

The Gathered Church (2)

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Date: 10 September 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship tonight singing in Psalm 118. Psalm 118, that's in the Sing Psalms version. You'll find that on page 155.

We're singing verses 1 to 9. O thank the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures always. Now let the house of Israel say, His love will last through endless days.

And let the house of Aaron say, His love forever will endure. And let those who fear the Lord declare, His love will stand forever sure. What a great privilege it is to follow in the line of these ancient people, long ago in Old Testament times, who were called by the psalmist here to give thanks to God, those Jewish people, the house of Aaron, all those who would gather from time to time to worship the Lord.

And we follow in that great line of worshipers, of God, the same God they worshiped, that we worship this evening. So verses 1 to 9 in Psalm 118.

O thank the Lord. O thank the Lord, for he is good.

[1 : 21] O thank the Lord, for his love and Europe is proceed. O bank of the person, our Lord, and king of . You were there. It's when the Holy Spirit is granted. uarialness, of God. O've he is good. God is belt-set teacher. How must o'er and aurait before the Lord are long efforts God, Now let the house of Israel say, His love will last through endless days.

God is proud to serve as many people, He has Einsatz hace Oh, God is faithful to him or sheep. And let the house of Edom sing, His love forever will endure.

Let those who fear the Lord be clear, His love will stand forever sure.

I cried in language to the Lord, He answered me and said, The Lord is with me and not here, What harm can be the good to Thee?

The Lord is with me constantly, He is the one who gives me, I look in triumph on my foes, I will not eat to Thee, I free.

[3 : 44] It's better far to trust the Lord, Than look for help in man's defense, It's better far to trust the Lord, Than in the grace of confidence.

Now we're going to engage in prayer, let's join together in prayer to the Lord. Almighty God, as we gather once again in Your presence, We thank You for these words that have brought us such reassurance, Words that assure us, Lord, of Your care for Your people, And words that teach us so clearly, How much better it is to trust in the Lord, Than to trust in anyone else.

And we bless You for the way that that trust that You give us to place in Yourself, Is a trust that is placed in one who is always faithful, One who will never be diverted from His purpose, One who is always true to His promises, One who will bring all things to fruition in the experience of Your people.

And we thank You, Lord, tonight for the rule that You have over us, And over the world in which we live, Despite the fact that there are so many things that we cannot understand, So many things that cause us to question, Even at times to be bewildered, So many things that we find taken up by those throughout the world, Who would seek to constantly find fault with the idea of God.

We give thanks, Gracious One, That You assure us through Your Word, That You, in the way in which Your throne is set, Are the Lord above all things.

[5 : 51] And this gives us, Lord, confidence to draw near to You even tonight, And to do so as a body of Your people, Who come here to worship You. And we give thanks, O Lord, That Your worthiness to be worshipped is so perfect.

Everything that You do is worthy of our praise and our adoration. And we ask, O Lord, as we come before You, Even at this time to pray, That You would enable us to come and give thanks, first of all.

Enable us to adore You, to love You, Even before we ask anything for ourselves, Or anything to be done for us by You. Enable us, Lord, to dwell upon the great fact of Your beauty and Your constancy, Your constancy, of Your worthiness to be praised.

And so we ask Your blessing, As we come together once again in this way. We ask Your blessing, Lord, upon Your Word for us. As we give thanks for Your Word, As we give thanks for the number of ways in which we use it, Even throughout a service like this.

We pray, O Lord, that You would once again bless Your Word to us. As we come before You, Stretching out our hands to You, O Lord, And acknowledgement that we of ourselves are empty, Empty of resources and empty of ability to please You, And to bring understanding to Your Word. [7 : 15] But we thank You that You have promised to give us that understanding. And we read in Your Word, Lord, Of those whose minds You opened, As You opened the Scriptures to them. And we pray that that will be our experience even tonight.

And we can never say, O Lord, That our knowledge of You is as full as we would like it to be. And we can never say that we've reached the point where we need to now cease to learn, Cease to come to have more knowledge imparted to us from Your Spirit and from Your Word.

And so we pray that You would help us even tonight to make a further contribution by Your grace, To make ourselves in Your presence to grow in grace and in the knowledge of You as our Lord. Lord, we bring our personal concerns to You as well. And although we have such a privilege of meeting together, A privilege of belonging to You as the gathered church of God, Nevertheless, Lord, we come with our individual concerns as well.

