

Sermon Transcript

05.10.2026

Hebrews 10:19-25

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- Good morning. As you make your way to Hebrews 10, in honor of Mother's Day, I want to begin with an illustration of a particularly significant woman in Scripture and that is Queen Esther.
- In many ways, she's not a fitting illustration for Mother's Day because the Bible never even says if she has kids. TBH, she certainly doesn't fit the biblical mold for womanhood & she's not in the Bible as an illustration of what it means to be a godly wife & mother. She's in the text as an exception, not the rule unless of course you want the rule to be that women should generally be compelled to undergo a year of comprehensive cosmetic lookmaxxing followed by a geopolitical beauty pageant under an imperial dictatorship in exile in a foreign land.
- So I don't mention her as a model for motherhood or femininity in general, but for 1 particular story.
- Perhaps you recall the tale.
- Esther learns of a plot to destroy the Jewish people. The genocidal villain is a guy named Haman. He wants to destroy all of the Jews because of a feud he has with Esther's cousin, Mordecai.
- Mordecai learns of Haman's plot and asks Esther to help, but doing so means approaching the king.
- That sounds simple enough. From our 21st century American context, a wife asking her husband for help should be no problem.
- But from the ancient near eastern perspective, there IS a problem...a BIG problem. She describes the problem like this:
 - *All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.* (Esther 4:11)
- In other words, drawing near is literally risking her life. It isn't only that the king has the right to kill, it's that death is the default. In other words, mercy is the exception to the rule.
- So what does she do? She ultimately decides to ask the king for help, but not without a lot of fasting and prayer and anxious deliberation. Even as she eventually draws near, there's trepidation and fear, due to the uncertainty and instability of the outcome.
- Would the king extend the scepter? Would she find pleasure in his eyes? That's the drama.
- Now, take that story and hold it in mind while you consider another image from the OT.
- I want you to think of the idea of drawing near to God in the OT. For your average Israelite, this was never going to happen. In fact, for your average Levitical priest, you would never enter into the presence of God in the holy of holies. The best you could do is get in the general vicinity, but the actual divine presence was verboten, restricted access only.
- Entering the most holy place was a privilege that was reserved for the Aaronic high priest, but even then, the responsibility was somber and severe. After all, Leviticus is clear that if the rules aren't followed perfectly, death was the inevitable result. To show how serious YHWH was,

consider the case of Aaron's sons who were put to death for offering unauthorized fire or Uzzah being struck down for even touching the ark while it was being carried to Jerusalem.

- The high priest as well as anyone understood that our God is a consuming fire, not to be trifled with or approached carelessly.
 - Thus, like in Esther's case, to draw near without invitation was to die.
 - And yet in our passage today, we'll see once again that we have a right & privilege that even the high priests didn't. And we have a confidence, assurance and hope that even Queen Esther didn't.
 - We can not only draw near, but do so with boldness because of Christ.
 - So let's pray and then we'll dive in together.
 - Self, others, me.
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- We are prone to forgetfulness. We see that throughout the OT where the Israelites constantly forget the works of God. We see it in the gospels as the disciples constantly question Jesus.
 - And if we're honest, we see it in our own lives.
 - Because we tend to forget, God reminds us. That's why Peter writes this in his second epistle:
 - *Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder...* (2 Peter 1:12-13)
 - I mention that because perhaps you wonder why we recap each week. Why do we spend 5 minutes going over a context we've already heard time and time again.
 - I do that for a couple of reasons.
 - First, because we have visitors who weren't here last week.
 - And second, because I don't presume that everyone has a prodigious steel trap memory.
 - Besides, this isn't just a mental thing. Remember the parable of the sower where Satan steals the word. This is a spiritual reality. Your flesh wants to forget. It relishes forgetfulness as it thinks that rebellion is justified by our spiritual amnesia.
 - So that's why each week I recap the context. Because there's been a battle raging in our hearts and minds the past 7 days and the enemy is doing everything in his power to distract you. So we need to be reminded in order to get our bearings.
 - With that in mind, we know that Hebrews is about the supremacy and superiority and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.
 - He is the true and better priest who has offered a true and better sacrifice in a true and better temple on the basis of true and better promises to establish a true and better covenant.
 - And if He is better, then why would you drift? Why fall away?
 - That's what the author is addressing. These Hebrew Christians are being persecuted and are therefore tempted to recant and return to the seeming safety of the synagogue.
 - So the author writes this book to show how utterly foolish and futile that would be.
 - In chapters 1 & 2, we saw Christ compared to the angels, who were instrumental in the giving of the Mosaic Law.
 - In chapter 3, Christ was compared to Moses. Both were faithful but Moses was faithful as a servant in the house of God whereas Christ is faithful as the son. Then in chapter 4, we saw Christ's rest and leadership compared to what was offered in the days of Joshua.
 - So in chapters 1-4, Christ is compared and contrasted to the angels, Moses, Joshua, the Sabbath, and the promised land.
 - Later in chapter 4, we read this:

