



November 20, 2011
Pastor Jeremy Vaccaro
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Upward, Onward, Outward

Hebrews 10:19-25

We have Saturday morning breakfast tradition in our house called Skinny Pancakes. They're not called Skinny Pancakes because they are a healthy choice for breakfast, but it is a very special recipe that we learned from a beloved Chapel Hillian. A while back though, we faced a minor crisis of epic proportions; we ran out of syrup. It's important to note that syrup is an essential part of the Skinny Pancake experience. So, life just wasn't the same without syrup! We tried to come up with alternatives, but all of them fell short of the glory of syrup. Within a few days (miserable days, I might add), Diane went to the store and bought some syrup. Now, you have to understand that we buy our syrup at Costco. So, when I say she bought syrup, I mean she **bought syrup!** Have you seen their syrup? It comes in packages of two 100-gallon barrels that you strap onto your roof with a line of surgical tubing that goes right down to your table. But when she got home to unload the pallet of syrup from the minivan, we realized that actually we had a whole barrel of syrup already. We had been living in turmoil because we thought we had no syrup, but really – the whole time – there was a barrel of syrup that we had somehow misplaced and forgotten about. Of course, the next few months were nothing short of bliss.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you forgotten about something that you already have? Have you needed a certain tool for your project, made a special trip to the hardware store to buy it, only to come home and realize that you already have that exact tool? It seems silly right? That's because it is. It's foolish to live as if we don't have something when it's actually there the whole time. But that's exactly what I think we do as Christians. There are amazing realities about what God has done through Christ that, it seems, we simply forget about. We go about our daily lives as if they never really existed. Today we're going to look at a passage in the Bible that both reminds us of the things we already have in Christ, and calls us to live like we have them. If we miss it, not only will we miss an important point in the book of Hebrews, but we'll miss the essence of what it means to be the church.

Hebrews 10:19-25

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The 'therefore' at the beginning of the passage is signaling to us that this section is building from a previous point or argument. One of the main points in the whole book of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is completely sufficient for our salvation. We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews, but we know it's written to Hebrew Christians who may have been confused about the nature of believing in and following Jesus as Messiah. When we get to this section in chapter 10, the author has spent the previous few chapters building the case for the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. It's a wonderfully written explanation of why Jesus' death was significant for our salvation. But here, in verse 19, the author turns to application.

But did you notice the tense of the verb? What's it say? "Since we have" And what does that imply? Yes, this is something that we already possess! It has already been done. The way has already been made. I hope that you underline those verbs in this text to remind you that you don't need to add this to your spiritual grocery list. Because of Jesus, these are things you already have.

So, what do we have? First, we have "confidence to enter the Most Holy Place". As you read the book of Hebrews it will always do you well to have the Jewish system of worship, as outlined in the Old Testament, in the forefront of your mind. In the Jewish Temple there was a section of the Temple that almost no one could enter – only the high priest could go in on one day each year, and only after he had been cleansed in the special water and had prepared the sacrifice just right. Inside, there was a great curtain that separated this Most Holy Place from the rest of the room which was just called the Holy Place. But I don't think the author of Hebrews is telling these Hebrew Christians to run into the Temple, knock over the priests on duty, and dive into the Most Holy Place. No, even more, it points to the actual throne of God, not just the material symbol of His throne. The Hebrews author proclaims that we can enter confidently into God's presence – what's identified in chapter 4 as the throne of grace, we can enter confidently.

But how could this be? Why no longer the restrictions that existed in the Temple? Look at the good news proclaimed in verses 19 – 20. It's by the blood of Jesus. No longer is it necessary, as for a priest to make an animal sacrifice to atone for the sins of God's people. Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross believers have been cleansed of their sin once for all. Jesus opened a "new and living way"; it's new because it didn't exist before – the opportunity for people like you and me to approach God's throne was out of range before Jesus' life and shed blood. In Christ there is a new way, and a living way because it's not just a path that Jesus created. Rather, Jesus IS the path and taking the path means having a living relationship with the living Jesus. The way (verse 20) has been "opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body". In the same way that the great curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was "torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 16:38) so was Jesus' body torn on the cross so that we might have confident access to throne of God. Without Jesus' body, divine and human both, broken and torn on the cross, there would be no access to God for us. And so we say, "thank you Jesus."

The second thing we already have in Jesus according to verse 21 is "a great priest over the house of God". The phrase 'great priest' doesn't just mean a really cool guy; this was another way to refer to the high priest of Israel. But Jesus is different. The high priest had access to what no one else had: the Holy of Holies—the place where God was present on earth. He offered sacrifices for God's people in the Holy of Holies. And he had to do so on and on, year in and year out. But Jesus isn't only a priest, he's not only the high priest -

Jesus is God's Great High Priest, the Son of God in the flesh, whose offering of his own body never ever has to be offered again. He doesn't just communicate to God on behalf of God's people; Jesus makes a way between us and God and, even more, ushers us into the very presence of God – into the throne room with him.

So, in Christ, we have – already – confidence to enter the Most Holy Place. He is the new and living way for us; he is our Great High Priest. Since we have those things we are called to live as if we have them – to live upward, onward, and outward.

