

To Give Access to the Holiest Place

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Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[0 : 00] Please be seated. You hardly need to hear from me this morning after that children's talk. That was fantastic, wasn't it? I love that level of audience participation.

So if you want to speak up and answer my questions in a loud, shrill voice, please feel free to do so. Paul's not here. I won't tell him. I have a word of encouragement for you this morning, a word of exhortation from the book of Hebrews.

This is another great passage I've been blessed with. It's such a privilege to speak to you from God's word. And today we're in Hebrews. And the author of Hebrews in chapter 13 tells us that the book, the letter that he's written, is a word of exhortation.

So I want us to be encouraged this morning by this word. And we've been helped out a lot by the writer with the structure of the passage because if you look carefully, you'll notice we have two instances of the word since.

Since this is true. I'm going to call them truth clauses. So we've got two truths that we're going to expound. And then we've got three instances of the words let us.

[1 : 09] So it's since these two things are true, let us, let us, let us. So I hope this is going to be a practical talk for us. And we're going to have three points of application that the writer's encouraging us to do as a church, as the gathered people of God.

So I'd like to pray for us before we begin. Let's bow our heads. Dear Lord, thank you so much for this word of exhortation in Hebrews. Thank you so much for Jesus Christ and what he's done for us. We thank you that he died to give us access to the most holy place, that he died to give us access to heaven, to give us access to you. I pray that this truth would grip us this morning, that we would understand its gravity and its meaning.

Please be with me. Help me to speak clearly. Help me to speak with encouragement for these people. I pray that we would go out of here encouraging one another, as this passage tells us to do. I pray it all for Jesus' sake. Amen. We'll dive right into the passage. And the first truth I want to look at is the truth that we can approach God because of what Jesus has done for us.

[2 : 19] We can approach God confidently because of Jesus' sacrifice for us. You can see it in verse 19 to 20. Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.

Now, what does it mean that we can have confidence to enter the sanctuary? I think to answer that, we need to look at the Old Testament sanctuary.

We heard about it in the first reading, the Old Testament reading. Hopefully, you didn't hear that it was from Leviticus and go to sleep. Hopefully, you listened really hard because this is an important truth.

Remember last week, I talked about the Day of Atonement, how Jesus similarly was put forward as a sacrifice for atonement, of atonement on the cross. And so now we're hearkening back to the Old Testament again and we're looking at the sanctuary.

And the sanctuary was a room in the tabernacle and later in the temple where God's presence dwelt. Literally, not metaphorically that God's presence was in the sanctuary, but that his literal presence was in the sanctuary.

[3 : 39] It was also called the most holy place or the holy of holies. And in the tabernacle, it was about 15 feet square, I think, perfect cube. And we learnt in the reading that God said to Aaron, you, Aaron, can come in once a year to the sanctuary through the curtain that divides me from the people, through the curtain that keeps God's wrath from being poured out upon the people, separates unholiness from a holy God.

You, Aaron, can come in once a year to make a sacrifice of atonement for the people. But before you come in and only you come in, you need to kill a bull as a sacrifice for yourself and your family. You need to wear special vestments. You need to burn incense. And you need to bring a couple of goats with you, one to sacrifice for the people and one to use as a scapegoat for the people's guilt. And this was very purposefully exclusive. Throughout the history of Israel, only the high priest could enter the holy of holies. And only after doing all of these rites and rituals and making these sacrifices.

That's the sanctuary in the Old Testament. And the writer here is using that as a kind of analogy for what Jesus has done for us.

[5 : 02] He says, We have confidence to enter the sanctuary, every one of us, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, everyone who believes in Jesus can have confidence to enter the sanctuary because of the blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

Can you see the analogy there? The Old Testament sanctuary was a shadow of the real sanctuary, which is heaven. God is in heaven now. And so we have confidence to approach him, I think in two ways.

We have confidence to approach him in prayer. Right now, you can draw near to God. You can approach God in heaven, right now in your seat. As you brush your teeth, as you lie down to go to sleep, on your way to work, while you're at work, you have confidence to enter the sanctuary, to draw near to God because of what Jesus has done for you.