We thank You that in the midst of the gatherings of Your people, You take note of individuals and individual circumstances. Lord, we give thanks that You take note of all the detail of the lives of Your people, That You are not beyond looking upon us in such a way as to draw near to us, To assure us in a personal way that we can safely trust in You.

[8 : 45] And we pray that You would speak to us personally, Lord, this evening. And we pray that You would do so no matter what others may feel, What others may experience, And what others may be in regard to their own relationship with You.

Help us, we pray, each one, and help us all together To seek You in a way that would further our acquaintance with You, And our experience of You as our Lord and as our God.

We bring before You too, O Lord, our needs as a congregation. We thank You for the way that You continue to provide for us, For the way in which we can say, O Lord, that You have helped us thus far on our journey through life.

You have helped us in our history as a congregation and as a church. And we pray, gracious Lord, that You would grant Your blessing, That we may further have that blessing imparted to us as each week goes by.

And we pray that You would grant Your blessing to extend into our homes, Our families, our children, our grandchildren, our relatives, our neighbors. O Lord, we pray for our communities.

[9 : 56] We pray for our island. We pray for all who no longer come to church. We pray for those who have never come to church. We pray for those, Lord, who are not concerned about being along with the worshiping people of God.

We pray for those whose hearts are closed to the message of the gospel. We pray that You would bless them. We pray that You would give to them what You have given to ourselves. That desire after You, that desire to know You, That desire, O Lord, that comes out of a knowledge of ourselves, That we need You, a knowledge of ourselves that we cannot organize and create for ourselves in life.

Those things that will be a sure foundation for us. Remember us, we pray, Lord, in all the different ways in which we seek to serve You, And be pleased to accompany all that we do in Your name, With Your blessing and with further evidence of Your delight in us.

We ask that You would forgive our sins. Every time, Lord, we come together in this way, Each of us is surely aware that we come with our own sins, With our own confession, With our own need to divulge to You, Although You know already that we need Your pardon, Your cleansing, Your acceptance of us.

Lord, our God, we ask as we confess our sins, That as You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins, And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, That we may know in You that blessing this evening, And that we may be assured that when our sin is forgiven, It is truly forgiven permanently.

[11 : 38] And even though we come on a regular basis to confess our sin, Lord, we take delight in the fact that in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, You come to blot out the transgressions of Your people, You come to wipe clean the record of debt, The record of guilt that is on our record, And You replace it with Your righteousness, With Your acceptance of Your people, And with the fact that You see them as righteous in Your Son.

Oh, gracious Lord, help us to give all the more thanks to You For the reality of these things. We ask Your blessing to be tonight with those who are ill. We know those of our number, Lord, as a congregation Of whom we've heard in recent days of illness.

We pray that You draw near to each and every one, And every home thereby affected. Remember those in hospital, those in the hospice, Those, Lord, who are in care homes throughout our island. We pray that You bless them and bless to them the care that they receive. Remember those who mourn the passing of loved ones. Gracious One, be near to them to comfort them. And be near to those throughout the world tonight Where the pain and the sorrow of death is so evident. And particularly tonight, we remember, oh Lord, Those in Morocco and Marrakesh and the surrounding district Whose lives have been devastated by an earthquake With such great loss of property and of life.

[13 : 13] Lord, we pray that You would provide for them And that the agencies that seek to come to their aid Will know of Your own provision and Your blessing for them. And we ask especially, oh Lord, that You would grant to provide for them An understanding and a peace that comes from knowing Yourself.

And we pray that You would help them, Lord, as they cry out in their agony. That You would help them and hear their cry And come to do for them more than we are able to ask or even think.

Bless us then now, we pray. Here we come to You, Lord, to seek that we will hear Your voice speaking to us from the Scriptures. And we pray for the grace to hear And to hear in such a way that recognizes that the Lord is indeed addressing us.

Hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Once again, let's praise the Lord. We're singing this time in Psalm 91. Psalm 91 in the Scottish Psalter.

That's page 351, verses 1 to 4. Words that remind us of the refuge that God is for all who trust in Him.

