

Together

Hebrews 10:19-25
December 30, 2018

This week our family had the opportunity to make a quick trip over to northern WI and visit my side of the family. My brother flew in from Colorado and my parents and my sister live in Eagle River, WI. It was so nice to have my dad/mom and all three of us kids home together for a few days around Christmas. I hope you had a chance to catch up with some friends or family over the holidays as well. On our drive home Friday night, the roads were pretty sketchy. So, our 6-7 hour car trip took more like 8-9 hours. This gave me a lot of time to think about my sermon for today. It also gave me time to reflect on the book of Hebrews. At one point, I put in my Bluetooth ear piece and I had my Bible app read the book of Hebrews to me.

The New Testament book of Hebrews is an amazing book! It causes me to reflect on our church's mission statement: "To promote the supremacy of Christ." Hebrews articulates multiple reasons why Jesus is indeed supreme! Chapters 1-2 teach that Christ is superior to the angels. Chapters 3-4 teach that Christ is superior to Moses. Chapters 4-7 teach that Christ is superior to the entire Levitical priesthood. Chapters 8-10 teach that Christ is supreme because He offers a better covenant than the old one, a better sanctuary than the old one, and a better sacrifice than all of the previous ones combined. After these 10 chapters go on and on about the supremacy of Christ, we come to the last half of chapter 10. This is where we are going focus our attention in this sermon, specifically on verses 19-25.¹ If you haven't already, please stop reading this transcript and take a minute to read Hebrews 10:19-25. These verses exhort God's people to live out their faith in some particular ways.

Verses 19-21 begin our section by summarizing two particular impacts of Christ's supremacy. The 1st impact (of Christ's supremacy) is found in Heb. 10:19-20, "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."²

1) We now have confidence to enter God's presence.³ Christ's sacrifice is supreme because it gained us access into the "Most Holy Place." The Most Holy Place was a special room inside the tabernacle. Under the old covenant, the people of Israel were not allowed into this room because that is where God's presence would come to rest. In fact, "only the high priest entered the [Most Holy Place], and that only once a year." (Heb. 9:7) The Most Holy Place was walled off by a tall, thick curtain. This is the curtain verse 20 is alluding to.⁴ By His death on the cross, Christ tore this curtain open, thus providing a new and living way for people to enter God's presence.⁵

The 2nd impact (of Christ's supremacy) is found in Heb. 10:21, "and since we have a great priest over the house of God."⁶

2) We now have the perfect priest to lead us. Christ is far greater than any earthly priest or pastor we have ever met. Our access to God is no longer being held back by the limits of human priests. No matter how hard we pastors might try, we are human and we struggle with sin just like the rest. The phrase, "house of God" is a reference to us as Christ-followers.⁷ Together, we are under the Lordship and the leadership of Jesus. He is now the perfect priest to lead us.

Once we recognize these particular impacts of Jesus' supremacy, how should we then respond as the people who make up God's house? We are given 3 exhortations in verses 22-25. Each one

¹ "The focus now shifts from the exposition of Christ's high-priestly work and the effectiveness of his sacrifice to an earnest appeal in which our author directly addresses the community. The opening phrase with its inferential particle, therefore, indicates that a conclusion is drawn from the whole of the preceding exposition, while the direct address, brothers and sisters (which appears infrequently in Hebrews: 3:1, 12; 13:22), functions as a discourse marker to indicate a turn in the argument." O'Brien, P. T. (2010). *The Letter to the Hebrews* (p. 362). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

² See Hebrews 6:19-20.

³ "Many interpreters, however, contend that here ["confidence" can also be] rendered as 'freedom', 'permission', or 'authorization.'" O'Brien, P. T. (2010). *The Letter to the Hebrews* (p. 362). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴ Jesus' sacrifice is supremely better than the blood of bulls and goats because it allows each of us to personally enter into God's presence.

⁵ See Matthew 27:50-51.

