

Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

Gather

November 3rd, 2019

Hebrews 10:19-25

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I’d like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Hebrews 10:19-25; that’s on page 1007 in your pew Bible. This is our 7th Sunday in our Vision 20/20 series and today we are beginning to address the question:

How Can I Get Involved?

I hope you are asking that question. As a good Protestant you ought to be asking that question. I mentioned last week that the Protestant Reformation was NOT about getting rid of the priesthood, it was actually about getting rid of the laity. That’s the point that Martin Luther was trying to make. He wasn’t saying that we don’t need priests – he was trying to say that WE ARE ALL PRIESTS.

The church is not a football stadium.

It’s not about 60,000 people in the stands watching 22 players on the field.

The church is about EVERY MEMBER being a MINISTER to the LORD and using their God-given – amen?

We call that the Priesthood of all believers.

That's one of the VALUES we mean to communicate when we change our name – publicly in a about a month – to Cornerstone Baptist Church. We are saying that Jesus is the CORNERSTONE – he is the foundation and the blueprint – and we all like LIVING STONES are being built up in him – let me read that verse – our new foundational verse – let me read that to you again:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:4–6 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

As you come to him – the living stone – the Cornerstone – you yourselves are being built up as a house:

TO BE A HOLY PRIESTHOOD.

TO OFFER SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES UNTO GOD.

That's our identity and that's our mission and so today we are asking the question:

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

To get us started with that we are going to be reading together from Hebrews 10:19-25. Hopefully you have that open in front of you now. This is God's Word to us:

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.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. (Hebrews 10:19–25 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now you've heard me say many times that whenever you see the word "therefore" in the text you need to go back and see what it is THERE FOR.

So here.

This is one of those marvelous HINGE PASSAGES – that we see all over the New Testament. Hebrews 10:19 is functionally identical to Romans 12:1 – do you remember that one? Romans 12:1 says:

“I urge you **therefore**, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.” (Romans 12:1 NASB)

Same idea.

Both passages represent a HINGE between the main doctrinal content of the letter and the social, practical and ethical implications that logically follow. P.E. Hughes puts it this way, he says:

“The conclusion of the central doctrinal section of the epistle is now followed by an earnest exhortation to the readers to apply and practice in their daily living the important truths which have been expounded.”¹

¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle To The Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), 405.

Are you seeing that?

So that's how this passage is set up. The Apostle says: "Look at what Jesus has done! Consider what he has accomplished! Think about what that means for you and me and now let's be careful to make sure we are living accordingly".

That's what he is saying – and so that's going to be our outline this morning.

We're going to talk about what Jesus has done and how we should live in response.

So let's start with what Jesus has accomplished through his life and ministry.

What Has Jesus Done?

Well, obviously we don't have time to read the first 10 chapters in the Book of Hebrews – so let me just take you to the climax and conclusion. Look at Hebrews 10:12-14. The Apostle says:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:12–14 ESV)

I want to say BOOM after reading that but I don't think that is very dignified – but this is a BOOM passage isn't it?

Listen to what he says.

He says that CHRIST put an end to the Old Testament sacrificial system. HE FINISHED IT. He accomplished it. People had been bringing their sheep to the temple to atone for their sin year after year after year for centuries. Thousands and thousands of sheep – millions and millions - and the sins just kept on coming!! And that was the point. People were supposed to be thinking as the shuffled forward in the line with their sheep:

“This is never going to work! How can the blood of a lamb pay for the sins of a human being?”

Great question!!!

That’s like throwing a cup of water on the WILD FIRES that are ravaging the state of California right now.

People were supposed to be asking: HOW IS THIS EVEN HELPING?

If this is all we’ve got then we are going to be doing this FOREVER!

That’s the HUNGER that Jesus came to SATISFY. And that’s why when he burst on to the scene John the Baptist pointed at him and said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV)

Boom!

Jesus is the BURSTING OF THE DAM upon the wild fire of human sin.

