

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

Hebrews 10:19-39

Key Verse: 10:20

“...by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...”

Thus far, we have studied the first two major sections of the book of Hebrews. In 1:1-4:13, the author describes Christ’s person; he is the Son of God and the Son of Man—superior to angels and Moses. In 4:14-10:18, he tells us of Christ’s works as the Great High Priest: Christ is the mediator of a new covenant and the perfect sacrifice once for all. Today we begin the third main section, which consists mainly of practical applications of how to live by faith in Jesus (10:19-13:25). This section begins with an encouragement to draw near to God, which the author has given repeatedly by saying “draw near,” “approach” or “come” (4:16; 7:19,25; 10:1,22; 11:6; 12:22).¹ Especially, in 4:16 he said, **“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** To the Hebrew people, however, drawing near to God was a frightening thought; they expected to die immediately. Though people want to draw near to God, they don’t because of guilt, shame, doubt and fear. If they draw near to God and meet him very personally, their deep inner life problems will be solved. But they don’t know how to draw near to God. At the same time, they lack confidence that God will accept them. So the author emphasizes that through Jesus, our Great High Priest, there is a new and living way opened for us to draw near to God. There is a new and amazing way to draw near to God! But many people do not know about this. So, instead of drawing near to God and growing day by day, they seem to be stuck. They are like drivers going through construction zones, struggling with roadblocks, re-routing and delays. They become frustrated and unhappy and complain, not knowing there is an express highway readily available to them. It is time for us to get out of the construction zone and onto the new and living way to God!

We can divide today’s passage into three parts. First: the great blessings we have through our Great High Priest Jesus (19-21); second, what

¹ The words “approach” “draw near” and “come” are translated from the same Greek word *proserchomai* (προσερχομαι). In addition, the Greek word *engizō* (ἐγγίζω) is also translated to “draw near” (7:19).

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

we should do based on these blessings (22-25); and third, warning and encouragement (26-39).

First, “...since we have...” (19-21). Verse 19 begins with the word “therefore,” followed by the author’s conclusion about the works of the high priest based on the new covenant. He reminds us of the two great blessings we have through our Great High Priest Jesus. In the first place, we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. This is the new and living way, in contrast to the old covenant and animal sacrifice. It is new because it is different from the old covenant. In the old covenant, access to God was extremely limited. Ordinary people never imagined entering the Most Holy Place. Only the high priest could enter God’s presence, and only once a year. Exodus 19 describes how dreadful it was for ordinary people to meet God. Though he would descend on Mt. Sinai to meet them, they could not see the Lord, but only hear his voice. If they approached the mountain, even to touch the foot of it, they would be stoned to death. However, a new way to God was opened based on the new covenant—a covenant of grace. God initiated this covenant out of his great mercy and unconditional love. He puts his laws in our hearts and writes them on our minds so that we may have a right and intimate relationship with him. He forgives all of our sins and remembers them no more. How precious is this new covenant! Usually new things become old after a little while. Two years ago my iPhone 5 was a hot new thing. Now it seems like an ancient piece of technology. But in the case of the new covenant, it never gets old, but always remains new, fresh and vibrant because it comes from the living God.

Not only is this a new way, but it is a living way in contrast to the animal sacrifice. In order for people to come to God in the old covenant, numerous animals had to die, shedding their blood. The new covenant began when Christ died, shedding his blood once for all, and rose again from the dead. Now he lives forever. The author associates Jesus’ body with the temple curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. This curtain was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide and four inches thick. It was a heavy hanging drape, which represented the barrier between the holy God and sinful people. Tradition says that if two horses were hooked to it and pulled in opposite directions they could not tear it. But when Jesus died this curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. “Top to bottom” means that God tore it in response to Jesus shedding his blood. God wants us to know that the way is now

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

always opened for us to come to him by the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus is very important. Not only does it cleanse our conscience and enable us to stand before the living God, it also has transforming power. It changes us from deep within: our desires, thoughts and lifestyle (Php 2:13). This is the new and living way which leads us to eternal life. It transcends time, space and judgment. We can come to God without fear anytime, anyplace by the blood of Jesus.