But before I go on to these next wonderful verses, I want to simply pause a moment to say it again. If you are follower of Jesus you have confident access to the very throne of God through your Savior Jesus. You have been made clean of your sinfulness through his sacrifice on the cross once for all. Do you believe that? Some of you are still functioning in a different reality than this one. Some of you are living as if you don't have these things. Some of you aren't really sure that God loves you or cares about you or is able to forgive your sin. Some of you are trying to earn God's favor. Do you believe what the Scripture reveals? I pray this morning that your eyes are open to the truth and the glory of Jesus, your living way, your priest.

How are we to live if we already have these things? The author of Hebrews calls us to live in three directions; look at verse 22, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." Now that the way has been made clear, the call of God is for us to draw near to God with hearts confident that through Christ we are presentable to God. Christ's call on our church is not to simply know about God or about God's Word. Our call is to draw near to God – to know Him – to enter his throne room of grace. Our call is to move upward toward God. But I have a hunch that some of you don't really want to draw near to God. I know there are times that I don't. It makes you uncomfortable; you don't want to be there; you want to keep God at a distance where it feels safer – where you can be more in control. Maybe you're afraid of what God will ask of you there. Or maybe you're just missing the point and you haven't realized God's upward invitation to draw near to Him. Beloved, how near to God are you?

Then the call for us is to hold on to our confession of hope. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful". We need to hold on to what we believe. This is our call onward – that no matter what we face we'll keep a firm grip of hope and faith. As we hold unswervingly to our hope in Christ we are strengthened to live God's way no matter what the circumstances. This is one of my main prayers for our students as they are graduating from high school, so I resonate with the author here saying, "Don't let go of the faith. Keep your hope in God." For he who promised is faithful. Are you holding on to the faith?

The call is upward – to draw near to God, and onward – to hold to our beliefs, and finally it is outward. Verse 23, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." I just love this idea of Christian fellowship with spurs, maybe we should start walking around on Sunday mornings with spurs on to remind us of the call we have toward each other. Did you walk into this worship gathering considering how you might help someone else love God more? That's what this verse is calling us to do. The Message says it this way, "Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out."

To accomplish this we have to be together, so Hebrews goes on, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Do you ever wonder why we make such a big deal out of coming to church around here? Do you think it's because we just want more people in the pews so that we can be one of the biggest mainline denominational churches in the South Sound? If you do think that, you're wrong. The Bible teaches us that we have to be in the habit of getting together. And when we get together we need to be in the habit of encouraging one another. Have you encouraged the people around you this morning? Did you encourage the people you saw in the parking lot or in the halls? Did you encourage your kids Sunday school teacher? If you did, to what end did you encourage them? Did you encourage them to draw near to God or to hold on to the hope we have in Christ? Did you encourage them toward love? Chapel Hill, until we learn how to live out these verses, we will never accomplish our mission of working together to present everyone mature in Christ.

William Barclay says about this passage that "no one has ever saved their soul who devoted their whole time and energy to saving it." When we only concern ourselves on Sunday mornings with our own Christian maturity, it's selfish. What are you doing to help others grow in Christ?

But honestly friends, I'm not sure if there is a way for us to really live out these verses by just being together on Sunday morning. Sunday morning is absolutely necessary and these verses need to instruct us about our time together, but Sunday morning is not enough. You have to be getting together with a smaller group of people with a very intentional attitude of growing as disciples of Jesus together. Two great ways to do that here at Chapel Hill are ministry teams and LifeGroups. Our dream is that every ministry team here – the teams that leads our student ministry, our Sunday school, our mission projects, our outreach, our renewal – will be a community of disciples together. Maybe the way that the Lord is calling you to respond to His Word today is to inquire about joining one of our many ministry teams. For everyone else, our hope is that you move toward a LifeGroup. LifeGroups are a prime example of what we believe it looks like to work together to present everyone mature in Christ. Are you in a LifeGroup? If yes, are you fully invested in helping that group grow together in Christ? If no, would you consider it? It's one of the most meaningful ways you can participate in our mission as a church. Maybe today is the day that you stop avoiding it and go to the Connect Center to get signed up. Maybe today is the day that you go to the web-site to track down one of our ministry leaders to pursue joining the team.

The more we live into these verses together, the more we'll experience all that God has for us as a church. Imagine a church community in which you feel connected, encouraged, supported, inspired, challenged, and motivated in your walk with Jesus. Imagine participating in a God given mission that is so much bigger than you are. Imagine seeing God's Kingdom come and His will be done in your families, in your neighborhood, in our city, and in our world because of what God is doing amongst us a community. You can be that together because of what God has already done in Christ. So, may we draw near to God. May we hold on to our profession of hope. And may we work together to love well and serve God.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. What is important about verses 19 – 21?
 2. What do these verses teach us about Jesus?
 3. What is the status of your heart to God? Why? What would it look like to draw near to Him?
 4. How are you doing at spurring others toward love and good deeds? What specific things are you doing to live out verses 24 -25?
 5. What is God asking you to do as a result of reflecting on Hebrews 10:19-25?