[14 : 25] How He provides for us security and safety in that refuge Against all that would seek to take us away from the Lord Himself and cause us distress. He that doth in the secret place of the Most High reside Under the shade of him that is the Almighty shall abide I of the Lord my God will say, He is my refuge still.

He is my fortress and my God. And in Him trust I will. As somebody once said, We can never run away from God to hide from Him.

He always sees us. But we can run into Him and find our hiding place and our refuge in Himself. And that's what faith actually does. It draws us into the refuge that God Himself is.

So let's sing these verses 1 to 4. He that doth in the secret place. Of the Most High reside He that doth in the secret place.

Of the Most High reside. He that doth in the secret place. And that of the Most High reside. the shape of him that is the almighty shall abide.

[15 : 56] I hope the Lord my God will sing.

He is my refuge still. He is my fortress, my God, and in him trust I will.

Assuredly he shall be saved, and give deliverance from subtle flowers, make and grow the noise of his to ends.

His feathers shall be high, I trust, under his wings shall be.

His faithfulness shall be a shield, and offer unto thee.

[17 : 38] Well, as you can see from the notes of the service, we have two readings tonight from the Scriptures from the New Testament.

First in Mark chapter 15, verses 33 to 41. Now we are going to read a passage also from Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19 to 25.

First to the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 15, and beginning reading at verse 33. We read about the death of Jesus on the cross.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani, which means, My

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

[18 : 55] And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

And if you take with you especially that reference in verse 38 to what happened to the curtain in the temple to our second reading in Hebrews chapter 10.

We can read from verse 19. Amen. Amen. 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 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 to 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." And you can see there the connection between the two passages where the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place at the death of Jesus was torn in two, and it was from the top to the bottom.

It wasn't done from below by someone. It was a divine act. And that symbolized and represented how access to God was now above that of the Old Testament, as we read here in this passage in Hebrews that we'll come back to, that we are able to enter in by a new and living way, and that is, of course, Jesus himself, to draw near to God through him.

[21 : 08] So may he bless to us his word to his own praise. We're going to sing again Psalm 34 this time. Psalm number 34, that's on page 40, singing verses 1 to 9.

Psalm 34, that's on page 40. At all times I will bless the Lord. I'll praise him with my voice. Because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice. Together let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me.

I sought the Lord, his answer came. From fears he set me free. They look to him and shine with joy. They are not put to shame. This suffering man cried to the Lord.

From him deliverance came. The angel of the Lord surrounds and guards continually all those who fear and honor him. He sets his people free. Come, taste and see.

The Lord is good. Who trusts in him is blessed. Oh, fear the Lord, you saints. With need you will not be oppressed. These verses from the beginning.

[22 : 15] At all times I will praise the Lord. I will bless the Lord. Amen. At all times I will bless the Lord.

I'll praise him with my voice. Because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice.

Together let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me.

I sought the Lord, his answer came. From fears he set me free.

They look to him and shine with joy. They are not good to shame.

[23 : 41] This suffering man cried to the Lord. From him deliverance came.

The angel of the Lord surrounds and guards continually.

He sets his people free.

Zeus come to god's promise. From his childrenitzer par■■■■ all the good souls, Nós ■■■■ tahu está,■■■■ bag unityjor Him■■■ and■ !

ganhar aé e al e e im Now, please turn with me to Hebrews chapter 10.

[25 : 05] Hebrews chapter 10, that passage we read from verse 19 to 25. We're going to focus on that for a short time this evening. 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, in full assurance of faith, and so on. Three great exhortations there, beginning with let us, in these verses from verse 22 onwards.

Let us draw near, let us hold fast, let us consider. Now, last week we began, last Sunday morning, we began a short study, or series of studies, on the gathered church.

We took that from Matthew 18, and I did say at that time that I was going to do this, whether it be in the morning or the evening, we're going to follow this theme for a few weeks. As we look at the Bible's teaching on the gathered church, the church gathered together, especially in a focus on the worshiping church of God.

And we saw last time that it was where two or three have been gathered together in his name, that he is there in the midst. And we focused on gathered in the name of Jesus, and we focused also on the second point, that Jesus is actually in the midst of his people, that he is in their hearts.