And in another way, in an ultimate way, we have confidence when we die that we will enter the sanctuary, that we will enter heaven with Jesus.

There's no St. Peter at the gate marking you off a list. There's no gates to hold you out. There's no purgatory that you must go through before you enter the sanctuary. You will approach heaven with confidence, boldly, because of what Jesus has done.

[6 : 28] That's amazing right there. I wonder if we miss the gravity because we forget the Old Testament truth that he's basing this on. But to think that any one of us could enter the sanctuary and be with God, could draw near to God, in those days was unthinkable.

And now, it's a reality for us, a precious reality for us, that we might draw near to God at any time. You see, it's all because of Jesus, isn't it, that we can do this.

His blood was like the blood of a sacrifice, once for all, sacrificed on the cross. There's no curtain between us and God now because if you remember the Gospels, when Jesus died, the curtain literally was torn in two.

I think in the temple at that time, they'd kind of done a renovation, an extension, and by now it was 60 foot tall and about four inches thick or four feet thick or anyway, it was really thick.

You couldn't tear it. And the point is, God tore the curtain himself when Jesus died to show us that he had been made available to us who put our faith in Jesus.

[7 : 44] Jesus spilt the blood. Jesus ripped the curtain. Jesus made a way for us to God. We don't need an Old Testament sacrifice. We have Jesus.

We don't need an Old Testament curtain. Jesus has made the way open. We don't need an Old Testament priest. Do you realize that? You don't need a priest.

You don't need me. You don't need Paul. You don't need Wayne to give you access to God. You don't need us to give access to God. You don't need us as an intermediary between you and God. You have Jesus. He's the sacrifice. He's made the way open. He's our great priest. The reason you can have confidence is because you're not resting on your own works.

You're resting on the works of Jesus. And we'll come back to that in a minute. That leads me on to the second truth. And I missed this. I missed this in my study this week.

[8 : 50] But I want us to look at it. It's the second since. Verse 21. He said all this that Jesus has that we can enter the sanctuary because of Jesus. And then he says since we have a great high priest over the house of God.

Do you realize that? That you have a great high priest? You don't have a sinful mortal priest like Aaron or a sinful priest like me or someone else.

But you have a great perfect high priest and his name's Jesus. What does that mean? To have Jesus as your high priest. Well it means that he's both priest and sacrifice.

He's the perfect version of both as we learned earlier. But it also means that he sympathizes with us in our weaknesses. It says that in Hebrews.

He sympathizes with us in our weaknesses because when he was on earth as a man he was tempted in every way that we are yet he was found without sin. Have you ever sinned that many times where you thought this is once too many.

[10:02] I can't bring this to Jesus. He'll be ashamed of me. He won't accept me. He won't forgive me. Well this passage says that Jesus as our great high priest will always be there to sympathize with us to forgive us to listen to us that we can bring our weaknesses and infirmities before him.

It also means that he's made a way open for us to God. He is our great intermediary and it means that he prays for us. He's seated at the right hand of the Father and he's praying for us as our great priest.

This is astounding if you think about it to have the creator of the universe all things were made by him and for him to have him as our great high priest is an amazing thing.

So glory in it be encouraged by it. Let's read on. And just a note on this I know myself I want to push this that we I know that we can become numb to these truths that they don't seem as great as I'm making them out to be because we've heard them or because I don't know we get so used to being Christians and we get so used to hearing about what Jesus has done that we become numb to it. I want to encourage us not to be numb to these great truths. If ever you feel yourself taking these truths for granted remember the Old Testament. Remember what had to be done to come before God.

[11:42] Remember the sacrifices and the rites and the rituals and then think about what Jesus has done in giving us access not only to God now but to God for eternity.

It's an amazing thing. So now to points of application. Our first point is that we should draw near to God with full assurance.

We should draw near to God with full assurance. You can see it in verse 22.

The writer says let us approach God with a true heart in full assurance with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The writer has already told us that God has been made available to us. The curtain has been torn. The blood has been spilt and now we can approach God with confidence.

