

Opening Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, the church was birthed in Acts chapter two to meet together weekly and worship you in spirit and truth (**Jn. 4:24**). It is where we can gather as your people to be made new by the transforming power of the Word of God when it is applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit so that we can grow deeper in our love and obedience to You. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Introduction: Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10 and we are going to look at verses 19-25. This is the first message in a two-part series called: **Why Church?** The title of the sermon is **Not Neglecting God's House**.

I want to begin with a story. Emily noticed one day that our bathroom faucet was starting to leak and drip inside the cabinet. I spent eight years in the plumbing trade, so this would have been an easy fix for me. But instead of doing the right thing, I looked at it and decided to put a bucket underneath it instead to catch the water. This went on for almost six months and Emily would gently nudge me to fix the faucet. Each time I promised her I would get to it in a few weeks.

Finally, I decided to fix it on a holiday weekend. That was a big mistake because everything that could have gone wrong did! Things broke off that shouldn't have, and I didn't have all the parts I needed. It is never really a true home improvement project unless you make eight trips to Farm & Fleet in Geneseo and two trips to Lowe's in Moline. What should have been a two-hour project turned into an eight-hour project. We have all been guilty of ignoring things that need to be fixed in our homes or on our cars.

What happens when we ignore God's house? Our souls need mending week after week and the place God prefers to repair them is when the saints are assembled to worship Him and be renewed by the teaching of His word.

There is a growing trend among evangelicals that existed before the pandemic. Many of them are taking the off-ramp away from God's house.

The author of Hebrews faced a similar challenge. In our passage, he is going to present the privileges we have in Christ to enter our heavenly sanctuary where God dwells but also the privileges we have to enter our earthly sanctuary on the Lord's Day. **That brings me to the first point.**

First Point: We have an open invitation to come before the King. Follow along as I read verses 19 to 23.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

I. We have an open invitation to come before the King (vv. 19-21) Suppose one day in the mail you received an invitation to meet with the President, a congressman, a senator, or a well-known leader. Without hesitation, you would go and meet them because they invited you. The main point of verses 19-23 is that we have been given the invitation to come before the King of Heaven.

A. Confident before the King (v.19): How do we know this? In **verse 19**, the author of Hebrews begins with the word **therefore** because in the previous chapters leading up to our passage he has been making the argument for the supremacy and superiority of Jesus Christ. Because the original audience had been converted from Judaism to Christianity and now they were wanting to return to their old beliefs.

Due to trials in their lives, they had doubts about their faith and we can all relate to that. If you are struggling today this passage is for you, my friend.

To draw these **brothers** back to God the author of Hebrews shifts his focus to the privilege you and I possess in Christ, **since we have confidence**, to say it another way we have the bold assurance that we can **enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus** where God dwells in heaven.

Under the Old Covenant, only the high priest could come before God in the Temple on the Day of Atonement. Now under the New Covenant that Jesus secured with his blood, we can enter God's presence on a daily basis because of the righteousness given to us by Christ. What a great invitation we have!

This all-access pass to God gives us the freedom to approach God and ask for his strength, guidance, wisdom, love, and grace. It is also a place where we can plead for mercy and forgiveness when we sin. Also, it is where we can petition him in prayer for our needs and the needs of others.

Pastor Jim challenged us last week that if we truly delight in God we will pray for the lost before the throne of grace. Don't miss the connection, being in God's heavenly sanctuary every day will grow your desire to be in his earthly sanctuary with his people. Make it a priority to spend time in His presence.

B. The Curtain is Cut (v.20): Notice in **verse 20** what this **new and living way** accomplished for us. When Jesus' flesh was torn on the cross it **opened the curtain in the** Temple as a way to symbolize our unlimited access to the Father in Heaven through Jesus Christ.

C. The Presiding Priest (v.21): As **the new and living way** Jesus is the **great priest** that stands over the **house of God**. This is not a brick-and-mortar building, but this is the global assembly of believers from every tribe tongue, and nation. Christ is our spiritual leader who brings us into the heavenly sanctuary.

1st Timothy 2:5, for there, is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. As our leader, he will not disappoint us. Stay close to him so that you can be strengthened by his power to carry the burdens of life.

II. We have been cleansed by Christ (vv. 22-23): Now Christ is the one who brings us into the heavenly sanctuary. But in verses, 22-23 take notice of the qualifications needed to enter the presence of the King.

A. Come to the King (v.22): **First** we need a **true heart** that has been born again and has pure motives in approaching God. **Second**, we need to come with **full assurance of faith** without a doubt that we can truly enter the presence of God as he has promised through Jesus Christ.

Third, we must be **sprinkled clean from an evil conscience**. We can't let our past sins haunt our minds paralyzing our souls and preventing us from entering God's presence. **Fourth**, because we have been made clean on the inside by the power of the Holy Spirit the outside of **our bodies have been washed with pure water**. Our lives should reflect that change through our actions.