In the second place, we have a great high priest over the house of God (21). Even though we enter into God's presence, we cannot stand before the holy God. We are weak, sinful and vulnerable; we need an advocate who can understand us deeply and intercede for us and defend us. Anyone who commits a crime and stands before a judge needs a good defense lawyer. Jesus is a matchless advocate. He never lost a case. Jesus understands us, forgives our sins, and defends us so that we may have fellowship with God. Jesus is able to save us completely because he always lives to intercede for us (7:25). All we need to do is depend on Jesus our Great High Priest.

In verses 19 and 21 the phrase “...since we have...” is repeated. This reflects the Greek, in which the first word in the sentence is *Echontes* (*ἔχοντες*) which is emphasized. The author wants us to know that we already have and always have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place and a Great High Priest Jesus. So we don't need to worry about anything. In any time of need, we can draw near to God and he will give us mercy and grace to help us. So let's draw near to God by the new and living way opened for us.

Second, “...let us...” (22-25). Based on the blessings we receive from Jesus, now what should we do? The author exhorts us to do three things: draw near to God with a sincere heart (22), hold unswervingly to the hope we profess (23), and consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (24-25). The first exhortation is “let us draw near to God.” Let's read verse 22. “...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and 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.” In the past our hearts were not pure and true. We were full of deceit and evil thoughts. So we suffered from a guilty conscience. But when we believed in Jesus our hearts were sprinkled with his blood and purified. Now our hearts are sincere, pure, genuine and undivided. When we were baptized in the name

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

of Jesus we were united with him in his death and resurrection and can now have full assurance that faith brings. This is what we have through Jesus. Now, based on this grace, the author exhorts us to **“draw near to God.”** When we see a beautiful sunset or picturesque mountain peaks, we are naturally drawn into the beauty of the scene. In the same way, when we begin to see God, we are amazed at his awesomeness, beauty, holiness and majesty. God is our Creator and our Redeemer. Our God is awesome, most beautiful, perfectly holy, glorious and majestic. When we catch a glimpse of God in his glory our hearts are filled with heavenly joy and wonder. Fanny Crosby, though she was blind physically, drew near to God through faith. She saw God’s beauty and wrote these words: “Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight! Angels descending, bring from above, echoes of mercy, whispers of love. This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.” When God is in our hearts, we have a foretaste of heaven even while living in this world. Eden was the garden of delight, not because of beautiful trees and delicious fruit, but because beautiful God was there. There are so many beautiful places in the world, but if God is not there, it turns out to be hell. But when God is there, regardless of the situation or environment, there is paradise.

The second exhortation is to hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. Let’s read verse 23. **“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”** Here the word **“profess”** refers to our public confession of faith in Jesus and allegiance to him and his kingdom. Through this we have hope of eternal redemption in the kingdom of God. At the present we can catch a glimpse of this glory, but in the future we will experience it as reality. We will see Jesus face to face. This hope does not disappoint us because he who promised is faithful. God has never bounced a check; what he promises he does without fail (6:18). So we should hold it unswervingly, not turning to the right or the left, regardless of the circumstance. We face obstacles and hindrances in our journey of faith, including unexpected illnesses, family problems, financial trouble, broken relationships and even death. But our hope is not in this world; it is in Christ and his kingdom. So let’s hold unswervingly to this hope.

