

Persevere

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[0 : 00] Now please turn back with me to Hebrews chapter 10 and from verse 19 and we're going to look at this passage for some time today, for a little time today.

Please follow me as you can as we open scripture and listen for what God has to say to you in your own life and in your own circumstances.

There's a very important word at the beginning of this section. Do you know what that word is? Therefore. It's a great word.

It's a linking word. It means what's gone before is important because it affects what is coming next.

It's a great link word. So all that we've been looking at, which I suppose very briefly you could sum up as being Christ is much better because remember these were a people, a Jewish Christians persecuted who were in danger of renouncing their faith, moving back from Jesus because he wasn't what they expected him to be.

[1 : 08] So the writer to the Hebrews has spent this early part of the book explaining how Christ is superior and it's been great for us, hasn't it? It's been great for us to remember how superior Jesus, how great Jesus Christ is.

And so we come to this therefore because of what Jesus has done and because of the amazing links between the teaching or the experience of the Old Testament and how that links with Jesus and what he's come to do.

Therefore keep going. Basically is what the writer to the Hebrews is saying. It's the consequence of the teaching that he's given.

It's like me saying maybe not today but on some rare and occasional warm day in Scotland saying it's hot today therefore we're going to have a barbecue.

It's a consequence of the weather because it's nice we're going to do this. That's simply what it is and what we have here is action being encouraged based on the facts of Jesus and how great he is being presented.

[2 : 21] Christ is far better therefore don't give up. Don't lose sight. Don't loosen your grip on him. And today we want to see things about Jesus with the eye of faith that will encourage us to do that.

There's a section here and I don't mean to be frivolous in saying this but it's what I would call the salad section just these early verses from 19 to 25 because four times the writer says let us.

Let us draw near to God. Let us hold on to our hope. Let us consider others. Let us not give up.

So you always have lettuce with a salad. So this is the salad section. Okay I know it's corny but I'll help you to remember. So there's four things that are very important here because Christ is so much greater therefore and there's these four encouragements for us that remain absolutely crucial and vital to us today.

It doesn't just refer to the Jewish believers who were in danger of giving up their faith. It is a word of the living God to all of us because there's many times when we are tempted to give up.

[3 : 45] So the encouragement is to remember that we are on a living path. Therefore brothers sisters since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way or a new and living path opened for us through the curtain.

That is His body. So as Christians we are on a living path, a living way and that living way is Christ Himself. Says that you know that it's a living way opened to us through the curtain that is His body.

We are in relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who loves us and forgives us and who is with us and because of that because we have the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of mankind in us and with us through His Spirit because He hasn't left us alone in His orphans.

He has sent His Spirit to be with us and He is in us and He is through us. He says let us draw near to God. Let us draw near to God with sincere heart and full assurance of faith having our heart sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.

That's what the whole last section has been about, about us freely entering into the holy of holies, the presence of God because of what Jesus has done. So let's use that because the temptation for us isn't it, is to do the opposite, is to run away from God.

[5 : 09] That's what sin encourages us to do. We run away from God who we see as awesome, scary, irrelevant, big, mean, different. I don't know what sometimes we think who God is but the temptation that Satan whispers in our ears is run away from Him.

But because of what Jesus Christ has done, let us draw near to God. Come close. That's what we are to do. We come close to the Creator, to the Redeemer in our lives.

We are clean. We've been made clean. We can freely go into His presence. We are His child. And He says we can go with confidence and with faith.

Sometimes we crawl into God's presence with our heads held low in a kind of faux humility.

Now, I'm all for humility and I'm all for recognizing the awesomeness of God but there's a humble confidence that we can come into His presence because of what Jesus has done because it's not about us.

[6 : 15] It's about Jesus and it's about what Jesus has done and we have confidence because we're covered in His righteousness. And so it's good to be confident in our faith and confident as we go into His presence.

Knowing what He wants for us, knowing that He loves us, let us draw near to God and let us do so corporately. That's one of the things about our prayer.

You'll see this and we'll mention it again. It's let us go. Let us come together. We're a people and we do this. And that confidence is bred by knowledge of God and by His word and by studying and knowing and living in relationship with Him.

Let us draw near to God. Let us 23, hold unswervingly to the hope we profess before He who has promised is faithful. It's the temptation for you today.

Let go. Is that what it is? To run from God rather than draw near. Or is it to let go rather than let us holding on?