When he died on the cross he said: IT IS FINISHED.

Good luck WILD FIRE surviving UNDER the FLOOD OF THAT!

Right?

Jesus PAID IT ALL!!!

And then he did a COSMIC MIC DROP.

The Apostle said he paid it all – and then he SAT DOWN at the right hand of God waiting for the time when all his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

That's what time it is, brothers and sisters!

And that's who WE ARE. We are the redeemed, reclaimed and restored people of God – that's what the Bible is saying in verse 14:

“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:14 ESV)

That's you.

You were fallen, broken, deceived and destroyed. You were dead in your trespasses and sins. But God in Christ took pity on you. And God in Christ ENLIVENED YOU.

Are you seeing that?

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ he has PERFECTED for all time those who are being sanctified.

So if you have the SEED in you. If you have been united with Christ through faith and filled with his Holy Spirit – God looks at you in terms of who you will INEVITABLY BE.

You will be perfect.

Because you swallowed the seed brother. You are filled with the Holy Spirit sister. So you WILL BE CHANGED by one degree of glory to the next into the same image as Jesus Christ. You will be perfect. You are BEING SANCTIFIED.

What God rescues – he RESTORES!

So because of what Jesus HAS ACCOMPLISHED – you are going to BE AGAIN what you were originally created and intended to BE.

That's what it means to be a priesthood – we were ALWAYS MEANT to be a priesthood.

The word “priest” means BRIDGE. A priest is a bridge between the Spiritual and the Physical realm. That’s what it means to be a human – POTENTIALLY. A human being has the capacity – IN CHRIST – to be a BRIDGE between GOD and the physical realm.

And that’s what we are now – because of the finished work of Christ.

Will you say amen to that?

Will you say hallelujah to that?

I won’t ask you to say BOOM to that, but that’s what I’m feeling inside.

Alright, now what are the implications of that for us as a church? That’s where we are going next.

What Should We Do In Response?

You can see them for yourself – there are 3 “let us” statements – three STRONG ENCOURAGEMENTS based on the logic of the preceding text. Because Jesus did that – because that’s what time it is – because that’s who we are now – then LET US, brothers and sisters DO THIS.

That’s how the text is laid out.

First of all then, he says:

1. Let us draw near to God

The whole Old Testament is a story about a people trying to find their way back to God. Right at the beginning of the Bible we discover that our first parents FAILED their probation as a priest and priestess. They were told that God intended them to be UNDER HIM but OVER EVERYTHING ELSE. He was going to RULE and BLESS the world through an OBEDIENT MAN AND WOMAN.

That was the deal.

But our first parents were tricked into wanting something better.

They wanted to RULE THE WORLD without reference to God.

Why be a priest when you can be a god?

Why be a priestess when you can be a goddess?

That was original sin!

The original sin was wanting to be AS GOD – deciding right and wrong for ourselves.

So reaching up, we fell down, and falling down, we were cast out. The Bible says:

“therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:23–24 ESV)

Are you seeing that? As a result of sin we were PUSHED DOWN and FORCED OUT.

And the rest of the Old Testament is about our FAILED EFFORTS to make our way home. By the end of the Old Testament we are like that sad cowboy song – where everyone is looking for love in all the wrong places. That’s us! We are so deceived and disoriented by the end of the Old Testament that we THINK we are looking for the way home – we THINK we are looking for God when actually we are chasing idols. We are following THE DEVIL dressed up as God – and we don’t even know.

There is no one so lost as the person thinking he is going home.

That's who we are at the end of the Old Testament.

We are lost. In the dark. Following a demon who we think is taking us home.

But then – into the DARK came the One who was the LIGHT!

That's the Gospel!

“the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16 ESV)

That's LITERALLY THE GOSPEL. The Gospel of Matthew 4:16.

Jesus came into the dark, destroyed our jailor and brings us home.

Back to God.

Back to ourselves.

And BACK TO OUR ORIGINAL MISSION AND CALLING.

