

## Life Under the Faithful Priest Hebrews 10:19-25

“You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” I see three options as it pertains to the horse in that proverb. One, the horse was stubborn. Two, the horse was sick. Three, the horse wasn’t thirsty. I’m guessing there’s more to the origin of that proverb than such simplistic deductions. I’m not all that familiar with the lives of stallions and mares. I do know this much—they must have water to stay alive.<sup>1</sup> If a journey to the water hole is necessary, then they must make application of their journey.

My miserable understanding of barnyard life aside, since September 3<sup>rd</sup> of last year we’ve been led in kindness by the LORD Himself to consider the greatness of Jesus Christ. Most of that biblical real estate covered the superiority of His priestly work on our behalf. Each consecutive argument being carefully reasoned. The author, drawing from what is familiar to convince these freshly minted Jewish believers that nothing or no one stands as Christ’s equal. In fact, walking away from Him is walking towards destruction. No greater danger exists.<sup>2</sup>

Matt mentioned how 10:18 was the last, defining stitch in the tapestry of the author’s argument concerning the priesthood. The word *therefore* does what it always does when reading anything. Yet, sometimes that word has a close-proximity relationship with what precedes it. At other times it has a more distant relationship to what precedes it. The latter seems the case here. Some might conclude that we’re led to reach back to at least chapter 3 where we see both ideas of Priest and King featured. We also have a mirror text in 4:14-16 to what is here in 10:19-21. But I’m not opposed to reaching back to the very first passage in Hebrews. We really have come to a clear transition. The truth of Christ for ten and a half chapters, here it is! Now it’s time for the fledgling, wronged, and tempted, believers to avail themselves of the truth. It’s time to appropriate His merciful work. It’s time to make application of treasure trove of truth. To draw upon the opening, how does the Spirit lead the author so that we might be led to drink of the Redeemer’s benefits?<sup>3</sup> First, He recaps the core message of the letter thus far. Then, on that basis, He offers a flurry of exhortations.

### I. Since...

#### a. *We have confidence to enter God’s presence*

***19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,*** Reminding his readers that they are *brethren* to him is not a detail worth sliding past. What seems like a flitting reminder to us may have very well landed with force on these readers. It would be a welcome greeting to a people who had *endured a great conflict of sufferings*.<sup>4</sup> Look what was secured for them and what believers of all ages can stand in...***confidence to enter the holy place.***

The idea of confidence as a necessary skill set seems to be imbedded into our cultural psyche. It raises its head in contexts where people are called upon to perform or entertain others. Moreover, it seems one can’t accomplish anything significant without it. In fact, if you’re not radiating confidence at every step, then something is wrong with you. You need to get that fixed. I hear this in casual conversations at Kroger and read it in my newsfeeds. Without confidence you won’t get the job, get the promotion,

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<sup>1</sup> Or to stay *out standing* in their respective *fields*. I couldn’t contain myself.

<sup>2</sup> Next week’s passage will make this quite plain.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 103:2-4, “*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy...*”

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:32

get the girl or guy, or get whatever you're aiming for. But the **confidence** of verse 19 is not grounded in human aptitude. It's not a confidence of presumption flowing from me towards God on the basis of my own goodness. It's not a confidence rooted in another flawed human being. The **confidence** spoken of here is based on God's own provision. It's **the blood of Jesus** that creates it. His death is the fertile ground of our lively **confidence**.

And through it, we enter the **holy place**. We've said it over and over again that this isn't in reference to any special confinements like the tabernacle. The **holy place** is the very presence of God, not like the old way under the old priesthood regulated by the old covenant. It's **a new and living way**. There's no slipping behind a man-made curtain in a man-made place to meet with God. But **through the veil, that is, through [Christ's] flesh** our very spirits, our inner-man can commune with the sovereign and gracious God. Before Christ this was not an option. Undoubtedly, a man like King David wrote songs of confession and poured his heart out to the LORD, but square in the background of his life were the requirements of the sacrificial system. The temporary-old gave way to the eternal-new because of Christ's torn **flesh**.

