

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

A Call To Action

Hebrews 10:19-25 (Part 1)

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

What is knowledge? How would you define it? What is wisdom? How would you define it? I think we might all readily agree that there is a subtle yet important distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Some might define knowledge as the accumulation of facts and data, perhaps in some organized fashion. In this sense we might conclude that the Encyclopedia Britannica is filled with knowledge. But what of wisdom? In my understanding, wisdom is the practical application of knowledge. In other words, it is one thing to know something and yet quite another to do it or do it well. I have spent much time over the past couple of weeks studying, gaining knowledge on the dental procedure I was to have done on me called an “apicoectomy” which is a fancy way of saying the amputation of the tips of the roots of a tooth. But, with this knowledge has not come the wisdom to perform the surgery. After I had it done and it was learned that my wife also needed the same exact procedure, she did not say, “Ed, why don’t you go ahead and do this to me yourself.” Why not? Because I had no wisdom or practical experience in such a matter.

I have been impressed lately of the great responsibility of the preacher to communicate the absolute truth of God’s word to the people. But what is the end or goal of preaching? Do I want you to simply know the facts about the Book of Hebrews? Is it important that you know there are thirteen chapters; that the theme of the book is the Superiority of Jesus Christ; that it speaks of the inability of the Law of Moses to transform a heart and the provision of the New Covenant promises to those who follow after Christ? Is it important that we learn the great doctrinal truths of man’s inability and Christ sufficiency in salvation? We do well to say, “Yes” and “Amen.” But is there something more beyond knowledge that I as a preacher of the Word of God should be aiming and hoping for? To this I say yes, something much more. For as good as the knowledge of the Superiority of Christ is, it is of little value to anyone who does not know how to apply it to their own life, to their own situation and circumstance. To put this another way, to rightly know the gospel truth as contained in the book of Hebrews or any book of the Bible, is to have such truth make a radical impact upon your life. Would we not agree that it is possible to know facts about the gospel and yet not ever know (by experience – or wisdom) the gospel? There is a need to apply the truths in such a way that they radically impact our lives. This is what the apostle Paul was getting at when he wrote these words to the Philippian believers:

9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge (what is important) and all discernment (application of that knowledge), 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless (radical change) until the day of Christ...

As we come to Hebrews 10:19 and all that is said following, the author of Hebrews makes an important shift in his presentation. Hebrews 1:1-10:18 has been doctrinal revelation

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as the pastoral author has informed his readers of the truths or facts concerning Jesus and His sufficiency as compared to all things. We have seen it proved by Scripture and argument that Jesus is superior over the Old Testament prophets (1:1-3); over the very angels of God (1:4-2:18); over Moses, the greatest of Israel's leaders (3:1-19); over Joshua, Israel's leader over the conquest of the promised land (4:1-16); over Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood (5:14-7-18) and even over the shadows and sum of Judaism itself (7:19-10:18). These are the facts. This is the truth. So now what? The rest of the book of Hebrews will expose us to a series of exhortations, calls to action, and ways of living that demonstrate both privately and publicly that our doctrinal knowledge of Christ actually has a practical outworking; that we would not be content with a dead orthodoxy (a correct knowledge without application in our lives). All the theory has been laid, now it is time to experience the truth. Here we are presented with how the truth of the first nine and one-half chapters are to affect our lives.

I. Our Confidence to Approach God (Hebrews 10:19-21)

This first series of exhortation I have entitled "A Call to Action" as there are three key commands beginning in verse 22 which are all based upon everything that has been taught. In verses 19-21 we see that the confidence we have to approach God is bound up in the work and person of Jesus Christ, this then being a summary of all that has been taught.

The text begins with that thoughtful transition, "**therefore**" – meaning, "in light of everything that has been taught." We might rightly say that in view of seeing the superiority, the majesty, the divinity, the faithfulness, the awesomeness, the utter sufficiency of Jesus Christ, how then shall we live? What impact is this to have on our lives? What will be the measure of our applying the truths we have learned converting them to wisdom and experience? In light of the greatness of Christ, we ought to experience first of all, confidence to approach God as "**we have confidence to enter the holy place**".

How do you feel when it comes time to come before God? What words or terms might characterize your approach to the Majesty on High? We are told here that we have confidence. This word speaks of boldness, openness, full access. This is given in the present tense meaning that those in Christ currently have and will always have such a confidence. This is not the description of an attitude we are supposed to have but rather is the believer's possession. We have full access and full confidence that we might stand before God. This confidence is not arrogance; it is not our self-earned right. This confidence is not flippancy, as if God is somehow diminished or lowered so that we might approach Him. This confidence is not presumption, as though we have the Almighty's ear and He moves at our whims. No, this is our sure way, our open door, our only means of relationship with God. With all humility, reverence and desire for God to be glorified, we have such access to God.

But lest we forget that all approaches to God outside of this one confidence, this one access will fall dreadfully short of their desire, the pastoral author reminds us that this confidence is founded on only two key aspects of Jesus Christ.