[26 : 33] And so in that sense, they carry Jesus with them as they come together. He is individually, he is in each individual life that he occupies, that lives by faith in him.

And when we come together, we also bring that presence of Jesus in our hearts with us. Not to say that that's the only way in which Jesus is present in the gatherings of his people.

But tonight, as we look at this passage, we can see that specific reference in verse 25 to being gathered together. He says there, Let's consider how to stand one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

And you can see the balance in that verse. That is, on the one hand, he's saying, Let's not neglect to meet together. And the opposite of that, the other side of it is, Instead of neglecting to meet together, let's encourage one another.

So obviously that means meet together in order to encourage one another. It's not just a matter of coming together to worship the Lord. That is the primary exercise of our gathering together as worshiping people, as a worshiping congregation.

[27 : 48] But here is another dimension to it as well. We gather together in such a way that seeks to encourage one another, through gathering together under the Word of God, and in fellowship, spiritual fellowship with one another.

So we have the opportunities there, and the privilege of encouraging one another as well. Now we need to keep this passage, these verses, we need to keep them bound together as they are here in the passage before us.

Because the three exhortations, as we said there, these three letters sentences, verses 22 to 25, these are actually set on a foundation, if you like, and the foundation is what goes before that.

The gathering, the exhortations that are addressed to us as we gather together, they all stem from what we're told already in verses 19 to 21.

Having certain things already in place. Having certain facts that we can rely upon. The facts especially about Jesus himself, and about the death of Jesus, and about the way that he's opened up for us through his death, into the presence of God.

[29 : 04] These great facts, he says there, are what leads them then to the exhortations. Having these in place, he's saying, let us now do this. In other words, we're reminding ourselves, and this is reminding us anyway, that when we gather together to worship God, we gather together in response to what God has already done.

We don't come to gather together in worship as if God would then do something in return, or repay us for the fact. There may be some aspects of truth to that, of course, as well.

But this is the great fact. This is the great fact. God has already done this for us. God has been active in Jesus Christ, providing us with this access into his own presence.

It's a new and it's a living way. And we have boldness, confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by this new and living way that he's opened through his flesh, through his death on the cross, and his own person.

When we come, as we're gathered tonight in worship, what we're doing is gathering together in response to something that's already taken place.

[30 : 17] We're not doing something that will give cause to God to bless us. He is freely able to bless us in any case or not. But we're coming together in response to, in believing response, in worshiping response to what he has already done and what he has done conclusively by the death of Jesus on the cross.

And that's such an important aspect of thinking of the church gathered together, the gatherings of the church, the gatherings of the church, especially for worship, public worship, as we're doing this evening and every other time we come.

We come because this has already happened. And this is actually something that requires of us that we respond to that by coming together and coming to God through this new and living way that Jesus himself is.

We could say a lot more than that, but you will notice the plurals that he's using. We saw this last time, the importance of noticing the plurals in the Bible the plurals by which God addresses his people, whether it's here on the Old Testament, these New Testament epistles, Hebrews, those of Paul, those of John, all of these have the same feature, that they address the people of God as a people.

Of course, as we said last time, that means addressing us as individuals as well. Everything here is addressed to you and to me in an individual sense. We have to make individual use of it.

[31 : 53] But nevertheless, primarily, it's an address to us as a gathered people. Let us draw near. Let us hold fast the confidence of our, the confession of our hope.

Let us consider how to stir one another up to love and to good works. They're plurals. They're addressed to a people. They're addressed to a gathered church of God.

And that's important for us also as you go through the various aspects of what we are privileged to have as Christians and as believing people.

We're privileged to have, yes, individually, but especially together. Together in such a way as worships him in response to what he has done. So let's look at these three exhortations briefly.

The first of these, you'll find is, let us draw near. 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.

[32 : 55] Now this passage has a lot in it that we're not going to go into in any detail because as I said, it's important that we keep it all together and get the main parameters of it worked out in our understanding and then put that to ourselves.

And what he's doing here is saying, here is what we're doing in response to what God has done in Christ. We're coming together to draw near to God. That's what you're doing this evening if you've come here with a mindset upon worshiping him with everybody else who's come here tonight to worship the Lord.

You are drawing near to God and of course you can do that and you do that in an individual sense as well. When you go on your knees or when you pray to God, however it is, your posture is to pray to God.