[7 : 24] Because we have a sure and a certain hope based on the promises and the character of God. It's not that vain wishful hope that someday there will be a rainbow at the end of the, or there'll be a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

It's not that kind of vague wishful thinking. Hope is a sure and certain hope based on the character and in the work of Jesus Christ. You will only hope in Him and trust in Him as you know Him.

Isn't that true of us? We tend not to put our hope on people we don't know and don't trust. That's why door to door salespeople have such a tough job.

Because who's going to trust them just on first meeting? Usually gullible people or people who need a vacuum cleaner. But there's this reality that we generally only trust people we know and have come to know and that is why we can hold on to Jesus so well as we know Him.

This is this determined, consistent, intentional keeping close to God and we can hope in Him because of who He is.

[8 : 44] You need to say in your life, I will not let go of this Savior. It's determined and we do so because of who He is and we do so together.

Let us draw near, let us hold on with hope. Let us 24 consider one another, how we may spur one another towards love and good deeds. A beautiful verse.

The danger, isn't it, also is in our individualistic private society which I'm always rumbling on about here is that it's all about me. It's all about my faith and my individual walk with God.

And yet we find that the very core of the Christian faith is this corporate body ministry where we consider others.

It's not just about me and the best way for us to live our lives self-forgetfully is to think about and live for others.

[9 : 45] Let us spur one another. It's a very strong word. It's like the word provocation to provoke. It's translated that in some of the Bible, versions of the Bible. Let's provoke one another. And it's usually used negatively.

We would normally use that word negatively. Don't be so provocative. Don't provoke someone to anger or whatever it might be. Here's brilliant, isn't it? Because it's positive.

We provoke, we stimulate, we trigger one another towards what? Towards love and good deeds. Have you done that? Do you know how to do that? Do I know how to do that? Do we know how to be so intentional in our lives that we want to provoke other people of our Christian community towards what?

Love? Love and good deeds, that's a great thing, isn't it? It's challenging. It's not wishy-washy and soft and sentimental. It's a challenging reality.

How can we do that? Well, we can only do it by being close to them, by gaining their trust. By an example. Isn't that true? We will need to commit to one another in order to provoke one another towards love and good deeds.

[10 : 53] So opposite. So often for us, it's the opposite. We provoke one another in an annoying and an frustrating way. Here is the theology becoming the traction for action.

So people say, well, theology doesn't really matter. Theology is one place. I'm just a practical Christian. Rubbish. There's not such a thing as divorcing theology, a truth, the knowledge of God from our practical Christian lives.

If we don't know God, we're not going to serve him and follow him. So let's put away that non-thought-provoking nonsense because theology is the traction for action.

And if we are truly understanding God, it's never going to stay in our heads because that's a waste of time. It's going to be transferred to our legs and to our hands and to our faces and to our feet and to all we do.

So our theology is the traction in our lives for acting. You see, therefore, he says, because of all of this theology of the Old Testament, because of all this theology of Jesus, this knowledge of God, because we have, what did he say?

[12 : 02] Because we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus. What can we do? We can wash one another's feet, for example, theoretically speaking, serve one another in the most menial way.

The grace of serving. That is what we're encouraged not to forget. Sign of a people who have great theology is a people who are doing invisible good things to one another spiritually.

You know, the kind of things that don't come up in the hundred great marks of a super-duper church. You don't find them in any of these books. It's the things that go unnoticed.

It's the loving good deeds that happen daily in our intimate and interactive lives together that mark out a church that is grace-filled and God-centered and theologically astute and understand what it is to be a Christian.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards loving good deeds. I hope you'll use that to spur one another on to prayer in this time of prayer that we're looking forward to.

[13 : 17] And then the fourth one is, let us not give up meeting together as someone in the habit of doing. Here's a challenging statement for you. The New Testament knows nothing of solitary Christianity.

The New Testament knows nothing of a solitary, kind of mystical, individualistic Christianity. Yes, we must come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Yes, we must stand before God in our own individual lives and come to a personal faith. But the New Testament and here it's all about brothers and sisters. Let us.

It is about a citizenship. It's about a community. It's about a people of God. But once not being a people, now being a people, that's what heaven is about as well, that we're moving towards.

We're not going to have on sweet rooms in heaven in our own individual private lives. We're going to be a community of people together and let us know he says not give up meeting together as the habit of some is.

[14 : 20] Now I'm going to spend to speak tonight about the fourth commandment, which we're looking at in the evening. We're looking at the commandments and that's about the Lord's day or the Sabbath.