A. Our confidence is founded on the death of Jesus (10:19-20)

First, our confidence is founded only "**by the blood of Jesus**." Perhaps it goes without saying, but this reference to the blood of Jesus implies the bloody, sacrificial death of Jesus by which He Himself paid for the sins of His people. As Hebrews 9:26 taught us –

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Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Our confidence to enter God's holy presence is found only in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary, by which we come without any hindrance (sin and death have been defeated) and by which we no longer need any further sacrifice. Notice that our text says it is the blood of "Jesus" – our Lord's human name. Redeemed humanity possesses confidence to enter the presence of God because God has already received Jesus, our representative, the God-man into His presence. Jesus has truly been fulfilling his promise of John 14:3 saying, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Beloved, that is our confidence to enter the holy place – Jesus has made the way and is the way by which we come to the Father.

Our text further augments the wonder of this access we have to God in Jesus in verse 20 saying, "by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh..." The Greek for the word "**new**" here can mean "freshly-slaughtered" and pictures for us the uniqueness of Christ's death – how it alone satisfied God's justice forever concerning the sin of those who would trust in Him. It is also called a "**living way**" reminding us that Jesus died, but also rose again, that our Redeemer is truly a living sacrifice who opened or inaugurated for us the only way to peace and reconciliation with God. Then, using imagery which the first readers would have well understood, our text pictures the tabernacle with the holy place and most holy place, the two most sacred places of worship and communion with God. Remember that the most holy place was separated from the holy place by a beautifully woven four-inch thick some 15 feet tall. It was behind this great veil that God revealed Himself to the High priest just once a year. I know that it is often taught that the veil was designed to keep sinful men out of the holy presence of God, and to be sure, this is true, but that earthly veil was merely a picture of the flesh or body of Christ, given as our substitute. Remember that when Jesus gave His last breath on the cross and declared, "**It is finished!**" (John 19:30) that then the temple veil "**was torn in two from top to bottom**" (Mark 15:38). No longer was the veil to be the object that separated sinful man from the holy God, rather the true veil that is Jesus Christ, became the very entrance through which all must go through if they desire the presence of God. We must go through Jesus, through His flesh, through His sacrifice – this is man's only hope and his only confidence to dwell in presence of the Almighty.

B. Our confidence is founded in the life of Jesus (10:21)

But not only is our confidence found in the death of Christ, but in verse 21 we see that is also found in the life of Jesus. Our text reads, "**and since we have a great priest over the house of God.**" Our confidence to enter the holy place is based not only in the fact of the death of Jesus for our sins, but just as importantly in the resurrection of Jesus unto eternal life. Again, we have, present tense, a living and here it is said a "**great high priest**". The adjective "great" distinguishes Him for all other priests of the most high God. What makes Jesus so great? Jesus alone is the eternal Son of God. Jesus alone descended from heaven and took the form of a man, whom He created, to deal with man's sin. Jesus alone fully accomplished the work for which He was sent by God to do, to pay for the sins of His people and then to prove the validity of His sacrifice by rising from the dead. This is the testimony of Romans 1:4 –

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who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Beloved, our confidence is this, that Jesus died with reference to sin and that in Him we too die in reference to sin and that Jesus rose from the dead and likewise, in Him, we too will rise from the dead. Our confidence then is summarized in Romans 6:1-6 -

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

What is our response to the Superiority of Jesus Christ? We have confidence to enter the presence of God; we are to have confidence to live out holy purposes of God and we are confident to proclaim this gospel, this good news of God. Is this your approach to God? This is the confidence that every believer is to have in Jesus Christ. Because He lives, I live. For, in the words of Hebrews 7:25, Jesus always lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God. Jesus is not simply the basis of our confidence, He is our confidence – He is the door, the way, our access to the presence of God.

II. Our Communion with God (10:22)

let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Beginning in verse 22 we have the first of three exhortations in this passage. In light of the Superiority of Jesus, we have confidence to enter the holy place, but how shall this impact us? How does the fact that we have confidence play out in our life? How do we go about it?

A. Abiding with God

To begin with, this confidence calls us to communion with God. By communion I mean a deep and intimate abiding with God. The command is this, **“let us draw near”**. Let us come to and long for the abiding presence of God. This call to “draw near” is another repeated theme of Hebrews. It is to be the desire of every believer to want closeness with God.

Hebrews 4:16

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 7:19

(for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

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Hebrews 7:25

Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek [draw near – same Greek word] Him.

Beloved, is it your desire to abide with God? Your willingness to abide with God is dependent upon your vision of Christ in your life. If you truly see Christ as superior to any and all things in your life, then the greater the abiding presence of God will be in your life. The more the world has a hold of your heart, the less exalted Christ is in your life, the more diminished your communion with God. There are so many things that avail themselves to us. We have computers for information, cell phones for conversation and cars for travel. We have sports and entertainment through television, movies and amusement centers. We have deadlines and promotions in our jobs. And in the midst of all these things is this call to prayer, this call to communion, to worship, to praise, to set all things aside and dwell in the shadow of the Almighty. And contrary to what is often taught today, you cannot draw near to God in just anyway you please. That is why there have been nine and one-half chapters devoted to the sufficiency of Jesus. He is the only way, the only truth the only life. To draw near to God is to understand the prayer of St. Augustine, “*You made us for Yourself, and our hearts find no peace till they rest in You.*”

