

Living Boldly
Hebrews 10:19-25
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And as we together turn in God's Word, if you have your Bibles with you in whatever format, we'll be turning and looking this morning at Hebrews 10:19-25. We now take this interesting path in the letter of Hebrews, the sermon of Hebrews, which is this turn towards—if these things are true, which he has repeated, if these things are true of Christ, how ought we to live? How should it change and how should it shape us? This is what the preacher of Hebrews turns to. And it is living boldly. It's not a foreign concept to the American mindset, to live boldly. But what kind of living boldly is it? Is it a bold sense of accomplishment? Is it a bold sense of what we have? Is it a bold sense of who we are, that enables us, strengthens us, to move out with strength?

So while the idea of being bold, even being a brash American, is common to us—a common description of the United States, even of our culture, that has shaped even how we view ourselves. But the Bible calls us to live boldly, but to do so not absolutely anything to do with us, who we are innately. It's not based on our accomplishment. It is based on someone else, namely Christ. Look with me this morning to Hebrews 10:19-25. He takes these words which are given to us in sentences, but in Greek it is one sentence. So in essence, he's turning what he's established, and now he's turning with a great burst to what difference it should make. And it is living boldly. Hear now the Word of Christ, Hebrews 10.

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, 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 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. [ESV]

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me.

Now, Heavenly Father, I ask that by your Holy Spirit that is the great power and presence of the triune God in the life and worship of the church and in the life and person of the Christian, by your Holy Spirit we ask that you would so reveal this word of truth to us in power and in might that it would change us individually and corporately as a people, that it would change how we relate to one another, that it would change how we speak to one another, that it would change how we pray to you, that it would change our approach to you. Father, we long for change. We long to be made new. We grow weary, which is why we need your Spirit to enable us to truly live boldly for Christ and his kingdom. Do this, we ask. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So as you see in your bulletin this morning, you'll see as we look at this passage together it is, in a sense, he gives four imperatives. There are perhaps others, but four imperatives that I want to highlight this morning. But looking at them as imperatives or as an encouragement, a call to what it means to live boldly, I also want you to see it as a description. So that's the way I've sort of positioned the outline this morning. Four descriptions that are to describe the Christian in living life before Christ and following him in discipleship. A Christian is to be characterized as one who is assured; one who is tenacious; one who is inspired; one who is connected. These are all things that we are growing in, in various ways. Perhaps as we look at this together, you will find a description of yourself. And in other things, you may say, "Nope,

don't see that yet." We are all works in progress. We are all people who are broken. So let's recognize that fact and get on with the work. But it is getting on with the work in courage and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

So everything that I say this morning needs to be remembered and will be summarized as—we have the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. As I've been talking about over the last few weeks, we are not victims. We are broken, yes. We are sinners, absolutely. And we fall daily. But we are not defined by that brokenness as Christians. As Christians, we are defined as people who have been emancipated from the reign of sin, though it is still present, though we still war against the king of sin. We are emancipated. And because we are emancipated, we are emancipated by a new king who has a new kingdom who gives us a new strength to live and to be described by these very things. So remember that as I seek to encourage you and encourage myself as a preach this word. But all of it is to be received through the power of the Spirit and lived by the power of the Spirit as God's people. So are you ready? Let's go. I only have a few minutes. Let's go.

Assured. Notice what he says. 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, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Full assurance. Confidence. But in what? It tells us there. It says "our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, our bodies washed pure with water." There are several allusions that are happening here, two that are prominent. Because he mentions Christ in his priestly role. What was required of the high priest on the day of atonement before he could do anything—he had, in the court of the temple, he had to have his body washed clean with water. What we've noticed over and over again is that this was not required of Christ as the great high priest, because he did not have to be cleansed from the impurity of sin or unrighteousness. We are cleansed through him. So therefore, we can say that as our great high priest has gone before us and offered the sacrifice that is his body, and has now entered a temple not made by human hands, but seated at the right hand of God the Father—Christ who is pure, who is clean. Now we who are united to him have been cleansed.

