

Hebrews 10:19-25

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[0 : 00] For around 30 years after we moved into this building, I think for actually quite a long time before as well, our church secretary or correspondent was Mr David Eard. David Eard was the father of David Eard, who is now an elder in the church here.

And one of the duties of the church correspondent was that every Sunday at the end of the breaking of bread service, which in those days was the one everyone attended, he would bring us the intimations, the notices.

And it's fair to say that Mr Eard had a unique style of doing it, what he sometimes lacked in brevity, certainly made up for in warmth and wit. But sometimes he had a more difficult duty to perform. When someone who was a member of the church had passed away, a mystery was informing us about their death. And in just a few sentences, he needed to sum up what had characterised their life.

And he had a wording that he used very often. I'm not sure if he always used it, but certainly he used it very often. And he would say, she loved the Lord, she loved the Word, and she loved the assembling of God's people.

[1 : 08] She loved the Lord, she loved the Word, and she loved the assembling of God's people. And in a sense, that said it all, there would, of course, be a funeral service, and someone, quite often my father, would pay more of a personal tribute about the individual's character.

But actually, when you've said what Mr Eard said, you have probably given as high accommodation of someone's involvement in the church as you could.

They loved the Lord, they loved the Word, and they loved God's people. And in Hebrews chapter 10, in this passage we've read, there are three exhortations that the writer brings to us.

And they are about the Lord, the Word, and the Lord's people. So in verse 22, the writer says, Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

Our relationship with the Lord. Verse 23, he says, Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we possess, for he who promised is faithful.

[2 : 18] God's promises, his word. And then from verse 24, he says, Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

God's people. I want to look very briefly at these three relationships this evening, and what the writer to the Hebrews has to say about them. But before that, just a little bit of background and the earlier verses that we read.

Quite a few of the New Testament letters can quite conveniently be divided into two sections.

There's a doctrinal section which takes up usually about half the letter, sometimes a bit more.

And then there's a practical section which comes after it. And the doctrinal sections always have practical implications, and the practical sections include great doctrine. But I think it's a valid differentiation to make in many of the letters.

And often in the middle, there's a kind of linking passage that links the two sections together, that closes off one and that introduces the other.

[3 : 23] So for instance, in Romans, Romans chapter 12 and verse 1, Paul says, Therefore, looking back, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Or in Colossians chapter 3, Paul writes, Since then, and again looking back, Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

And in both cases, he then goes on to some very practical instructions for the Christians. And I think in the book of Hebrews, this is that linking passage.

It takes what the writer has been bringing us in the early part of the book, particularly from chapter 4 onwards, and it links it into the latter part of the book, which is full of exhortations and also of examples that we should follow.

And this little passage, towards the end of chapter 10, links the two together, summarizes one, and prepares us for the other. So what does the writer say?

[4 : 31] So looking back, the writer says two things. First of all, he says we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Christ, Jesus. And then he says we have a great high priest over the house of God.

We have access to God's presence, and we have someone who stands before God and who represents us to him. Now the picture, of course, is from the Old Testament, and it is of the tabernacle or later of the temple.

And within the tabernacle and the temple, there was an area which was called the Holy of Holies, or the most holy place, the writer calls it here. And only one person, the high priest, could go into that area and only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

The normal people, even the normal priests, would never get to see inside the most holy place.

That is where the presence of God was, within the camp of the Israelites, or within the temple of the Israelites.

And only one person could go in, only once a year, and only having followed various rituals to make sure he was in the right condition to go there.

[5 : 49] And the writer here is saying, that was the old position. But the new position is that all of us can go into the presence of God.

That barrier, that curtain that used to be there, has gone. And if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus, if he is our great high priest, then we have access into the very presence of God.

And the reason for that is the two things we'll be thinking about later on as we take communion together. It's the blood and the body of the Lord Jesus.

So before the priest went in, the animal had to be sacrificed, his blood had to be sprinkled, and the reparation for sin had to be made.

The writer says, we can enter the most holy place, not through the blood of animals, as the high priest used to, but through the blood of the Lord Jesus, through the sacrifice that he made for us when he died on the cross.

[6 : 56] And he says, the curtain that used to be there is gone. Now you remember, at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, the curtain in the temple that separates the most holy place from the holy place was torn in two.

That barrier to entrance to God had gone. And the writer here says, the barrier is still gone for us as well. And what is represented by that is the body of the Lord Jesus, which was figuratively, or literally in many ways, torn apart for us.

