

## Jason Upchurch - Hebrews 10:24-25

We're taking a little break from 1 Corinthians this morning to look at an amazing passage here in Hebrews. I was actually asked by Chuck and Ellis to preach a sermon on this passage, so any criticisms can be directed to them.

This sermon is really a development from our men's Bible study a couple of months ago and I hope it is an encouragement to you about how we all think about coming to church every Sunday morning.

I titled this sermon "Thinking About Church" because what I want you to walk away with this morning is this: when we come to church - when gather on Sunday morning - we need to come prepared to encourage other people; and we need to prepare to be encouraged by other people.

And the chief word in this passage here is "consider." We need to **consider** - or think about - what we're going to be doing when we gather together on Sunday mornings.

A lot of times we roll out of bed Sunday morning, get cleaned up, get dressed. Maybe we brush our teeth, maybe we forget to brush our teeth. And come to church hoping it'll be good. We hope the sermon will be good (trust me, I hope it'll be good too). We hope that the songs will be good. We hope that we will be refreshed again in the grace of Jesus at the Lord's Supper. We hope that we walk away encouraged and built up in the Lord, maybe just a little more sanctified than we were earlier that morning.

Those are all good things, but let me just say, those are all passive things. What we're hoping is that something will happen to us. We're hoping that we will be affected rather than that we'll have an effect. And if we're not careful we can simply become spectators at church.

And that's not what the Lord wants. The command here is about us considering how we will participate in the Sunday service.

Now, most of you are probably familiar with this passage. It's often quoted as sort of the "go to church" Bible verse - and rightly so. The author of Hebrews says do not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some. He is talking about meeting together as a local body of believers. And this is the clearest command in Scripture that we need to be committed to gathering in person with the local fellowship of believers.

Many other passages assume this command.

**Acts. 2:42:** They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. This is what they did every Sunday together and all throughout the week.

All of the letters to various churches - Rome, Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth, so on - are written assuming that those churches were gathering together every Lord's day.

And especially over the last 2 years, this verse has gotten a lot of attention because, frankly, many people have simply given up on gathering together with the church.

Even 2 years later, there are still people who are afraid to go to church because they are afraid to get sick. And what has happened is that they've become so accustomed to watching sermons online and listening to sermons that they have now made a habit of not going to church.

Can I just be really honest? I think Covid was just the excuse many people needed to quietly bow out of church altogether.

They still go to the grocery store, they still go to the doctor, they still go out in public. They just don't go to church. For some, this is where they finally walked away from Jesus. And you say "Is not going to church the same as walking away from Jesus?" And the answer is yes. The Bible knows nothing of Christianity that is lived out apart from the regular gathered body of Christ.

But here's what we need to understand about this passage: this passage is more than a "go to church passage." This is actually a "**why** to go to church passage." And we need to be reminded to think about why we go to church.

Now, we're here in the middle of Hebrews. The author has just rested his case that Jesus is better than everything in the OC. He's a better priest, from a better priesthood, who offered a better sacrifice, in a better temple, to give us a better covenant. He did that all by sacrificing himself on the cross in our place for our sins.

And so now we all have access to God through Jesus. Access that only the high priest had once a year. So the author of Hebrews gives us 3 commands. And they all start with "let us." The first is let us draw near. **Read 19-22**

Let us draw near. Because of the blood of Jesus - the death of Jesus (and his resurrection) - we can draw near to God with boldness because we've been sprinkled clean, as it were, from all our sin.

We can also hang on the the faith. **Read 23**

So, draw near and keep drawing near. Don't give up. Keep going. The confession we have is the gospel. We confess that the risen Jesus is our Lord and we will follow him no matter what. Let us hold fast.

So draw near to God, stay near to God. Here's the 3rd: **Read 24-25**

Did you see what the main action word is in this verse? It's not do not neglect meeting. The main action in these verses is: let us **consider**. Everything else is basically telling us what we need to consider.

And the word "consider" in Greek is the idea of of contemplating or thinking carefully about something. If you're thinking about taking a job in a different location you think losing and hard about it. If you're thinking about asking a girl to marry you, you think long and hard about it.

It's not just a passing thought or a last minute consideration. It's deep consideration.