You're drawing near to God. When you sing in praise to God on your own, you're drawing near to God. You're conscious that you're drawing near to this God you're worshiping.

And it's a wonderful privilege, more so than in an individual sense, to come together to worship the Lord means together we're coming to draw near to him.

[33 : 59] We're coming into his presence. We're coming through this new and living way into the very presence of God. We don't need any other warrant to come than what's already been done for us and his own invitation and exhortation based upon that.

Let us draw near to him. Are we conscious tonight that this is what we're doing? Is that not our mindset as we come through these doors to gather together in this place of worship that we are actually intending and seeking to draw near to God?

That we look at what worship is in all the various aspects of it, but it's primarily a drawing near to God through Christ, through this new and living way.

And he says here, we're drawing near with a true heart and a true heart in full assurance of faith. Well, a true heart really there is something that means just opposite to hypocrisy.

We're coming with a genuine sincerity in our hearts to worship God. Our worship is never perfect as it leaves ourselves. Our minds at worship are not perfectly attuned to listening to God or to speaking from the pulpit about God.

[35 : 22] We're still sinners. We're failing in so many aspects of what we do, even in our worship. But here he's saying we're coming with a sincere heart. Your being here tonight at this service of worship is something that you can say of yourself, I want to be there.

I'm sincere about my desire to worship God. I'm not drawing near to him just as a matter of form, just in terms of a formality, just doing something outwardly.

I'm coming before him with a sincere heart. I'm not coming to him in pretense. I'm not pretending to be something that I'm not.

I'm coming with a sincere heart. And you see, he's putting it in the plural, let us draw near with a sincere, with a sincere, with a true heart. Let us draw near with a true heart.

And then he says in full assurance of faith. Another aspect of the drawing near, of the coming together, that we come in full assurance of faith. Now that sometimes troubles people.

[36 : 27] And it used to trouble myself until I came across a meaning given to it that really helped me out because every time I thought of this in full assurance of faith coming near to God, I thought, well, I'm failing there because my faith is sometimes so poor.

My faith is sometimes so weak. I wish I had a stronger faith. And if I had a stronger faith, I would fit into the category of what this writer is saying, drawing near to God with a full assurance of faith. But then you see, that's not what this phrase means. It doesn't mean drawing near to God fully persuaded that you are saved or having that full assurance that yes, you are saved, you are a believer, you are indeed trusting in Christ.

Let me read to you what that great Puritan theologian John Owen says in his commentary on Hebrews about this phrase. Obviously, he met in his own day with people who thought that this full assurance of faith meant reaching a very height of assurance that you are a believer.

This is what he says. The full assurance of faith here represents not the assurance that any have of their own salvation, nor any degree of such an assurance.

[37 : 51] It is only the full satisfaction of our souls in the reality and efficacy of the priesthood of Christ to give us acceptance with God in contrast to all other ways and means thereof.

And that really is saying to it full assurance of faith, Owen is saying, means you are fully persuaded that Jesus is everything you need in order to have that full acceptance of God.

That everything you require in order to have a life that God himself receives and takes delight in and accepts as righteous in his sight, that's all in Jesus.

And the full assurance of faith, as Owen said, is the full satisfaction of our souls in the reality and efficacy of the priesthood of Christ to give us that acceptance with God.

So if you're coming tonight and saying, I know that I don't have anything in myself and my own ability that I can create in order to give me acceptance with God.

[39 : 01] I know I can't come to God and draw near to God with his people to worship him thinking that somehow my sincerity, although I'm sincere, that my sincerity is something that will guarantee me acceptance before God.

I can't come before him and say, Lord, I prayed today and I prayed a number of times today and I'm pleased that I was able to pray and on the basis of that I'm persuaded that you'll accept me.

You can't come with that. Great and wonderful though prayer is. No, you come to draw near to God.

We come to draw near together as we come to draw near to God and we're saying this, Lord, I have everything I need for your acceptance and I accept this as being perfectly sufficient for me that Jesus in his death is everything and all I need.

You're saying that tonight. Then you have that full assurance of faith. You're saying that you discount every other possibility of something of every other means that you may think of would give you acceptance with God and you're saying no, Lord, I don't want to trust in any of these.

