



## **Draw Near, Hold Fast, Stir Up**

*Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 10:19-25

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Every faithful pastor in the world and throughout history carries the same intense, two-fold burden, the same two-fold desire and longing for his people, for the church to whom he preaches. It is what keeps you up at night and what keeps you on your knees. First, he wants his people to know the truth of the Word of God, to truly be growing in their understanding of the message of Scripture, of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to know God the Father and Jesus Christ, through His word, to have the Spirit of God enlighten and train the hearts and the minds of the church... that they would know God and His Word – not in an academic sense, not just to know spiritual truths and facts, but to have a growing understanding of the Lord and His revelation to us in His Word, to really know and understand Him.

Second, and equally important, he wants his people, God's people, to live out the implications of the truth they know – that they may have life and have it more abundantly, to experience the blessing of a life that is grounded in the Biblical truth about God and His Christ, who Jesus is and what He has done and then, who and what we are, and what we have, by His grace, as a result. He wants the truth that he preaches and teaches to move from exposition to experience, from belief to blessing, from head to heart, from concept to conduct.

And that is true of the pastor who wrote this sermon to the Hebrew Christians in Rome. In this text that we are looking at this morning, there is a shift taking place from instruction in rich theological truth to exhortation and encouragement from a deep sense of pastoral concern. From this point on, the writer of Hebrews is going to make powerful application from everything that he has just taught, in order to strengthen their devotion to Christ, in order to strengthen their hope, to help them not only to survive in the midst of the

persecution of the Roman society and the rejection of their Jewish families, but to thrive. It's what the Hebrew Christians in Rome needed and it is what we need.

Over the first 9 and a half chapters of this letter, this sermon, he has been unfolding the glory and supremacy of Jesus Christ in a number of ways: His glory as the radiance and exact imprint of God; His supremacy over angels, over Moses, and over the high priest of Israel because He is the Son of God, the final word from God, and the one who makes the final sacrifice that gives us forgiveness and peace with God – His own blood. He has talked about the power of Christ to do remarkable things that the old covenant sacrifices could never accomplish – give real forgiveness of sins and expunge from our record the guilt of every sin – past, present and future, to truly cleanse our conscience, and to purchase the blessings of the new covenant – the Word of God written on our hearts and minds; making us holy in the eyes of God and growing us by His Spirit to become in practice what we already are, by faith, in the eyes of God; giving us the power to be obedient to the commands of God from the heart and to please the heart of God. Truly, Jesus is the author and the finisher of our salvation – but to what end? It is so that we who were rebels and estranged from God, under His just judgment for our sinful rebellion, could be brought near and be made sons and daughters -- worshippers of God. All that Christ has done, all that this writer has been teaching, all of this incredible theological truth is for naught if we do not personally believe the gospel and draw near to God.

Like I told you last week, this is what God is after. This is what He desires. This is the reason for all that we have seen in the old covenant and why God has given us Jesus Christ to inaugurate the new covenant in His blood, so that we could draw near to God, so that God would have worshippers who worship Him in spirit and in truth, so that we could be sons and daughters of God. That is why He sent His Son into this world to seek and to save the lost and to remove the barriers to our free and full access to and delight in Him – so that we would actually draw near to Him. This text today is all about drawing near to God. Now I want you to see what the writer is doing here this morning, ok? Here in these first few verses, he is going to summarize what he has been teaching and what we must believe and know with certainty so that we can draw near to God. I want you to see first with me this morning the

**Reasons We Can Draw Near to God (19-21)** Look at what the writer of Hebrews says, starting in verse 19. Looking back to the power and person of Christ and of His sacrifice for our

salvation so that we could approach God the Father in worship, the writer reminds us of three things that are true of us and our standing in Christ. He says: **“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, ESV)

He calls them brothers, confident that they are fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and he reminds them that the first reason that we can draw near to God is that **we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus**. The way has been opened into the very presence of God, the barrier of our sinfulness having been destroyed once and for all by the blood of Jesus.

We can worship God with confidence, draw near to Him with boldness, with certainty, knowing that we will not be turned away, but God will receive us with grace and mercy and gladness, because all of our guilt before God has been taken away. We can draw near to God because of objective truth, because of something that is outside of us. We do not have confidence to draw near to God because of a certain level of spiritual performance that we have mustered, or because we are “doing well” in our obedience this week. We are confident to enter the presence of God because of the perfection of Another, because of Jesus Christ. That’s great news to my ears because my performance is never perfect; is yours?

