

A Call to Persevere in Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Verse 11, verses 11 to 25. So if you have your Bible, you can follow me. Hebrews 10, 11 to 25. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties.

Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First, he says, this is a covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my law in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. Then he adds, their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through the curtain, that is his body. And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings. Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching. Our next song is 108.7. Lord, I come before your throne of grace.

[2 : 1 1] The question is this. Caesar's, they reply. Therefore, he says, give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Pride may be the greatest sin, but hypocrisy is surely a close second. If, however, we draw near to God with a sincere heart, we may also come in full assurance of faith. Assurance is not only a Christian doctrine, it is something that we experience. Romans 8.16 says that the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. And that fact, together with what Jesus has done for us, gives us the confidence to come into God's presence. Of course, we must be careful not to be overconfident. We have to be careful how we come into his presence.

Confidence can too easily become presumption. God is our Father, and he is a friend to whom we can tell anything, but he is not our pal. Like me, you probably grew up with a Father who cared and provided for you.

Who you were comfortable with, who you could talk with, and even have fun with. But like me, you probably knew that there was a line that you dare not cross. Woe was me if I was ever cheeky or disrespectful to my Father. How much more must a heavenly Father be treated with the utmost respect?

There are a number of instances in the Bible when individuals were too presumptuous and, as a result, crossed the line with God and paid the price. When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them to do, they were immediately struck down and died. Moses said to Aaron, this is what the Lord spoke of when he said, among those who approach me, I will be proved holy. In the sight of all the people, I will be honored. When many years later, King Uzziah tried to do much the same thing as Aaron's sons, he was immediately struck down with leprosy. Recently, my wife and I watched a video of a well-known American TV evangelist. We talked of God and his relationship with him with such over-familiarity that we cringed. I almost felt like stepping away from the TV in case it was struck with lightning.

God is a holy God. So we must be careful how we come before him. Under the old covenant, the priests were commanded that on the day of atonement, the high priest must first wash himself, then put on his priestly garments, sacrifice a bull for his sins and the sins of the people, and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. It was with this image in mind that verse 22 says, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. So next we come to verse 23.

[5 : 48] Let us hold fast without wavering to the hope we possess for he who promised is faithful. The epistle to the Hebrews, as the title suggests, was written to Jewish Christians who were under pressure from their fellow Jews to abandon their faith in Jesus as their Messiah. Some of them were no doubt subject to gentle persuasion, others perhaps to ridicule, still others to coercion or downright hostility, and certainly some were even subject to persecution. The author addresses the believers in verses 32 to 34 of chapter 10 saying, remember those early days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and to persecution. At other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. Persuasion, ridicule, coercion, hostility, and persecution are all tactics that the devil uses against believers. And although scripture says that we are not ignorant of his devices, nevertheless these things are not easy to deal with. And in the case of the

Jewish believers, this was having a marked effect on them, so that some were evidently struggling. And some had even given up their faith in Jesus. Which is why the author of the epistle encourages them to hold fast to the hope that they possess, and to do so without wavering. Reminding them that he who promised is faithful.

That is that we can trust him, God, to sustain us. In fact, the entire epistle of Hebrews was written for the self-same purpose of encouraging those believers to remain faithful to Christ in the face of increasing hostility. Christians too in Britain today are experiencing an increase on hostility from politicians and institutions, as well as from specific sections of society, which we won't go into because of the children present. But this hostility is particularly aimed at those of us who are Bible-believing Christians, as what we regard as sin is at variance with so much of what the world regards today, not only as acceptable, but is often actively promoted and celebrated even in our schools.

This is why when taking the Bible study on Wednesday, last Wednesday night, as most of you knew, I did not continue the study in Jonah as I was meant to do. But in the light of the impending election and having had the message of Habakkuk impressed on me the night before, I instead shared how Habakkuk, who, like us, lived in a time of deep spiritual and moral decline, marked by increasing violence, corruption and injustice, prayed to God to do something about it, but was not given the answer that he expected.