- *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14–16)*
- Notice the similarities between this passage and our text today.
- Both talk about Christ passing through the holy places. | Both call Christ our high or great priest.
- Both call us to hold fast. | Both tell us to draw near.
- Both speak of our confidence and our confession.
- Those similarities aren't incidental or coincidental. They're intentional.
- They form what is called an *inclusio*, which is a literary technique in which you bookend some material, you begin & end a unit of the text with the same language in order to showcase that everything between is somehow related.
- Think of the movie *The Lion King*.
- How does the movie begin? With Mufasa showing Simba to the animals gathered around Pride Rock. And how does it end? With Simba showing his new cub to the animals at Pride Rock. And what song is playing each time? *The Circle of Life*.
- Which is what the movie is ostensibly about. All the themes of the movie revolve around the idea of the circle of life. That's an *inclusio*.
- My point is that chapters 4 and 10 end on the same note as a sign that everything between, that is chapters 5-10, are related in that they all answer the question, how can you draw near?
- That's the command we see in chapters 4 and 10, but that was impossible under the old covenant so what is it about the new that makes what was prohibited before permitted and even prescribed now?
- The answer to that is that Jesus is a better priest who has offered a better sacrifice and so forth.
- So don't miss the forest for the trees as we dig through the passage.
- With that in mind, let's look at vs. 19-21.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God... (Hebrews 10:19–21)

- Right off the bat, notice the word confidence. You could also translate that as boldness.
- In fact, that's the way the word is translated a number of times in Acts. For instance, when the disciples are brought before the Jewish authorities, they noticed the boldness of the disciples.
- And lest we forget, that was a matter of a few weeks after those same Jewish authorities had crucified Jesus. The disciples hadn't forgotten the danger that the Sanhedrin represented, but they were bold, they were confident because of the gospel.
- And consider how this word might have served to encourage these first century saints facing persecution. It was a word that connected their experience to that of the apostles. We'll see the same sort of thing in chapter 11 where we read about a list of saints who had walked by faith in God's promises, even at great cost and risk.
- It is often said that courage isn't the absence of fear, its the willingness to act in spite of the fear. And that's what these early readers needed. They needed courage, boldness, confidence. Not because the danger wasn't real, but because hope is greater than despair.

- But here the primary sense of confidence isn't boldness to witness for Christ, but rather boldness to enter the holy places.
- Again, this is what's so new and amazing about the new covenant. The entire edifice of the tabernacle and the later temple communicated the inaccessibility of God. For the average Israelite, they were separated from God by various courtyards and curtains.
- And behind those curtains were cherubim, perched on the mercy seat to guard the presence of the Lord.
- And the danger wasn't merely presumed or hypothetical. In fact, God Himself warned against drawing near.
- When God descended on Sinai, He said this to Israel:
 - *And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.* (Exodus 19:12)
- And then in the tabernacle, God says this in Numbers 18:
 - *To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting, so that the people of Israel do not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die.* (Numbers 18:21-22)
- In fact, even the high priest couldn't come at any time and in any way. Look at Leviticus 16
 - *and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.* (Leviticus 16:2)
 - *and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.* (Leviticus 16:13)
- Death was a constant threat under the old covenant.
- So this idea of drawing near and doing so with confidence is foreign to the OT. Its foreign to the OT because its an implication of the new covenant.
- Notice how we enter. By the blood of Jesus and through His flesh. We don't enter through a curtain, we enter through Christ...or we could say that Christ is the curtain, kind of like He calls Himself the door.
- Again, chapters 5-10 are explaining how what was previously closed is now open. And the answer is, as all church kids know...Jesus.
- He has passed through the curtain, which, as we've seen in previous weeks refers to the heavens. And He has entered into the heavenly sanctuary of which the tabernacle was a copy and shadow. He's entered there and sat down.
- And that will be the foundation for our confidence.
- As an illustration of this, consider visiting the White House or Buckingham Palace. It would be the height of presumption and quite perilous to try to just walk in. But what if you were invited by King Charles or Donald Trump himself?
- That changes the equation. And that's what the author is saying. You are beckoned, welcomed, invited by the king Himself.
- Not only has Christ gone through the curtain, but remember what happened at his death.
- Mark says it like this:
 - *And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.* (Mark 15:38)
- Why? To symbolize that the old is closed, a new way is open & a new high priest is in session.
- And if the way is open & if we've been invited, then we should have confidence. But apparently confidence is a bit like a muscle that needs to be exercised & strengthened. After all, in vs. 35 he'll say