BACK TO THE PRIESTHOOD!!

Back to being a bridge between heaven and earth.

That's who we are – so let us draw near to God.

That's what the Apostle is saying.

The long wander is over. The exile is over. The time out is over. So get your face out of the mud, brush yourselves off. And get back to work. And step one – priest; step one priestess – is for you to GO AND MEET WITH GOD. Because you don't have anything of value to offer other people

apart from God. A priest is a TUBE not a well. You are a CONDUIT. Not a source. So you have to MEET WITH GOD before you can minister effectively to anyone.

Are you seeing that?

That's why we have Psalm 34:8 written over the doors of this sanctuary. Because that's job 1; that's how we get back to work; we:

“taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”
(Psalm 34:8 ESV)

Do you see the logic there?

The door was closed. You were outside. You were cut off from your purpose and calling. But Jesus has opened the door. The veil is torn. The way is clear. So get up. Wash your robes in the blood of Christ – and get back to work.

Let us draw near to God.

And:

2. Let us hold fast our hope

Interesting here that he uses the word HOPE instead of faith. The two words are almost synonyms in the New Testament – they are overlapping, but they are not exactly the same. The word FAITH puts the emphasis on our identification with and trust in what God has done for us in Christ – so it has a “looking back” theme to it. The word HOPE puts the emphasis on who we are, what we have and where we are going BECAUSE OF CHRIST.

So hold on to that – the Apostle says, because you let go of it once before.

You got a little too big for your britches and you don't want to make that mistake again. So this time you better stay where the Lord has put you.

That has been a major emphasis in this epistle – you know that if you’ve read it. In chapter 3 verse 6 the Apostle says:

“we are his house, **if indeed we hold fast** our confidence and our boasting in our hope.” (Hebrews 3:6 ESV)

Then again in 3:14 he says:

“For we have come to share in Christ, **if indeed we hold** our original confidence firm to the end.” (Hebrews 3:14 ESV)

And then in 4:14 he says:

“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.**” (Hebrews 4:14 ESV)

So – STAY WHERE YOU ARE PUT – that’s what he’s saying, is it not? Don’t wander away. Don’t move your stone – if you want to be part of the house. Hold fast your confidence – hold fast your hope until the end.

Now – pastorally – I know that whenever you teach on this you have to give some instruction as to how to do it – and on who will do it. People are always wondering – am I responsible for my perseverance or is God responsible? That’s a good question – the best answer you will find is in the Book of Jude. In Jude we discover that actually, the answer is both. God keeps us in the faith by enabling us to DO KEEPING THINGS.

I didn’t really come up with that on my own – that’s basically a summary of the best sermon I’ve ever heard on the Book of Jude by John Piper. I’ll send you a link to that sermon if you want it – but I’ve just given you the Coles Notes version. God keeps us in the faith – Jude says - BY ENABLING US TO DO keeping things. Things like reading your Bible. Things like coming to church. Things like forsaking sin. Things like serving and loving and blessing others. God will help you do those things because those are the things that will help you hold fast to your confession.

So – since Jesus has done all of what he’s done for us – first of all we should draw near to God, second of all we should stay where he put us and third of all we should build each other up as a church.

3. Let us build each other up as a church

You can see that in verses 24-25:

“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.” (Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV)

So that’s ONE COMMAND with a few supporting thoughts as to how it may be accomplished. We want to build each other up – we want to encourage each other – we want to empower each other to greater heights of love and greater works of service – that’s the command – and we will do that, principally, by not NEGLECTING to meet together.

Are you hearing that?

What he’s saying is that you CAN’T BUILD EACH OTHER UP if you are not MEETING TOGETHER.

Being here matters!

And it matters for more than we are inclined to think as modern western people. As modern western people we are RABID individualists. We tend to evaluate everything in terms of how it benefits ME. So when you hear a preacher say: “You need to come to church” you hear that – I hear that - in terms of how it affects “me”.

And it does affect me.

I need to be here.