⁶ See Hebrews 3:1-6 and 4:14-16.

⁷ In fact, it connects all of the way back to Hebrews 3:6. See discussion in O'Brien, P. T. (2010). *The Letter to the Hebrews* (pp. 365-366). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

begins with the phrase “let us.” Each one is urging us along in our faith; prodding us with good advice about godly living.⁸ Since we now have confidence to enter God’s presence and since we have the perfect priest to lead us, God’s people are given 3 exhortations. The 1st exhortation is...

1. Let us draw near to God. Hebrews 10:22 says, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Now, this may sound a lot like the statement I made earlier that “we now have confidence to enter God’s presence.” But there is a significant difference between having the confidence to enter and ACTUALLY entering. This is a call “to seize the opportunity of access to God which Christ...[has] made possible.”⁹ The reason we can draw near to God with sincerity and full assurance is that Jesus has opened up the curtain. One way of better understanding this imagery is by studying the Old Testament Tabernacle. Our church owns a model of it. It is such a great visual of what the book of Hebrews is talking about. If you haven’t had an opportunity to look at it, feel free to stop by church and we can show you it.



Perhaps you have seen the sign they put on certain doors “authorized personnel only.” Well, that used to mean that only the high priest could enter God’s presence. But now, any believer in Christ can go through that door. Therefore, we can move toward God with confidence. Let’s enjoy our favored status as men and women of God who are now on the list of “authorized personnel.” The 2nd exhortation is...



2. Let us hold unwaveringly to our faith. Hebrews 10:23 says, “Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Holding “unwaveringly” means holding fast without wavering; without bending to one side or the other.¹⁰ As I read this verse and meditated on it this week, I felt compelled to share a sad story with you. It’s not a story I enjoy telling. In fact, it’s one of the saddest things I’ve heard this year.¹¹ I share this story as an encouragement to take to heart the verse we just read. The story is about some much-loved worship leaders: Michael and Lisa Gungor. They were actually on tour right here in Bemidji about 4 years ago. I didn’t go to the concert, but I’m pretty sure that they led worship at the Switchfoot concert at the Sanford Center back in Nov. of 2014. I remember at the time, feeling like the Gungor’s faith was swerving a bit. What I mean by that is their theology was getting off track. I wish at the time that I could have warned them. I remember deciding that I just couldn’t personally support or promote their concert because of my own theological concerns.

Perhaps you went to that concert. If not, perhaps you will recognize one of their most popular songs: Beautiful things. The lyrics go like this: “you make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of the dust...”¹² This is a wonderful worship song. I hope that we will continue to sing it as a church. Michael and Lisa Gungor are very talented young musicians. God has used them to lead some really powerful times of worship all around the world. I don’t know their whole story and I won’t try to tell all of it, but you can hear a part of it in an interview from Buzzfeed that was published in September of this year.¹³ In this interview, Lisa Gungor explains their journey of becoming “heretics,” which she says in a kind of tongue in cheek way. In recent years, her and Michael found that their ideas of God were deconstructing. For various reasons, they began drifting from biblical orthodoxy.

⁸ It is unclear who the actual author of Hebrews is. The author uses the word “us,” including themselves in the activity. They invite their original Jewish audience to join them in continuing to live out their faith. They say, “let’s go you guys; let’s do these things!” In a similar way, the author invites us, as believers in Christ today, to join in these three exhortations.

⁹ Ellingworth, P. (1993). *The Epistle to the Hebrews: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 522). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press. As referenced in O’Brien, P. T. (2010). *The Letter to the Hebrews* (p. 366). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

¹⁰ “ἀκλίνας... (κλίνας ‘lean’... ‘bending to neither side’) without wavering... hold fast the confession without wavering.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 36). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹¹ Learn more by watching videos on YouTube: “How I lost Faith in The Mega Church” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-nE-zrlhKc&t=315s> or by watching Dave Wise “Lisa Gungor Interview – A Response to Those Judging” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdulN2RoC9Q> or by watching Derek Ouellette “Gungor: 3 Concerts Cancelled over Unorthodoxy? What! (re)News” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4H7z_rUSIs

¹² “Dry Bones” is another pretty popular song by them.