B. Cling to the King (v.23): **Fifth** and finally in verse 23, **let us hold fast the confession of our hope**. This means our testimony of coming to faith in Jesus Christ, but also our trust in the Word of God when we wed these together it prevents us from **wavering** because **he who promised is faithful** to save us from our sins.

Jesus has created a way for us to enter into our heavenly sanctuary so that we can be in our Father's presence and fellowship with Him. This is a great privilege that must never be ignored for it is vital to our spiritual lives. But now the author of Hebrews is going to show us the importance of entering into our earthly sanctuary. ***That brings me to the second point.***

Second Point: Gathering in God's House. Follow along as I read verses 24 to 25.

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

I. We are called to stir up the saints (vv.24-25)

A. Stirring up the Saints (v.24): The title of this two-part series is ***Why Church?*** In the next two verses, we are going to begin to unpack that all-important question.

Speaking to the saints, the author of Hebrews uses the all-inclusive exhortation, and ***let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works***. The word ***consider*** means each of us needs to give thoughtful consideration to those we know in the body of Christ and ask ourselves the question. How might I stir them up in a Christ-honouring way? To accomplish that means we need to be involved in each other's lives and not just in a superficial way.

It starts by being here for Saturday night or Sunday morning worship services. To go deeper with each other you need to be with other believers in a small group, bible study, Sunday School, or one-on-one discipleship.

That is exactly how the 1st-century church functioned. ***And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.*** Did you catch that first part? Day by day they were together, whether it was in the Temple or their own homes.

Why? What does the author of Hebrews say? ***To stir up one another to love and good works.*** We can't do that by ourselves. We need the community of other believers surrounding us and challenging us to grow spiritually. How do we ***stir up*** each other in a good way? I picture the chocolate milk that I make for our youngest daughter Adela.

Unless the milk is mixed with the syrup nothing happens and unless we gather together in person to hear God's word taught it will be a struggle for us to grow the fruit of **love and good works**. We are to be the spoon in other people's lives to **stir up one** another's spiritual syrup producing **love**, which is the trademark of the Christian.

Jesus defines **love** in John 13:35. **By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.** Do you come to church with the express intent of sacrificially loving others and expecting nothing in return from them? Notice the domino effect when **love** is stirred up **good works** will follow. Ultimately, this is how we are to minister to each other and create unity in the body.

B. Gathering in God's House (v.25): But that can only happen if we gather in our earthly sanctuary the church. Now it's time to put on some steel-toed boots because I am going to step on some toes.

I realize at times people are unable to join in person because they are on vacation. Others have physical limitations or infirmities, and they faithfully watch online. If that's not you, there is no reason you shouldn't be here. You might say to me, Pastor you just don't know my schedule. Our weekends are so busy. We are going here and there and everywhere.

As your Pastor, the one who oversees your souls and will give an account of how well he shepherded you, please understand that busyness is not a badge to wear but an idol to break! Then you need to take some things off of your schedule and stop **neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some**, letting God's house become an afterthought.

Maybe you are thinking, "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian." That is true. However, it would be like me saying, I am married to Emily, but I don't have to spend time with her to have a relationship. I want to be with Emily because I love her. If you don't have the desire to be with God and fellowship with His people your love for Christ has grown cold. I would urge you to examine yourself to see if you are really in the faith.

In the middle of verse 25 we are reminded that assembling together is not for our benefit, **but encouraging one another** to serve God and hold each other accountable in our walk with Christ. The Bible knows no such thing as a solitary Christian. Don't buy into this cultural demon of rugged individualism.

In reality, it is isolationism, and it comes from the devil. If he can separate you from the pack you become an easy target for him.

Stirring each other up to **love and good works** is the first reason we are to assemble, but notice there is a second reason, **the Day is drawing near**. The Day mentioned here is the second coming of Christ. The original audience was beginning to doubt this glorious truth. Sadly, many Christians today live like Jesus isn't going to return. The author of Hebrews is spurring us on to keep an eye on the sky so that if Christ does appear in our lifetime he will find us living in a way that is honoring to him.

1. Priorities: As we close I want to leave you with two application points. The first application point is **Priorities**. I remember telling Emily when I was working as a plumber *"it's been such a long week we haven't seen much of each other let's stay home today from church so we can spend time together as a family."* On the outside, that sounds noble, but you see I had my priorities mixed up.

What I was doing is placing my family above my love for Christ and being together with his people. Fortunately, Emily didn't hold back and said, we are going to church! She loved me enough to call me out and it stirred up a good work. Whether is it your spouse or close friend find someone in the church who will keep you accountable when it comes to gathering together on the Lord's Day.

2. Pursue: The second application point is **Pursue**. In one of Pastor Steve's business meeting devotionals, he made the point from Genesis chapter four that we are our brother's keeper. We must look after each other in the church because each one of us has value. After all, we have been bought with the blood of Jesus.

If you truly treasure your brother or sister in Christ you will love them and pursue them if they begin to stray away from the body. Does it always mean they will come back? Not necessarily, but what God desires is your faithfulness. James chapter 5:19 -20 gives us our application step as we go out this week.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. Let's pray.