- *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (Hebrews 10:35)*
- Virtue, like any muscle, will shrivel away and atrophy if not used. That's why courage begets courage. Confidence begets confidence.
- So there is both an objective and subjective aspect to confidence. Objectively, we should have confidence because of Christ, but subjectively, we experience greater confidence as we walk out our faith day to day. Our subjective confidence grows as we lean into the objective reality. We become what we already are, in a sense.
- And what that confidence leads to, we'll see in vs. 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. (Hebrews 10:22)

- There is a phenomenon that permeates Scripture in which indicatives lead to imperatives.
- Don't get lost if you don't know those terms, I'll explain.
- An indicative is a statement about what is true, especially what God has done or who you are because of it. You are dead in your trespasses. By grace you have been saved. Christ is Lord. These are indicatives. Just statements of fact.
- What about imperatives? Imperatives are commands. It is imperative that you do this thing. Love one another is an imperative. Be holy is an imperative. Endure hardship. Don't stop meeting together. These are imperatives.
- And in many NT epistles, we see a definitive order in which imperatives follow indicatives.
- So for example, in the book of Ephesians, we have three chapters of indicative talking about what God has done. By grace you have been saved. He's torn down the wall between Jew and Gentile and so forth. You have three chapters of indicative followed by three chapters of imperative.
- And that order is not accidental. The point is that the imperatives flow from the indicatives as certainly as chapters 4-6 follow chapters 1-3. In other words, we can only do Ephesians 4-6 in light of Ephesians 1-3. That doesn't mean you'll do Ephesians 4-6 perfectly, you won't, but it does mean that Ephesians 1-3 provides the fuel and motivation to obey. They provide the objective truth worked in you that you subjectively work out.
- The reason this is important is that there are two main errors we need to avoid.
- First, is that we attempt the imperative apart from the indicative. We try to do what God commands without reference to what He has already done. We call this legalism. To put this into Heb terms, we attempt to draw near (that's the imperative) apart from Christ's work (that's the indicative). We try to draw near on the basis of our own works, our own offerings or sacrifices.
- The second danger is that we claim the benefits of the indicative, but disregard the imperative. We claim grace without obedience. This is called licentiousness or antinomianism which is when you stress the indicative to the neglect of the imperative. So, again, to put this into the terms of Hebrews, this would be to enjoy the confidence of access to God, but never actually draw near.
- Jesus tells a parable that might help us to understand the two dangers. We find it in Matthew 22.
- A man is throwing a wedding feast and he invites a bunch of people and they don't come and so he invites others, but one guy comes without the proper attire.
- Those who don't come are like those who refuse to draw near whereas the one who comes with the wrong clothes is like the one who attempts to draw near on the wrong basis.

- There are 2 dangers, 2 ditches, 2 errors to avoid. And we do so by stressing both indicative & imperative & recognizing the cause & effect relationship between them.
- Back in vs. 19, we saw the word since. Since we have confidence. Since we have a great priest. Indicatives.
- Therefore, draw near. Imperative.
- Don't miss that. If you neglect the indicative, you end up in one ditch. If you neglect the imperative, you end up in another.
- So the imperative here is to draw near. Again, what was utterly impossible, verboten, forbidden under the old covenant is not only permissible, but prescribed.
- And this goes back long before the tabernacle. Think back to the garden.
- Man sins and then what? He hides, he attempts to cover himself with fig leaves. Sin produces shame. What does grace produce? Boldness, confidence, drawing near.
- So that's a question to ask as we come to this text, when you sin, what is your response? Do you drift, do you fall away, do you run away, or do you draw near?
- Your response to your sin will tell you how well you understand the gospel and how well you live in the light of grace.
- Do you have confidence? Or, to use the language of this verse, a true heart in full assurance.
- With hearts sprinkled clean and bodies washed with pure water.
- What's that about?
- I think that's a reference to the promise of the new covenant. Over the past few weeks we've seen the author quote Jeremiah 31 and the promise of a new covenant, but there is another OT passage that makes a similar prophecy. Look at Ezekiel 36. YHWH says:
 - *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)*
- Notice the new heart and spirit which corresponds to the language of Jeremiah 31. And notice the phrase clean water. In the LXX, the Greek translation of the OT, the phrase there is the exact same as in Hebrews 10 and the reference to pure water.
- So we draw near not only on the basis of what Christ has done on the cross, but also on the basis of what His work on the cross has done in our own hearts. He has given us a new heart, washed and cleansed us from our sin.
- He has brought about an internal transformation, one which the external rituals of the Mosaic covenant could merely illustrate. For instance, in the OT, there is circumcision of the flesh, but the OT itself held out hope for another type of circumcision, that is the circumcision of the heart.
- The external ritual of circumcision performed under the old covenant was a shadow, a type, pointing to the internal reality accomplished under the promises of the new covenant.
- That's what Christ has accomplished for and in us so that we may now draw near.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 23.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