[12:55] And he says here that we should do it with full assurance. So my question to you is do you have full assurance this morning?

The Bible tells us that we should have full assurance. That we can draw near to God now and that when we die as in today if I walk out from this place and get hit by a car which could happen or if you get a diagnosis from the doctor that you've got three weeks to live before the brain tumour takes your life the writer says in the midst of those things you can have full assurance to approach God in heaven when you die.

So do you have it? Do you know that you have assurance? The reason that you have assurance praise God is because your heart has been sprinkled with blood and your body has been washed with water.

That is hearkening back to the Old Testament the sacrifice has been made for you. I think the reason sometimes we are not so assured that we will approach God when we die is because we are resting on our own works to get us there.

If I was resting on my own works to get me into heaven I would have no assurance. None. At best it would be shaky. but the Bible says the writer of Hebrews is saying you can have assurance not because of your own works but because Jesus has made a perfect sacrifice for you.

[14:57] Once for all for all your sins. You see in the Old Testament the high priest would have to make sacrifice for atonement and then what would happen?

People would sin. Have to make another sacrifice. People would sin. Another sacrifice. More blood. More animals. More sin. More blood. More sacrifice.

And that's how we can feel. We can feel I'm right with God and then I've sinned. I'm out of heaven now. I'm out of the book of life. Now I've sort of made myself right with God. Now I've sinned.

It's like a sliding scale and that is the wrong view. Hebrews tells us that the sacrifice has been made once for all.

Let me see if I can find it. It's Hebrews 10 just before this passage 11 to 14. He says and every priest stands day after day at his service offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins.

[16:08] But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since then has been waiting until his enemies would be made a footstall for his feet for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

God do you get that? Yes we continue to sin but the sacrifice has been made once for all time. When we come together at communion we're not sacrificing Jesus over and over again. We're not making another atonement for sin and another atonement for sin. The sacrifice was once for all made for us.

When we come together we commemorate that great act. We remember it together and encourage one another but the sacrifice has been made once for all so have assurance.

No other religion offers this by the way. If you're a Muslim sitting here this morning you would have no assurance that you would enter paradise when you died.

[17:22] You would work and work and work and try and do the right things and try and please God and then at the end God's going to put it in a balance and who knows. Only Christianity offers you grace and assurance not because of what you've done but because of what Jesus has done.

Are you hearing me on this point? Praise the Lord. Application point number two.

Verse 23. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering for he who has promised is faithful.

Let us hold fast to our faith. The message of Hebrews largely is hold fast, hold on. the audience that he was writing to was under dreadful persecution and some of them were wavering and wondering whether it was all worth it, whether it wouldn't be a better idea to go back to Judaism or to throw away the faith altogether.

And so he says to them and he says to us today, hold fast to your confession. What is your confession? Do you remember it when you became a Christian? You confessed that Jesus Christ was Lord.

[18:55] You heard the gospel and said, yes, that is true. You heard that all of us are sinners destined for hell and condemnation and that God put forward Jesus, as we heard last week, as a propitiation, as a sacrifice, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

That God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were his enemies, Christ died for us. That Jesus died on a cross for our sins, that he was raised for our salvation.

And that demonstrated to us God's power, that when we die, if we have our faith in Jesus, that he can raise us from the dead as well. Death cannot hold us down, for he is risen.

That's what you signed on to. And so the writer says, hold fast to that confession. If everything else falls away, hold fast to the gospel.

gospel. So are you holding fast to the gospel this morning? You should preach it to yourself day in and day out.

[20:11] Preach the gospel to yourself as well as your friends. Remind yourself of your confession. salvation. He goes on to say, hold on without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

God did. God made a promise to you.

He said that if you put your faith in Jesus, you will be saved. Simple as that. That's the promise. And he's a God who keeps his promises. He's never broken a promise.

God is trustworthy. Though every man is a liar, God is true. God is faithful. Put your faith in the faithful God.