When the Lord Jesus' body was nailed to the cross, when he took our sins on himself. That is what opened up the way of access to God.

Jesus, who stands between us and God, has given us access into the presence of God. So the writer says, we have a new and living way open for us.

New and as it was previously unavailable, those who didn't know Jesus, as those who had come before, even the believing Jews, they couldn't come in the way that we can. It's new. And it's living.

[8 : 12] It's real. It's active. And it is based on a saviour who has died and has risen again. What a wonderful privilege it is that we can come into the presence of the most holy God without fear through the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Alongside that, the writer says, we also have a great priest over the house of God. What is the function of the priest?

It is to make sacrifices. It is to represent men before God. And we, of course, are a kingdom of priests that we can come directly into God's presence and intercede for others to him.

But the Lord Jesus is the great priest or the great high priest, the one who stands before the Father and as the hymn said, the song we listened to earlier said, whoever lives and pleads for us.

And we have someone in the very presence of God who is our representative there, who is our high priest and who is presenting his own sacrifice to God as the basis on which we can come into the presence of God.

[9 : 26] And these two descriptions very succinctly sum up what's gone before in the book of Hebrews. And of course, there's lots more there, but in terms of a summary, these two really sum it up.

The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus greater than the sacrifices in the Old Testament. The priesthood of the Lord Jesus greater than the priesthoods in the Old Testament.

And so the writer says, given that, given what we've thought about, given what's gone before, given what we know about our position before God, here are three things to think about.

Here are three things that as Christians should mark us. And the first of these is verse 22, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

So this is about our relationship with the Lord and it is characterized by faith. By the faith that we have in the Lord Jesus and the confidence that that gives us to come into the presence of God.

[10 : 41] And we can come without fear, knowing that the Lord Jesus has taken all our sin on himself and that God, on that basis, is happy to accept us, to accept us indeed as his children and to have us come freely into his presence to bring our praise, our thanksgiving, our confessions and our requests to him.

And we can come with confidence. We can come with the full assurance of faith, says the writer, as we come with sincere hearts.

But he also says something about our condition, our confidence and our condition as we come. He says, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Now I think the immediate reference in this verse is to the Old Testament. It is to the fact that the blood had to be sprinkled and the priest had to go through the ritual of cleansing, of washing himself in the exact form stipulated before he had come into the presence of God.

But perhaps it is appropriate for us to look at it in a similar kind of way to the way we looked at John 13 a couple of weeks ago in terms of us being made clean. And our hearts have been cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus by his sacrifice for us.

[12 : 09] And that's been symbolized for many, if not all of us, by going through the waters of baptism. Our bodies in that sense being washed. And baptism is a representation of something that's happened internally and is showing to the world that we are different.

And perhaps the writer, at least as a secondary thought in these verses, is thinking about the cleansing internal of our hearts and the way that is represented when we are baptized.

But the key thing is we come to God, we come to him in faith, and we come to him with real confidence. Then in verse 23, the writer moves on, we've got a second exhortation, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful.

And I've characterized that as being about God's word, God's promises to us. And the key thing that should mark us as we think about them is hope.

That we know that our God is faithful, that he is reliable, that he keeps his promise. And so when we come to him, we come with a confidence that he holds us in our hands and that he will do whatever is best for us.

[13 : 31] we should hold unswervingly, it says. That's quite a strong word that's used, the adverb there, unswervingly. We should have a firm and steadfast hope and faith in the Lord Jesus.

Doesn't mean we'll never have doubts? I think probably all of us at times have doubts. But nevertheless, our faith, our hope in the Lord Jesus should be something that sustains us through the hard times as well as through the easy times.

And certainly the last few months for all of us in differing ways have been very hard. And I hope for all of us that something of the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus and our knowledge of him has been able to sustain and strengthen us.

Knowing that whatever may happen in our world, we are in his hands. He is ultimately in control.

And we have this marvellous hope in him, not just for this world and looking for things to get better, but beyond this world we have the hope of eternal life through the Lord Jesus.

And we should be aiming to hold unswervingly to that hope and in the most difficult times lay hold of it as the thing that helps us through as we think about our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

[14 : 55] our relationship with the word characterised by hope. And then finally in verses 24 and 25 there is our relationship with God's people and I would suggest that that is characterised by love.

So the writer says let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Notice the main verb here.

This writer doesn't say let us spur one another on. That's true, we should be spurring one another on, we should be encouraging one another. But the writer says let us consider how we may spur one another on.