- Earlier in the book we saw that the danger was described as drifting or falling away and that was contrasted with holding firm or fast. For example, in chapter 3, we read:

- *but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Hebrews 3:6)*
- *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (Hebrews 3:14)*
- Consider how this would have read in the midst of a first century church being tempted to recant that very confession, to let go of that very hope.
- And remember what hope means in biblical terms. Hope in the bible doesn't mean the same thing it does in our common English usage. I hope the Cowboys win the East. I hope I get a promotion. I hope I do good on that test I didn't study for.
- Esther hoped the king would extend the scepter, but there was no promise, no assurance, no guarantee.
- In our everyday usage, hope is nothing more than wishful thinking.
- But in the Bible its confident expectation grounded in some objective guarantee.
- According to Romans 5, hope doesn't put us to shame.
- And in 2 Corinthians 3, hope is linked to boldness. We can be bold because our hope is certain. The more certain the hope, the more confident the boldness.
- And look at how faith will be described in Hebrews 11
 - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1)
- So hope has to do with assurance and conviction.
- And that's what we are holding fast. That's what we are clinging to. That's what keeps us from drifting.
- From drifting into apostasy as the context of Hebrews concerns, but also drifting into sin or drifting into despair.
- As Andy says to Red in Shawshank, "hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies."
- But our hope is only as strong as that in which we hope. The reason that we can't put much hope in the Cowboys winning the Super Bowl is that they haven't proven they can do that. They have a track record of postseason mediocrity at best.
- But the hope that the author commends here is solid because its grounded in something unchanging. Notice the basis, the rationale, the foundation of our hope.
- For He who promised is faithful.
- First, think about the importance of the promises of God. We've seen in Hebrews, the author stress God making promises and how He doesn't make promises because He needs to make promises, but rather He makes them for our sake.
- He doesn't make promises because He is untrustworthy, but rather because we are untrusting. He doesn't make promises because He forgets, but rather because we do. He makes promises in light of our own weaknesses. As a good Father gives good gifts to His children, so our Father gives us promises to assuage our doubts and fears.
- Promises like I will never leave you or forsake you. Promises like working all things together for the good. Promises like His return and our resurrection.
- It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of the promises that God has made. In fact, our very joy and hope and life is dependent on those promises. All of our anxiety and fear and depression and despair boil down to a failure to remember God's promises.
- But we've all broken promises. So how can we rest fully on God's promises?
- Well, because unlike us, there is nothing that could possibly prevent God's promises from being realized and actualized and consummated and fulfilled.

- Think about why you break promises.
- Perhaps you just lied. Well, unlike you, God doesn't lie.
- Perhaps you changed your mind. Well, unlike you, God doesn't change.
- Perhaps you intended to keep the promise, but circumstances got in the way. Well, unlike you, God is sovereign over all things, He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.
- Can you see how practical theology is? Some of you get tired head when we talk about the sovereignty of God or His aseity or simplicity or impassibility, as if those are abstract ivory tower doctrines when in reality those are profoundly important for cultivating confidence.
- This is what He means when He says, He who promised is faithful.
- He is faithful. Always.
- Now, think for a second about what the author is doing here because its amazingly rich.
- He is telling us to hold fast, to hold firm, to persevere, to endure. He tells us to do that. We have that responsibility. That's what obedience entails. God commands something of us.
- But he is grounding that command in the nature and work of God.
- In other words, the fact that God is faithful and God has made promises and God will preserve us, doesn't excuse us from our responsibility. But neither does our responsibility derive from ourselves. We hold fast because God faithfully holds us. That's not a contradiction, that's not an inconsistency. That's theological tension.
- I'm reminded here of the book of Jude. In vs. 20-21, it says this:
 - *But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.* (Jude 20–21)
- Notice that command. Keep yourselves.
- But lest we take that and veer into Arminianism or self-righteousness, look at how the book begins:
 - *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:* (Jude 1)
 - There the verb is passive. We are kept. By whom?
- Look at how the book ends
 - *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jude 24–25)
- Notice, the idea of us being kept by God forms an inclusio, a bookend. We can only keep ourselves in light of the fact that we are kept. That's not a contradiction, that's a glorious mystery that should prompt worship and awe.
- As Augustine said, "Give what you command & command what you will." God commands us to hold fast even He Himself holds us firm.
- As Paul writes when he comes to the end of his exposition on the sovereignty of God in Rom 11:
 - *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* (Romans 11:33)
- Vss. 24-25.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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. (Hebrews 10:24–25)