He doesn't break his promise. It says hold fast to your faith without wavering. But what's the foundation for your faith? That God is faithful.

[21:20] That God won't let you go. That God has accomplished everything for you. You're not trusting in your own works. You're trusting in the works of Jesus. God is faithful.

He's promised to keep you and he'll keep that promise. Every time you feel like wavering, every time you feel like throwing away your faith, when a loved one dies, when you see another tsunami, another disaster, whatever happens that makes you question your faith or want to give up, remember, God has promised.

things to you. He's made promises to you and he will keep them. Let's go to application three, verse 24 to 25.

verse 25. He says, and let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

let us consider one another. The first verse there literally is, let us consider one another in order to provoke one another.

[22 : 47] And they kind of condense it down because that sounds a bit messy, but I think we lose it. The force of it is that we are considering one another, looking out for one another, and that causes us to love one another.

It prompts us to love one another and do good deeds for one another. See, if we're with one another, if we're the gathered body of Christ, and we're looking out for one another, then you'll know to ask the widow if you can go around and mow her lawns.

You'll know to ask the alcoholic if you can help them recover. you'll know what's going on because you'll be looking out for one another. And so he encourages us to be with one another, to have community with one another, to look out for one another, and in so doing we will see the good deeds that need to be done to help one another, and loving one another will be easy.

This idea about us being with one another implies a few things. It implies that we will actually meet together. He warns us against neglecting that later on.

And we should be encouraged, and we should praise God for the church that we have been given here. This is a great church. It's a great church to be a part of because of the community.

[24 : 24] There are good Bible teaching churches like ours where the sense of community is not there. They read these passages and believe them but ignore them. Or there's a spirit of critical, there's a critical spirit in churches like these sometimes.

And I haven't seen that here. I've seen love and community. I've seen people look out for one another and that is fantastic. So the exhortation to us is to keep going, is to spur one another on. That's provoke one another. The meaning behind the word is to spur one another on. If you've ever ridden a horse, to get the thing going, you dig your heels into its belly.

That's what he's saying. Dig your heels into one another. Provoke one another. Spur one another on to love and good deeds. Keep each other accountable. Encourage one another to do that thing that should be done.

It's our duty and our delight to love one another. John Wesley said a great thing once. He said that the Bible knows no solitary religion.

[25 : 35] The Bible knows no solitary religion. Christians aren't called to live in solitude. Christians aren't called to live in silence.

Christians are called to live with one another, encouraging one another, spurring one other on. And that's what we ought to be doing here. And praise God, I think it's what we are doing.

We should be encouraged to keep going. And just in this, I know it's my job this morning to exhort you because that's what the passage says, but I don't want you to get the feeling that it's the preacher's job to exhort everyone else and that's it.

No, it's your job to exhort one another. We have a pastoral care ministry, but it's not only Carol's job to care for people pastorally. It's all of our jobs.

It's all of our calling as people, as the people of God. God has called us to look out for one another, to exhort one another, to care for one another. So let's do it. Therefore, he says at the end there, just in closing, very interesting thought, that we should do this and we should do it all the more as we see the day approaching.

[26 : 54] Now the day is the day when Jesus returns and he is coming, friends. I might not get down from the pulpit before Jesus comes back.

Do you know that? He's going to come like a thief. And these are the last days. And in the last days, the Bible teaches that Satan ramps up his activity against the church.

Right now, he is here trying to pluck the word out of your mind. He's here trying to distract you, trying to get you to be forgetful or cold or numb to the word.

He's trying to close you off from hearing God's word this morning. He doesn't want you to praise God. He wants you to throw away your faith. And so that's why this writer says, all the more as you see the day approaching, as Satan's activity becomes more and more fierce, like a lion prowling around looking for someone to devour.

As that happens, fight against it. Encourage one another. Exhort one another. Ask that brother who hasn't been to church for a while, are you still a Christian?

[28 : 04] Are you trusting in Jesus? Because it's a war and this is the army right here. And successful armies encourage one another.

