

Drawing Near, Holding Fast

Hebrews 10:19-25

In this morning's passage, we see the fruit of a **Living and Active Faith**. Our passage spells out what a transformed life looks like on a regular basis. This is not a description of a "radical Christian," but instead, it is the biblical picture of person who loves and trusts Christ. If the Bible was drawing a portrait of a true believer, the finished product could be described by the details that follow in Hebrews 10:19-25...

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let 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. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not 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.

I. A living and active faith Draws Near to God (Vss. 19-22)

The believer who possesses a living and active faith draws near to God. In other words, true, saving faith longs to be near to God. Living faith desires more of God. An active faith "pants for God" like a "deer pants for water." The risk that we often run in believing that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is thinking that I only need to draw near to God one for salvation but for nothing else. We get fearful of a preacher or a writer talking about the things that Christians should be doing or should not be doing because we are worried about legalism; that is, we are worried that if we tell people that God expects them to be holy and obedient that they will start to think that they are accepted by God on the basis of their works and labors. And to be faith, that is legitimate risk that we must be mindful of when we are teaching God's Word to others. We want to make sure that everyone knows, as we saw last week, that no one is able to stand righteous and acceptable before God on the basis of their own works. With that said though, we must also say that those who have drawn near to God by faith WILL continue to draw near by faith to God.

Drawing near to God is one of the greatest privileges of the salvation that the believers possesses. In fact, I believe you could even argue that it is THE greatest privilege of salvation, as Jesus Himself describes "eternal life" as knowing the "only true God" and "Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Therefore, salvation is not like a Christmas gift that we receive at a distance relatives house to take back to our homes to play with and enjoy at our convenience. Instead, salvation is the gift of a change of residence. Salvation is a new citizenship. Salvation is a relationship with God Almighty, and those who possess this "Great Salvation" draw near to God in a present and active manner. To not draw near to God is to not experience eternal life. You were saved to draw near to God, not drift away from Him. You were made clean, as the passage says in verse 22, to enter into the presence of God, bringing your prayers before Him, asking for His mercy and provision, pleading with Him to strength you in His grace, asking Him to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness, entreating Him to heal your marriage, protect your children, and give you courage to live a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ. This is what a living and active faith does, it **draws near to God**.

II. A living and active faith Holds Fast to Hope in Christ (Vs. 23)

The Christian who practices a living and active faith holds fast to hope in Christ. This means that a real Christian not only reads the promises of God in scripture, but also believes that those promises are true and trustworthy. Initially, this may not seem like too big of a deal to you, but you have to remember that the letter of Hebrews was written to a congregation that was facing persecution and rejection for following Jesus. In other words, contrary to Christianity in the Bible belt, being a Christian in the first-century was a social and physical hazard, not a help. We are going to see this next week in Hebrews 10:32-34 as we read of how these Christians were persecuted for following Jesus. The author tells us that these Christians “joyfully accepted the plundering of their property” because “they knew that they had a better possession and an abiding one.” Another way to state this would be that these Christians held fast to the hope that they had in Christ, which means, no matter what they lost in this life, nothing compared to the hope and salvation that they possessed in Jesus. Is this true of your faith today? If you lost the things that our culture values, would you be able, like these Christians, to “joyfully accept the plundering of your property?” If you showed up at your house this afternoon after church to find it ransacked and vandalized by people who hated you for being a Christian, would you rejoice? The audience of the book of Hebrews did. How were they able to rejoice? Because their hope was firmly set in Christ above. Their living and active fast was holding fast to hope in Christ. Do you have this type of faith or does this type of faith threaten the real object of your hope? Are you hoping in Christ or are you hoping in the things that will never really satisfy you? **A living and active faith Holds Fast to Hope in Christ.**

III. A living and active faith Encourages Others in the Church (Vss. 24-25)

The follower of Christ who exhibits a living and active faith encourages others in the church. This means that followers of Christ not only love other followers of Christ, but they make a special effort to spend time with them and care for them in the context of the church of Jesus Christ. Other Christians are not burdens, but brothers and sisters in Christ that God intends for us to encourage, love, and support. And the place for such encouragement, love, and support is in the church. God has organized the church in such that Christians receive encouragement and accountability. We receive encouragement when we lay aside the pretension and get real with one another. We receive accountability when we others check on us and care for us to make sure that we are “drawing near to God” and “hold fast to Christ.” Some, as the passage states, habitually neglect such gatherings with other Christians for various reasons, and they do so to their own harm. If a person is a true Christian, that is, a Christian as described in this passage, they cannot neglect gathering with other Christians without suffering from it. I know you may think that no one misses you when you are gone or that your absence is unnoticed, but according to God’s Word, we are the body of Christ, and when one of our body part, one of our members is not with us, we all suffer, especially the member that is not able to be present. Now, please do not hear me saying that there are never legitimate reasons to be absent from the gatherings of the church. People get sick, go on much needed vacation to recharge, visit family and friends out of state, minister to others, and the list could go on for a while. This passage does not have in mind such legitimate reasons for absence from the gatherings.

Instead, the passage is aimed at an attitude that does not take the gathering of the body of Christ seriously. This passage is concerned with the attitude that devalues the gathering of the church, and not just on Sunday mornings at 10:45am. The early church met daily to pray, receive instruction from the apostles, fellowship with one another, and worship together. So, while Sunday mornings were important for the early church, they could have never imagined that Christians would reduce their involvement in the life of the body of Christ to a matter of less than 8 hours a week with other believers. The point is that we can hardly assume that we are fulfilling the expectations of this passage by “being present” at a few weekly meetings at the big church on the corner, across from the post office. Faithfulness to this passage means not only attending the scheduled times of gathering but also investing your life in other believers in this church. In other words, while this passage certainly teaches that you ought to be faithful to the gatherings of your church, it is also teaching that you must be more than merely present at those gatherings. We fulfill the expectations of this passage when we “stir up one another to love and good works” and “encourage one another.” Should you attend Sunday school, life groups, and prayer meeting as well as our Sunday morning worship time? It depends. If your presence at such gatherings is merely about checking off your attendance instead of being encouraged while encouraging others and stirring others up to love and good works, don’t bother showing up. The point is not your presence, but your participation in the body of Christ. A living and active faith is not concerned with checking a box, it is concerned about others being strengthened and encouraged to draw near to Christ. A living and active faith is concerned with building relationships with other believers for mutual accountability and growth in Christ. A living and active faith loves other Christians and wants to be around them.

Conclusion

This morning, we have looked at three aspects of a living and active faith. We have seen that a living and active faith draws near to God, holds fast to hope in Christ, and encourages others in the church. Apart from faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we will never be able to exercise such living and active faith. You, like I, need the Holy Spirit to move in your life and empower you to exhibit such faith in Christ.

So, I want to close by praying for God to cause us all to draw near to Him and hold fast to the hope of Christ so that we might be love and encourage one another in the church. Would you bow your heads with me?