Sometimes when we sin it makes us very hesitant to approach God. Make no mistake, we still grieve over our sins; we still feel acutely the sting of our sins and we should. Christ paid too great a price for us to be casual about disobedience, but here is the thing. Even when we have sinned, we should have humble confidence to draw near to God, trusting in the promise of forgiveness and cleansing, as we confess and forsake our sins for Him. God desires that we draw near to Him with the assurance that He will receive us and in fact delights to receive us, because He does. Listen to the words of Zephaniah as he describes God’s delight in His people: **“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”** (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV) God invites us to draw near to Him and to do so in confidence, recognizing the liberty and freedom we have to do so, because of Christ and the power of His blood.

Christ has opened for us the way into the presence of the Father. ***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...*** The writer of Hebrews is telling us that as those who know Christ as their wrath-bearer, as their Savior, who trust in the blood of Christ for redemption, we stand before the doorway to the presence of the Lord with free and open access to God, to the “holy places.” You are familiar with this language, the writer of Hebrews, like he has been doing, is using temple or tabernacle imagery as he describes our privilege.

You remember the Holy of Holies, the place of God’s manifest presence, was blocked off from all worshippers and even from the other priests by a thick curtain, protecting the sinful men and women from the holiness of God. But Jesus has opened that way into God’s presence by His flesh. The writer of Hebrews is saying that Jesus’ flesh is like that curtain, not that He blocks the way to God ***but*** that through Him, through the tearing of His flesh, is the way to God. It is through Him, through His flesh – His incarnation, His taking upon Himself our humanity without any diminishment of His deity and through His flesh torn on our behalf, for our sin, that we have access to God. When the flesh of Jesus Christ was torn for us at the cross, the way to God was open. That’s the point of this analogy. It is the death of Christ that opens sweet communion with the Father for all who trust in the gospel, for everyone who wants it. It gives such meaning to Christ’s words when He said: ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (John 14:6, ESV)

Jesus is the new and living way to the presence of God. It is new – new in the sense that He does away with the old, new in the sense that we have what the Old Testament saints did not have – the right of entrance into the presence of the Lord, a way into God’s personal and relational presence, into intimate and real communion with Him. The OT saints did not enjoy such an invitation from God because the blood of Jesus Christ had not yet atoned for their sins. Now, as a result of what Jesus has done – this fresh, recent, new thing – all of God’s people have, as their privilege, immediate and intimate access to God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is also a living way in the sense that it is lasting and eternal. Our access to God is rooted in Christ, who was dead for our sins but now is alive forevermore. For that reason, there is no danger of this way ever becoming obsolete, ever closing or passing away. It cannot, because Christ who has risen from the dead, never to die again is the **great priest over the house of God**.

He is the One who, far better than the priests of old, prepared and presented to God, on our behalf, an offering that we could never bring. It is through His offering of the perfect sacrifice – His own dear blood – that we are invited to draw near with confidence. More than that, as our high priest, Christ stands continually in the presence of God the Father, securing our acceptance with God and interceding for us. And listen, if our High Priest who **“suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18, ESV)**, is forever at the right hand of the Father in heaven, we can be **confident** that joined to Christ by faith, we belong there too.

Now if all of this is true of us – and it is – the writer of Hebrews tells us how we should be

**Living in Light of Great Theology (22-25)** In fact, the central exhortation of this whole section is found in verse 22. Look at it. **“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, ESV)** His whole point is this – we have been given something great, something wonderful through Jesus Christ, so let us come and draw near to God. Now when we first read this call to draw near to God, our first instinct is to see this as a call to corporate worship – and that’s part of it, a big part of it, as we will see later. But that’s not all of it. He’s talking about an everyday, continual experience. This is not just a call to corporate worship but to private worship, to personal, intimate communion with God, to really know Him and His heart and desires intimately and personally. To draw near to God is to come to know the greatness of His person, to delight in His truth and His will, with confidence that there is great reward in pursuing a deepening personal relationship with Him. God rewards those who seek Him.

I wonder sometimes if we value this, as we should. I wonder if this is central to our lives as it should be. Salvation is more than forgiveness; it is the promise and blessing of access,

fellowship, friendship with God. Drawing near to God is to be the very orbit of our lives, the ground for all that we do, the motivating factor of our lives. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains, “It is only when I am near to God in Christ that I know my sins are forgiven. I feel His love, I know I am His child, and I enjoy the priceless blessings of peace with God and peace with others. I am aware of his love and I am given a joy that the world can neither give nor take away.” Drawing near is the very thing for which we were made, making God central in our affections, making our life with Him, and finding supreme satisfaction in Him. This is what Christ died to give us. Draw near, he says,

***With a true heart...*** that is, with sincerity, with an undivided heart, with openness and honesty about who and what we are and what we have been made by Christ with a desire to have our hearts for God refreshed and renewed and with a desire for greater godliness. Come understanding the gravity of the privilege given to you. Come