This **way** is **new**, but it's also **living**. This is likely a reference to Christ's resurrection.<sup>5</sup> It's the **living** way because it was established by the power of an **indestructible life**.<sup>6</sup> It's **living** because all who enter have eternal life. It's **living**, not only because the inaugurator of this way did not undergo decay, but that the communion never stales or dies. And one way this relationship with God reveals its living nature is that as we walk with Jesus, Paul says that the inner person is being renewed day after day.<sup>7</sup> Echoing David in Psalm 23, our Lord said, "*If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*" Christ is the way to a life fed, a life sustained, a life nourished. By means of His flesh being torn in death, we are healed and given life in abundance.<sup>8</sup>

b. *We have a Priest who rules over God's house*

The church is a family structure. We are the household of God.<sup>9</sup> And this Priest rules over His house. And the LORD is so patient with us because we're too easily swayed by reasoning and acting as if we're little sovereigns. That was the root problem with the prodigal son of Luke 15. He desired to rule himself and lost his way in doing so. Christ rules **over God's house**. The author has already pointed this out in chapter 3, saying clearly that He supersedes Moses in greatness precisely because of His kingly rule.

Surely this truth lifted many a believer to a gladness and poise in the midst of their difficult circumstances. Reading that you are not just a group of people who gathers under significant commonality, but part of something superior. In a society dominated by prestigious households, God's people are inside of a household which possesses a Landlord with absolute dominion over all things.<sup>10</sup> He's the Landlord and Head of the church who bore all Her sin. And being bodily raised in power as a kind of firstfruits of their own resurrection? Things couldn't be any better for these believers! These Christians, no matter where they were positioned socially, could live with a dignity that neither Roman nor Jewish powers would ever think of bestowing. They are family members of the most significant

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *EBTC: Hebrews*, 316.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 7:16

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16, "*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*"

<sup>8</sup> John 10:10, "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*"

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:19, 1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Peter 4:17

<sup>10</sup> Craig Koester, *Hebrews*, 449.

household—the LORD’s and His Christ. He’s already told them and it’s a truth worth repeating. The greatest Priest is also the greatest King. He is *a great priest over the house of God*.

No doubt that this truth dignified their lives, but it also was intended to help them persevere in whatever they were presently facing. They could come back from moments of unbelief and the steps towards their old way of life. Seeing that Christ surely bore their guilt for the sins committed outside of Him, He also bore the guilt of the sins and imperfections they expressed as saints and worshippers.<sup>11</sup> This priestly rule of Jesus is comprehensive and gracious beyond compare.

## II. Then...

### a. *Let us draw near*

It’s the polar opposite of what some reading this letter for the first time were tempted to do. If your eyes skimmed ahead in chapter ten, you’d see the essence of the temptation is expressed in the phrase “shrink/s back.” This same exhortation was issued in the last verse of chapter 4. Many important truths concerning Christ occurred between that text and this text. Each truth given to solidify the confidence to do what is being exhorted here, *draw near*.

In Kenya a few years back, Andy and I became fixed on the idea of the gospel being a kind of baklava. If you’ve tasted baklava, you get it. If you’ve prepared homemade baklava, you know that it’s an intensive labor of love, one sweet layer on top of another sweet layer.<sup>12</sup> The author layers the truths to show them why they can draw near, and why we can. You can track it from chapter 5 onward: We can draw near because He’s gentle; we can draw near because of His perfection; we can draw near because His priesthood came through Melchizedek and not Levi; we can draw near based on His promise with an oath, in which God cannot lie; we can draw near because there is a new covenant enacted on better promises; we can draw near because God’s wrath has been assuaged by an offering that was undefiled, innocent, and separate from sinners; we can draw near because that perfect offering bore all our imperfections, appearing now in God’s presence as the source of both our justification and sanctification; we can draw near because, securing our forgiveness, He washed our consciences clean and fills us with the Spirit of truth! Do those sheets of truth affect your confidence to draw near to God in worship? This is certainly personal. Yet, the author is also beginning to draw our attention to the community of faith by the word *us*. Do all those layers of truth affect our collective confidence as we take the Lord’s Supper, as we gather for corporate worship, as we pray before STINT? It does. It should. It’s meant to.

