looking forward ahead to that promised city. for he who promised is faithful.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, we praise you for your amazing grace in sending your son, that he would die in our place is incredible.

Thank you that we have access to you, full access, permanent access through Christ's finished work. Please help us to know that. Help us to feel so safe in your arms because of what Christ has done.

help us to live out that safeness in you by living in your presence, enduring hardship as your discipline, longing for a better city, and coming to you for help when we really struggle with sin.

[33 : 24] Thank you for all this grace. Help us as a church to live boasting in this grace and living in the hope that is ours through Christ.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.