So for us what this looks like is Thursday, Friday, Saturday, we're intentionally thinking about Sunday morning and specifically about the people we will see. And how we will interact with them.

Have you talked to so and so in a while? What do you say? What's your plan? If we're called to think deeply about gathering together and make a plan, what's the plan include?

Well, the author doesn't leave us in the dark. He gives us 5 ways we can be thinking about how to build up the body of Christ every week.

1) We need to think carefully about stirring up love. **Read 24**

This is the first thing we need to be thinking about. How do we stir up love in one another? And I don't mean in a vague, ethereal way. "Yeah, we should all just *love each other, man.*"

No, this is: how does the rubber meet the road when you're talking to so and so on Sunday morning and you know they're struggling with patience or kindness or keeping a record of wrong - how do you address that? We need to think about that, and have a plan, and act on that plan.

As we've looked at **1 Cor. 13** I think it's clear we all need to love a little more. I don't think anyone here has love down to a science. So we all need to be encouraged to love.

How do we do that? What do we say to that person? That's what we need to think about and consider carefully.

Maybe when you come to Sunday morning it's "Hey, I know its been rough at work for a while and you're getting easily irritated, can we grab some coffee and talk a little? Maybe I can encourage you."

Or maybe it's "Hey, I know the kids have been crazy and I've been praying for you. Is there anything I can specifically pray for as you try to love you kids?"

"I noticed you let a few swear words slip the other day and I just wanted to encourage you that I struggle with that too. And a verse I find helpful is **Col. 3:8**: Put away all anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from our mouth. Do you want to memorize that together and keep each other accountable over the next few weeks?"

Maybe they just need refreshed in the gospel. You get beat down long enough, times are hard long enough - sometimes you just need to be reminded that God loves you and cares for you. That your salvation isn't secured because you're a great person, but because Jesus is a great Savior.

These are the conversations we need to be thinking about throughout the week as we prepare for church.

It's a proactive view of our participation in the body of Christ. It's not haphazard, it's not accidental, it's not winging it. It's thinking carefully about how we can encourage the body of Christ to love more every time we gather.

## 2) We need to think carefully about stirring up good deeds. Read 24

So we need to think carefully about how to actually get people motivated to actually do good deeds.

Most of you know that we are called as followers of Jesus to be doing good deeds. That's part and parcel of following Jesus. Obeying his commandments in such a way that blesses other people.

Doing good works does not save us. We are not saved by works at all. There is nothing we could possibly do to earn the favor of God.

We are saved all by faith in Jesus. Our sins are removed by believing that he alone is the sacrifice for our sins. And God counts us righteous because we believe that Jesus is the resurrected Lord of the universe. Good deeds don't save, only faith in Jesus.

But we're also called to do good works.

**Eph. 2:10:** We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them.

Why were you saved? Paul says you were created **for** good works. God redeemed us so that we would go do righteousness. Yes we praise God, yes spread the gospel. But part of that is simply doing good works.

We read the Bible, according to **2 Tim. 3:17**, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. As you and I soak in the Word of God our prayer should be "God, change me and give me a desire to do what is right. To do good works."

**1 Pet. 2:12** Keep your conduct among the pagans honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Sometimes our good deeds are rewarded with scoffing and mocking. Keep doing them anyway because when the scoffers stand before the Lord it will all be made plain.

And because of all that, we need to be stirred up to do good works.

By the way, that word stirred up - or some of you have spurred on - is a good word. I like "spurred on." Because what do you do with spurs? You kick them into the side of a horse to make them go.

That's the word. Something that annoys and agitates someone to good works.

Can we just all really be honest? Sometimes we need a kick in the side to do what we know we should be doing. People can hint, people can suggest. But at some point we need to be kicked in the sides with some spurs to do some basic good works.

**Look over at 1 Thes. 5:14** for a minute. I think this is helpful for knowing what our attitude should be when someone is struggling to do good works. Notice here. **Read**

So we don't treat everyone the same. We admonish - or strongly warn - the idle. Idle people are those who are just lazy. They know what to do and should be doing it but don't want to. So we're a little tougher on them.

We encourage the faint hearted. These are people who have been trying for a long long time and are just tired of going on. They're doing good works, but it's taking a toll. They don't need spurs in their sides. They need encouragement. Good job, keep doing what you're doing.