¹³ They got married pretty young and fairly naive. They began serving at a HUGE church in Michigan when they were only about 20 years old.

And, they began asking tough questions in very public forums. Beyond just asking questions though, they began making controversial statements. Statements like suggesting that it's a good thing to call God both Father and Mother. Now, this would have been an interesting idea to debate at a seminary or to discuss in a Sunday School class setting. However, they were making this statement in public arenas. Just to be clear, asking tough questions about God is a very good thing. In fact, I recommend it! But, we should be careful where we ask those questions and we should recognize the impact that our words have on others who are listening.¹⁴

Unfortunately, rather than heeding the cautions from other Christians around them, they seemed to become defensive.¹⁵ At the time, I certainly wasn't calling Michael Gungor a heretic. But it did seem clear to me that he was swerving from the Christian faith that he professed. Sadly, today Michael Gungor no longer even professes to be a Christian. In this same interview, his wife Lisa, admits that Michael said, "I don't believe in God anymore." Lisa shared that her husband Michael is now enjoying the freedom of his newfound atheism. "Enjoying atheism;" those were tough words for me to hear her say.

When fellow believers caution us, we can either fight back and call them judgmental OR, we can consider whether there may be something for us to learn. The Gungor's story should call all of us to humility and teachability. To be real about our questions and doubts, but to be careful in how we go about finding good answers to those questions and doubts. The Gungor's story should also call us to consistent discipleship.¹⁶ If we truly want to hold unswervingly to our hope in Christ, then we need continual, daily discipleship. Gathering with other believers for encouragement and spiritual formation is vital.¹⁷ In fact, that leads us right into our 3rd exhortation...

3. Let us consider how we may spur one another on. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward 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."¹⁸ That word "spur" sounds a little harsh to me.¹⁹ A spur makes me think of what they put on the back of a pair of boots to motivate horses. That doesn't sound like something we should do to other people. And yet, that's the idea in this verse. It carries the idea of stirring each other up, rousing one another to activity. Not only are we exhorted to "spur one another on," but we are told to "consider" HOW to do this. This makes a little more sense to me. Each person is motivated a little differently. Some of us respond the first time we get a gentle nudge. Others of us, need something more akin to a bowling ball dropped on our head, before we even begin to think about getting motivated. Regardless, while we certainly want to be respectful and appropriately loving to one another, this verse teaches us that there may be times to push a little. If there is another believer whom we genuinely care about, who is not moving toward love and good deeds in his or her faith, we need to consider how we can spur that person on.

Now that we've established that, I'm going to push you a little. (By the way, this is reciprocal, so I am very open to you pushing me as well. Please don't hesitate to spur me on, toward love and good deeds.) Let me encourage you in some very specific ways:

1) Attend one of the new Formation Groups during our Sunday School hour. Pastor Eric is launching these soon. They are designed to enhance your personal spiritual formation in the areas of your thinking, your relationships, and your priorities. (We also have Sunday School for youth and children of course.)

¹⁴ Consider James 3:1 and 2 John 7-11.

¹⁵ Michael is quoted somewhere saying, "Enough calling people heretics or apostate for disagreeing with your reading of the Bible!"

¹⁶ Gungor's story also clearly illustrates the danger of young people being promoted too quickly and without the vital discipleship opportunities that all of us need. See 1 Timothy 3:6.

