

Let us stir one another up

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 September 2020

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] Good evening. Reading from Paul's letter to the Hebrews. It's starting in verse 19.

The lead up into this is how Christ's death fulfills the will of God and Christ's death perfects us. Starting at verse 19, reading from the King James Version, New King James Version.

I was given this Bible by my mum when I accepted the Lord and I've used it ever since. Therefore, brethren, having the boldness to enter the holiness by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled 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 has promised is faithful. faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much more as you see the day approaching.

Well, good afternoon, everyone. I know it's Heidi here today.

[1 : 44] Sorry to put the spotlight. Just wanted to congratulate you while you were with us. You congratulated Sam when he was here, but yeah, excited. They're engaged, if you don't know what I'm talking about.

Well, can I kick us off by asking, why might we give up on meeting with Christ's people as the local church?

I want to look at two common reasons, I think. The first is the cost in society. So some of us might have to choose at one point between church and sport.

Time for assignments and exams. Maybe blocking out your availability for work where it's possible. There's a cost to leisure time.

Like, I mean, cleaning toilets on a Saturday. Really? But then sometimes the cost is much more severe than those things.

[2 : 53] You are the butt of jokes at school or work. You are publicly put to shame on social media. Even worse still, I think you are intentionally cut off by friends and family.

Sometimes even spouses who want to distance themselves from God, and so they distance themselves from you. That's really painful. There may well be a time in the future when, like the original audience in Hebrews, we're going to have to choose whether we associate with that person in this church who's being sued or is potentially facing prison time for something Christian that they did.

It's possible. If we just be religious and do our Sunday quota, but the rest of the time we're like the rest of the world, you're going to fit in with the world.

There won't really be a cost except for Sunday morning, the time. But if you try and live all your life for Christ, associating deeply with his people, there will be a cost.

So that's one reason we might think about giving up on meeting and being in the church. A second reason we might abandon meeting together is the mess and the hurt within the church because of the sin that's still here in us.

[4 : 23] Those I know who have totally thrown in church, nearly every one of them say it's to do with relational pain they've experienced. It can range from just not feeling included to a severe conflict.

Some are disillusioned with church leaders. Others are disillusioned with just church generally, the whole communities as if churches are judgmental. So the cost outside, the mess inside, these might make us think twice about meeting with Christ's people.

God's word to us today in Hebrews is not to abandon meeting together as Christ's people. Now these verses, if used in isolation, can just seem like a pastor's trump card to guilt you in the covenant church.

You must come, see, God tells you so. But that empty religious performance is exactly what the author of Hebrews is imploring his readers not to go back to.

These verses must be saying more than that. So why is being the local church so necessary to our Christian walk?

[5 : 49] Well, first, because to belong to Christ's community is what we were saved to be. We struggle to see this because of our individualistic culture, I think.

If I'm safe in God, then that's all that matters. For Jewish people, the Jewish Christians first reading this letter, community would be assumed. If you're in covenant relationship with God, you're part of Israel.

You're part of the tribe. You're one of God's people. Drawing near to God by faith in Christ means becoming part of God's community.

This isn't like being an anonymous member of an RSL club. It's like being a member of a family. It's fundamental to who you are. It's an identity thing. This is, first and foremost, the heavenly reality.

If you flick over to Hebrews 12, 22 to 24, or listen as I read it out, we see this heavenly community around Christ.

[6 : 59] This is who we're saved to be. This is the reality of being saved, this heavenly community. Let me read it out.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

To be the community is to be saved. It's who we are. It's what we were saved for. So if being part of this heavenly community gathered around Christ in worship of him is who we are, why wouldn't we do it in the local church?

Why wouldn't we express that? It's who we are. And Christ's community is the future hope we're longing for. It's what we're promised.

If you notice the words used to describe our eternal hope, it's a city that God has prepared. It's a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

[8 : 25] Belonging to Christ's community is who we're saved to be. So if you look in verse 25, there's actually an emphasis there, not to neglect on our meetings.

