

Let Us Draw Near

Let's turn in our Bibles to the epistle to the Hebrews. And let's look at, we're going to be looking at verse 22 of chapter 10, but I'll be reading first from 19 to 22. So Hebrews 10, 19 to 22.

Hear the word of God. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil that is his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let's pray.

Father, as we looked at this passage in passing, and part of the larger context this morning, help us to now drill into the first of these exhortations, let us draw near, and learn a little bit of what it is that you would have us do, how you would have us to act, in terms of our devotion to you, and our obedience and our following of you and our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, amen. Well, again, the epistle to the Hebrews was written to Christians. You'll remember, if not from your previous study from this morning's sermon, I hope, they come from a Jewish background, who were struggling and considering leaving Christ and returning to the Jewish system.

And it can be divided into two parts. Chapter 1, verse 1 to chapter 10, verse 18, is the first part of the epistle to the Hebrews, dealing primarily with the doctrine of Christ, his work, who he is, and then warnings to the Hebrews, reminding them particularly from the history of their fathers and their forefathers. And then in verse 19, where we began reading this evening, there's a therefore, and we move into the rest of the book, is dealing with the application.

If this is who Jesus is, if this is how perfect is his work, then what does that say to these wavering believers? And what does it say to us? Again, the primary exhortation for these Jewish believers is to continue in their faith, not to leave Christ and return to Judaism. And we're going to look this evening at the first of the three-part exhortation, let us draw near, then let us hold fast, then let us consider one another. Tonight, we're going to look at let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Draw Near to What?

Draw near, brothers. Well, the first question you would probably ask is draw near to what, to who? I mean, it's great to say draw near, but get closer. But to what are the believers supposed to draw near? And the answer is in verse 19, as I preached a little bit about this morning, the holiest.

Having boldness to enter the holiness by the blood of Jesus. And that's what we refer to as the Holy of Holies. It's the innermost, most sacred portion of the temple.

It was the most sacred portion of the tabernacle of Moses and then the temple in Jerusalem. It was constructed as a perfect cube and it contained only the Ark of the

Covenant, which was the symbol of Israel's special relationship with God. And this area, the Holy of Holies, was accessible only one day a year and only by one man, the Jewish high priest.

Once a year on Yom Kippur, for those of you that didn't grow up with the Jewish calendar, that's September, October in our calendar. In Yom Kippur, which is the Day of Atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the small windowless enclosure to burn incense and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal, actually two sacrificial animals, on the mercy seat of the Ark. By doing so, the priest atoned first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people.

Now, the Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the holy place by a curtain, a veil, a huge heavy drape made from fine linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarn and embroidered with gold cherubim. God said that he would appear in the Holy of Holies, Leviticus 16.2, hence the need for the veil because there exists a barrier between God and man, man's sin versus God's holiness. The holiness of God could not be accessed by anyone but the high priest and then only once a year because God's eyes, as Habakkuk 1.13 says, are too pure to look on evil and he can tolerate no sin.

So the veil and the elaborate rituals undertaken by the priest before he could enter on Yom Kippur were a reminder that man could not carelessly or irreverently enter God's awesome presence. In fact, before the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he had to wash himself, special purification ritual. He had to put on special clothing.

He had to bring burning incense to let the smoke cover his eyes so that he might not see the presence of God and have a direct view of him. And he brought with him the sacrificial blood to make atonement for sins. A regular Jew then could never enter the presence of God.

One of the things that you knew if you were raised a Jew is you could never enter God's presence. As you go through the Old Testament and you look at the times when God reveals his presence to men are few and far between and they're really awesome to study, whether it's Moses, whether it's Isaiah. They were prohibited from being in God's presence.

But now for his people, Christ has changed this forever. Christ's blood was shed once for all his people forever. And now all believers can enter the presence of God.

