

## Hold Onto Christ

Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18), 18-25

This morning you will be glad to know that we are having our last lesson from the small letter to the Hebrews. We have learned that Jesus is superior to every other priest; that there was not need for him to make sacrifices on his own behalf because he was without sin; that his sacrifice was once for all; and today our scripture reminds us that when Jesus offered himself he then sat at the right hand of God; by a single offering he has perfected for all times those who are sanctified.

Our focus today is what does it mean to hold onto Christ...why is it important...what does it do for us... what does it look like from our vantage point?

We have learned previously that our earthly worship is a pale copy of heavenly worship, but Christ's sacrifice has opened the way to God for us (Heb. 10:19-39). No Old Covenant worshiper would have been bold enough to try to enter the holy of holies in the tabernacle. Even the high priest entered the holy of holies only once a year. The thick veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies was a barrier between people and God. Only the death of Christ could tear that veil (Mark 15:38) and open the way into the heavenly sanctuary where God dwells. Jesus is the living way to the presence of God. We enter into the presence of God by the sacrifice of Jesus. To understand we must learn a little more about Jewish worship. Before the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle hung the veil or curtain to screen off the presence of God. For men and women to enter into that presence the veil would have to be torn apart. It was when Christ died on the Cross for the sins of the world that men and women really saw God. All Christ's life showed God; but it was on the Cross that God's love really was revealed. As the rending of the

Tabernacle veil opened the way to the presence of God, so the rending of the flesh of Christ revealed the full greatness of his love and opened up the way to God.

We are also told Jesus is the High Priest over God's house in the heavens. The function of the priest was to build a bridge between humans and God. This means that Jesus not only shows us the way to God but also when we get there introduces us to God's very presence. A person might be able to direct an enquirer to the White House but not have the right to take them into the presence of the President; but Jesus can take us all the way.

Jesus is also the one person who can really cleanse. In the priestly ritual, the holy things were cleansed by being sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices. Again and again the High Priest bathed himself in the laver of clear water. But these things were ineffective to remove the real pollution of sin. Only Jesus can really cleanse a person. His is no external purification; by his presence and his Spirit he cleanses our inmost thoughts and desires until we are really clean.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians tells us that we now have a gracious invitation (vv. 19–25). “Let us approach.... Let us hold fast... Let us consider one another.” This threefold invitation gives us boldness to enter into the holiest. And this boldness rests on the finished work of Christ. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest could not enter the holy of holies unless he had the blood of the sacrifice (Heb. 9:7). But our entrance into God's presence is not because of an animal's blood, but because of Christ's shed blood.

On the basis of these assurances—that we have boldness to enter because we have a living High Priest—we have an “open invitation” to enter the presence of God. The Old Covenant high priest visited the holy of holies once a year, but we are invited to dwell in the presence of God every moment of every day. We have a tremendous privilege! Let us examine what is involved in this threefold invitation.

First, let us approach the presence of God. That is to say, let us never forget the duty of worship. All of us live in two worlds, this world of space and time, and the world of eternal things. Our danger is that we become so involved in this world that we forget the other. As the day begins; as the day ends; and in the midst our daily activities; we should stop, if only for a moment, and enter God's presence. Every person carries with them their own secret shrine or altar, but so many forget to enter it.

Secondly, let us hold fast to our confession of hope. That is to say, let us never lose our grip of what we believe. The cynical voices may try to take our faith away; the materialist and their arguments may try to make us forget God; the events of life may conspire to shake our faith. We must have a grip on the faith that nothing can loosen.

Thirdly, let us consider how to provoke one another. That is to say, let us remember that we are Christians not only for our own sake but also for the sake of others. No person lives a faithful Christian life if they devoted their lives to only themselves. We live faithfully when we show concerned for others. It is easy to drift into a kind of selfish Christianity; but a selfish Christianity is an oxymoron or contradiction in terms.

