

Hebrews 10:19-25

Introduction

We've just celebrated Easter. For some, me included, that means it's time to get back on the diet. For others, it means there's a stash of chocolates in the cupboard, waiting to be eaten. But for all of us, it *should* mean that we're asking, what now? What difference will the cross and the empty tomb make to our lives? How will my life be different having just celebrated Easter?

In chapter 10 of Hebrews, that we're turning to this morning, the writer brings to a climax all that he's saying about Christ's death on the cross. In the first half of the chapter, he says that Christ has dealt with the sins of his people fully, finally, and permanently. His work at the cross is complete. In verse 14 he writes: **For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.**

That's what we've just celebrated, this Easter. Through his death on the cross, Jesus has made his people fit for heaven. He has opened the way to a real and personal relationship with God, that we can enjoy today, and which lasts forever. There's no more to be done. Christ has done everything. It's the good news of the gospel. So, what now? How should that effect how we live?

Here are four exhortations from our passage. Firstly, it says, draw near. That's our first heading: draw near.

Draw near

Let's read from verse 19 again.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

The good news of the gospel is that the way to God is now open. That hasn't always been the case. It wasn't the case before Christ came. Remember the curtain in the temple that barred the way into God's presence. It said, "Keep out!" It taught that sinful people like you and me couldn't enter God's presence without coming under his judgement. But now Christ has borne the judgement that we deserve in our place. He has opened the way into God's presence by his blood.

It's a new way because it wasn't open before. It's a living way because Christ rose from the grave and lives forever at his Father's side in heaven.

And because the way to God is now open, we're to draw near.

If you have small children, you'll know how wary they can be of strangers. If you speak to someone they don't know, you're likely to have them hiding behind your legs. Perhaps peeking out warily from behind your knees. But if they see someone they know and feel safe with, they're just as likely to run up and give them a hug. The writer to the Hebrews wants us to be like that.

See how he piles up the reassurances. We can draw near to God with the full assurance that faith brings. We have been cleansed from a guilty conscience. We have been washed with pure water.

We don't need to fear God's anger or doubt that he loves us. Nothing should hold us back from our heavenly Father. We can come to him in his word, the Bible, with confidence that everything he says is for our good and blessing. He speaks tenderly to his children, whether with words of encouragement or rebuke.

And we can come to him in prayer with confidence that he delights in us and hears us. He listens with love and patience as we speak to him in prayer. We don't need to put on our best telephone voice. We don't need to pretend we're someone we're not. We're simply to draw near to him as we are.

One of the great joys of belonging to Jesus is the knowledge that we aren't "doing life" alone. We live each moment in fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the good times, God is with us. He delights to see us enjoying the good things that come from his hand. And he's with us in the bad times too. When we're struggling with sin and temptation, he's with us. When we're battling with doubts, he's with us. When everything's going wrong, he's with us. When we're pierced with hurt and pain, he's with us. We aren't "doing life" alone. In all things, God is with us and for us.

So, the writer to the Hebrews, urges us to draw near. There's no reason to hold back. We can enjoy every moment of our lives in his presence. Draw near.

The next thing we're to do is to hold on.

Hold on

Verse 23 says this: **Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.**

One of the things we've done as a family over the last few weeks is to gather together to watch *Gladiators* on TV. If you've watched it too, you'll know that holding on is an essential ability for a contender. If they're climbing up The Wall, chances are they're going to have a gladiator grabbing on to their ankles and trying to yank them off. They need to hold on. If

they're dangling from the rings in Hang Tough, they're likely to have a gladiator wrapped around their waist, trying to pull them down. They need to hold on.

And it's the same for us as we try to navigate the Christian life. We are bombarded with reasons to give up. The Christian faith is ridiculed. Or, worse, it's regarded as offensive. Core biblical truths are attacked on the internet on and the TV. At times it can feel as though the world is full of gladiators, grabbing on to us and trying to yank our hearts away from Christ. We need to hold on.

