

Hebrews 10:19-25 // Draw Near as the Day Approaches

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[0:00] This evening's reading is from Hebrews chapter 10 verses 19 to 25 and you'll find that in the church! So that is Hebrews chapter 10 verses 19 to 25.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with a full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards 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.

Well, g'day everyone. Let me add my welcome to Andrews this evening. If we've not met, my name's Azariah and I'd love to get to meet you after the service. If we have met and you're wondering why I look different, it's because my glasses ended up at the bottom of a lock, so if that's out the way, you can not be distracted by that anymore. It's a pleasure to be here with you all looking at God's word together tonight. Let me begin with a quick prayer.

Our Father in heaven, please help us to draw near to you with sincere hearts and the full assurance that faith brings. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name. Amen. It will be very helpful for me and even more helpful for you to keep your Bibles open at Hebrews chapter 10, page 1208 as we go tonight. I'm still quite new to this preaching thing, so if there was ever a week to double check your seat belt and strap a helmet on, this is it. And the best way to do that is to make sure that what I'm saying is what's on the pages in front of you. If you have any complaints, you can send them to me directly at martinatsantsilas.org.

[2:42] We're continuing our series in the book of Hebrews, which we've been working through for the last six months, and we've come to a particularly significant passage in the overall book. As we've been hearing, this book is predominantly written to Jewish people who have become Christian. We don't know exactly who wrote it, but we do know why it was written. At the time of writing, Old Testament Judaism enjoyed a privileged position as a sanctioned religion under the Roman Empire, but Christianity was brand new, a rapidly spreading but politically powerless sect that Judaism said was blasphemous and the Romans thought was dangerous. So anyone who converted to Christianity found their lives got harder, and this was especially true for Jews. They would be barred from the local synagogue and would lose the privileges of belonging to a religion sanctioned by Rome for as long as they identified themselves with and proclaimed Jesus. As such, there's an incredibly strong temptation to drift away from Jesus back to the Judaism they'd grown up with. After all, they might think, it's the same God, just two different ways to relate to him, right? And so the author of Hebrews encourages them to hold the course, to draw near to Jesus instead of drifting away, and to convince them that what they have now isn't just an alternative way to relate to God, but actually the fulfillment of the old way, the thing that was pointing to the whole time, the real deal. So our passage tonight is one of these great exhortations to the recipients of this

letter. A lot of what we've been looking at in Hebrews since we returned to it in February after Christmas has been about how Jesus is better than the whole Old Testament system of approaching God. He's fulfilled it all and replaced it all. This section about Jesus is sandwiched between two great calls to action. Rona quoted from one of them in the prayer, chapter 4, 14 to 16, which acts kind of like a thesis statement for this argument, and then our passage tonight is sort of the conclusion of this argument. If you've been here for the last couple of months and you've been wondering why the author keeps going on about priests and covenants and tabernacles and sacrifices, this is what it's been building up to. So let's dive into this amazing passage together. We'll begin by looking at verses 19 to 22 under the first heading on your service sheets. Jesus has made a way, so draw near. What does it take to draw near to God? The writer of Hebrews begins our passage tonight with acclaim. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place, we have confidence to enter the most holy place. The astonishing nature of this statement can very easily be lost on us. In the Old Testament, the most holy place was the part of the tabernacle or temple where God's presence dwelt, a tiny outpost of the throne room of heaven on earth, present in the middle of the people he had chosen for himself. Almost no one could enter, and no one entered confidently.

Once a year, the high priest could, after being ritually cleansed of his uncleanness, the contamination of living in a fallen world, after offering sacrifices to pay the debt of his sin, after dressing in sacred clothes, and only for a short time, for a specific purpose, enter the most holy place. He had to carry incense with him that covered the place above the ark where God's presence rested to protect him from being burnt away by the unfiltered glory of God. He was entering God's presence, but I don't think he would have felt particularly confident. At best, reverent and careful, quite possibly fearful, trembling as he passed through the curtain, to make atonement for the uncleanness and rebellion of the people and represent them before the very presence of God. The great claim here is that under the new covenant, we have confidence to enter God's presence, and not just a tiny outpost of it, but a way into the very throne room of heaven itself. But why does the blood of Jesus give us confidence? Look at the end of verse 19. We have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus. Covenants are big in the Bible. They're binding agreements made between a greater party and a lesser party, and they form the structure across the biblical story of how God reunites people to himself. Covenants are always enacted through a sacrifice. The blood is like a signature, a seal, a declaration that the parties commit to following the terms laid out on penalty of death. So here we can have confidence because the blood of Jesus was the seal on this new covenant.