I know I mustn't do that. It's not going to bring me acceptance with you at all but here is my acceptance. Here is my ground of confidence.

[40 : 27] Here is Jesus. I believe in him. I trust in him. I trust myself to him. I put myself in his hands and at his disposal.

I receive him as my righteous savior. I receive him as Lord your provision for a poor sinner like me. I receive him gladly.

I receive him with relief for my soul because I am persuaded by your word that that gives me acceptance in your sight.

let us draw near let us draw near with a true heart and in the full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

well in a word that really just indicates the totality with which God saves us and brings us into acceptance with himself. We need a clean conscience.

[41 : 33] We need a conscience that's sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. We need outwardly as well in our behavior to have our bodies washed with pure water. A spiritual way of stating that our entire person needs to be made acceptable with God and that's what Jesus does.

That's what faith in Jesus brings. Not that faith is meritorious. It's Jesus himself who has the merit and through that we receive this acceptance with God this sprinkling of our conscience from our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.

A conscience that you want to always pronounce that you are right with God. Of course your conscience even as a believer convicts you when you know you've done wrong or when you know you haven't done something you ought to have done.

That's perfectly alright in the sense that I mean it's perfectly alright in the sense that it shows you and indicates there's something there in you that really is keeping you in the right direction and that you're relying upon Christ himself for your acceptance with God and not anything in yourself.

Let us draw near let us draw near he says with a true heart and in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

[43 : 06] But then he goes on with another exhortation let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful.

Now notice he's saying it's the confession of our hope rather than confession of faith which we very often come across this is the confession of our hope.

What does Jesus do? What does God do when he brings us and saves us and puts us in Christ and brings to us that salvation that becomes ours then through faith in Christ what is he doing?

He's giving us hope. Remember how Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 2 he described what the Ephesians once were when they were unsaved heathen pagans in all their idolatry before the Lord sent the gospel to them and they came to be saved through the gospel through the preaching of the gospel you were he says at that time cut off from the commonwealth of Israel without God and without hope in the world.

One thing that characterizes the unsaved sinner is the absence of hope because hope in the biblical sense of it is not somehow hoping that things will improve.

[44 : 39] That's a worldly hope. That's a hope really without any foundation even though it might be good to some extent to have a hope that something will happen to improve one's life but when you're thinking of this hope the hope that you have through Christ and through faith in Christ the confession of hope that's mentioned here is the hope that's founded upon Christ's own resurrection from the dead especially when you come to receive Christ you come to receive not just the Christ who died but the Christ who is now alive who is risen from the dead and is alive forevermore and it's there that you find hope.

You know we're so used to being at funeral services here in this congregation in our community we have so many times gathered with families who have lost loved ones and that's part of life in this world as long as this world continues and one of the things that's really so sad to see so desperately sad to see is that people come to die who've not expressed any confession of hope while they lived who didn't have that trust in Christ who couldn't confess I have a hope that's now firmly based upon the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and therefore God assures me that that hope will be fulfilled and that I will share in the triumph of Jesus over death.

That's what you want tonight to have as a characteristic of your life to have that hope that the Bible speaks of the hope of the gospel the hope that comes through Jesus Christ put away every kind of hope other than that because hoping for the best is just vain hope it's not necessarily worth anything at all when you come to hope and have hope in Jesus that hope is based on Christ's resurrection it's a hope that looks to the promises of God that they will fulfill they will be fulfilled because notice what he's saying let's hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful why am I sure tonight that the hope I have of resurrection life of life in heaven through faith in Christ through my coming to give myself in response to his love to be ruled by him to be saved by him why am I persuaded that that is actually sure and certain for me because he is faithful who has promised it

God is not going to be other than true to his word and when God gives you that hope in your heart that looks forward to heaven despite all the imperfections that you and I have in our lives tonight one thing you can be sure of is this having this hope in Jesus is certain to be realized in glory with him what a great privilege that is and doesn't it show you how empty a life is crammed with all the things that this world can actually give you and without this hope what does it profit as Jesus himself said what shall it profit a man though he gains the whole world and lose his soul let us hold fast the confession about hope without wavering and you see that's where the gathered church again the whole concept the whole truth the fact of a gathered church the fact of gathering together

that's where it really comes into its own as far as this is concerned because we all have that hope individually when we're

