

## ENCOURAGEMENT AND WARNING

Series pt 12: Hebrews 10:19-39  
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 4/7/24, Matt Heerema

Please turn with me to Hebrews, chapter 10.

We are now in the home stretch of our series through Hebrews. Four more sermons left after today covering three more chapters. What we're seeing in the book of Hebrews is a rather long sermon. (I wonder how you'd react if I stood up and gave a thirteen chapter long sermon some day?) And today, in the second half chapter 10 we are finally coming to the conclusion of the sermon...the application, the "so what" of everything that has come before.

Starting in chapter 6, the author of Hebrews has been teaching his audience about the "solid food", rich theological concepts of the High Priesthood of Jesus, and the new covenant God is making with his people through Jesus.

Remember that Hebrews is written to a primarily Hebrew audience. Christians who have converted from Judaism and the Law of Moses in the Old Covenant. They would have been familiar with the priestly and sacrificial system of atonement for sin described in the Old Testament. When they were converted to Christianity, or as other parts of the Bible would put it, when they were "saved" or "born again", they learned that Jesus came to establish a new way of relating to God, a way for both Jew and Gentile to finally be free from their sin, finally right with God, and finally free to be in close relationship to their creator.

You'll remember we saw that these new believers were under pressure from their community, friends and family and neighbors who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and do not believe that God has made a new covenant, a new deal with his people. They were being pressured to come back to the old ways, the old covenant sacrificial system. To give up on their following of the teachings of Jesus.

And the author has been exhorting them, encouraging them, pleading with them, reminding them that there is nothing to go back to. The only way that their sins can be taken away is through Jesus! The old covenant sacrifice, the law of Moses, never took away sin, its purpose was only ever to point to the coming Messiah.

In the first half of our chapter today, the author proclaims to the people that through faith in the blood of Jesus, their sins are forever forgiven! And that there is no other way to have your sins forgiven than faith in Jesus. So he continues to encourage them:

# THE ENCOURAGEMENT: FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

He encourages them to faith in Christ, hope in God's promises, and to Love one another.

## **Hebrews 10:19-25 (CSB)**

**Therefore**, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—he has inaugurated for us a new and living way 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 in pure water.

**Let us hold on** to the confession of our **hope** without wavering, since he who promised is faithful.

**And let us consider one another** in order to provoke **love** and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

**The Curtain** - I wanted to make a quick comment on verses 19-20. What is going on with this sanctuary and curtain language. If you've been studying along with us, you'll remember that in the past three chapters the author has been talking a lot about the tabernacle, the special tent where the Jewish priests would offer sacrifices to God.

The "sanctuary" or "holy of holies" was a very special interior room in the tent that only a priest could enter. The priest had to pass through a curtain that screened the sanctuary from view. That curtain was very special. Luke 23:45 describes how the day Jesus was crucified, just before he died, this curtain was miraculously torn in two. Now the sanctuary was open to all, not just the high priest.

This is what verse 20 means. Before Jesus, the only way for man to be close to God was for the high priest to go through the curtain into the sanctuary, (the "holy of holies"). But now that Christ has come and offered his final sacrifice once and for all, the way for man to get close to God is "through his flesh" - through Jesus.

And so the author says, now that we can finally approach God, through Christ, we can approach God boldly with faith, hope, and love.

With **faith** that Christ's sacrifice really is the payment for all our sin, and since it has been paid, we are now clean. Our sin is gone. We can be close to God!

He tells us to hold on to that truth with **hope**—we now have hope because God is faithful to his promise that he has made us clean by the blood of Christ. We are going to be tempted to doubt... "Maybe this time was too much. Maybe this time was too far. Maybe this time God won't love me anymore." Have **hope** the author says—God is the one who promised. What did he promise? Look at verse 17. When will God remember our sins? Never. He promises.

It's going to be hard to remember that. We need each other. Which is why we are also encouraged to **love**. To love one another by *provoking each other* to love and good deeds. I love that the author used the word "provoke" here. The original word means "to disagree sharply..." — usually a very negative thing, isn't it? "I don't know if God loves me anymore." Response: "You're wrong! He loves you immensely! Look at what Jesus has done for you!" That's the kind of sharp disagreement we should be having, isn't it?