It was the guarantee that the terms laid out, which give us confident access, were trustworthy. More than that, blood was required as a cover for sin and rebellion against God. The penalty for sin was death, but rather than paying the penalty themselves, God's people could instead sacrifice an animal as a payment on their behalf, which satisfied the debt so that they could approach God. Jesus' blood shed on the cross does both things. It is the seal on the new covenant and the payment for our debt to God that enables us to approach him with confidence. In verse 20, the author then describes the way that we enter God's presence, no longer through a thick curtain that kept the most holy place separated off except once a year, but a new and living way. Opened for us through the curtain, that is his body. We see that Jesus has opened this new and living way by his body and then in verse 21 we read, and since we have a great priest over the house of God. When the priest entered the most holy place, he entered as a representative of the people and symbolically carried them with him. He burned incense that mingled with the visible cloud above the ark, demonstrating the presence and proximity of God with his people. He made atonement for the sins of the people and to cleanse them from the defilement of living in a fallen world so that they could continue to live with God in their midst. Just like the old high priests, Jesus enters God's presence in his human body and takes us with him. But unlike them, he doesn't enter the earthly outpost, but the true heavenly throne room. And unlike them, he actually takes us in with him. Not physically, not yet, but spiritually. Right now, if you're a Christian, you have been spiritually united to

Christ and are with him in God's presence.

This is why we can pray to God. This is why we have the Holy Spirit living in us, because Jesus gives us access to the very throne room itself. So, says the author, verse 22, draw near. The way has been made.

Draw near with sincere confidence, with the full assurance of faith, because Jesus has done everything to open the way. You've been cleansed inside and out so that you can stand before a holy God with confidence. Don't hold back. And don't try and rely on old ways of gaining access.

[11:22] They've been done away with. We'll now move on to our second point, verse 23. God is faithful, so hold on to hope. The author continues, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. All throughout our series in Hebrews, we've seen reminders that these people are tempted to drift away from Jesus, back to the trappings of the old covenant. Following Jesus in the early church is hard. There's persecution, both from Jerusalem and Rome. It's much easier to let go.

Gently drift away, back into established habits and rituals and the stability of community and state sanction. But instead, the author urges the Hebrews, hold unswervingly to the hope you profess. Stay on the course. Don't go off to the right or the left. Now, whenever the Bible talks about hope, it's useful to clarify what it means. In the modern day, when we speak about hope, we usually mean one of three things. Something that we're not sure will happen, but we really, really want to.

I really hope Scotland gets to the second round in the World Cup. It could happen, but we don't know yet. Or it could be that you don't have all the information you need to assume that something is true, so you hope. I really hope that my friend in hospital I haven't heard from in a while is recovering well and feeling better. It might have already happened, but you don't know yet. Finally, we might speak of keeping a hopeful outlook, an optimistic view of the world that all things will work out eventually because it's better for our mental health than assuming the worst.

hope is something certain, demonstrated by events or promises in the past that can be trusted to come to fruition in the future. If you buy a new house and you sign all the paperwork, you pay the deposit, you don't rock up to the estate agent's office thinking, I really hope they give me the keys. You know they will because the agreement is made, the work is done, and you're just waiting for that final moment to arrive. When Scotland beat Denmark 4-2, you weren't at home nervously biting your nails, hoping that they would now be allowed to participate in the World Cup. They'd done it. They were in.

[14:04] When the author here says, hold on to hope, he's saying, this is certain. Hold on swervingly to the hope you profess.

So what is this hope? How can they be certain? As we've said already, this section of Hebrews is a bit of a recap of the previous chapter, so let's flick back a couple of pages to chapter 6 to see what is being referenced here. Hebrews chapter 6, verses 17 to 18, page 1205.

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised. He confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged.

Notice, God wants his people to have confidence. He's not trying to leave them in the dark to test their commitment. He's giving them everything they need to trust him. What's more, God's character and righteousness acts as its own guarantee. He cannot lie. So we can be greatly encouraged.

Finally, this hope is set before us. It's not a distant hope or a moving and changing hope. It's right there in front of us as long as we don't turn away from it. Verses 19 and 20 fill in the rest of the picture for us. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The hope is in Jesus, our forerunner. It is bound up with him, anchored to him, anchored to him and follows him through the curtain into the heavenly sanctuary.

[16:14] Jesus is our eternal heavenly priest and his entry on our behalf into the most holy place is the firm hope that we take hold of. Jesus, right now, is installed as a high priest on our behalf at God's right hand, interceding, representing us and bringing us before God. This isn't

a hope that something will happen in the future or something to help us have a more optimistic, positive mindset.

This is something that is happening right now that gives us confidence right now to draw near to God right now. Let's hold to it unswervingly. There are so many things that distract us and draw us away from this hope. The risk for the Hebrews and for us that's being addressed isn't suddenly doing a full 180. You're holding fast to Jesus one day and completely rejecting him, abandoning him the next.