For the original readers, they had a choice to make. Do they stick with the unpopular, persecuted gathering of Christ's people, or do they go back to the safe and popular gathering at the Jewish synagogue?

They had a choice. Which community was theirs? Who did they belong to? Which community they identified with was actually an expression of whether they would come to God through Christ, or whether they would reject Christ and belong to the world.

I think it makes us ask the question, who do we see is our core community that we belong to? Is it a group of friends?

Or colleagues? Or is it Christ's local church? Church is something we are before it's anything we do.

[9 : 47] So let's keep being the church. Let's keep being the community Christ has saved us to be. The second reason why gathering is so necessary to the Christian life is because community is the way that God matures us, grows our faith and our love.

How do we grow in our understanding of who Christ is and what he's accomplished so we can trust him more? It's in community. How do we endure? It's side by side. How do we develop the same mind of Christ who sacrificed himself for our sake?

We sacrifice ourselves for our brothers and sisters' sake. The idea of an isolated Christian thriving in their faith, you won't find in the Bible.

Unless you're prevented by sickness or being in prison or having just moved to a country where there's not Christians yet. Otherwise, God says you need community.

You need it to mature and to endure in the faith. We need it. I need you. Pastors, elders, deacons, leaders are not exempt from this.

[11:05] I need you. You need me to mature and endure. I watch this super interesting show on Netflix called The Social Dilemma.

I'm not sure if you've seen it or not. It interviews people who designed a lot of social media, like stuff to do with Facebook and Instagram. So these are some core people, like, up there in the businesses.

And they're terrified by what they created. They created it and they're scared by it. Because it is designed, it's literally programmed to show you exactly what you want to see and hear so that you keep tuning in to that social media.

You're not getting a view of what everyone else is seeing. You're seeing what you want to see.

Over and over and over again. You're stuck in your own thinking.

And it works. So that you look at more ads. It's how it works. And I think our sinful hearts are the same thing. We tell ourselves what we want to hear over and over and over again if we're in isolation.

[12:25] We convince ourselves we are right. We convince ourselves we've done the right thing. But if you're in community, you're lovingly exposed.

Your thinking is exposed. What you do is exposed. And that is a great thing. Not something to run away from. That accountability is so good. To be affirmed in what is good and also to be corrected to more Christ-likeness.

It's the way we grow. And we desperately need each other because we're always on the move.

Either closer to God or away from him. Every moment. I'm not talking in an absolute sense. Like you can totally cut yourself off from Christ. I'm talking in a relational sense.

In a each moment obedience sense. We're either moving closer to God in trust and obedience or turning away from him. So let me illustrate this.

[13:34] I think C.S. Lewis in his book The Screwtape Letters gets this across really well. So to understand this quote, you need to understand the premise of the book.

So there's a senior devil called Screwtape. And he's instructing a junior devil on how to work in the mind of a human to make them turn away from the enemy.

And the enemy is God. So it's a really interesting take. It's an interesting read. But let me read this part from chapter 19. You complain that my last letter does not make it clear whether I regard being in love as a desirable state for a human or not.

But really, Wormwood, that is the sort of question one expects them to ask. Leave them to discuss whether love or patriotism or celibacy or candles on altars or teetotalism or education are good or bad.

Can't you see there's no answer? Nothing matters at all except the tendency of a given state of mind in given circumstances to move a particular patient at a particular moment nearer to the enemy or nearer to us.

[15:03] End quote. I think that gets it across well. Is it good to buy a house or not? That's not the point. Will it be an expression of drawing near to God?

A place from which you can produce love and good works? Or will buying a house be a place where you have your slice of heaven now? This is my security and comfort for me. Do you see the difference moving closer to God or further away?

Either growing in love and good works or pursuing our own interests. We're always on the move in every situation. So I think what it means to love someone then is to help a person draw closer to Christ in each moment of their lives.