In order to do that, see verse 25, it is imperative that we meet together with frequency. Over thousands of years, Christians, taking all other things into account with the necessary obligations of life, settled on a rhythm and tradition of meeting together weekly, for the purpose of prayer and worship, instruction and fellowship.

Here's a question: do you average meeting together with your fellow Christians for worship, prayer, instruction, and fellowship at least once a week? That should be your bar. I know from various statistics that in America that is the habit of only about 57% of evangelicals. So to you 57% who are obeying this passage and following through with the centuries of practice of your brothers and sisters in Christ in meeting together at least weekly, you are doing well.

And you need it. You need to be reminded at least weekly, and hopefully vastly more frequently than that with daily devotion in scripture, because how many other messages are you hearing from the rest of the world in the classroom, through advertising, TV, movies, music, "conservative" talk radio, television news or daytime programming, or whatever is going on in your social media feed? Are you spending *at least* a similar amount of time listening to Bible discussion with those in your church or in private devotion and study? Something to think about. What messages are you saturating your mind with?

And then the author shows us what is at stake.

And it gets intense.

# THE WARNING

## **Hebrews 10:26-31 (CSB)**

**For** if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries. Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, who has regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

**For** we know the one who has said, “Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”<sup>1</sup> It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

On July 8, 1741, theologian, preacher, and philosopher Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” While the sermon was over a different passage, it contained very similar language verses 26-31. This sermon was one of the sparks that kicked off an event in North America and Great Britain called “The Great Awakening.”

At the time, many people were coming from the Europe to North America. The population of what is now The United States increased by five times. Churches were bursting at the seams, but more importantly, a revival of spirituality and seriousness about faith was also taking shape. This revival of seriousness about Christian Faith gave birth to the political philosophy that led to The Revolutionary War and American independence from The British Empire<sup>2</sup>. Piety came before Patriotism. Repentance came before revolution.

But what struck me was that the sermon that sparked the most important religious revival in our nation was not a feel-good, positive, encouraging, message.

Here’s a clip:

...[this is] the case of every one of you that are [not in] Christ.—A world of misery, a lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 32:35-36

<sup>2</sup> Mark A. Noll, “A History of Christianity in The United States and Canada”, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 114.

There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor any thing to take hold of; there is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.<sup>3</sup>

Why did Edwards, still considered by many scholars to be the greatest philosophical and theological mind America has ever produced, decide to preach *this*? Because, he said, "The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation." And indeed it did have that effect.

Why does the author of Hebrews include this warning? Because he knows that non-Christians are listening in. If you do not go to Christ for forgiveness of sin, the only thing left for you is "a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume..."

But, brothers, sisters, and to you friends who are not yet in Christ, "he who promises is faithful!" If you are in Christ, God will "never again remember" your sins and lawless acts!

Out of love I tell you, the consequences are dire. Sin is real. Hell is real. Judgement is coming, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if your sin against him has not been dealt with.

But Christ, our high priest, is waiting eagerly for you to approach him boldly for help in your time of need. Go to Him. Trust Him. Draw near to Him. All the payment needed to make up for all your offenses against Him have been paid by Jesus's precious blood. You do not need to fear.

Edwards' point with saying "it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up..." out of the flames of hell is not that God is delighting in dangling you over the flames. You are dangling yourself.

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 9.

He is holding on to you, holding you up and out of that final consequence, and maybe just till today. Maybe just so you could make it here this morning and finally hear that Christ is the savior. He is mercifully holding you up and out of your just punishment in hell so that you have an opportunity to hear about Jesus. An opportunity to turn to Jesus. So turn to him.

## REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

As our chapter closes out, the author calls the people to think back on how they have given their lives so far for the faith. He calls them to remember why they did that. He urges them not to throw that all away, not to give up now that the going is hard. It's been hard before, and they made it through. And I think in these final words in our chapter, we can find encouragement.

He calls them to remember who they are, and through this, he calls us to remember as well.

### **Hebrews 10:32-39 (CSB)**

Remember the earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times you were companions of those who were treated that way.

**For** you sympathized with the prisoners and accepted with joy the confiscation of your possessions, because you know that you yourselves have a better and enduring possession.

**So don't throw away your confidence**, which has a great reward.

**For** you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised.

**For** "yet in a very little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith"<sup>4</sup>; and if he draws back, I have no pleasure in him. But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved.

Let's pray.

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<sup>4</sup> Habakkuk 2:3-4