And we help the weak. The weak are those who either don't know what they should be doing in the faith. They're new and don't know how to live in light of gospel truths. Or maybe these are just utterly broken people. They've just been beat down and they have no energy to go. We don't spur them. We help them. We teach them, we come alongside them. We show them.

So we have to do a good job of knowing where people are in these categories. And I love what he says at the end: be patient with them all. No matter where other believers are at we should be patient as we encourage them on.

But connecting this back to **Heb. 10** we need to consider how to do this. How do we spur each other on? Well, we don't avoid hard issues. We've got to talk about it sometime. But maybe we're not a bull in the china shop on the first go 'round.

It takes some serious thinking. It requires prayer and tact but also boldness.

I mean, imagine you were slacking in doing some good work. Maybe you're being lazy. Maybe you've become a recluse and don't want to deal with people anymore. Maybe you're having a rough season in life but you've kinda become a jerk.

How would you want someone to approach you? What would motivate you?

Is the the best approach on a Sunday morning while everyone's standing around sipping coffee to be like, "Hey, you know you should be more thankful to the Lord and stop complaining." Yeah, maybe not a great group conversation.

"Hey, how about them Seahawks?" "Well, they had a losing season so..." "Yeah, speaking of losing seasons, let's talk about you." Yeah, I don't think that's the best way to go.

We want to spur, sometimes we need to dig in. But we want to be gracious. Here's the thing you guys: this is a command. We need to consider how to spur. We need to get into peoples' business and urge them on toward good deeds. This is not optional.

And this goes both ways. We need to do that and we need to **be open** to that. We need to be open enough with people about where we're struggling and limping so that they can get in our business. And can I tell you something? When people spur you, it doesn't feel good. He doesn't say tickle them on toward good deeds. He says spur. We need that. They need that. That's part of being in Christ's church.

**3) We need to think about not neglecting meeting together. Read 24-25**

This phrase is probably what most of us focus on when we come to this passage. Go to church! And for good reason. Here, the command isn't actually to go to church. Going to church is assumed. The command is really: Don't give up on it.

And he says it in 2 ways. First, don't neglect it. Or another way of translating this is "don't abandon" it.

I remember having a discussion in high school with my pastor about going to church and why it's important. And he said simply: I know what happens when you take a coal out of a fire. The coal goes out.

I've met many, many people over the years who have given up on church for one reason or another. They drifted away, they abandoned fellowship. Most of them still claim to be believers. I have to be honest: I doubt many of them really are. If you don't love the bride of Jesus, do you really love Jesus?

See, Christianity is a team sport. We were saved into the church. Yes, the universal church but that is worked out at the local church. And if you've read your Bible for longer than two seconds you know there's just no such thing as a perfect local church. Every single church has issues. Every single local church that was addressed in the NT had problems. Most churches today have some kind of issue. Or five. But we don't abandon the church.

Can I tell you something? I don't know of one person who is a self-professed Christian who has given up on church that is spiritually mature.

There's not one person I've ever met who has a vibrant spiritual life but refuses to go to church. Maybe they have a little Bible study they lead watch sermons online. But can I tell you something? They usually end up with really, really weird theology. Or some really weird lifestyle choices.

I've talked to guys who tell me they can't find a good church in all of Spokane. Now, setting aside my love for our church for a moment: in all of Spokane?? Really. Then whatever you think church should be is too narrow.

Part of going to church is that we are confronted with truth. And given enough time, our theology is put to the test by Scripture. And if we're open enough with other people, they will gently challenge our views on Scripture.

And part of going to church is that we're confronted with the need to show grace and mercy. Maybe we disagree with something or something bugs us frustrates us and isn't resolved 4 seconds later. That's okay. We're not celebrating error, of course, but we do need to have lots of space for grace.

So he says don't abandon meeting together. He also says, as is the habit of some.

Rarely does someone wake up one morning and just decide they're all done with church forever. Maybe sometimes, but not usually. We compromise a little and the habit builds.

It's soccer season and the games are on Sunday...so, you know, we can't make it.

Once soccer is done, then there's the lake during summer. The winters are so long here...