If you don't come normally tonight to church at night, I really encourage you to come tonight. It's a really important theme and we're going to speak a little bit more about that. It's a difficult command.

There's a lot of different ideas, but let's try and find out why meeting together in the worship of the Lord's day is so important. Let us not give up meeting together. Now that means more here than just meeting and worship.

But let's be a people who are dependent on one another, who meet with one another, who lean on one another, who rely on one another, who aren't simply spiritual lone rangers in our lives.

You see, it's a great thing to do. It's a good habit to do that. How would I have advised this church? This is a persecuted church.

[15 : 18] They're struggling to survive because they're getting killed. They're getting killed for their faith. And what would we say? Well, these times are bad. How about being a secret Christian for a while?

Don't meet together because it's a dangerous thing to do. Stay away from one another because you're a spiritual unity and God understands. No. He says, let's keep meeting. Don't give up that meeting together.

However dangerous, however risky it is today in these days of persecution, it's a good habit. It's a heavenly habit because it's pointing this toward it. It's a grace habit where we come together for instruction, for mutual encouragement, to talk about Jesus, to express and expose love towards one another.

I'm just going to read something, a quote from the little marriage handbook that I use when people are getting married. And it's not quite on the same theme, obviously, as this chapter.

But there's a great quote from C.S. Lewis about love, which gets kind of to the heart of why we don't give up meeting together and how dirty and ugly sometimes it can be.

[16 : 23] To love at all is to be vulnerable, love anything. I've probably read this many times here. Your heart will certainly be rung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to know and not even to an animal.

Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless and airless, it will change.

It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. You see, our hearts are meant to be broken in relationship with one another. And we are to forgive one another and be with one another and teach one another and learn from one another.

It's a good habit. Giving, coming together is not an optional extra. It is a good habit. The bad habit that we...

You know, habits are easy to form, aren't they, one way or another? Bad habits are when we stop meeting together. There's a habit among the church here of giving up meeting together.

[17 : 29] Easy to do, isn't it? We can have lots of reasons for not doing it. If we stop thinking of the Holy of Holies and the access that we have to God, we'll stop meeting together to enter that Holy of Holies in the presence of God.

Sometimes easy. And very often we just drift into that bad habit of not meeting together. But this good habit is so encouraging.

It's encouraging to one another. It's encouraging to be here today. It's encouraging to be with your family in Christ, to speak kind words, to smile at one another, to pray for one another, to worship together, to answer one another's questions, to hear one another's complaints, to get perspective, to belong.

Let us not give up meeting together. So we have this path that we are on, this way that we are on that encourages us to do... Not encourages, commands, challenges us to do these four things, among others.

But can I say also, and more briefly, we don't... We are not only on a living path, as it were, a living way that we need to walk on and to be determined and committed in God's strength.

[18 : 47] We also have a living God. Now I know that's a given, isn't it? I hope we recognize it on this resurrection morning. It's a living God that we serve and we worship.

You find in verse 31 that reminder to us, a very solemn reminder that the Lord will judge His people or vindicate His people. It's a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

Now that's why so many people are so brave in their objectionable hatred of God, because they have convinced themselves that He's not living, that they're not accountable, that it doesn't matter what we think about Him.

But our God is real. You know, we are to be more pity than anyone if we get ourselves out of bed on this wild and windy morning and come and prepare and worship and His song and every all the other ways.

If we're worshiping someone who's dead or who doesn't exist, crazy. Jesus, great, glorious, wonderful Creator, God who has come into our existence in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who we've rejected and who He's rescued and who shows and shares us His grace.

[20 : 14] He's a living God. I know we know that. But we need to be reminded today that it matters, you know, if you're in relationship with someone, you know, contact with someone, it matters how you act and speak with them because they're living.

They are living and they may have responsibilities, they may have authority over you, there may be ways that you have to act, but it affects how we react and interact with them. And here we have a living God who is not only the Creator, the Sustainer, the Redeemer, he's also the Judge.

He's the one who has justice in his hands. And we want that, don't we? We want a just world as well as a loving world. The two must go together.

You can't have love without justice. It's just that sometimes we don't like the thought of God being the standard of judgment and of justice, but we should because he's good and because he's perfect and we are not.

And sin separates us from this good and perfect and just God, but He gives Jesus justly to take the punishment in our place.

[21 : 41] And so he makes clear here, the writer, that to deliberately reject this God or turn away from Him and reject His mercy and His grace is a truly solemn thing.

To move back into a place of deliberate, willful, sinful behavior is a place of dread.