I need to taste and see that the Lord is good – but that’s not all the text is saying. The text is also saying that I need to be here to build you up. And you need to be here to build me up.

But we don’t tend to think that way – and the less we think that way – the less frequently we come to church.

Every observer of the church – everything who writes blogs and books about the church – has been saying that there has been a noticeable shift in evangelicalism in the last 5 years². The shift is that NOW the average committed evangelical thinks it is normal to go to church 2 Sundays out of 4 in a month.

That’s the new normal.

In grandma’s day you went to church 19 Sundays out of 20. And on the 20th Sunday you better be dead. Even when I was a kid – which was only 40 years ago – if you were a committed Christian you went to church EVERY SUNDAY unless you were bleeding or vomiting – preferably both.

Did anyone else grow up that way?

But now – according to the experts – 2 Sundays out of 4 is the new normal.

“To put it simply, because people attend less frequently, it takes more people to average 100 than it did 10 years ago.”³

We see that here. There are about 850 people who attend this church on a regular basis. But only about 600 are here every Sunday – that’s why attendance here can differ by over 100 people from week to the next – because we have a lot of people who go to church 2 Sundays out of 4 in the month.

² As per: <https://network.crcna.org/pastors/twice-month-new-normal> and <https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>

³ <http://holinesstoday.org/is-this-the-new-normal>

Interestingly, this is not the first time this has happened in the history of the church. You know, in a lot of ways, the present generation is a lot like the first generation in the history of the church. It's like we've come full circle. The historian Adolph Harnack writes about the first generation on the church – late in the first generation, when he says that there was a great falling away in terms of attendance. It was at the time when most of the great Apostles had died and passed off from the scene. He says:

“At first and indeed always, there were naturally some people who imagined that one could secure the holy contents and blessings of Christianity as one did those of Isis and the Magna Mater, and then withdraw. Or, in cases where people were not so short-sighted, levity, laziness, or weariness were often enough to detach a person from the society. A vainglorious sense of superiority, and of being able to dispense with the spiritual aid of the society, was also the means of inducing many to withdraw from fellowship and from the common worship. Many, too, were actuated by fear of the authorities; they shunned attendance at public worship, to avoid being recognized as Christians.”⁴

Well – that hits a little close to home, doesn't it?

Those are all the same reasons that church attendance has become so sporadic in the last 5-10 years. Because some people come, take what they want and disappear. Because some people are short sighted, shallow, lazy and exhausted by life. And because some people – many people I would say – are too arrogant to actually understand how desperately they NEED TO BE HERE. And because – some people - many people are afraid, all of the sudden, to be associated publicly with the name of Jesus Christ.

That's why people started attending church less frequently at the end of the first generation.

And that's why we have been seeing it happen again in our generation over the last 10 or 20 years.

And yet according to this text – THIS IS NOT A GOOD TIME for us to be giving into those ignoble impulses. Now is the time for us to be together.

Because the closer we get to the end – the harder the winds are going to blow – the deeper the deception is going to run – and therefore, the more we will need to BE HERE. The more we will

⁴ Adolph Harnack, as cited in F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle To The Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 257.

need to TASTE and SEE that the LORD IS GOOD – and the more we will need to encourage and build one other up. 6 days out there is going to break a brother or sister down – so when they come in here – it’s our job – collectively - to build and stir them up.

Do you see that in the text?

Let me read it to you again. The Apostle says:

“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.” (Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV)

You see – it’s that ONE ANOTHER piece that we are so inclined to forget.

We need to tend to come to church as many times as we think we need it – and we usually GROSSLY underestimate how many times we need it – but we tend to miss this piece altogether – how many times our brothers and sisters need us to be here.

We often forget to factor that one in, don’t we?

So let’s stop doing that.

Let’s remember that we are in this together. We need to be here – we need to gather together - to build one other up – to urge one another on – and all the more, brothers and sisters, as we see the day approaching.

That’s the need of the hour. That’s the right response – and this IS the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.