B. Assurance of Faith

But let me ask you, do you believe that statement, that “our hearts find no peace till they rest in” God? Can you dare begin to set more and more of life’s pleasures aside to find more and more pleasure in God? Notice our text calls us to “**draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.**” What is meant by “a sincere heart”? Beloved, it is a heart that longs for satisfaction in Jesus. It is a heart that not only knows the fact of Christ’s superiority, but longing desires to experience this superiority in His life. A sincere heart is in opposition to a deceitful heart, that is a heart weighed down with hypocrisy and longings for sin. Here we might be reminded of the earlier warning of Hebrews 3:12-13 -

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The sincere heart is one rooted and ground in “**full assurance of faith**” – [slide 24] meaning that the heart’s actions are anchored upon the truth, the reality, the knowledge of Jesus death and resurrection. This is the heart that believes – ^l

9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

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Let me ask you this question, “Are you motivated to do everything you do in light of the death of Jesus for your sins and the resurrection of Jesus for eternal life?” Do you wake up in the morning with such an assurance of faith? Do you spend time with your family or friends with such an assurance of faith? Do you do all your work heartily as unto with Lord with such an assurance of faith; guided by the knowledge that if you are in Christ that Jesus died to free you from living in sin and that as He rose to newness of life, His intention for you is to live in such newness of life? This is our assurance of faith.

C. Affected life

Finally then we see that we are called to “draw near” – to abide in deep intimacy with God because our lives have been radically affected inside and out. We read at the end of verse 22, **“having our hearts sprinkled clean from and evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”** This describes a life affected and changed by drawing near to God.

Let us first observe who does this cleansing and washing. The verb mood and tenses are in perfect passive, telling us undoubtedly that something has happened to us, not of our doing, we were passive in the event in the sense that we could not clean ourselves, but being in the perfect tense indicates this as a done deal with continuing effects in the present. Sometime in the past, that is at our conversion to Christ, we had our hearts changed, hearts that once rebelled against God and were filled with evil thoughts have now been consecrated, set apart, made clean by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. Remember that when Israel was set apart to live under the principles of the Law, Moses took the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the book and on the people to which the people responded, **“All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”** Of course the sacrifices they offered for sin never really satisfied. They could show outward obedience and yet continue with evil hearts and consciences.

But now, in Christ, His blood is sprinkled not merely externally, but rather internally, upon our hearts. The life that has meet with the blood of the Savior is a life whose heart has been changed to love, obey, serve and be devoted to Jesus above and beyond all things. The heart that has been sprinkled with the blood of Christ, having been set apart for Christ, longs for Christ to be glorified, exalted, honored and proclaimed. How do we know if we have had our hearts sprinkled with the blood of Christ? Beloved, measure your devotion to Christ, your willingness to sacrifice for Christ. We might sing that Jesus is our all in all, but does the sentiment of your heart concur? Is your life changing, becoming more and more fixated on Christ, desiring less and less from this world and more and more of Him. Certainly even the Christian will have his momentary seasons of coldness, but by and large, what is your commitment to Christ? Has your life been affected inwardly?

But our text seems to include not only this inward change, but also one that then is expressed outwardly. We read, **“and our bodies washed with pure water.”** While the picture of water is used in the Scriptures to speak of the inward regenerating work of the Spirit (see Titus 3:5), the use of “bodies” here also seems to suggest the rite of water baptism. As these first readers had their lives radically affected inwardly, they desired, regardless of the cost, to be baptized publicly, outwardly, as a confession of faith. Inwardly they had been washed by the application of the gospel by the Holy Spirit, and so they wanted to outwardly express this truth through baptism. We must remember that most who were baptized in the early church did so at great expense. Their public identification with Christ would often cause

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all sorts of trials; family members disowned them, jobs lost, even persecution and death. But these were filled with such joy, such triumph as Jesus cleansed them from their guilty consciences, that they could not keep themselves from publicly testifying of these truths.

Beloved, how is it for you? Are you so filled with joy at the work of Christ for you; has your life been so radically affected that you are willing to make public and bold confessions of Jesus Christ? Do you possess the confidence to enter the holy place and receive power from on high to be the witnesses of Jesus Christ? This is our calling. This is our duty. This is our privilege.

Let me close with these questions to challenge your thinking in these matters:

1. Do you live daily in light of the sacrificial death of Jesus for your sins, that you would not live in them any more; as well as in light of the life of Jesus, that as He lives, you live?
2. Do you seek deep, intimate and abiding communion with God? Do you “draw near” to Him in light of the way Jesus has made for you? Have you been negligent to make use of this access, this confidence?
3. Do you find rest and hope in what God has and continues to do for you? Do you have this assurance of faith?
4. Do you reflect back upon your physical water baptism, your public confession of Christ and what He accomplished for you by cleansing your heart and mind to serve Him? Are you desirous to make the same or even more of a public confession of Jesus due to an increasing joy in being in God’s presence?

May it be so for the glory of God. May we not be content with simply knowledge, but have wisdom to so serve Christ Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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