The third exhortation is to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (24-25). This exhortation regards our attitudes toward one another. Christian life is not just a personal matter between God

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

and self. It is also a matter of relationships within the body of Christ. American culture has been greatly influenced by individualism. While there is a positive side, that it fosters independent spirit, personal responsibility, and personal faith in God, there is also a negative side: People easily ignore the importance of community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in his book *Life Together*: “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”² Though we are in Christ, we are not yet fully mature. So we make mistakes, have conflicts, offend others and experience disharmony. At such times, we are tempted to complain, blame others, criticize and plant doubt and fear. This is discouraging and damaging to the body of Christ. Even when we do not say anything, holding a judgmental attitude hurts others. In order to overcome this kind of attitude that leads to an unhealthy environment, we need to consider how to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. We should spend time thinking about others, come to really understand them, and prayerfully find the way to encourage them to love and good deeds. Visiting others at a critical moment can bring great encouragement. Speaking positive words and complimenting others’ good points inspires them to love and serve God. The best way to encourage others are with the words of God and prayer. In order to do this we should not avoid each other, but meet together. Some people claim that meeting together does more harm than good; they say, “let’s not meet together.” But the author encourages us not to give up meeting together; but rather to meet together all the more as we see the Day approaching (25). Let’s meet together all the more, encourage one another and spur one another on toward love and good deeds!

Third, remember and persevere (26-39). Verses 26-31 are a strong warning against apostasy. In verse 26a, those who deliberately keep on sinning does not refer to those who are weak morally, but to those who intentionally deny Christ as Savior and Lord. They seemed to believe for a while and shared fellowship with Christians. But in the time of trial, persecution or disadvantage, they turned against Christ. This is a very serious matter (26b-27). They have no way of salvation because they rejected the only way of salvation God offers. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses (28). How much more

² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. (Harper & Rowe Publishers, Inc.: New York, NY, 1954), kindle loc 89.

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

severely do those deserve to be punished who have denounced the Son of God and what he has done (29). God is not only the God of salvation, but the God of judgment as well (30-31).

In verses 32-39 the author encourages Hebrew believers to remember past victories they experienced and to persevere in present trials. Hebrew believers were vulnerable to the devil's temptation to abandon their Christian faith in order to avoid persecution. They needed to keep their confidence that comes from faith in Christ. In order to help them, the author reminded them of their past victories. In the early days, when they had received the light of the gospel, they faced fierce opposition. They were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. They suffered along with those who were put in prison and had their property confiscated (33-34a). But they were full of joy. They never fell into self-pity or retreated. Their motto might have been, "No retreat, no regret, no reserves." They were sure that what they had gained in Christ was much more than they had lost (34b). But now they were tired of suffering loss without any visible reward. Did the author say to them, "I am sorry you are suffering so much"? No! He said, "Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded" (35). When we consider the reward God gives to those who keep the faith, it is not a small thing. It is eternal life in the everlasting kingdom. So Paul said, **"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"** (2Co 4:16-18). Here we learn how to overcome present hardship. It is by remembering victories God gave in the past and how great his reward will be.

In order to receive God's reward, we need to persevere. Verse 36 says, **"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."** The Greek word translated **"persevere"** means "the capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances."³ This is not just the exertion of one's own willpower, but a dependence on God who empowers us to bear up under difficulties and what is more, to do the will of God positively. In order to help us persevere, the

³ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 307). New York: United Bible Societies.

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

author freely quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4: **“For, ‘In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.’ And, ‘But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.”** Jesus will come soon. We don’t know when he will come. We also don’t know when we will pass from this life into God’s presence. That is why we should be alert and live by faith. When we live by faith, we can please God. But when we shrink back, God is not pleased.

Whether one lives by faith or shrinks back makes a big difference. Paul said that anyone who lives a godly life in Christ Jesus will surely be persecuted (2Ti 3:12). When we face persecution and difficulty it is time for our faith to take deeper root and to experience the power of faith and bear good fruit. But if we shrink back or give up, we wither and die and fail to bear fruit. So we need to persevere and live by faith to the end. When we fall, we need to rise again, and when we fall again, we need to rise again like Rocky Balboa, who had a never give up spirit. Proverbs 24:16 says, **“Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.”** Apostle Paul suffered so many things in his Christian life but there is no trace of a victim’s mentality in him. Rather, he had a great sense of victory. It came from his deep love relationship with Christ. So he sang a song of victory: **“In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”** (Ro 8:37). **We do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved** (39).

Let’s draw near to God by the new and living way and live by faith that perseveres and presses on the upward way.