But the writer to the Hebrews goes on to outline our duty to others in the most practical way. He sees that duty extend in three directions. We are to provoke each other to love and good deeds. The best way we can do this is by living faithfully ourselves and being a good Christian example. We can do it by reminding others of God's promises; reminding them what God had already done in their lives; and reminding them what God has done in the lives of those around them; reminding them that they are to study and pray and live out their faith; by

showing them how Christ is revealed to us everyday. We need reminders. Yesterday my beautician told me that she had a former employee that called her to thank her for telling her about Jesus and encouraging her to be faithful. The woman is now a preacher and teacher of God's word. God needs our lives and voices to teach others about his love and faithfulness. The sermon may do nothing for you, but the Angel Tree Ministry or the Mitten Tree might be just what you need to understand God's faithfulness and love. The story is told of a young dying soldier who looked up at Florence Nightingale and murmured: "You're Christ to me."

We are also to worship together. There were some among those to whom the writer of the Hebrews was writing who had abandoned the habit of meeting together. Some people think it is fine to watch the television evangelist or listen to the radio evangelist and substitute these for worshiping with fellow Christians. But God has designed us to be in relationship and to encourage one another.

Some people may not go to church because of fear. They may be ashamed to be seen going to church. They may live or work among people who laugh at those who do so. They may have friends who have no use for that kind of thing and may fear their criticism and contempt. They may try to be a secret disciple. They need to remember that going to church is a demonstration of where our loyalty lies. Even if the sermon be poor and the worship boring, the church service still gives us the chance to show to men and women what side we are on.

Some people may not go to church because of carefulness. They don't want contact with people who are "not like them." There are congregations which are like club. The church may be located in a neighborhood with a changing demographic; and the members who have remained faithful to them would be as much embarrassed as delighted if the poor people in the area came flooding in. We

must never forget that there is no such thing as “those people” in the sight of God. It was for all, not only for the respectable, that Christ died.

Some people may not go to church because of conceit. They may believe that they do not need the Church or that they are intellectually beyond the standard of preaching there. Social snobbery is bad but spiritual and intellectual snobbery is worse. The wisest person is a fool in the sight of God; and the strongest person is weak in the moment of temptation. There is no one who can live the Christian life and neglect the fellowship of the Church; if any one feels that they can do so let them remember that they come to Church not only to get but to give. If they think that the Church has faults, it is their duty to come in and help to fix them.

We must encourage one another. One of the highest of human duties is that of encouragement. We are never to speak discouragingly to anyone, only encouragement. In the book of Job, Eliphaz unwillingly paid Job a great tribute. One scholar translated it: “Your words have kept men on their feet” (Job 4:4). I have a friend that is always talking about people, rather than building them up. If there is anything positive to be said we need to be repeating that. If there is something negative that has been said, we need to keep it to ourselves. We need to sow happiness with our words and not despair. It is easy to laugh at someone’s ideals, to pour cold water on their enthusiasm, to discourage them. The world is full of discouragers; we have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many times a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a person on their feet. Blessed are we when we speak words of encouragement.

Finally, the writer to the Hebrews says that our Christian duty to each other is important because the time is short; the Day is approaching, the soon coming of Jesus Christ, the Second Coming of Christ when things as we know them will be ended. The early Church lived in that expectation. Whether or not we still do, we

must realize that no one knows when death will take them out of this world. In the time we have it is our duty to do all the good we can to all the people we can in all the ways we can.<sup>1</sup>

We should have confidence to come into the very presence of God. God's presence in the most holy place and the curtain that once was a barrier to humans is now no longer so. Christ's death gives us direct access to God. We are to approach with sincere hearts with full assurance, knowing that we have a great high priest that has made us acceptable to God. There ought to be no wavering in regard to these realities. Each Christian should approach God in the conscious enjoyment of freedom from guilt because our hearts have been sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and with a sense of the personal holiness that Christ's sacrifice makes possible. This kind of confident access to God means that we are to hold onto Christ with the hope we confess with full confidence in the reliability of God's promises. We are to love and encourage one another more and more each day.<sup>2</sup> We are to demonstrate our Christian virtues in our lives: faith (Heb. 10:22), hope (Heb. 10:23), and love (Heb. 10:24). These are the fruit of our fellowship with God and each other.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 115

<sup>2</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:804

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Heb 10:11