***In full assurance of faith...*** that is, without wavering, but certain that Christ has done all things necessary to grant us access to God and to maintain our standing with God. Draw near to God with certainty that you belong there. Come

***With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water...*** We are to draw near to God with clear conscience. The blood of Christ so completely covers our sin and removes our guilt that our consciences can be at peace - not because we are sinless and perfect, and not because we are not convicted in our conscience of sin when we fall short, but because when we do sin and our conscience does accuse us, we repent and grieve over our sin and hate it, and we also know that we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for me, who bore my sin and who cleanses my transgressions, who because He is righteous has made me righteous, who washed me and made me whole and clean before God the Father and who has given to me newness of life, a life empowered by the Holy Spirit, of which my baptism – bodies washed with pure water – is a beautiful picture.

In essence, he is saying, “Don’t take the grace of God for granted. Do not treat this incredible gift lightly or treat the invitation to know God intimately – both personally and together with the other people of God – as something insignificant or unimportant, but treat

it as the precious, treasured, cherished, invaluable blessing and privilege that it is.” How we are feeling is not an excuse. Our feelings are not defining. As John Piper says, **Even when we feel dull and lifeless, we should say, "O God, I am dull and lifeless, and there is only one hope for me, nearness to you. I come. Have mercy on me and touch me with your flame and set me on fire again. Give me life in your presence. Open my eyes to your glory and make me live again."**

Draw near in confidence. Believe that God wants you to. Is Christ's sacrifice not sufficient? Is God's love not inviting? Is his grace not greater than our sin? Beloved, God is glorified with we desire His presence, when we desire to commune with Him. The great gift of God's love is access to God Himself. Do not treat as common this invitation to draw near to God through Christ. Draw near.

But, he isn't finished with his exhortation. He knows the temptation to hang it up and leave Christ behind that they are facing. He says, **“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23, ESV)** To “hold fast” communicates the idea of guarding or keeping something, of holding to something without bending no matter the pressure and no matter the cost. He is telling us – hold on, don't give up, don't quit, don't waver, don't walk away, but persevere, be faithful, persist and endure on the path you have entered and the hope that you have.

Don't turn back because God is faithful. God's promises can be trusted, both to you and to Christ. God as made promises that He is not going to break. Hold fast to Christ and God's promise to you through Him – promises of eternal life, the promise of forgiveness of sins, the promise to write His word on your heart, the promise to work in you what is pleasing in His sight, the promise to never to leave or forsake you, to present you blameless and perfect before Him, promises of sufficient grace, to supply your every need and on and on. And hold fast because of God's promise to His Son to be our High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek and to give to Him the rewards of His suffering – you and me. God the Father will not break His promise to us or to His Son.

So, hold fast and confess your hope in Christ despite the pressure of this world to abandon Christ and conform to its godlessness. We confess our hope every time we worship –

privately or publically. Every time we bow our knees in private, pour out our hearts in prayer, seek His face in the Word of God, submit ourselves to His commands with gladness, seek His wisdom – we are confessing our hope in Christ. Every time we gather to worship God together, to corporately express our praise, to magnify His worth, to pray to Him, to serve Him, to hear from Him His Word preached with faith, we are confessing our hope in Christ. Every time we choose righteousness over sin, spiritual discipline and self-control over selfish ambition, love over malice, forgiveness over spite, reconciliation over estrangement, repentance over hardening of heart, humility over pride, obedience over disobedience – these are all acts of true worship and are all confessions of our hope – not for this life only but of the life to come, the eternal joys that await us.

And this call to hold fast to our confession of hope in Christ extends to our open witness. In a society and country like ours where Christ is not loved and His ethical and moral standards are not honored and where the Christian faith is often dismissed, every time we openly confess Christ before this unbelieving world, every time we speak biblical truth, every time we insist upon moral right and wrong, every time we stand against and speak against the moral erosion that we see all around us, we are confessing our hope in Christ.

We have to fight to hold fast to Christ. And that's why he says what he does in this last exhortation. ***“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, ESV) The writer of Hebrews knows the fight involved in faithfully worshipping Christ. He knows we cannot do this alone and so he calls us to express our love toward Christ and toward one another by considering how it is that we can stir up one another – literally the word is incite – to fire up one another to loving God more, to loving one another, to doing good works in keeping with love for God and for others – everything from faithfulness and obedience, to preaching, to using spiritual gifts, to faithful giving, to loving your wife or loving your husband, to working as for the Lord – the list is endless. We must be continually stirring up one another to lives of worship.