I think consider is an adequate translation here but perhaps it doesn't get across the full force of what the writer is saying. And I found a couple of paraphrases quite helpful in this.

the Passion Translation says that we should discover creative ways to spur one another on. The message says let's see how inventive we can be.

[16:05] Now there are paraphrases that are going beyond what the original text says but I think they get something of the flavour of it. We should be consciously thinking how can I best encourage my Christian brothers and sisters in their walk with the Lord Jesus.

How can I take every opportunity to support them and to give them encouragement to keep going and to follow Jesus and to love one another and to do good in our world.

And perhaps at times we have a bit of a kind of one size fits all mentality in terms of how we think people should be acting. But we should be looking as a church of what is appropriate for us but also for individuals as we come alongside them and we seek to encourage them in their faith.

Can we consider what are the things that are going to be most effective in building them up in the Lord Jesus. And of course we will point them to his word we may well be reading God's word with them and encouraging them through that but doing it not on a kind of rote basis this is what you do if you're a Christian rather thinking through well what is it that people need what is this going to most encourage them spur them on and let's think how we can do that.

I think over the last few months a good number of people in this church have been very good at doing that at thinking about the needs of particular individuals and at looking to meet these needs and to encourage them in their faith and in their walk with the Lord Jesus.

[17:43] And all of us should have that as our goal that we work together that we serve together that we encourage one another in our faith.

And then the last verse verse 25 I suspect I didn't discuss with Graham and Nasser but I suspect this may be the verse that particularly determined that this would be the passage we looked at this evening.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Let us not give up meeting together. There's an awful lot you can do by phone or by Zoom as we've discovered over the last few months but equally there's an awful lot you can't do remotely.

Being able to sit with someone presumably distance at the moment to talk things through to see their reactions and their body language and how they're feeling and how things are going and to have a much more in-depth conversation with them than you can over the phone.

[18:52] When things are a bit more relaxed than they are now to be able to put your hand around the shoulder of a brother or sister who is struggling as you encourage them in their faith. To be able to pray together as we meet together.

And we need as Christians to recognise we're not just a collection of solitary individuals worshipping Jesus and serving him. Rather we're the church of the Lord Jesus that meets at Brunfield and we have responsibilities towards one another that can only really be fully discharged in person when we see one another.

And we're wonderful, won't it, when we're all able to be back together as a church and to share together in the way that we've been used to in the past.

But I think there's a real encouragement there as we are able to over the coming weeks. To meet together whether it's outside or whether it's in houses to be distanced to meet together and to be able to share together the things of the Lord Jesus.

Particularly to look for those who perhaps need that word of encouragement and whether they're feeling a bit down or whether they're perhaps slipping away a bit in their Christian faith. But to encourage them and to strengthen them in the Lord Jesus.

[20:13] What is the final incentive for that? The writer says all the more as you see the day approaching. The Lord is coming back. We don't know when it will be.

It could be very soon. And the writer says that is a real incentive for us to encourage and strengthen one another in our faith and in our walk with the Lord Jesus.

It's a real incentive not to absent ourselves from meetings of God's people but where we can where it's appropriate and I realize for everyone it's not for everyone it's not appropriate at the moment to meet like this but where we can to meet with others and to encourage one another and strengthen one another in our faith.

So three relationships. A relationship with the Lord that should be characterized by our faith in him and thinking about our access to God the Father.

Let's make good use of the access that the Lord Jesus has given us. A relationship with the word characterized by our hope and by the certainty of God's promises and strengthening us through difficult times.

[21 : 23] And a relationship with each other characterized by love and bringing mutual support and encouragement in walking with the Lord Jesus. It may be able to be said of all of us he loves the Lord he loves the word and he loves the gatherings of God's people.

Let me pray briefly. Father we thank you for your word to us this evening. We thank you for the writer to the Hebrews and the great concern he had for those he wrote to. People were going through difficult times and we thank you it is still relevant to us today that we need to remember that we have access into your presence through the Lord Jesus and what a wonderful privilege that is. That we need to cling on to the hope that we have steadfastly as we go through life's trials and that we need to consider how we can best encourage and strengthen one another in our faith in our love in our works.

Help us to learn these lessons we pray and be with us now as in a few minutes we come together to share the communion to share the Lord's Supper may we do it in a way that is worthy of our Saviour.

We give you thanks in Jesus name. Amen.