- Thus far we've seen that we have to hold fast and draw near, but now we see this isn't a private individualized command. There is a horizontal dimension, a social nuance to this admonition.
- We've already seen this social aspect referenced before. For example, in Hebrews 3, we read this:
 - *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* (Hebrews 3:13)
- When we were in chapter 3, we used the image of concrete which hardens when not stirred constantly. But here it isn't just that we stir ourselves, but each other.
- We're called to stir up one another by means of exhortation and encouragement.
- This is a community endeavor. Similar to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.
- In other words we are not independent. In fact, we are not even merely autonomous members of a universal body, we are as Romans 12 says, members one of another.
 - *so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* (Romans 12:5)
 - *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.* (Ephesians 4:25)
- We are members of one another, interrelated, interdependent.
- In fact, in Ephesians 5, marriage serves as an analogy for the church. As man and woman are one flesh, so members of Christ are one body.
- And therefore we have an obligation toward one another.
- That obligation here in chapter 10 consists of a few responsibilities.
- First, we are to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Notice it doesn't merely say to stir up one another, but to consider how to do so.
- That verb consider is the same as Jesus uses in telling us to consider the ravens and the lilies. It was the word the author of Hebrews used in chapter 3 to tell us to consider Jesus. It means to contemplate and study, to reflect and observe.
- This is more than just a casual willingness to help if help is requested, this is a call for us to consider the body and look for opportunities to encourage and exhort and correct and caution. There is an active intentionality in this. There is a vigilance to this. A discipline, a deliberation.
- And in order to be actively encouraging one another, we need to be around each other so that's the second responsibility.
- Not neglecting to meet together.
- That word meet together in Greek is episynagogen. What root word do you think that is from?
- Synagogue. What was the synagogue in Jewish culture? The synagogue was the center of the Jewish community. It was like a church, courthouse, coffee shop & country club rolled into one.
- That's what the NT envisions for the church to be as well, not a peripheral supplement, but a central aspect of your identity, not to be ignored or marginalized or neglected.
- Again, if you're neglecting meeting together, you can neither be encouraged nor encourage others. In fact, all of the biblical 1 anothers assume deep community, belonging, & involvement.
- I can't very well serve or encourage or be hospitable to someone that I'm not regularly around. Though I may have a real theological connection to a Christian in Cambodia or Cameroon or Canada, I don't bear the same responsibility to them that I do those in the church in which I've been grafted by the Lord's grace.
- God has given me the body that He has so that I may be discipled and make disciples and I neglect that responsibility to the detriment of my own soul and others. Again, the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.

