**LET US DRAW NEAR TO GOD**

April 24, 2016

Hebrews 10:19-39

Key Verse 10:22 “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.”

In Hebrews, we have been studying the absolute superiority and supremacy of Jesus Christ. Jesus is better than Moses, and Jesus is better than angels, and Jesus is better than all the prophets. And Jesus offered a better sacrifice than all the other priests. All the way through chapter 10:18, is a presentation of the superiority of Jesus Christ. And now, as we come to verse 19, we find that the author asks for a response. Now, periodically, up through chapter 10:18, he has been giving warnings. “How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” (2:3). Later on in chapter 4, more warnings. “Let us make every effort to enter that rest.” (4:11) In chapter 6, more warnings. “If we know these things and we fall away, it is impossible to be renewed to repentance.”

But now the author is going to ask for a full response, beginning in verse 19. Notice that verse 19 begins, “Therefore.” It means, “On the basis of what I have said for 10 chapters and 18 verses, you must respond.” If you know the gospel of Jesus Christ, you either take a positive response and boldly as in verse 19, “enter the Most Holy Place,” or you take a negative response, as in verse 26, you sin willfully after you knew the truth, and you fall away, and judgment comes about. Only two responses. After ten chapters of basic doctrine about the identity of Christ, finally, he says, “Now here is the opportunity for you to respond.” The first is a positive response, which is salvation. Now, salvation is made up of three features: faith, hope, and love; firstly is faith. “Let us draw near by faith,” in verse 22. Secondly is hope, in verse 23, which says, “Let us hold fast to the hope.” And then there is love. Verse 24 says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love.” Three statements beginning with “Let us,” one having to do with faith, one having to do with hope and one having to do with love. Salvation is drawing near, holding fast and loving each other. Somebody who draws near and falls away, that is not salvation. Somebody who draws near, sticks around a while but doesn’t love his brother is someone whom 1 John 4:20 says: “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.” And so salvation could be kind of dissected into faith, hope and love, faith in God, holding fast to our hope and loving each other. That indicates a true believer. And so he is talking about a real response. “Come on,” he says, “draw near, hold fast and love each other.”

Let’s begin with faith. Look at verse 22. “Let us draw near to God with the full assurance that faith brings.” We are going to draw near through faith. On what basis can we draw near? Look at verse 19-20. “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 opened for us through the curtain, that is his body.” You remember that in the Old Testament, there was the Temple, and inside there was the holy place, and separated by a curtain, was the Most Holy Place. It was where God dwelt. And no man could enter into that place except the high priest once a year to offer atonement for the sins of the nation Israel. But now he is saying, “You all can enter into God’s presence. The curtain has been torn down, and you can all enter in, and you can enter in boldly.” This is quite shocking to Jews because, to a Jew, entering into the Most Holy Place is absolutely forbidden. And if a Jew ever tried to do that under the old covenant, he would have been instantly consumed in the flames of the fire of almighty wrath. So no Jew would ever consider going into the Most Holy Place. They say that in Jerusalem there is a certain area of the Temple ground where it is forbidden to Jews to ever walk there, because it may be the area where the Most Holy Place once stood, and no Jew would ever put his foot on the Most Holy Place. Therefore, there are big signs outside the gates of the Temple that say, “Orthodox Jews have been forbidden by the rabbi to enter in this place lest they step on the Most Holy Place.” They have fear, still today of ever going into the presence of God. But because of the new covenant, the author says we can have boldness. We don’t even go in sheepishly, saying, “God, I’m coming, don’t consume me with fire.” We can enter in boldly.

Remember the prodigal son in Luke 15. The prodigal who went away came to his senses, realizing he spent all of his money, and he wound up in a pigpen tending pigs. “And he said to himself, 'I will set out and go back to my father.’” “So he got up and went to his father.” When he gets back, you find him in his father’s house. You don’t find him outside the door. You don’t find him peeking through the windows. The father welcomed him. Sovereign grace has given him boldness to enter the house. Why not? He confessed his sin. He received the kiss of reconciliation. The father put on him the best robe, gave him a ring for his finger. He was fitted to enter the father’s house, and that’s where you find him, not outside looking in. Boldness. And so in the passage of the prodigal son, we are told the prodigal son had been, in a sense, perfected. He had been made fit to enter the father’s house. And so it is in the experience of anyone who comes to God. Jesus Christ puts the right robe on, the right ring on his finger, and gives him the right things so that he may enter the Father’s house and not be in the wrong place. He can go in boldly. And, of course, those in Judaism were afraid. This whole concept was so revolutionary to them. There was no way they were going to understand it in the first time it was indicated. That’s why it has been repeated so many times in the Book of Hebrews.

Verse 20 says, “By a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.” Here the Greek word for “new” is not neos, meaning “new from old.” It is prospheton, which means, “Freshly slaughtered.” That is the literal meaning. What it says is, “We have boldness to enter into the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus by a freshly slaughtered and living way.” How vivid is that? Who was it that was freshly slaughtered that opened the way? Jesus Christ, a freshly slain road to God. All the old sacrifices didn’t make it. The old road was a dead road. It was not a new and living way. It was an old dead one. There was not any life there. The old way was only an index finger pointing to the new road, in Christ. Jesus Christ was slain once, and his slaying is fresh and still just as fresh today, 2,000 years later, as it was the day it happened. His sacrifice is effectual for all of time, and thus it is spoken of as fresh. Not only that, it is a living way. It talks about resurrection. Jesus is not a dead sacrifice. He is alive. He has risen. And he is seated at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us. And so it is a living way because the sacrifice is alive. More than that, it is a living way because we are alive. Ephesians 2:4-5 says, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.” We were dead to God. No matter what God says, we did not understand it because we could not feel it. We could not sense God anyway. But when we believe in Jesus, God made us alive, and we began to sense God. Things begin to make sense. We begin to see what God wants and to think with the thoughts of God. And all of a sudden a whole new dimension opens up to us. We are alive to God, and we feel him. It is a new and living way.