But it also has pictured baptism. And this picks up on an Old Testament allusion to the prophecy of Ezekiel. Hear this, Ezekiel 36:

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 Christ is prophesied here as the one who would cleanse us. And the water that is the water of baptism is the picture of that cleansing. Not that we do anything in baptism—we offer ourselves to the water of baptism. The water of baptism does not itself do anything but is the picture of what is happening internally, of the one who has promised it, the one who has revealed, the one who will make us clean has been revealed to us in the person of Christ. And we have an assurance, we have a confidence, to draw near to the throne of God. Not in anything of ourselves, but in Christ alone.

This would also be picked up in 1 Peter:

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right

hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. [1 Peter 3:21-22]

Now, watch this. Without an ounce of arrogance, without an ounce of presumption, the Christian is so assured by what Christ has accomplished for us and where he is now seated and has professing faith has received the outward washing of the waters of baptism as a picture of what has been revealed in Christ alone, as we confess, we do not do so as those who grovel before a holy God. We do so as ones who are emancipated and can go before God boldly and assured that we are sinners. You see? We can go and say, "Lord, it has happened again. But I do not need to hide that from you, because I know that my Father in heaven receives me." This is why we pray corporately a confession of sin. It's because we can say we're not just sinners individually—we're sinners corporately. Our sin isn't just maintained within the boundaries of our flesh. It seeps out of us and affects the whole body, affects the whole culture, affects the whole world.

So we can come boldly and say, "Yeah, I'm not just guilty of my sin. I recognize I see my sin pictured in others. And while I may not have committed it this week, I'm certainly guilty of it." So we can come boldly, corporately, and individually, and pray a prayer of confession, and do so descriptively, graphically. Why? Not because we presume God's grace. It's because God's grace has already arrived, and we have assurance. We have confidence. And that priest who is over the house of God, Jesus Christ our mediator, is there and has pled for us. And we can go with confidence. We are an assured people. Amen?

Secondly, we are to be a people that are marked by a tenacious attitude, a tenacious spirit. What is meant by this? Notice the words in verse 23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." A tenacity of spirit, I believe, is what is being described here as a people who hold fast to the confession. Now, it's not that we hold fast to our confession, because our hope is never in our own faith. Our faith is not in our faith. But we hold fast to the one in whom we confess, who is Christ. And we have a hope without wavering, with tenacity. He who is faithful, it says, he's promised.

So our tenacity, our tenaciousness, is itself not in our ability—now watch this. I've said it before and I'll say it again this week. Our tenacity is not based in our confidence in our own correctness or in our own orthodoxy. What we believe, the doctrines of our faith, are important. But we do not make an appeal before God because we believe, "Lord, we've arrived. Look at our orthodoxy. Look at what we believe." While we may have strength and we may hold to doctrines of faith, that is not itself where our tenacity is to be based. Our tenacity, our confidence, again, the spirit in which we hold to, is in the revelation of God in Christ who has promised his love and grace.

Now, let me go a little bit deeper here. There can be a sense in which we can present ourselves as Christians saying, "I hold to the truth. I know the truth. I speak the truth." But that is not what we are called to do. That is not the fuel of a tenacious spirit. Because that comes off as arrogant. That comes off as if we were treasure hunters in the world looking for truth and, ta-da, we found it. We dug deep, and here's the truth. The reality is not a single person here who has confessed the Lord Jesus as Christ and Savior found it out because you were particularly smart, logical, intelligent, in the right place at the right time. The truth found you out and found me out. You see the difference?

What the world needs is not an arrogant Christian who believes, "I have the truth, and you are to live by it. Let me show you." You see, that's how Christianity is portrayed. In fact, that's how the enemies of the Christian faith want to portray Christians. And they're kind of right. Because if we're not careful in how we pronounce truth, it sounds as though we got it. We found it. Let me show you. But what the world needs is a profoundly humbled people that are also tenacious and hold to the confession of our faith, because we didn't find it out, Jesus found out me. Notice, again, what this kind of tenaciousness does. In Psalm 40, the Psalmist writes this:

Blessed is the man who makes

the Lord his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!
You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.

As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!
For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.

Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me!
O Lord, make haste to help me!
Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who seek to snatch away my life; [Psalm 40:4-5, 11-14]

Do you hear the tenacious spirit? It's not based in his confidence in himself. It's not based in his own orthodoxy. It is based on the self-revealed, loving God of the Scriptures. And he said, "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust and does not turn to the proud." In fact, this kind of tenacity has nothing to do with pride. It has to do with a humbled spirit. Because he says, "My sins are more than iniquities I can't even see." But watch what he does. He says this right in the middle of the Psalm:

I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness

from the great congregation. [Psalm 40:9-10]

He wasn't revealing himself. He wasn't arguing the rightness of his cause. He was tenacious in saying, "Look what the Lord has done to a man like me whose sins are so many I can barely see." Now that is a tenaciousness. That is a sermon. And that is a humble and contrite heart, but tenacious.

The preacher of Hebrews moves on from tenacity to inspiration. He says in verse 24, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works." The word in Greek can be, if you will, translated as either stirring one another up or provoking. Now, the ESV shows stirring up, because of the baggage that the word "provoking" carries with it. "Provoking" carries with it annoyance. Now, sometimes we annoy each other, but we are to provoke, we're to stir, we're to inspire one another to love and good works.

This is the shortest of my points, and so I'll state it succinctly. We are inspired as a people more by narrative than imperative. We're inspired more as people by narrative than imperative, which means this—we don't go around pointing and saying, "Do good works of love." Rather, we simply tell the story of what we have personally seen and experienced in our lives of the love and good works of other people. We seek to encourage, which is why we have a Sunday evening service where we give testimony and a time of prayer. And beginning in September, we're going to begin doing this within our morning service where we're going to have a time for testimony once a month, where someone is going to tell the story of what God has been doing. Because we recognize when we really get down to who we are, we're more motivated and inspired by narrative than imperative. How is the Lord working in you? What have you seen? And may the Lord use those kinds of stories to encourage one another in each of us to love and to service.

I saw this happen this last week. An old friend from college who is now a professor at Liberty University—her name is Dr. Karen Swallow Prior. While preparing to speak at a women's conference in Nashville, walking on the sidewalk going to the conference, stepped out in front of a bus. The crash caused serious injuries. It collapsed her lungs, fractured her pelvis, ribs, and shoulder. And she needed seven staples in her head after surgery. While receiving treatment at Vanderbilt University Hospital, she, after coming to, began to tweet—because she's a prolific Twitter user. And this is what the newspaper in Nashville wrote. It said, "Prior worried about the well-being of those who witnessed her crash. She called on her social media followers to pray for the bus driver and others who saw it happen."

This is what she says: I still don't really know what happened in the accident and don't have the police report yet." So at the time of this tweet, she has no idea what happened. "Regardless, I'm sure the bus driver and the witnesses could use prayer to overcome their trauma. Please pray for them as you pray for me." Shortly after this tweet, she received the police report, which indicated that the bus driver was not at fault; she was. She stepped out into the lane while there was a green light, and the bus had the right-of-way, and the bus driver simply had no time to swerve and miss her. After finding this out, it did not change what she says. She said the following, "I am very sorry for causing that kind of trauma to someone."

When I read that story as one who was hit in 1988 by an automobile, it was partly his fault, partly my fault, the police report said, and I was a new Christian. And I will tell you, I wanted to get a lawyer and I wanted to lawyer up and see how I could get college paid for. But I was reminded of that when I read her story as I saw—here's what she was doing. She was praying. All the attention being given to her—she was praying for those who were not even injured but who were likely emotionally impacted by what happened, even if it was her own fault. That is someone who stirred me up to love and good works. We need this kind of narrative. We're going to spend some time after service fellowshiping together. How can we use this time to encourage one another, to inspire one another to love and good works? May we seize the opportunity to do that.

Finally, we are to be a connected people. He says in verse 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.” He’s saying that these things are to describe us, but it is to describe us not purely as individuals but as people who are part of a corporate body. We are to be connected to the body of Christ. And he says there were some who were already neglecting because of the suffering they were experiencing, because of the persecution they experienced, because of the discouragement they were living. They were—many had stopped meeting together in these house churches. And so he’s saying, “No, let’s fight against that.”