¹⁷ Consider Proverbs 27:17.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, sometimes it becomes easy for us to get a little lazy with our faith. We can become a bit apathetic in our walk with God. This doesn't mean we are necessarily going out and committing a bunch of horrible sins, but it may mean that we are committing sins of omission. That is, we are leaving things undone that need to be done. We may very well be justified in saying, "I'm doing nothing wrong." But the question verse 24 causes us to ask is, "What are we doing that is right? Are we directing our time, talent, and treasure toward love and good deeds?" God calls us to be proactive. Ephesians 2:10 tells us, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Again, this all points to the supremacy of Jesus. If anyone is worthy of our worship and our diligent service, it is Jesus.

¹⁹ Πάροξυσμός = "rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking." Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 780). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2) Go to the Men's Wild Game Feed or the Women's Craft Weekend. And, as long as you are going, consider who you could spur on and invite!

3) Commit to reading through the New Testament in 2019. We need to embrace good priorities like daily time in God's Word. This is a great way of guarding against swerving away from God's Truth. We have paper copies available at church. And there is also a wonderful YouVersion Bible App for this on smart phones. It's called "Foundations: New Testament #NT260." If you use the YouVersion app, consider who you might want to invite to join you. Use this tool to spur one another on! By the way, our church is also selling some great Bibles at very affordable prices. Just let us know if you need one.

4) Get to church every Sunday that you can. Hebrews 10:25 goes on to say that we shouldn't get in the habit of missing church. Meeting together is vital for Christ-followers. If we want our spiritual life to thrive, we can't afford to miss these opportunities to meet TOGETHER. Verse 25 urges us not to give up meeting. The ESV translates it "not neglecting to meet together." The NKJV translates it "not forsaking the assembling." This is actually a very strong expression. One way we could think of this is a military defector. When a soldier abandons their unit, it discourages the rest of the troops. We are mistaken if we assume that our faith is only our own personal business. Our faith is also communal; it's not just about ourselves. And so, we live out our faith for the sake of others, not just our own sake. For the sake of our friends, our families, and our church body. God has designed the church to be TOGETHER, for bros./sis. in Christ to thrive TOGETHER.

One of my favorite illustrations for unity and our togetherness in the church is the contrast between a braided cord than a linked chain. Sometimes we might think that we are all connected to each other like the links in a chain. Metal chains are incredibly strong. However, if each of us represents one link in the chain, then we only need to be concerned with links that are immediately around us, on our left and on our right. Therefore, if one of the other links drops off for some reason, it doesn't really hurt us that much. We just take one link out of the chain and the church goes on. And, if a chain has a weak link, it weakens the entire chain. There is nothing the rest of the links can do to strengthen the weak link. In fact, the other links might just prefer to get rid of the weak link.

The church is really more like a braided cord. Each one of us is one strand, wound around all the others. There is an intimate connection and a mutual dependency that we all share. We are much stronger together than we are individually. Therefore, when one of us is weak or frayed or struggling, all of the rest of us come around that person and offer help and support. We carry the load and offer strength to whoever needs it the most.

This is why it's so vital that we not get in the habit of dropping out of church for months at a time. It's unhealthy when we consistently shop around from church to church just because want a change of scenery, a change of sermons, a change of music, or because something else isn't going quite the way we want it to. It is for the benefit of the other believers in this church if each of us can be here on a regular basis to offer words of encouragement, to minister with our spiritual gifts, to carry each other's sorrows, to rejoice together, and so on.

So, I urge you to set a goal for your church attendance in 2019. I realize that all of us need to be gone occasionally whether it be for vacation, out of town business, sickness, or whatever else. I've missed a few Sundays myself. However, it is important that we commit ourselves to be here as often as we can. There are 52 Sundays in a year. Most of us probably can't make all 52. But, could you make 42? Or 45? Or how about 40? That would mean missing church no more than 1 time a month. Whatever goal you set for yourself, I pray that God will compel you to see how urgently you are needed here. As believers in Jesus, we are in this together. Therefore, it's important that we don't give up on each other, that we not get in the habit of abandoning ship when things get difficult or awkward. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us not give up meeting together. Rather, let us encourage one another all the more!

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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