Look at verse 20 again. “A new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.” Recall that the curtain separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. The author says that the curtain is Christ’s flesh. As long as Christ stayed alive, and as long as he was living, the way to God was closed, even though he was telling us about God. Christ came into the world and said this and that about God, and if he remained alive, and if his flesh was never torn on the cross, then the way to God was never open. But when the flesh of Jesus Christ was ripped apart at the cross, the way to God was open. Until Christ’s flesh was split, the way to God was closed, even though he was here. An uncrucified Savior is no savior at all. If Jesus just came into the world, talked a lot, said what he wanted us to do and left, the way would still be closed. He had to die and rise again, so that we could die to sin and live to God. When he died, the curtain of his flesh was torn, and the way to God was open. Jesus had provided actual entrance into the presence of God. He not only opened it up, but he became the high priest in the presence of God. Look at verse 21. “…and since we have a great priest over the house of God.” He not only showed us the way, he took us in there with him. Jesus Christ not only pointed out the access to God, but he took me by the arm and ushered me into his presence, and he sits there with me. In Revelation, chapter 3, it says that I sit on the throne with Jesus, who sits on the Father’s throne. It is an amazing thought. And so he is the great priest in the presence of God, living to intercede for me.

It is on this basis that the author says, “Let us draw near.” Come on, it’s open. Come to Christ. You can come in boldly into the presence of God, because of what Christ has done. So the first response that the Word of God is calling for to the new covenant is the response of faith. He says, “Let us draw near with the full assurance that faith brings.” Whatever needs or problems you have, you can come to God with the full assurance by faith: Whether it is a need for forgiveness, whether it is a need for purpose in life, whether it is a need for fellowship with God, whether it is a need for somebody to love you, whether it is a need to get rid of guilt conscience, whether it is a need for peace in your heart. You can come to Christ by faith with boldness and trust that he will solve all your problems.

Second thing in our study in the Book of Hebrews in this passage is hope. Look at verse 23a. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.” We need to have faith in a positive response, but we need to have hope. Faith says, “Let us draw near to God with a true heart and full assurance of faith,” so that we may be cleansed. Then let us have hope. You may believe, but the validity of your faith will be revealed if you continue. There are a lot of people who are going around confessing Christ, and the devil is willing to have people confess Christianity as long as they don’t practice it. In John chapter 8, those half-converts were hanging in the balance. They were believing, and yet Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” In John 12:42, many believed in Jesus, but because of the persecution, they did not openly acknowledge their faith. There are all kinds of people who say they believe, but their faith is not real because they don’t hold fast. Of course it is not easy to hold on our hope when things get tough. If you believe and your faith is real, you will hold on to the hope. What is hope? Hope is simply the trust that God will keep his promise and do what he said in the end. Is God going to keep his promises? Look at verse 10:23b, “for he who promised is faithful.” But just hold on to your hope. God’s best is yet to come.

The third thing is simply love. Look at verse 24. “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” You know, people say, “Well, I don’t need to go to church. I’m already saved, and I can miss a few here and there.” We need each other to be together. We need to be in fellowship with other as mutually we strengthen each other, and we encourage each other to remain steadfast. Just being here is an encouragement to us. I am encouraged when in trial people pray for me. I am encouraged when I pray for them and see the answer come.

Now let’s think about the negative response to the gospel briefly. Look at verses 26-27. “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” Here deliberate sinning refers not to sins of ignorance or weakness, but to those that are planned out, determined, willful. We call it “apostasy.” Apostasy is an intentional turning away from the Lord. We have been delivered from death to life. We have been unshackled from sin’s captivity so that we might not go back to our former life. This is the truth of God. At the same time we war against our flesh and when our flesh wins and we fall into sin, we know that we have an Advocate, Christ Jesus, who intercedes on our behalf before the Father. Our God is faithful to us. He has promised that he will never let us go. He has provided his Spirit to show us when we sin so that we might turn back to the Father. When our life demonstrates a lack of faith and we fall, we need to know that God remains faithful. That is not the case for an apostate. An apostate is someone who deliberately sins against God.

Someone says, “Every apostate is an unbeliever, but not every unbeliever is an apostate.” There are many people who do not know the gospel, they have never had anyone explain to them the saving message of Jesus Christ. This is not true of an apostate. An apostate knows the truth intellectually. They can quote chapter and verse. They may even attend a local church, but their hearts are far from God. They know the truth, but they have refused to receive the truth so that it might transform their lives. Simply having knowledge of God is not enough. Knowing that Jesus has died for our sins will not save us. Simply gaining knowledge will not gain us entrance into God’s presence. We must surrender to the knowledge made available to us as our only hope. The author closes his warning in verse 31, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Jonathan Edwards preached what has become one of the most famous sermons in history, entitled “Sinners in the Hands of Angry God,” based on verse 31. Edwards delivered a devastating picture of divine judgment upon sinful men, particularly upon those who were the baptized members of the church and yet gave no evidence of really being saved. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” was no delicate, entertaining sermon, but a striking portrait of the righteousness of God and the sinfulness of Man. In this sermon Edwards compared sinners to a spider dangling by a thin thread over the fire of God’s wrath.

God wants our faith to be real, and not that fake kind of faith that stays a little while and then fades, but the kind that holds fast, and the kind that is seen in those who are here and faithful in the fellowship and the assembly.