Because the preacher of Hebrews recognizes something about us as human beings. Because he recognizes it about himself—that there is a gravitational pull towards comfort, ease, and privacy, even back then. We haven’t advanced very much. We’ve become even better—our tools are perhaps a lot sharper—where we just simply say we’re busy, our schedules are full. And whether it’s coming to the Lord’s worship for his people, whether it is being a part of deeper community and community groups, we must recognize as a people, generally speaking, Christians very much are enculturated, the church is enculturated. We’ve become so busy in mimicking the world—not because we recognize that we’re doing it, it’s because we just do it to stay up, that we have to fight against the gravitational pull towards comfort and ease and individualization.

We as individuals, as families, have with the blessing of our culture set up private economies that do not depend on other people. And we want to make sure we’re not dependent on other people. And we want to be selective about who’s dependent on us, because we might be taken advantage of. This is what we live in. But what he has in mind is the recognition of what has already been read this morning from Acts 2. Do you remember what was read there earlier by Pastor Mayfield when he says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship.” *Koinonia*, the winning word of the national spelling bee. Right?

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [Acts 2:42-45]

If that doesn’t feel uncomfortable to you, you’re not reading it. What is called to here is a radical fellowship. Not just in giving to one another as we have need. These verses in which it’s situated in Hebrews 10 is not just financial or material. It’s also emotional and relational. Now that’s uncomfortable. When we read and see what is going on in the Greek here in Acts 2, what is being called for in Hebrews 10, we must first acknowledge that if we are being truthful to ourselves, this is an excruciating level of community.

And now let me speak specifically to this congregation, before I close, in regard to being connected as a people. One of my mentors said it takes at least five years to get to know a congregation and a region in which you minister. I will now have been your pastor seven years this coming July, and I would say it has most certainly taken me seven years to have a greater understanding of the uniqueness of this culture between Baltimore and Washington D.C. It is one of the most unique, one of the most interesting cultures I’ve ever pastored in. And I’m looking out at a group of people who are some of the most educated and smart people I’ve ever had the pleasure of serving. And so it attracts a group of people who have advanced degrees out the wazoo. But what I’ve also become more and more aware of is that many of you—many of you, well over 50% of this body—work in an industry where many of you have security clearances, and you’re asked routinely, “Have you met with foreign nationals? Who are they?” You’re routinely trained to be suspect of those who might be asking you questions about your life, where you live, where you work, where you play. Why? Because now Columbia and Howard County has outpaced Washington D.C. as a target area for foreign intelligence officers.

What this means is we all live in an environment where suspicion and fear and privacy is actually a pretty smart way to play your life. To say that working in this industry—which God has called you and equipped you to do—but to say that this kind of work doesn't impact how we relate to one another is to be blind of how our work shapes us, how the culture shapes us. And what this is calling us to do is a counter-shaping. James K. A. Smith said:

Christian worship, we should recognise, is essentially a counterformation to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in, cultural practices that covertly capture our loves and longings, miscalibrating them, orienting us to rival versions of the good life.

It means that where we spend 90% of our time shapes us more than what happens in the confines of this room on Sunday morning. But worship and the Word calls us to be connected even in uncomfortable relationships in community groups, sharing where I need prayer not just for my children, but where I need prayer. Not just saying, "Oh, I'm busy, pray for my work." No, "This is what's going on in the interior of my life." Now, we're not to bleed on everyone. But if there's no place for you to bleed within the confines of Christ's body, we're missing opportunities to connect. We're missing opportunities where we can share how we're being inspired. We're missing the place where we can talk about the tenaciousness of the faith to which we hold, and the assurance and confidence that we have in Christ.

What he is calling us to here is to be a people that recognize that where we work might shape how we live and how we relate, but the gospel is calling us to a new way of living, to a deeper level of dependence, a deeper level of transparency, so that the gospel of grace might shape us anew. It's a tall order. But a people who have been emancipated from the reign of sin, through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of God the Father and has given us his Holy Spirit to connect us to one another—he can make us new. He can change the way we live, how we speak, and how we worship, and how we pray. The question is not whether God can do this. It's whether we want him to. Would we be willing as a church to corporately say, "Lord, have your way with us and make us a new people that live boldly for Christ and his kingdom." And may the Lord lead us in that, provide for us in that. And he may close doors, but he'll open others. May these things be more and more a description of who we are individually and corporately as a body, for Christ and his kingdom. Let's pray.