That takes effort and it requires a radical reorientation of our lives – to the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Here's why this matters. If I have drawn near to God, but I have failed to encourage and spur on my brothers and sisters, I have left part of worship undone. We must consider how we can make your conversation edifying. Consider how we can demonstrate Christ's love to a brother or sister, and be ready to sacrifice our money and



time to make it happen. Consider how we can motivate a brother or sister to serve God. There is no specific “to do” list here. It’s up to each of us to use our minds wisely to consider how to stir up other church members to love and good deeds.

This is so vital. We need one another to persevere and to stay strong in the faith. The writer of Hebrews is calling us to consider one another – to think about one another, and focus on one another, to let our minds be focused on one another and not only on ourselves for the express purpose of thinking of ways to spur others in their walk with Christ. Without deliberate and purposeful fellowship with one another, it is altogether too easy for us to wander from Christ, to lose our passion and fire for God and His gospel, and to become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

This doesn’t happen without effort. In fact, the direct application of this command is the need to meet together as the people of God in corporate worship in order for this to take place – ***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.*** The author of Hebrews here is saying that just like it is in our own age, even early in the history of the church, the habit of some was to neglect meeting together. Some of the Hebrews, for instance, because of Roman persecution or the mocking of their families and worldly friends, or because of the attractiveness of worldly pleasures, had given up gathering for corporate worship. The word that is translated as “neglecting” is a word that means to forsake, abandon, or desert. That’s huge. Neglecting to meet together is desertion of the church, desertion of the bride of Christ. Withdrawing from corporate worship, avoiding personal and invested relationships with other believers, just drifting away is abandoning the bride and body of Christ and this neglect can be habit forming and it is not small and insignificant; it is sinful and spiritually deadly. It weakens you and the church.

We need to love God and love one another so much that we make gathering together for the sake of worship, for the studying the word, of lifting up prayer to God, and engaging in mutual and shared life the greatest priority. Corporate worship is that important – it must be the chief priority of our lives. The Father has sought us out, and gathered us together for this purpose, that we might worship Him. The goal of our salvation, the purpose of our weekly fellowship, and the eternal destiny of all the chosen in Christ, is to worship God in heaven. Let us never be guilty of taking this lightly. There is great encouragement in singing together and worshipping together, in listening to the Word of God proclaimed together, in

pouring out ourselves in service together that is faith building and soul stirring – that cannot be found in any other way.

God chose to design the church to be a means of grace to keep you strong, to keep you devoted to Him. God placed you into a body of believers in order that you would be encouraged and exhorted. We must give attention to worshipping together and to building real and lasting relationships within the church. Maybe you have been hurt in the past, maybe you have been burned, maybe you have felt betrayed – so have I. What’s the solution to that? Just remain at a polite distance from everyone? Of course not.

What I need today are brothers and sisters, a company of the faithful, to come alongside me and say, “Let’s run the race together. Let’s pursue Christ and draw near to God and let’s hold fast to Christ together. I’ll pray for you, you pray for me. Search my heart with me and I’ll search your heart with you.” It is what I need and it is what you need too. This is what we all need. This is encouraging one another. This is how we survive and thrive until the day of His coming.

But, let me just say one more thing. As important as corporate worship on a Sunday is, it is not enough. We need to make our lives together and to ground them in Christ. It is the kind of thing that takes place in our small groups that meet to talk about the sermons and to encourage one another with the promises of God and exhort one another in love for Christ and holiness and faithfulness to God’s word. It is what needs to be taking place before the services and after the services. It requires of us investment of time, phone calls, e-mails, texts, sharing meals together, pursuing friendships, intercessory prayer, visits, and personal, non-superficial conversations, sitting with someone you don’t know in church, practicing hospitality with one another, going out of your way for the sake of others. We cannot fulfill this command by simply ducking in and out of worship services but by real investment in one another.

Oh beloved – this is how we must live! This is how we live out the implications of the new covenant purchased for us in Christ. This is what we were made for – to draw near to God through Christ, to hold fast to Jesus Christ as Lord, and to stir up one another to greater and greater degrees of love and to good works. Everything else is passing away and the Day of

Judgment is coming. Jesus asked, **“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”** (Luke 18:8, ESV) My prayer is yes! In you and in me and in this church. I’m praying that God finds us faithful. So, the question is

**Where Do You Need to Hear and Apply This Exhortation?** Do you need to be more disciplined, more consistent in drawing near to God? Meditate on what Christ has done to make that privilege yours and the rich promise of knowing God intimately. Do you need to be bold in holding fast to Christ without wavering? Think of all He has done for you and ask, “What has a greater claim on my than Jesus?” Do you need to be more faithful, more consistent in corporate worship? It is the thing for which you were made and drifting is spiritually deadly. All of us can grow in our devotion to God and in our encouragement to stirring one another up to faithfulness. Draw near to God and ask Him to show you how you better and more joyously live out the implications of the great work of Christ for your soul.

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