Christians when we're in the Lord when we've come to put our trust and our faith in him and when that hope then is realized in your heart but you see in order to encourage one another to strengthen that hope that's in you individually you think well I need to be with the Lord's people I need to be a part of and a member of that gather church and if I want my hope to be something that grows if I want to have if I want to have a holding fast of that confession of my hope if I want that holding of my hope to become stronger I can't do it without the Lord's people not at least not very successfully but here we are together and here we are addressed in a way that God sees us gathered together as worshipping people and here is what God is saying to us together let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering so there's let us draw near let us hold fast and then thirdly there's let us consider let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works now I think [50 : 00] I've referred to this verse previously and we have preached on some aspects of this previously and it's better I think that the way it's worded in the authorized version on this occasion at least because literally what the text is saying is let us consider one another let us consider one another so as to stir one another up to love and to good works and that makes a big difference he's saying more than let's consider how to stir one another up what he's really saying is let's give attention to one another let's actually be thoughtful and prayerful in regard to one another let's consider in that sense of it it's a very strong word actually it's used back in chapter 3 at the beginning of chapter 3 you find it used there at the very start of it you who shared in heavenly calling consider Jesus consider

Jesus now obviously that means a serious consideration giving your mind to thinking of giving your mind to your relationship with Jesus to consider himself all the time focus upon him keep your focus upon him and that's the same word that's now used here in considering one another let us consider one another and you see how that fits into not neglecting to meet together because to consider one another means that we gather together that we interact with each other that we are not being nosy and busy bodies looking into other people's lives and aspects of the lives that we have no business prying into that's not what he's on about here he's on here about actually improving our own progress spiritually and he's saying let us consider one another let's give due thoughtful prayerful attention to one another because that's the opposite really isn't it of

I think I mentioned last time the world and the worldliness that you see around us sadly is very much I can just look after my own life and I want to look after my own life this kind of inward selfish individualistic view of life well the gathered people of God are the opposite to that because you don't gather here with other people thinking well it's all about me and it's all about what I can get out of the service of worship that I'm attending that's really all I'm concerned with how I can improve my own spiritual standing and understanding and progress yes there's that individual aspect but you're coming and you're considering others you're considering one another we're considering together each other's lives so as to help one another along the path of life let us consider one another and you know we can do that before we ever come to church and we should be doing that before we ever come to church let me just put it to myself and put it to yourselves as well because we here together did I think before

I left home before I left my house to come to this service did I think even briefly of what it would be like to meet with others and those who are going to be meeting with me did I come into this building tonight and take my place wherever I'm seated and was one of the first things I did look around me and see who else is here how can I pray for them what's my responsibility for them to ask that they too will be blessed or did I just think of myself or did I just to come in and just start talking about the things of the day and here he is saying let us consider one another let's make it a practice when we come through these doors to worship the Lord together that we give due prayerful attention to each other as you look around you and you see people and you know that they have different needs maybe somebody is recently bereaved maybe somebody is going through some very difficult challenges in life that you know are already made public maybe somebody you know has a difficulty in their family that they are wrestling with and that has become known it is not something to be ashamed of but as you sit there and as you see such people around you and me too let's consider one another so as to stir up you see he's saying to love and to good works and that's tied up with what he said here encouraging one another 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 as we said at the

beginning here the two sides are the same issue the same coin if you like instead of neglecting to meet together we are actually meeting together so as to encourage one another so as to give consideration to one another in order that we will have our own lives as we pray for one another and consider one another so that we will actually be stirred up by that to love and to good works a wonderful thing isn't it when when you think of how love for God and love for God's people and love for God's church brings us and persuades us and constrains us to come together and worship then you find the cycle going around the other direction if you like that gathering together actually adds to your love for one another and for God it's a complete cycle love brings you to be with others who are worshipping and being with others who are worshipping increases your own love and your appetite for them let's consider one another not neglecting to do this as he says is the habit of some even in his day during this early time in the church at the time even of the apostles he was already aware that some people were making a habit of not gathering with the others who came to worship not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some