But note how we’re to draw near,<sup>22</sup> *let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith*. In contrast to the *evil and unbelieving heart* that these Jewish converts were warned away from, here is the idea we considered from the book of James. That is, we’re not to possess a heart with divided loyalties.<sup>13</sup> When we think of the first century world, it was true that all good citizens of the Roman Empire were expected to believe in the gods and venerate each successive Caesar as divine. Gentile converts were called upon by the gospel to lay aside that life. The Jews here in Hebrews were being called upon to understand the law and the prophets in light of the teachings and work of Jesus. And because of those teachings, they experienced new-birth pains. But for a faithful interaction with the text, we must do a bit of digging inside ourselves. Coming to Christ, you’ve borne a few scars with

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<sup>11</sup> David Gooding, *An Unshakeable Kingdom: The Letter to the Hebrews for Today*, 194.

<sup>12</sup> I’ve seen recipes with up to 40 layers of phyllo dough.

<sup>13</sup> Called “double-minded” in James 1:8 & 4:8.

some clear breaks with past habits. And that heart work is still worthy. My sin is on repeat, but so must repentance and faith be. That desire must die. I can't stay in that relationship. I can't do that thing anymore. Following Christ and learning a life of drawing near will both injure us in the best ways and heal us in the best ways. A loyal heart. A sincere heart fully assured by faith that Christ is as promised.

He's begun the work needed to bring us along. Our hearts have been *sprinkled clean from an evil conscience*. An evil conscience is condemning one. And self-condemnation more often than not paralyzes us from drawing near in faith. We must learn to live without taking our eyes off of our Justifier, His promises, and His finished work. If we spend the majority of our time measuring and counting our wounds, then we'll slink back into debilitating guilt. This doesn't mean we suppress or try to ignore what rises in our hearts which defile us. The work of grace in us is that we're conscious of them and confess them, but as we grow in maturity, we learn the habit of not lingering long over an upset conscience. We draw near to God, confessing and concluding repeatedly that Christ alone has secured our complete forgiveness, as a way of life.

That totality is the idea behind having *our bodies washed with pure water*. The imagery that would have most naturally come to mind for first recipients of this letter was that of baptism.<sup>14</sup> When Darby went under that water and came out, it was a symbol of what has happened to her whole person by grace. Her affections, allegiances, will, actions—all of Darby went under the water, and all of her is now tied to the LORD through the work of Christ! She has been set apart to love and serve Christ for the rest of her life. Again, with the plural use of *bodies* here, it's a reminder that she was and is not alone. We too were baptized as a picture of what the gospel worked in us. Darby, continue to draw near to God, through the graces of prayer and scripture reading, with your *faith* fixed on Christ. But remember, some of your greatest growth and most important times for your spiritual health happen when you are gathered to worship with the people in this sanctuary.

Brothers and sisters, *draw near* and keep at it. Spurgeon once declared, “When once we accept the sacrifice of Christ, we are at home with God. Where should a child be bold, but in his father's house? Where should a blood-washed sinner live, but with his God to whom he is reconciled?”<sup>15</sup>

*b. Let us hold fast*

<sup>23</sup> *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* What is *the confession of our hope*? It's our lively affirmation of God's truth as understood through the person and work of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> We don't hesitate on this, and we're not to be intimidated off our trust in Christ. This is what—He is whom we're to be tenaciously clinging to.

I don't know all the ways that a non-committal spirit was manifested at the time of this sermon letter. But it did, and we see the same in our day to be sure. From malfunctioning marriages to broken contracts, from overactive college basketball transfer portals to high turnover rates at places of employment, it seems almost fashionable to be one who vacillates. When it comes to the faith, we've noticed the same trend over the past couple of decades. We have new terms for people who fail wholesale to *hold fast the confession of hope* in Christ—deconstructionism. That simply means someone has gone through the process of ultimately rejecting biblical authority. Most of the time it's based on some bad experience or some kind of realization that Christianity is filled noxious people