They yell battle cries. Have you ever seen Braveheart? The Highlanders, they are just this fierce army because they just screamed these battle cries to one another to get one another up fierce, ready for the fight.

And that's what we are like as soldiers in this army. We need to encourage one another, maybe not with battle cries, but with exhortation and encouragement from the Bible as we see the day approaching.

there's so many opportunities for you to be involved in this church. I looked on the internet, there's a million ministries that you can be involved in this church.

And that's not exhaustive, make your own ministry. Feel free. Maybe ask Paul first, but feel free to think about it at least. Right?

[29 : 09] There's so many opportunities. Some people get into a habit of neglecting to meet with one another. It becomes a habit. It becomes normal for them not to meet with other Christians. We don't want to be like that.

We want you to be involved. I know many of you are. It's very encouraging. So in closing then, let's look back on what we've learned. First truth, we have confidence to approach the sanctuary of God. In the past, no one could do it. And now they can. I just thought of my own experience, probably running over time, but I remember as a kid, we had this sanctuary in my house.

We had a big homestead style house. And for me, the Holy of Holies was the crystal cabinet room. The crystal room. Right? I don't know if houses have these anymore. A bit more open space.

But we had this room and it kept the crystal and the glass and the nice stuff. And I was never allowed in it. Me and my two brothers, quite rightly, were barred from ever entering the crystal room.

[30 : 20] It was like our Holy of Holies. And I remember distinctly the day that my mum took me aside and said, you are now allowed into the crystal room.

Before then, it was once a year, Christmas time. The good stuff came out and I was able to see what was in there. Every other day, not allowed. And then, I was old enough.

My brother had gone before me, he was allowed. I was anticipating the day and then I was allowed. I was deemed worthy to enter the room. Ten thousand times that kind of awe we should have for this passage.

Do you know what I mean? In the past, we weren't even, we're not even Jews, let alone high priests. Now, because of the great high priest, we're able to enter that sanctuary, to draw near to God, to come into heaven when we die.

Second truth, Jesus is our great high priest. Never forget this. Sometimes we can think of Jesus on the cross, Jesus as saviour, and we miss Jesus being our great high priest.

[31 : 29] Calvin said it perfectly. He's our prophet, priest, and king. And this passage highlights his priestly role for us, that we can come to him, that he will pray for us, and points of application for us.

Think about these throughout the day. We need to draw near to God with full assurance. Be assured. Be reminded this morning, Jesus has earned you a place in heaven.

That's brilliant. Be assured of that. If you get hit by a bus on the way home, you will enter the sanctuary with God.

You will enter heaven if you have faith in him. Confess him as Lord, and you can be assured of your faith and assured of your future.

Point two, let us hold fast to our faith. Let's not waver. Let's not give up. Let's remember our confession that Jesus is Lord, the gospel.

[32 : 33] Preach it to yourself. Remember it daily, what Jesus has done for you. And lastly, let us consider one another. And maybe this is the banner flying over the whole of Hebrews.

Consider one another. Encourage one another. Exhort one another. Love one another. Look for the good deeds that you can do for one another. And do it all knowing that Jesus has done the work.

That Jesus is our great high priest. That Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our sins. I'd like to pray for us.

Please bow your heads with me. Amen. Such an encouragement, Lord.

Such an encouragement that you have made the way open to us. that us, we, in our sins, might be able to draw near to you in prayer, even now.

[33 : 44] I thank you that I can draw near to you in prayer now. That we can draw near to you in song. Can draw near to you at any time of the day without performing rituals and sacrifices.

sacrifices. That we can draw near to you when we die without any ritual, sacrifice, purgatory, doubt. We thank you so much for Jesus, our prophet, our priest, and our king.

That he made a perfect sacrifice for us. That he was the perfect sacrifice for us. Once for all. To bring us to you.

Lord, encourage us as we go out today to exhort one another to love and good deeds. Help us to stay around after the service. To talk deeply about things that matter.

To encourage one another to hold on to our faith. Give us opportunities to love one another in this place. And all the more as we see the day approaching when you will come in glory to take us home.

[34 : 55] Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.