As you have opportunity, obviously. I think this raises the question, who decides what is loving? Is it the person who's offering the love?

Do they decide what is actually loving? I think we can all think of times when someone thought they were helping and they just weren't. They thought they were being loving but they just really weren't.

[16:21] We can't do that. Our society is adamant at the moment that each individual decides what they receive whether it's loving or not.

So it doesn't matter anymore the intention behind someone's words. It just matters how I receive them. In a TV show called Community, it's a bit of a silly show, but in a recent episode there's a guy who falls in love with a robot.

I told you it's silly, but you'll see why I'm raising this. And a character on the show called Annie, she comes to this guy's defence and in the show the camera zooms in on her, the music goes quiet. To get this point across, this is going to be a profound point. She says this to defend the guy. We have to respect each other enough to let each other want what we want, no matter how transparently self-destructive or empty our desires may be.

That was the profound point. I think that's our world's definition of love at the moment.

[17 : 45] Isn't it crazy? To just let someone self-destruct. How is that love?

I don't think it's the giver who decides what love is. I don't think it's even the receiver who decides what love is. I think God alone decides. And he's demonstrated it once and for all, most powerfully on the cross.

What was Christ's goal in going to the cross? It was to bring us to God. I think that's the goal of love.

To help someone come closer to God. Deeper and deeper in faith in him. Trusting him more.

Following him more. Loving like Christ has loved. Let me give you an example of how I think we can do that, even with practical acts of service for one another.

[18 : 55] So when Em and I received meals from our Bible study group, those meals really helped us carry the burden of those first few weeks of parenting.

But I think it did more than fill our bellies. And did more than mean we didn't have to go to the shops for a few weeks. It did more than that.

It was an expression of God providing for us through their help. And I think it even did something more than that. I think it helped reinforce our thankfulness to God for his grace in bringing us into his people, into his community.

Just with a meal. Pretty simple thing. But it can help move someone closer to God. You can't guarantee how someone receives it, but you can have that goal, that intention behind what you do. What we do and what we say, by God's grace, has power to urge someone to draw closer to Christ. But it's not one size fits all.

[20 : 13] We're told here to consider how. Consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds. Now we're all experts when having heated arguments to consider carefully.

What words can I say in this moment to just hit that person in the sorest spot that's just going to cut them deep and knock them flat? We are so good at choosing words to cut deep, aren't we?

I think we're all good at it. Imagine if we used that ability to consider, not to destroy but to build up.

What does that person need in this moment? Encouragement is not just positive words.

Certainly positive words, it includes that, absolutely. But true encouragement, building up, requires understanding a person, understanding their situation, putting ourselves in their shoes, even understanding their sin, and then asking yourself, what do they need to trust Christ more in this situation?

[21 : 28] What do they need to love like him in this situation? What would that look like? We've got to consider how to stir each other up.

I asked Emma the other day for her perspective on something I said to someone and I asked her, did I say the wrong thing? And I was just really hoping that she would reassure me that I didn't do anything wrong and I could get on with the rest of my day.

Now, she could have thought in that moment, the way to encourage David is to make him feel good. So I'm going to say, no, no, it was fine what he said. Unfortunately, she chose to actually encourage me and she told me where I got it wrong and it was really annoying.

But by doing that, it made me look to Christ for forgiveness. It made me consider, do I need to apologise to that person?

It made me, hopefully, wiser for the next time. True encouragement points us to Christ.

[22 : 43] God is the one who grows us, but he uses our words. He uses our acts of service to bring others closer to him.

And isn't that just an incredible privilege to be part of that? That brother or sister is going to make it to the end, partly because God used you and your encouragement for it.

They're going to become more like Christ, producing more fruit in obedience to God, partly through you. That's an incredible privilege. So let's be a church that carefully considers how to stir one another up.