Pause a moment, please. Think about what this would have meant if you were a Jew and you heard the gospel message to the Jew who was seeking atonement, seeking forgiveness, seeking being right with God, but could never approach God other than through the sacrificial system, which God provided, which pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now, because of the work of Christ, you'll remember that the crucifixion, as Christ gives, says it is finished and he gives up his spirit from his earthly body.

The veil is rent, torn in half. That separation from God, which was required because of God's holiness and man's sinfulness was removed. You see, the entire structure of worship and sacrifice enforced the message that God was holy and you as a Jew were not.

Well, their fathers, their forefathers, they themselves all understood this from birth. God was holy. They couldn't approach him.

But now, and this is the amazing message to the Jews of that day, there is a new and living way. The veil has been torn. There is a way to enter God's mercy seat to come where his presence is.

And it's made possible by the blood shed by Jesus Christ to make atonement for them. Jesus was their high priest, as the author says. Not only did he enter God's presence once a year, as the previous high priest had done, he entered it once and then the veil was destroyed and he sat down at the right hand of God.

He opened the way for the believer to enter the presence of God. This is, if you were a Jew, unthinkable. The system which you knew, which you lived your lives, was gone.

It was unimaginable for the Jew to be able to enter the Holy of Holies, to be able to enter the presence of God. It meant that their entire lives, the way they had sought to have a relationship with God, was done away. It could not be restored.

And that's the author's point. To the wavering Jew, why would they consider, ponder about returning to Judaism? Didn't they understand what had happened? Didn't they realize the implications? And so the epistle to the Hebrews is to explain, again, what it is. What are the implications? What actually happened? What does it mean for them? Because at that point, as we discussed this morning, looking at the broader text, if they turned away from Christ, deliberately and willfully turned their backs on Christ, then they were left with nothing but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which would devour the adversaries.

That's where the Jew was. What about us? As I pointed out this morning, the author says, as he gets to the exhortation, the exhortations are not, you wavering Jews, you need to draw near, you wavering Jews, you need to hold fast to the confession, etc. The author says, let us.

His exhortation includes himself and therefore it includes you and me. Now, I asked you to pause and think for a minute. What it meant for the Jew, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the demolishing of the system under which they had grown up and the replacement by a new and living way.

And the author in the epistle to the Hebrews calls upon these believers to focus on Christ and his excellence and the supremacy of the work that he has, the finality and sufficiency of the work that he has. Now, we are not, I don't think any of us here come from a Jewish background. We're from the Gentiles.

So let me ask you. How often do you stop, pause, reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and what it meant and what it means for you? You see, we, I'm not, I'm a ruling elder. So I had a job, now I'm retired.

But I've got my days used to be very, very full. Now they're just full to very full. And I've got lots of things to take my attention.

How often do I ask myself every so often and certainly as I was preparing the sermon, how often do I stop and really pause, meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and that God has opened a way for me to approach him? You see, we also are to be bold to enter the worship of the Lord. We're not to stand off. The exhortation is to us as well to draw near.

God provides us this opportunity every Lord's Day. Here at Providence, we have morning and evening worship where we can draw near to him. These include the public means of grace, the preached word, public prayer, the sacraments.

Come to the public worship of God. I'm so thankful that you have this evening and this morning. Draw near.

And we have the private means of grace as well. Reading of the Bible, personal prayer, family devotions, et cetera. And as Pastor Mathis said recently in the Sunday school class, whenever you focus on your Lord and God, it is an act of worship.

So draw near with the public means of worship. Draw near with the private means of worship. The author said earlier in Hebrews chapter four, verses 14 to 16.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to set up some regular schedule. Just pause and reflect. Take time from the busyness of your days, whether it's mundane busyness or some more elevated form of busyness.

I know as a ruling elder through several churches, how much the normal average person, you know, believer struggles to find time to stop and pray, to read the word of God, to use the private means of grace. They have the opportunity to come weekly for the public means of grace, and that's such a blessing. But our motivation, part of our motivation should be a recognition that we ponder, meditate upon every so often that the only reason we can come to God is that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

How to Draw Near

So we are called to draw near. Now that leads to the second question. Well, how do you draw near? What does the author say about that? And he gives three conditions of approach.