The Lord told him instead that he was about to judge Israel by bringing Babylon against the nation to punish her for her many sins. In other words, things were going to get worse before they would get better. Despite the hope that many people might have in a new government, and it's right, as Karen did this morning, that we pray for them, I'm beginning to think that regardless of which party is in power, things are going to get worse for Christians, which is why this message in Hebrews is so relevant to us today. And by the way, John, if you're listening, sorry that I didn't do Jonah.

[10:09] Whatever happens, we must hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. He who promised is faithful, but he also says in verse 20 of our chapter, if anyone draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. So let us draw near to God. Let's keep near to God. Let us hold fast to the profession of our faith.

And finally, we're going to look at verses 24 and 25. Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching. The first thing I notice here is that verse 23 said, let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. That tells me that it is responsibility of all of us, not just of the church leaders, to spur each other on. The phrase spur one another on conjures up an image of a rider on a horse, giving it a dig in its ribs to make it go faster. Now I'm no Greek scholar, but evidently the Greek word is *paroxousmos* or *paroxousmos*. It means to excite, to stimulate, to stir up. And that's where we get that English word *paroxous* to mean over excitement, but that's another story. Now of course, stirring people up can be either. It's not uncommon for people, even in a church, to stir up trouble or hatred. Certainly we see enough of that on the TV.

But we are to stir one another on good deeds. Love and good deeds are the marks of a Christian, even as a Christian. You've probably heard more sermons on love than any other subject, but it's a good thing to be reminded about the need for love in our relationships, both inside and outside of the church. Probably the most famous passage in the Bible on love is, of course, 1 Corinthians 13, which tells us that love is patient and kind. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, and indeed never ends. But just as important as knowing what love is, is also knowing what it is not. And so in the same passage we read, love does not envy or boast.

It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. And if you felt a tinge of conscience when I read those words, don't worry, so did I. We are told to consider, that is, to think of ways that we can spur one another on towards love and good deeds. In respect of love, that can, for instance, mean encouraging our young folks not only to love God and his word, but to love their parents so that they learn to respect and obey them, to love learning or music or sport or nature, things that are good for us that God has given us to enjoy. And what about helping people to love themselves, not in a narcissistic way, but in a healthy way? I'm no psychologist either, not a Greek scholar, not a psychologist. But I know that when, say, a wife or a child is constantly criticized, it eventually sucks a life out of them. And they can become convinced of their own unworthlessness. Helping them to see their worth in the eyes of God can be transformative.

These are just some thoughts. There are so many ways that we can spur one another on, we can stir one another up towards love and good deeds. And of course, good deeds. For there are also many opportunities for us to do good deeds. Apart from the good works done by all who contribute to the life of this church, many of our members are also involved with outside organizations.

[14:47] Some Christian, some non-Christian, some paid, some voluntary. Some of the areas that I know our members help with are food banks, care homes, child care, youth work, evangelism, supporting missionaries, preaching, and Bible distribution. But there are so many other needs out there.

We are not only part of the local body of Christ, we are also part of his wider body, and part of our communities, even of different communities. For example, a teacher can at the same time be part of a school community, a church community, a golfing community. So we all have opportunities to do good. Some folks get disgruntled because they are not being given the opportunity to use their talents in the church. But there are many organizations that are crying out for help where they could find fulfillment in serving. So if you have time on your hands, which most of you don't, spare time that you want to use to make a difference, let me stir you up to go and find something to get involved in and something positive to do.

We are to consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. During COVID, when congregations couldn't meet together, people got into the habit of doing other things on Sunday mornings.

And although things eventually got back to normal, some folks didn't go back to church, enjoying the freedom more than the fellowship. But we are told not to give up meeting together because we are a body, specifically the body of Christ. We need each other. The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. And how can we encourage one another if we don't see each other? Spurring one another on, not giving up meeting together, and encouraging one another are the things we are to do. And all the more, says the text, as you see the day approaching. That day is the day of the Lord. Jesus is coming back for his church.

When he does, may he find us close to God, holding fast to the hope we possess, and engaged in love and good deeds in fellowship with one another, as we look to him expectantly for his return. Amen.

[17:37] We'll stick with Hebrews for the benediction. May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead that our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Thank you. Please stay behind and have fellowship over a cup of tea.