We're talking here about a slow drifting. There are so many things that are good, but which can draw our focus too much without realizing we can end up adrift. Whether it's work and career, which feels like a much more stable thing to build an earthly foundation on than a heavenly hope. Maybe we're trying to earn our way into God's presence by doing enough good things or enough religious things instead of relying on Jesus as the way to draw near. And so returning to chapter 10, the author says, hold unswervingly to the hope you profess because this hope is sure and certain. Don't turn aside from it and keep professing it. I have to admit, I don't follow the football, but within hours of Scotland qualifying, I knew it had happened because all the football fans kept talking about it. They had a sure hope and they weren't shy to profess it. Now, I haven't heard nearly as much about it in the lead up. I knew the qualifiers were going on. That was about it. But once Scotland was in, sure and certain, once the hope was, in the language of chapter 6, firm and secure, they professed it with gusto.

And so it can be the same for us. We have confidence to draw near to God with the full assurance that faith brings, with Jesus our hope having made a way for us. So let's profess that hope. It's wonderful news.

Now, you may have noticed the whole way through our passage today, the author isn't addressing the Hebrews as individuals. It's not, hey you, draw near. Hey you, hold fast. They're being addressed as a family, brothers and sisters at the start of verse 19. And the author identifies with them, let us draw near. Let us hold fast. So this isn't to say that there's no individual element. We each individually need to draw near to hold fast. But this isn't something that they're to set about by themselves.

[19:39] Instead, the culmination of this exhortation, he urges them to keep going together. Which brings us to our final point. The day is approaching, so consider one another. Let's read those final verses again, 24 and 25.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards 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. It's interesting how this is laid out. It doesn't launch straight in with spur one another on, but consider how you may spur one another on. This isn't something that happens automatically or thoughtlessly. We are to consider how we are to spur one another on. And notice as well, it's not just sort of an aimless riling up, but a targeted encouragement. We're to spur one another on towards love and good deeds. This is a challenge to all of us. It's certainly a challenge to me. When I'm walking across the park to church on a Sunday, I'm usually thinking about what I'm going to do rather than the people I'm meeting.

I've been thinking this week, how would my Sundays look different if I spent that time considering and praying about how I could spur my brothers and sisters on towards love and good deeds? I can think of people here who do that for me, and it's a blessing. Someone will come up to me and ask how I'm going with the thing I mentioned last time we spoke, or share how God has encouraged them with something that was difficult in the past week that encourages me to keep going with Jesus.

These people are a real encouragement to me. I come away from those conversations feeling loved and wanting to love others and to live for Jesus. I also often come away thinking, how do they do it?

[21:52] Or sometimes, you know, I wish I could encourage someone like that. I've been challenged this week by this passage. I don't know, have you tried thinking about it? Think about it. Pray for it.

It might not be something I'm naturally good at. It might not be something you're naturally good at. But I guarantee I could do it slightly better if I spent 10 minutes prayerfully considering it.

And I think that might be true for a lot of us. Here's something I'm going to try for next week based on this passage. Choose one or two people who you hope to see at church and spend some time

praying for them during the week, considering how, when you next see them, you can spur them on, encourage them towards love and good deeds. If you don't see them, message them to let them know that you've been praying for them. That's the other side of this. Consider how you can spur one another on and don't neglect meeting together. Why? Because meeting together is the best way to spur one another on. Think about the original hearers of this letter again. They're isolated from their former community.

They're looked down on in society. They're experiencing real hardship for their beliefs. Meeting together is essential for them to encourage one another, to spur each other on in drawing near to God and holding fast to Jesus. If we're not meeting together, two essential things aren't happening. I'm not spurring you on and you're not spurring me on.

Imagine the joy of arriving next Sunday. You've been praying for someone, considering how you can spur them on to love and good deeds and you head straight for them as you walk in and they're coming straight for you and it turns out they've been praying the same things for you as you were for them.

[23:52] Or the person who spent the week alone, struggling, who barely made it to church on Sunday, being met by someone who's been praying for them, who is ready to encourage them onwards.

Or the person who walks through for their second week, not sure if anyone will remember their name, met at the tea and coffee by someone who met them, who prayed for them and has been considering how to spur them on in love and good deeds.

I've got to be there. I've been praying for Dave this week and I want to encourage him in love and good deeds. I've been thinking about how I can spur Ruth on.

I've got to be there. Why the urgency?

Why is the author so concerned that they might drift and that they keep encouraging one another? Why is this letter written at all? Because the day is approaching.

[25:03] Turn with me to the end of Hebrews chapter 9, back one page. Let's read verses 27 and 28 together. Just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Brothers and sisters, that day is coming.

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Thank you for the purpose of God. Thank you that he covers our sin, that he makes us enter into a new covenant where we have confident access to the throne room of heaven.

[26:54] We pray that we would hold unswervingly to this hope. We pray that by your spirit you would help us to spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

We pray that when the day comes, we would all be found waiting to receive the final salvation. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to sing again together now as the band lead us a wonderful song that reminds us that Jesus is before the throne of God and of all the great things he has won for us.