A True Heart

The first is with a true heart. Now, heart here isn't an organ that pumps blood. It means your full self, body, and soul.

And it's critical to properly drawing near to have a true heart. Observance of public worship or personal devotions, being involved, apart from your hearts, is empty superstition and cannot please God. That's a quote from William Gouge again.

And what he points out is that superstitious people place all their piety in external observation, external observance, going through forms. False approaches include both those that come formally to worship but haven't committed themselves to Christ. Through my years as a believer, I've known people like that who profess Christ, and then eventually the Holy Spirit brings them to their knees and they say, I was faking it the whole time.

And it also includes those who seek to define worship according to their own imaginations and inventions, ignoring what the Bible teaches us, and instead focusing on their heart, their feelings. I'm worshiping God with my heart because this feels right to me. Unfortunately, that is a false approach to drawing near.

So we are to have a heart and a true heart. And by true is meant a person committed to the Lord. Other synonyms for this in Scripture might be whole, faithful, pure, sound, honest, upright, clean.

There are those who may confess Christ but have never truly committed themselves to him for salvation. They may draw near, they may come to worship, they may have quiet times, whatever. But they practice a form of Christianity and they don't have a true heart.

Why do you draw near? Is it to please God? Is it to do his good pleasure? Is it because you understand yourself to be a sinner devoid of anything good in yourself? Is it because you've committed yourself to Christ and want to follow him? Is it with a true heart? It's so easy to come for other reasons. Your friends are there. I like the fellowship of being with these people.

I'm seeking to be right with God and this is one of the things I should do. Others expect it of me. I once, when I was counseling some years ago, about decade plus ago in the church here, a high school student in the church who had not made a profession of faith when her friends in her had.

And the point she made was, I'm not prepared to do that and I didn't want to do it just to be one of the gang. Because all my friends had professed themselves to be Christians, I wasn't willing to do it. And I commended her for that.

She didn't have a true heart but she understood where she was. The one who comes with a true heart, who draws near with a true heart, is one that knows who he or she is. A sinner.

Recognizes that they deserve eternal punishment. And they come to God not because they're trying to check the boxes or act the right way. But they come to God because they are so moved and impacted by the fact of what Jesus did for them.

When he hung on the cross, when he suffered, when he shed his blood and when he died. They want to come then to praise him, to worship him. And that's their motivation. That they have a true heart.

Full Assurance

The second condition is in full assurance of faith. Now already there's been some emphasis on faith in the epistles of Hebrews.

And in the next chapter, chapter 11, we have the hall of faith. So there's going to be a lot more emphasis to follow. And with the use of the preposition here in the Greek.

What the author is saying is that drawing near with this full assurance of faith. It's the environment in which we are to approach. Hebrews 9.6, the author has said, He who comes to God must believe that he is.

And that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. This faith, that such a faith, strips a man of selfish, self-focused conceits. Such faith excludes boasting.

Such faith rests upon Jesus Christ and his work for acceptance with God. So what does it mean, full assurance of faith? If you want a quick definition. Full assurance of faith is a faith that knows no hesitation in trusting in, obeying and following Jesus.

It's not just intellectual faith. It acts upon what you believe. It's an act of faith.

It's not presumption, which is focused primarily on yourself. But it focuses on Jesus Christ and following him. Full assurance means your confidence is in Christ and who he is.

Because you believe him, you will follow him where he leads you. Calls to mind Abraham, who's mentioned twice in the next chapter, in chapter 11. Who obeyed when he was called to leave where he was and go to a land where God had called him.

And later, when he believed God's promise, even when he was called to take his only son Isaac and sacrifice him. That's a faith of full assurance. Being willing without hesitation to trust and follow God.

And the full assurance of faith is important because, as the author has told us, because of what Christ has done. We know that we have access to God. It's not a question.