And especially because the day is drawing near. This brings some extra motivation, I think. The day would be familiar to those with the Old Testament.

It refers to the promised time when Christ returns, when the present experience of our sinful society will come to an abrupt end, when God calls each person to account, judging his enemies, delivering his people.

[23 : 58] It's the day when he'll bring into the full experience all his promises of heaven on earth. It's a big concept. So judgment ends salvation.

Have a listen to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, just to feel the weight of this day. 1 Thessalonians 5. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, while people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day.

We are not of the night or of the darkness. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him.

[25 : 13] Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. Each person, every person you interact with, is taking each step of their lives on the very threshold of eternity.

Our need for encouragement is urgent. It has an eternal impact.

And I think this means we shouldn't evaluate how someone is doing based off external measures like their wealth and their health and their employment and their marital status.

We've got to look deeper than that. With the eyes of eternity. How is their heart? Are they close to Christ? How can they get closer?

And we should see the cost and the mess in light of the day. The loss of respect from family and friends and workmates, being the target of jokes and intentional exclusion, all the other costs.

[26 : 32] In light of the day, we can say along with the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.

Beyond all comparison. Beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen, but the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient.

But the things that are unseen are eternal. The cost hurts, but it's light and momentary.

It's not worth comparing to what's coming. God's actually using that pain to prepare us for that weight of glory that's coming. And is the remaining sin and mess in the church reason to give up on the church?

Or is it reason to press closer into one another so that we can encourage and stir one another up? If you get close to sinful Christians in this community, you're going to get burnt every now and then.

[27 : 41] And you're going to burn others. It's going to happen if we do community right. But that's where we can offer that forgiveness.

That's where we grow in our character. We aren't a finished product yet. There's more work to do. I grow in patience when I'm surrounded by someone who annoys me and frustrates me.

We need each other. This is the context of growing in character. There's a... There's a... I'm not saying you annoy me, by the way.

I just realised the implication. There's a music lyric I like. I can't find who said it. But he said, the church isn't a museum for good people.

The church, it's a hospital for the broken. If you look for a museum, you're going to be completely disillusioned. If you look for a hospital, there is so much work to do.

[28 : 49] Let's get cracking. I need you. You need me. I need you to express that forgiveness of God in Christ.

I need you to keep stirring me up to follow him. In light of the day that is coming, we are on the threshold of eternity each step we take.

It means the pain is temporary. The consequences for people is eternal. The need is urgent. The final holiness of Christ's community is guaranteed.

It's coming. Our efforts are worth it. So let me finish by asking this last question.

Is it down to our ability and our power and our wisdom to build each other up? Thankfully, not. Our faltering hit and miss efforts are used by God to do the internal heart work that only he can do. [29 : 59] Even if someone doesn't have good intentions, God can still use it. For good. Just as we've heard these four weeks in Hebrews 10, it isn't by our religious efforts that we are made clean to come near to God, but by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.

It is by his death and resurrection that we can have confidence to enter God's presence. It's by his death and resurrection that our hope for the future is certain. So too, it's his death and resurrection that we're given grace right now in the present moment to grow and become more like our saviour. It's God's grace from start to finish. That's how Hebrews finishes the letter in chapter 13, 20 to 21. So I'm going to finish by reading these verses.

This is where the power comes to change. Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in your sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Will you pray with me as I finish? Father, we thank you for your grace from start to finish.

[32 : 01] Thank you that it doesn't come down to our efforts, but the finished work of our Lord. Lord, thank you for bringing us into your community.

Thank you that you haven't left us in our sinfulness, but you've brought us close to you and therefore close to one another, members of your family.

Father, please help us to see ourselves this way, to see the church and brothers and sisters this way, that we are gathered around Christ and we will be perfected one day because you promise it.

And Father, please help us to not look to our own interests, but to the interests of others to have that mind of Christ who lowered himself even to the point of death for our sake.

Give us this mind in this church. In Jesus' name. Amen.