We begin justifying things. I've done this too, to my shame. We lived in the Bay Area for 4 months 14 years ago. We were living with family and it was just going to be temporary until we could move to northern CA. And we thought this was a short season in life where we could hang out with our family on the weekends. Well, one month turned into 2, then 4 and I think I went to church like once in 4 months. And my reasoning was: well, we can spend time with family. That's good right.

Fast forward 10 years and we go down to visit them in the Bay Area. We're there over a weekend and I wanted to take our family to a church. And one of them said - in a very nice way, mind you - "Well, does it really matter if you're not preaching? I mean, you didn't go to church the whole time you stayed with us." They had seen our habit of not meeting together. What's the big deal?

And I had to apologize to an unbeliever for my disobedience to Jesus. They didn't care about my commitment to church - but they saw.

Can I tell you something? Everyone sees what our commitment is. And we can make every excuse we want. But our kids see where our priorities are. Our neighbors and family do. And the Lord does. We're not fooling anyone.

I've talked to many parents who made it a habit to neglect meeting together for every sporting event, every vacation, every whim they could think of. And they just don't understand why their adult kids have no interest in Jesus or the church.

One of the things we need to consider as we gather together, is actually how we are tempted to neglect gathering.

One thing I think most of us have realized over the past 2 years is that gathering is essential. Zoom is not church. Sermons online are not church. Listening to your favorite band is not church.

We've been saved into the **body** of Christ expressed in the local church. A body that serves each other and loves each other. To neglect the body is actually to neglect Jesus.

#### 4) We need to think about how to encourage one another. Read 25

How can we encourage each other when we come to the fellowship. How can we be a source of encouragement?

Again, this is super practical. I don't think I've ever heard anyone say: You know what I could use a little less of in my life? Encouragement. I've got too many encouragers around me and I'm just sick of it.

No, most of us could use a little more encouragement.

I was at the conference this weekend and bumped into a friend of a friend. We barely know each other. And he had a friend with him. And we struck up a conversation and I gotta tell you, he's one of the most encouraging people I've ever met in my life. I could just hang out with him all the time.

Imagine - seriously - imagine if every single person in our church thought deeply on Thursday through Saturday about how they were going to come to church and encourage the daylights out of everyone they could. If we all just had this one big game plan of how to encourage each other.

We could be open and honest knowing that what we'd get in return is a massive dose of encouragement. That'd be pretty awesome. That'd be an amazing church.

You know what? We're called to think deeply about exactly that: how can we come every Sunday and encourage each other.

#### 5) We need to think about our lives in light seeing Jesus. Read

Listen, eschatology is one of the best motivations for continuing on in Christian life. Forget all the talk about premil, post mil, amil, whatever. The reality is that either you're going to see Jesus or Jesus is coming to see you.

It is appointed for a man to die once, and after that comes judgment. You've got once shot on planet earth to walk in faithfulness to the Lord. As has been said, what you do here echoes for eternity.

Some people will say "We'll I'll just be glad to get in the gates." That's fine. But nowhere are we called to be satisfied with just getting in the gates. Nowhere are we called to be happy with back row seating in the Kingdom.

Paul says in **1 Cor. 9:24**: run the race to win the prize. Don't hobble along. Don't walk it. Don't lollygag. Because we're not running for some flowers that die in a week or two. We're running for a wreath that will never perish. Eternity is on the line.

**Hebrews 12:1** let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and run with endurance the race of faith.

Some of you guys like running. I can't stand running. I don't like the cotton mouth, I don't like the bouncing, I don't trying to take a drink of water and spraying it all over my face.

But we're called to run. And one of the ways we motivate each other to run is to look forward to the prize. To look forward to the wreath that's ahead.

At the conference I got a chance to sit in on a seminar by Paul Washer. Some of you know him, he's kind of a fiery preacher. But he was pretty weak. But he said this about seeing God:

"If you are a child of God, do you know God - your Father - wants to see you more than you will ever want to see him. Because he loves you, and cherishes you."

If you're in Christ God isn't mad at you. He's not watchful toward you. Even if he disciplines you he does out of what? Love. God wants you home; forever.

And in the mean time he calls us to think deeply about encouraging each other to remember the Day that's approaching. Remember the Day when we see our Lord face to face.

**Pray**