Jesus gained us the access. The writer is not only clear about the possibility of full assurance, but assumes it to be present in all worshipers who take advantage of the new way. So that's condition two.

Cleansed Hearts and Bodies

The third condition is cleansed heart and bodies. Now, I will say that if you check out a bunch of commentaries, they're going to divide those two and say there are four conditions

of approach. Gouge, and I agree with him, takes the last two, the hearts and the bodies, and puts them together.

As Gouge put it, the third virtue required for a right manner of drawing near to God is sanctity. Which is thus expressed having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. This shows that sanctification consists in the renovation of both soul and body.

So to find this sanctity, to have a cleansed heart and body first, your hearts need to be sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. So the filth that is in your heart is the evil conscience. If you read Hebrews 13 at the end, verse 18, the author points out that what he means when he has, he believes he has a good conscience in all things he desires to live honorably, that is following Christ.

The metaphor of sprinkling is derived from the Old Testament. You know it because we Presbyterians sprinkle or pour when we baptize, we don't immerse. This comes, but it's deeper than that in the Old Testament.

Exodus 24 verses 6 to 8, and Moses is dedicating and consecrating the altar. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read in the hearing of the people and they said, all that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient.

And Moses took the blood in the basins and sprinkled it on the people and said, this is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words. Sprinkling of blood consecrated the people and the altar. It made them pure before God and was part of their commitment to follow God.

Our consciences must be sprinkled with the blood that Christ shed. We must be purified and committed to him to draw near. But our sanctity also includes our bodies being washed with pure water, which is an allusion, it seems, to Christian baptism.

Pure water, the author is talking symbolically. Your conscience deals with your inner attitude. The baptism deals with overt acts.

So outward sanctity, the washing of your body, follows the sprinkling of the conscience. Outward sanctity flows from inward sanctity and purity. Holiness means that your heart is sprinkled justification and your body is washed sanctification.

And if it is an allusion to baptism, which it seems to be, and he's saying that you need to have your bodies washed with pure water, it is the church to whom God has given the sacrament of baptism for administering. So it also says that you need to be part of his church. Something he will pick up in the third part of the exhortation, let us consider one another, the importance of being in the church.

So what's the conclusion then as we look at what does it mean to draw near to heart, full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water? Well, first, it means the first conclusion we have to draw is that

God is to be approached, not worshiped from afar, not set up as some idol over there, but God calls us to draw near to him, to approach him. And that needs to characterize our lives as believers in prayer, in Bible study, in things that we have problems just getting to because of the busyness of our lives or the lack of focus. Christ has procured for you and me the freedom to draw near to God.

We have to use the freedom that Christ has procured for us to do just that. As a side note, let us, that which the author is exhorting us to do, he must do himself. As a ruling elder, when I exhort people to do it, I need to be doing it myself.

Our hearts must be pure. Another way that you can put this is our faith must be genuine. Are we known, are you known as somebody who believes the Bible and lives it? There are few higher statements that can be made about you, few compliments that are higher than that.

Are you unhesitating in obeying Christ, obeying him with what you know right now, today? And as our pastor continues to open the word to us every Sunday, what you shall know. You listen to the word being preached that you might learn how you can, what it is that Jesus wants from you, what he calls you to do to obey him, that you might do it. Christ's blood has atoned for us.

He calls us to draw near to the Lord. So does the author of this epistle. So let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for what Jesus has done. Help us to reflect on it, that it might be a motivation for us.

Not just when we are facing temptations, but it needs to infuse how we live our lives. Because we recognize that apart from what Christ did on the cross, we would be lost. Lord, let us recognize that Christ has given us the freedom, procured for us the freedom to approach you.

Let us do that. For you're not a far off God, but you are Abba, Father. Lord, help us to draw near with a true heart, full assurance of faith, and our hearts and our bodies sanctified.

May this characterize us and may we be known as those who believe the Bible and live it. Because we are unhesitating in our willingness to follow that which you proclaim to us through the word of Jesus Christ and the rest of the scriptures. So call us to draw near, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.