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<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, 319.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Spurgeon, <https://ccl.org/ccl/spurgeon/sermons34/sermons34.iii.1.html>

<sup>16</sup> Sigurd Grindheim, PNTC: The Letter to the Hebrews, 506.

who hold toxic beliefs. Somewhere along the way, the de-constructors find it in themselves to define their own lives, often turning to other deconstructionists for affirmation. At some point, instead of jumping all into their new self-defined reality they probably *wavered* back and forth. The wilderness generation heard the good news of grace and blessing to be poured out, but they failed to unite God's Word with faith.<sup>17</sup> Even coming off the display of God's glory bearing down on their enemies, their attention spans fizzled. They grumbled and longed for the Egyptian way of life once again. At this, God was provoked to anger.

But God was then and is now *faithful*. He proves it with the time He gives us. Darby will come to know by experience what many of You have come to know in time, that is, that dying to self, overcoming the world, hoping against all hope, trusting the Lord when His purposes are difficult to trace, among a host of other disciplines—these aren't downloaded into us at conversion. John Newton, in a letter to a friend, wrote that the beginning of life in Christ is like a series of fire-side talks of great things. But, unlike learning to navigate the high seas in one's living room, with a head full of rules and methods, the art of sailing is to be "thoroughly learned upon the spot."<sup>18</sup> And along the way, God proves His faithfulness. But He will only do that to the one who holds fast in confessing Christ.

c. *Let us consider how to stimulate and encourage one another*

<sup>24</sup> *...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...* The play on words in this passage, and especially in these last two verses are meant to gain our attention. The word *stimulate* typically had a negative slant when used, and it carries the connotations of being incited or pestered.<sup>19</sup> Here, the author flips the negative into spurring them on to something that is positive. What are they to do? *Consider how* to provoke one another. See the connection with verses 19-21? Look at the patience and kindness with which Christ cared for the whole household under His management. Would not He require us to be careful in caring for one another? The meaning here is to be perceptive with each other; to show a charitable alertness in our interactions with one another so as to bring out what the Spirit has worked or is working in them. This takes thinking, observation, and planning. As I witnessed Joy walking her Wednesday night class up to the baptistry to teach them about baptism, that "pestered" me to an overall love for the children of South Woods. It made me want to hear what they learned, to pray for their salvation, and to be understanding to the parents who are seeking to raise them up to know Christ. When the Ruth family moved, I was moved by the number of men that helped. The hospitality I've witnessed recently by some of you has driven me to gratitude. I could keep going. And we all need to keep going in thinking carefully about how to spur each other on to *love and good deeds*.

But that happens with far more irregularity if we skim on the mainframe of our lives together, which is our Lord's Day gathering. Notice verse 25, *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another*. It's a subordinate clause, which means that the commitment to gather for worship is a result of concern for one another. You want a clear path forward in provoking one another to love and good deeds—then let us all be committed to this hour of worship on Sundays. One commentator points out that the word *habit* is a word typically used for the word custom, or the pattern of attending to some kind of practice.<sup>20</sup> But here, some were forming the unhealthy custom of *forsaking* the assembly of the weekly gathering. They were missing out on one

<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 4:2

<sup>18</sup> John Newton, *The Letter of John Newton*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 287.

<sup>20</sup> Koester, 447.

of the main ways we are to be *encouraging one another* in this life. And this should be done so *all the more as we see the day drawing near*.

If any of us are going to stay true to Jesus, we must avail ourselves to the means He's given to stay true. Look around. You're looking at others who share the same Priest, the same King, the same living and active Word, the same Spirit indwelling each of us, sharing many of the same struggles, and on the way to the very same destination of a splendid place prepared, a place whose Builder and Maker are God. You need the people in here this morning to arrive there. And those people need you.

### ***Conclusion***

The Lord has led us to the nourishing waters we all need. Let's make application of this journey through Hebrews. As the day draws near, draw near to worship Him. Before our faithful God draws history's strings to a close, be found holding fast the confession of our shared hope. Before the great assembly of every tribe and tongue worships the Lamb of heaven, let us renew our commitment to gather for His praise. There is much grace in life under the faithful Priest.