I'm sure it was in some ways understandable because these Hebrews were obviously suffering for their faith and they were going through some very testing times and you'll find here in the likes of this chapter itself at verses 32 there to 39 where he says recall the former days when after you were enlightened you endured a hard struggle with sufferings sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction and so on and he's saying recall these things go back in your mind and think well this is really the life that I entered on willingly so why should I think differently now he's saying don't neglect don't let us neglect gathering together but it may very well be that it wasn't it certainly isn't the case in our day and in our context that you have persecution in the way you have it in other parts of the world and in the way you find it described in some of these New Testament letters it's not however difficult it may be for us whatever opposition you meet with you can't really say that it equates to persecution such as you found in those days or still find in places throughout the world here is what one commentator said

[58 : 02] William Lane in his commentary on Hebrews it is natural to think that the neglect of the meetings was motivated by fear of recognition by outsiders in a time of persecution or by some other acute concern it is sobering to discover that in the early second century in Rome it was simply preoccupation with business affairs that accounted for the neglect of the meetings of a church that is sobering but then you see you go back to the Lord's own teaching in the parable of the sower what do you find in the parable of the sower well you find him saying that there were all these different types of soil four different types of soil into which the seed fell the seed of the gospel represented in its reception or lack of it by these four soils what were they like well the one that was by the roadside the devil came and picked away what was sown in the heart and then he says what was sown on the rocky ground is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy yet he has no root in himself but endures for a while and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word immediately he falls away well we've said already that's not a category that we can easily fit into because the level of persecution we face in whatever opposition we have it doesn't really amount much to opposition though it might be very difficult and

I don't want to minimize it but then the next one as for what was sown among thorns this is the one who hears the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it becomes it proves unfruitful you see there it is the cares of this life the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches the materialistic bent of our hearts will draw us very quickly away from profiting from the word of the gospel planted in our hearts that's why we need each other that's why we need to gather together in a way that doesn't neglect the meeting together to encourage one another encouraging one another instead of neglecting of one another and he's saying it's to love and to good works because that's really outwardly what a Christian life is known as in the world not people who keep themselves entirely apart from contact with the world but people hopefully of which the world could say these are people who are dedicated to love and to good works to helping people and he says all the more as you see the day drawing near just finally with these words all the more as you see the day drawing near what is the day that's drawing near it's the day of Christ's return the day of his judgment of the world what he's saying to us here is the more we realize as we surely do every day that we're another day nearer to the coming of Christ that we're another day nearer to the judgment of the world and of us all by Jesus what should that be doing for us what should our response be to that well it's this that we do this that we do this meeting together and encouraging one another all the more as you see the day drawing near in other words he's saying

the more you think about the return of

Jesus and the day of judgment the more we should be concerned never to neglect the meeting of ourselves together but rather encouraging one another as the gathered church of God now all of that fits in with what we're beginning to do monthly at our Wednesday first Wednesday of the month where we began looking at six studies of what are called six steps to loving your church very practical way of looking at things but it's designed so that we will think of a relationship with each other that we will actually think of as this passage tonight says not neglecting to meet together but encouraging one another and thinking of what it is we're doing when we're part of the church of God and our privilege to love the church to love the people of God to love the gathered worshipping people of God let us not he says neglect the gathering of ourselves together let us draw near let us hold fast let us consider one another may God bless these thoughts on his word to us we're going to conclude this evening singing in

Psalm 65 Psalm 65 that's on page 82 and verses 1 to 5 so on page 82 Psalm 65 and Zion praise awaits you Lord to you our vows will pay to you all people will come near you hear us when we pray when we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us lay you pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away how blessed are those you choose and bring within your courts of grace we're filled with blessings in your house and your most holy place with awesome deeds of righteousness you answer us oh God our savior hope of further seas and all the earth abroad so let's sing these verses to

God's praise amen to you in Zion praise I wait to Lord to you our vows we'll pray to you all people will come near you hear us when we pray when we will overwhelm our sins and guilt upon us lay you pardon all our trespasses and washed our guilt away how blessed are those you choose and bring within your courts all and all our and the

[65 : 45] Lord of grace we're filled with blessings in your eyes in your hope's holy place with awesome peace of righteousness the needs of righteousness you answered us O God our Savior hope of far the seas and all the earth have the love the Lord after the benediction I'll go to the main door if you allow me to get to the door please now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen