

Neglecting So Great a Salvation

...of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. Please be seated.

If you would take up your Bibles and turn, please, to the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 10. I'll be reading and preaching on verses 11 to 27 of Chapter 10 of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hear the word of God.

...those who are being sanctified. The Holy Spirit also witnesses to us for after he has said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts and into their minds.

I will write them. But he adds, their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more. Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

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 us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the matter of some, but exhorting one another.

And so much the more as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we come and look at your word this morning, we ask that your Holy Spirit would be here and speak through me, give me the strength to speak. Father, and may my words be clear. May your Holy Spirit open our ears and our hearts that we would hear and understand the situation into which this letter is being written, was written, and how it applies to us today.

That we might not neglect the great salvation provided for us in Christ Jesus. Amen. Okay, we are in the epistle to the Hebrews.

And it was written to Christians of a Jewish background, hence to the Hebrews as the title, prior to 70 AD. And the letter's purpose was to exhort these believers from leaving their faith in Jesus Christ. They were being tempted to return to the Jewish faith in which they'd grown up.

There are indications that not only had they faced persecution, but they were facing it anew. And they may have been becoming weary in their faith, and considering returning to Judaism to avoid the difficulties they were experiencing as Christians. The author seeks to encourage them by reminding them of the greatness of the salvation provided by the Lord

Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, who is more excellent than the angels, who is better than the Aaronic priesthood, who is the King of righteousness.

He also, the author, is very pointed in warning them that if they apostatized, they would be like their fathers in the wilderness, who were not able to enter God's rest, the kingdom of heaven. The epistle to the Hebrews, then, is not a theological treatise on Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to explain to these Hebrew believers, who had come from Judaism, why their faith in Christ was paramount, and what might happen should they apostatize and leave it.

This epistle, or letter, is structured into two parts. Chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 10, verse 18, in the middle of the passage I read this morning, consists of doctrinal teaching primarily about the person and work of Jesus Christ, and warnings against turning from the faith. Chapter 10, verse 19, beginning with therefore, to the end of the epistle, focuses upon applying the truths that had been taught in the first part.

And, following verse 19 with the therefore, the immediate application to the people to whom it was written is made under three headings. Let us draw near, verse 22. Let us hold fast, verse 23.

And let us consider one another, verses 24 to 25. Now, those three specific applications, we're going to look at the first one this evening. Let us draw near.

And then, at the end of December, when Pastor Mathis is on vacation again on the 28th, in the morning, I'm going to pick up the second one. Let us hold fast. And in the evening on the 28th, let us consider one another.

But for this sermon, we are going to look at the whole passage in which these applications were found.

A New Covenant

So, point one in the sermon, a new covenant. Let me read again, verses 11 to 18 to you.

And every priest stands ministering daily, and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But this man, referring to Jesus, after he offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool, for by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after he has said before, this is the covenant I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.

Then he adds, their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more. Now, where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. So, the author, the passage that I read this morning from verse 11 to 18, is the end of the first portion.

The more doctrinal talking about the personal work of Christ, the warnings against the issues. And here the author summarizes again in the verses we read. I could have gone back to verse 1, but I started with verse 11.

But he's summarizing again what it is he has been teaching and proclaiming since chapter 1, verse 1. The supremacy, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as compared to the Judaism and the system from which they came. Now, if you want to spend a lot of time studying Hebrews, William Gouge, who we know because Pastor Mathis has found him and we had a Sunday school class on one of Gouge's books. He has a four-volume work on the epistles of the Hebrews.

And he reminds us of what the author is talking about here when he's in verse 11 and 12, the Jewish sacrificial system. And he says, for the high priest did offer sacrifices every year when he entered the most holy place. And they offered sacrifices at every feast and on the first day of every month and morning and evening on every day.

You see, the goal for the Jew was to be right with God, to have his or her sins atoned for and forgiven. But the Mosaic system neither atoned for sins nor granted forgiveness. Rather, it emphasized by the continuance and repeated nature of these sacrifices just how much men were sinners.

The daily, the monthly, the festival, the annual sacrifices demonstrated over and over again that sin needed a savior, a sacrifice that could accomplish what all these sacrifices could not. And the author goes on to explain that Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins, his one and only sacrifice forever. And his work is complete and final.

And this is evidenced by the fact that unlike the priest who stands every day at the altar, when Jesus had sacrificed, he does not continue to stand to minister. He sat down because there was no more need for sacrifice. And where did he sit? He sat at God's right hand, the position of honor and dignity and authority.

And Christ's sacrifice in verse 14, by one offering he's perfected forever those who are being sanctified. It's sufficient. It perfects those forever.

That's opposed to the law to which these hearers were considering returning, which makes nothing perfect, as the author said in Hebrews 7.19. And it's an encouragement to know that while in our sanctification, we're struggling with our sin on the basis of Jesus Christ's work, we will succeed not because of what we do. But because of what he has done, the author says that this was witnessed to by the Holy Spirit in verses 15 to 17. The passage that he quotes there is first quoted by the author in Hebrews 8.7-13. Let me read that to you.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. That's referring to the Mosaic covenant. Because finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my

covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their mind, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God.

They shall be my people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord. For all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds. I will remember no more. In that, he says, a new covenant he has made the first obsolete.

Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. So when the author again in Hebrews 10 quotes from Jeremiah 31, he's reminding them of what he's already told them. This will have been familiar.

Now, okay, let's stop back and put yourself in the New Testament age. Take your Bibles, get rid of them, you don't have them. When, you know, the letter was written to the churches, it wasn't, if you go back to when I was young, it wasn't written on a ditto or a mimeograph and copies run off and handed out to everybody.

There was one letter. It might be copied to be sent to other churches, but the way you heard the epistle to the Hebrews was to hear it. Somebody would stand and read it because there was one copy and it might not stay with your church, it might get passed around physically.

So they've just heard Hebrews chapter 8. And now two chapters, remember the chapter divisions are not given by God. They were given by some guy who I think was riding at the back of a Jeep over very bumpy ground and that's where the verses and the chapters come from. Sometimes they make no sense.

But they were hearing this, so they've just recently heard this. They knew the Jeremiah passage, the promise of the new covenant. And the author has gone through that in chapter 8 and now in chapter 10 he repeats that.

So in verse 16 of chapter 10, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts and into their minds. I will write them.

Brothers and sisters, that deals with our sanctification. The law being written in our hearts and minds so that we can keep it. We just don't get how remarkable it is compared to thousands of years of God's church to be able to have your own Bible, to be able to have a copy of the law, the Ten Commandments, the whole Old Testament.

You have it in Hebrew, the Tanakh, and the whole Bible including the New Testament. They didn't have that. So for God to write it in your hearts and minds keeps it in front of you.

So God is saying he's going to help us in our sanctification by giving us his words so that we can remember it, ponder it. He's helped us because he gives it to us in writing. In verse 17, then he adds their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more.

That's your justification. When the Lord remembers your sins, your lawless deeds, no more. Because when he looks upon you because of the sacrifice that Christ made, you are clothed in Christ's righteousness.

So the author is challenging his hearers who are considering returning to Judaism with why. Verse 18 concludes the first half of the epistle by saying, Now where there is remission of these, sins and lawless deeds being the object of the pronoun these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Now that addresses specifically the Jewish believer wavering in his faith or her faith where Christ has made us his sacrifice for their sins, for our sins.

Where we have justification and sanctification, then our faith needs no continuing sacrifice. You didn't grow up as Jews at this time. You didn't come if you were in Jerusalem and you went to the temple.

You didn't smell Febreze. You didn't smell nice odor fresheners. You smelled blood.

Because every day, morning and evening, sacrifices, bloody sacrifices were made to atone for you, to atone for these Jewish believers. Where Christ has made his sacrifice, there is no continuing sacrifice. Why would one return to the old Mosaic system? The purpose of the Jewish offerings was to atone for sin and seek and offer God's forgiveness.

But with Christ's sacrifice, the need for such offerings ceases to exist for those who have faith in Christ and follow him. A new era has dawned. There is a new covenant in force.

So the author concludes by saying, fellow Jewish believers who are struggling, who are considering wavering, your system is gone. Jesus Christ has provided in his one sacrifice what your forefathers, what your fathers, what you have sought. And because there is a new covenant, we come to point two in the sermon, there's a new covenant response.

New Covenant Response

So verses 19 to 25, I'll remind you. 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 and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much more as you see the day approaching. So the goal for the Jew was to be right with God, to have his sins atoned for and forgiven. And the author has pointed out now that that's not possible under the Jewish system.

And there are many sacrifices. And he stressed that it's Christ's one sacrifice that does it. And with that sacrifice, the old system is done away.

There's a new covenant. Remission of sins is only possible because of Christ's work. And in verse 19, the author turns to answer the question.

One of my favorite response questions when I'm preaching is to say, and so basically the question that they're answering is, so what? What does it mean? If remission of sins is accomplished, if the forgiveness, if the atonement that I've sought is accomplished, what do I do? Remember that the recipients are wavering. They're considering abandoning their Christian professions and returning to the failed system under which they grew up. And so the author begins with, therefore, which means for this reason or because of this.

And he's about to tell them what to answer their question. What should they do? And it's therefore on the basis of this. And that probably is referring to the entire first half of the epistle, which he summarized there in chapter 10.

Because the Jewish system is done, because Christ provides remission of sins, the atonement and forgiveness for which they sought, then we have, what do we have? Well, we have boldness or confidence to come into the presence of the Lord. In the Greek, the word boldness or confidence generally relates to man's freedom to approach God because of his new relationship. Note that it is not universalism.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, it's brethren. It is those who have placed their faith in Christ, professed him, and are seeking to be in the new covenant that have this freedom to approach God. And what do they have freedom to do, confidence to do, boldness to do? To enter the holiest.

Okay, now, Shulman over this last week, I think it was in Sunday school, but the holiest refers to what we call generally the holy of holies. It's part of the temple structure. The temple structure has the court of the Gentiles and the court of the women.

So women are at least better than Gentiles, closer to God there. They have the court of Israel, or court of the men. They have the altar of sacrifice.

Beyond the altar of sacrifice, where every day, morning and evening, a sacrifice was offered, was a holy place. In it was the altar of sacrifice. And then at the back was the holy of holies.

It's separated by a veil from the holy place. And that's the holy of holies, what the author here refers to as the holiest. It's the innermost part of the temple.

It signified the very presence of God. And the point that he's making after therefore is that because of what Christ has done, unlike the system in which they grew up, where only one person, the high priest, could enter the holiest, the holy of holies, and then only one day per year. They now have freedom to enter all the time.

That the holiest has become something where they can enter and be in the presence of God. Now notice it's only by the blood of Jesus. It's not by the blood of bulls and goats.

On the day of atonement, the high priest would sacrifice a bull to atone for his sins, and having washed himself, etc., so that he was ritually and ceremonially clean. And then we

have the goats, the scapegoat, which is sent off into the wilderness, and one that was slain, and the blood of the slain goat was entered into the holy of holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. So not by the blood of bulls and goats, which was the old system.

Christ's one finished, complete, perfect sacrifice is how we are able to enter the holy of holies, the presence of God. And it's a new and living way he consecrated for us through the veil, which is his flesh. The new and living way.

In the Greek, the concept of new is recent. It doesn't mean new as compared to old. It's referring to the fact that Christ's sacrifice for these believers was recent, versus hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years of the Mosaic system.

So the focus, when he talks about that, is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which gives us access to God, freedom to come before God. And he goes on to explain that Jesus is the high priest now. He's the forever high priest over the house of God.

And brothers and sisters, as we learn elsewhere in the New Testament, you are the house of God. It's not a building. God dwells amongst his people now.

So you don't stand alone before a holy God. Jesus ministers on your behalf as your high priest. He continues to minister on your behalf.

So because of all this, therefore, what are we to do? We come to the main exhortation in the epistle. Since the only salvation or ability to be right with God exists through Jesus Christ, since the old system which they'd followed and their fathers and their fathers before them is gone and done away with, we have a three-part exhortation, each one beginning, let us, in the English. Because he says let us, it's not just talking from the author to them.

He's including himself. And since he includes himself, he includes you. So these exhortations apply to you as well.

First of all, let us draw near to God. This is devotion. It's a reminder from Hebrews 4.16 where the author wrote, let us boldly, let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

See, we're not to turn away from God as these Hebrew believers were considering, but rather because of the freedom Christ has provided to come boldly because that which Christ has done has given us the freedom to do, to draw near to God. We're to draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having hearts sprinkled, purified from an evil conscience and having bodies purified, washed, that is, with pure water. Let us draw near.

The first thing that he challenges these believers who were wavering to do and he challenges us to do, recognize what Christ has provided, the freedom that you have, and draw near. Then he says, let us hold fast our confession of hope without wavering. This is a challenge for consistency.

Now, it's a confession of hope, not of fear. We're our confessional church in the OPC. We have, I'm sure, there's probably a copy of it somewhere, our book of the Westminster

Standards, the Confession, the larger and shorter catechisms, whether it's the Apostles' Creed that we recited together, which is a confession of our hope.

The confession is the truth of the gospel. And he tells them not only are they to draw near, but they're to hold fast to their confession, to the truth, especially when tempted to doubt as they were. And the third part of the exhortation is let us consider one another.

This deals, let us consider one another. This is social obligations. It's not just me and God.

We're not Lone Ranger Christians. The concept of considering one another is pretty much the antithesis of what we have in America right now. We have a, Americans have a leave me alone attitude.

When I grew up, I was born in 1950 at the end of it. When I grew up in the 50s and the 60s, you knew the families on the street where you lived. You knew the kids.

You all played together. New family would move in. You'd take them a cake or, you know, something.

And if they had kids, the kids would come out and play with all the rest of you. How many of us today think of where you live? If it's a house, go three houses to the right, three houses to the left. Do you know the names of those families? Have you even met them? What about if you live in an apartment? Go three apartments to the left, three apartments to the right or up and down.

Do you even know who they are? Well, we are to consider one another. I'm just making the point that our culture in America today is not, is leave me alone, not consider one another. The verb there, consider, doesn't mean just think about it.

The exhortation is to consider. You've got to give some real thought. Here's a timely, because of the season we're in, concept of how to get into consider.

You've got presents you're buying for family or friends or both. Do you just go to Walmart, Costco, wherever, and just pick some things out or do you think about what will that person like? You're considering. You're actually focusing on the other person so that, you know, hey, you know, Mary, I'm going to give you a wonderful three-foot machete.

Well, I might like that, but Mary wouldn't. You know, so you need to consider the people and that's what he's saying. We need to consider one another.

We are in the family of God. We're to give real thought about each other in this third exhortation. And having given some real thought, we are not to then go recline in our easy chair and snooze.

We're to act. We're to stir one another up to good works, to encourage each other. We're to continue coming to the assembly of each other, of the brethren.

Now, wait a minute. What's the assembly of the brethren? Oh, it's called church. You're here this morning.

The people to whom the epistle was being written, apparently some of them were forsaking the assembly of the brethren. He tells them, no, you need to keep coming. And there's some motivation for that because the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back in judgment.

That's the day. Jesus came once to provide salvation. When he returns, he will return in judgment. The day is approaching, so there's motivation to act, to consider and to act.

New Covenant Warning

Now, the third part of the sermon is New Covenant warning, verses 26 to 27. For if we sin willfully after we've received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries.

Now, in your English version, I don't care which one you have. I'm reading from the New King James. There is, you know, in the New King James, it's, you know, for if we sin willfully.

The word willfully can be translated deliberately. In the Greek, it's the first word. So if I were trying to write this the way it is written in the Greek, it would be deliberately if we go on sinning, willfully if we go on sinning.

The first position in a sentence is emphatic. So the author is saying to them, this isn't just a warning. You know, it's a warning about a deliberate act that his hearers were taking or considering taking.

And so his exhortation here is going to be in the warning is to not make that deliberate choice, that willful choice to sin. Now, calling it sin for if we sin willfully may sound a little bit harsh, but he's not talking about doubt. Almost every one of us during our Christian life has gone through a period of time where we have some doubt.

Is God really there? Is he really listening to me? Is this really true? That's not what he's referring to here. He's talking about a deliberate choice to walk away from God. And if they do, they're responsible.

And if we do, we're responsible. What kind of sin then? Rejecting Jesus Christ after we've received the truth, which is the position of the Hebrew recipients. They'd be doing that with their eyes open because they've received the knowledge of the truth.

This would be a deliberate choice, a deliberate sin. And to do so removes them from the new covenant. They reject the laws that God has placed in their hearts, that he's written into their minds.

For such who make that willful choice, there is no atonement. For those under the new covenant, there's remission of sins and there's no longer an offering for sin. They're justified.

They're being sanctified. They turn from the Lord now. They reject Christ's sacrifice and face only a certain, certain fearful expectation of judgment and God's fiery indignation.

I took the title for the sermon, Neglecting So Great a Salvation from Hebrews chapter two. Let me read verses one and one to three to you as we are wrapping up. There, the author wrote, Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

For if the word spoken through angels proves steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? The author's charge to these wavering Hebrew Christians is to maintain their profession. Christ has done away with the old system. There's nothing to return to.

Christ has redeemed his people by shedding his blood once for his own. They have justification and sanctification in the covenant and only there. They and we need to draw near to God, not turn from him.

They need to hold fast to their confession of hope. As Peter said in Acts 4.12, Nor is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

They need to reverse their course and stir one another up to good works to assemble with their brethren. To reject the new covenant is to reject Jesus Christ's sacrifice and there remains only a certain fearful expectation of judgment. The author calls us here is to return, strengthen their faith and their commitment.

Brother and sister, if you waver, the author calls you as well. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you and praise you for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

For the new covenant that he initiated. For the justification and sanctification that he provides. For the access we have to you to draw near.

Lord, help us to do that. Help us to hold fast to our confession. Help us to consider one another and to stir each other up to good works.

And Father, build your church that we may continue to assemble ourselves together as your people. We ask Lord that we would be those Christians that with the knowledge of the truth that we have act upon it.