If we're to stay the course and get to the finish line, we need to know what we believe and why.

We need to know that our sin is real, but that Christ has dealt with it at the cross. We are forgiven.

We need to know that his death is sufficient. There's nothing lacking. His work at the cross is complete.

We need to know that we're saved by grace through faith and not by works. Our salvation is received not achieved. Our standing with God doesn't depend on our performance as Christians. It has already been secured at the cross.

We need to know that the way to heaven is open. The empty tomb declares it so. And it declares that Christ alone can get us there. There is no other way.

And we need to know that he will do it. The best always lies ahead of us in the Christian life... until that day when we stand with him in the glory of a new heaven and a new earth.

This is the hope we profess. And we need to hold unwaveringly to it. When we're tempted to waver and let go, we need to know that **he who promised is faithful**. No matter what we go through now, his word will prove true in the end.

We need to hold on.

And, thirdly, we need to spur one another on.

Spur one another on

Verse 24: **And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds...**

We need each other. We can't live the Christian life alone.

In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* Frodo Baggins sets out on a mission to destroy the Ring of Power. He's got to take it on a perilous journey, deep into Mordor. He encounters

numerous dangers on the way. And once there, he needs to throw it into the fires of Mount Doom.

Frodo is a hobbit. A small, simple, unadventurous race of people. It's difficult to see how he can possibly succeed. Yet, he doesn't go alone. He has his friend, Samwise Gamgee. And as they come across one difficulty after another, Sam does two things. He reminds Frodo of the truth – that their journey is the only hope for the world. And he walks with Frodo every step of the way, encouraging him. Frodo couldn't do it without him.

And in Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee, Tolkien is giving us a picture of the Christian life. The Christian life can be a long and difficult journey. It's easy to become bitter and resentful. Loving people can be draining. We can tire of doing good. If we're to keep going, we need friends like Samwise Gangee. Friends who will remind us of the truth of God's word and encourage us along the way... who will keep us on the right track... who will help us back to our feet when we've fallen down.

We need friends we can talk to over a cup of coffee. And open the Bible with. And pray with. We need friends we can serve with in ministry. We need to be part of a team, with teammates who will love us and encourage us. And if necessary, rebuke us and correct us.

Well, look around you. Without one another, we walk alone. But God has placed us here and given us to each other, so that we might walk together and spur one another on.

And that's why, fourthly, we're not to give up meeting together.

Don't give up meeting together

Verse 24 again: **And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

We don't live the Christian life alone. We live it in fellowship with God. We also live it in fellowship with one another... the church family that God has given us.

Our purpose in meeting together is that we might encourage each other to keep trusting in Christ and living for him. It's interesting that when the Bible talks about our meetings like this one it doesn't describe them primarily as acts of worship but rather as acts of encouragement.

As we read the Bible together and sing together and pray together, we encourage each other to keep trusting in Christ. He alone has opened the way into God's presence. He alone can get us safely to heaven. And as we meet together, we encourage each other to keep trusting in him through the ups and downs of everyday life.

And that becomes more and more important, the writer says, as the day of the Lord's return approaches. We don't know when that will be. All we know is that it's a day closer today than it was yesterday. But we do know that Christ will return. And when he does return, we'll be with him forever in glory. That's why it's so important that we keep encouraging each other to trust and follow him while we wait.

Conclusion

So, what's next, then? The way to God is now open. So, how should you and I respond to the good news of Easter?

The writer to the Hebrews says, draw near to God in the full assurance that he welcomes you with open arms because of Jesus. Hold unswervingly to the truth of the gospel and don't let anyone prise your heart away from Jesus. Remember that you can't do it alone. So don't give up meeting together so that we can encourage one another until the day he returns.

Let's pray that we would do that.

Loving Father, we praise you for the good news of the cross and the empty tomb. Having just celebrated Easter, please help us to live as your people, enjoying each day in fellowship with you, holding on to the hope of the gospel, spurring one another on and encouraging each other as we meet together. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.