It's the dread of a definite, settled state of rejection. People who have known, who have tasted, who have been around the truth, who deliberately walk away from it and never seek repentance again.

Dreadful thing. And it's a dreadful thing generally to reject God's grace, to not see any need of it.

He will banish evil and sin and wickedness eternally from an environment that will be full and free and relational and good and perfect.

[22 : 50] And everyone will accept that. Those who are at enmity with God now will no longer be at enmity with Him then.

They will acquiesce in His just and perfect judgment. It will be clear. See the moment for, sometimes for people in this life who are maybe fugitives of justice, they can bluster and proclaim their innocence and shake their fists at the justice system when they're out of jurisdiction, when they can't be brought to account, and they can be bold and courageous in that sticking their fingers up at the justice system, denying their guilt.

But when they have been sentenced, when they've been brought to justice, when they're in the dock, and when the sentence has been passed and their guilt has been made clear, the bluster and the confidence, doesn't it, it often goes.

People are very seldom arrogant and full of bluster in the dock. And much more seriously with God, that remains the case, separation from Him.

We have a living God who is the source of justice, who is the measure of justice, who we are guilty before, but who in His grace and love has given His Son to be our saviour, to stand in the dock for us and to take our place so that we can be clean and free and in relationship with Him.

[24 : 34] That's justice and love. Grace, mercy and justice kiss together at the foot of the cross. So consequences are great, but He will vindicate His own people in that day.

We recognise that He says that. That He will vindicate His own people and He will bring them His mind to...

The Lord says in verse 30, the Lord is mine to avenge, I will repay, He says the Lord will judge His own people and there's a sense in which that day will also be a day, not so much of condemnatory judgment, but of vindicate of judgment.

Well He will vindicate us in that day and a more significant day you will never know in your entire existence when the judge of all humanity vindicates your acceptance because of Jesus, because of what Jesus has done.

Then Jesus will be really... We will understand how important He is. He's our advocate and it will matter on that day whose side we are on. He will vindicate us people.

[25 : 54] Therefore, and I close with this, we've got to stand firm. He reminds us that we need to live by faith and we need to stand firm.

Remember those early days after you'd received the light when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. He's encouraging this early Christian church who had known a lot of persecution to think back to better days when they did stand firm.

Days that were difficult and they supported one another, they stood side by side with one another. They sympathized with those imprisoned. They were joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property. They stood with one another and they said, remember these days and stand firm again.

Be courageous. Enjoy that faith, that hope and that love that He speaks about in this passage because He's coming back. Keep that perspective.

Stand firm. Don't wander off on your own. Don't wander away from God or away from truth but stay with His people with all our faults and failings and idiosyncrasies.

[27 : 00] Stay with us. Stick with it and stick with God and be a people who recognize and know the importance of not shrinking back because He says in verse 38 and 39, we are not those who shrink back in our destroyed but those who believe and are saved.

Let us remember the importance of that and remember the importance of staying close to Him because Jesus Christ Himself is returning.

He who is coming will come and will not delay. So He's coming back to take us home. So that's our perspective.

It's not observable science, okay? And observable science has its place and the data that comes from it. But it's not all that is.

We have the Christ of Galilee. We have the Christ of Golgotha. We have grace in our hearts which has changed us. We have a gloriously fine tuned universe all that bear God's signature and He is coming back to claim His own.

[28 : 16] And shrink back but believe. And that's what the time of prayer this next following week and 50 days after is an encouragement for us to do is to take these kind of truths and words and stick together and rely on God and move forward in faith and not give up.

And I would encourage you to come tonight as we look at the fourth commandment. There's a lot of things that are very important. There's questions for the identity for the young people that they'll be discussing.

And I do think we have to think about the large day a bit more and what it means and why it's important and why it's changed maybe also. And come to some kind of more fixed commitment to it in our lives as an encouragement for us.

So please consider that. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Other God we ask and pray that in our lives together we would be encouragers, that we would support one another, that we would forgive one another, that we would meet with one another, we would talk about Jesus together, that we would hold fast to the hope that we profess, that we would do so unswervingly, that we would provoke one another to love and good deeds, that we would do all that we can to draw near to God in full assurance of faith, not stumbling and failing and weak in our own strength but with the faith of God given as a gift and one that he will give to us more and more as we ask him.

So Lord bless our day today, bless, as time of worship bless our fellowship together afterwards and renew us in our faith and in our understanding for Jesus' sake.

[30 : 06] Amen.