- But that's exactly what I'm saying if I neglect the gathering. I'm saying I don't need the body or I don't need that particular member of the body.
- And in doing so I'm implying self-sufficiency. I'm implying that I'm wiser than my Creator. I'm implying that I'm the exception to the rule.
- Does the occasional sickness or occasional vacation entail a forsaking of the assembly? Of course not, but when occasional becomes regular, when the exception becomes the rule, when the pattern and trajectory is towards neglect, that's concerning.
- I think about it a bit like my experience of church as a kid. I relished the times I would wake up sick. I longed for a reason to skip. So, the question is, do you relate to the assembly like that? Are you eager to gather or are you happy for any excuse to miss?
- Think for the second about the word assembly. There are three main ways that the ESV translates the Greek ekklesia. I don't know why it translates it differently, but it does. Most of the time its translated as church, but sometimes congregation and sometimes assembly.
- So think of the word assembly. Now think of a toy or a piece of furniture from Ikea and on the box it says what? Some assembly required.
- The same is true for the assembly of the saints. No church is fully formed.
- The Bible says that we're being built up, its ongoing & active. And that happens by means of our labor. Yes, God is sovereign, but God exercises His appointed ends through His appointed means.
- Therefore, if the church is lacking, don't just lament and complain, pray and roll up your sleeves and get to work. Build up the body by means of taking responsibility for it.
- Don't ignore or neglect it.
- And the tragedy of this tendency toward negligence becomes even clearer when you connect it to the original context of the danger of drifting from God. How often do we find that drifting from God begins by drifting from His people? Drifting from Christ often starts with a subtle drift from the body of Christ.
- And in a sense, God has designed it that way. He's designed the church such that we as Christians are dependent on each other. He's designed us so that we flourish together & atrophy alone.
- As Proverbs 18 says:
 - *Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.* (Proverbs 18:1)
- I'm an introvert so I'm keenly aware of the allure of isolation and yet I believe what God has said about the way that He has designed us. I believe that some of the things I naturally desire are actually antithetical to my joy.
- As I was thinking about this reality this week, I was typing on my computer and thought of my charger. As long as I'm connected to the charger, my computer runs well, but the moment I disconnect the charger, my computer begins to lose power until eventually it dies.
- That's like a Christian & the church. As a straggler won't survive long in the wilderness apart from the herd, so a lone Christian won't last long in the world apart from the communion of saints.
- Is that a denial of the perseverance of the saints? No. Its a recognition of the means that God has provided to guarantee our preservation. In His wisdom, He has decided to sanctify and preserve us by means of others.
- So the church is the context in which we hear the word, speak the word to each other, taste the word in communion, confess sin, be encouraged, repent, sing, pray, etc. You can do some of those things in isolation, but only in the church do all of those coalesce.

- So don't neglect the assembly. Don't neglect the body. Don't neglect the men and women sitting around you. Because in doing so, you neglect yourself, you rob yourself of the nutrients that you need to hold fast.
- This is particularly compelling when considering again the context of Hebrews. For a community facing persecution, I'm sure there was a particular fear of gathering with other Christians. Like fish in a barrel, the congregation simply gathered everyone together to be persecuted.
- And yet the pattern that church history has shown is that hope and faith have changed the calculus on risk assessment.
- For example, when Romans persecuted the early church, they kept meeting.
- And when the black plague descended on Wittenberg, Luther & the Reformers kept meeting.
- And when cholera broke out in London, Spurgeon kept preaching.
- And when the Germans blitzed London, churches met. In fact, there is a famous story of Martyn-Lloyd Jones preaching when a bomb destroyed the building next to the church. The explosion shook the church and Lloyd-Jones paused briefly and then just continued preaching.
- Am I saying that it is never appropriate to flee a plague or bombing? Of course not.
- But I am trying to challenge our default assumption which is to prioritize safety & personal security to the neglect of the church. To stress individual rights to the neglect of communal responsibility. I'm saying that there is a far greater danger than bombs or bacteria. There is the danger of drifting, disobedience & the devil, the danger of fear, the flesh, & falling away.
- And God has given you a means to resist those dangers and that means consists of men and women committed to your joy.
- So draw near, hold fast, don't neglect the gathering.
- Why? Because Jesus is coming back. The day of the Lord draws near. And we've received certain promises. And He is faithful to fulfill those promises.
- So maranatha, come Lord Jesus.
- Let's pray.

Communion

- Fence table
- As we prepare our hearts to partake, I want us to take a second and apply the text.
- We have a chance to actually consider each other this morning.
- The Supper is not only about our communion with God, but also our communion with each other.
- That's why the Bible stresses the one loaf and the one cup.
- In 1 Corinthians 11, some of the members of the church were neglecting other members. They were eating and drinking before others even arrived.
- And Paul offers a strict warning. In vs. 29 he writes:
 - *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:29)*
- So communion isn't merely a time to look inward and upward, but also outward to the body of Christ. To discern the body, to consider each other.
- So before we partake, in just a second I'm going to encourage you to take a few seconds and look around. You introverts will love this, trust me. As awkward as it might be for all of us, I'm going to encourage you to make eye contact. Don't wink and make it weird. But look at the people around you.

- Do you know their names? If not, make it a point to learn them after we dismiss. Consider how you might stir them up to love and good works.
- Consider how God has given them to you for your sanctification and given you to them for theirs.
- So go ahead and take a few seconds and look around.
- A take a second and pray for the body. Pray for yourself to love the body. Pray that we might be build up in love and good works.
- Let's partake together.
- On the night...