

## DRAWING NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

**Date:** October 22, 2023

**Scripture:** Hebrews 10: 19-25

Hebrews 10:19-25

*"<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His Flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <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; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."*

The writer of Hebrews starts off this particular passage by saying: *"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place."*

You would wonder why he would use a word like confidence or what implication that word has for our understanding of this passage. The truth is that, previously in the dispensation that was before, they didn't have confidence. They had only fear and trepidation in coming before a holy God. The holy place was where the priest could meet. But only once a year, a priest went into the holiest place, having made atonement for himself and for the people; and he went in with fear.

In fact, tradition tells us that they used to tie his ankle with a long rope, so that if he didn't come out, they could pull out his body. There was so much of fear about going before a holy God; it was impossible for those who had sinned to even get into the very presence of His holiness. If you remember, when Moses came down and the presence of God covered that mountain, it was said that if even a beast touched the mountain, it would die.

Such was the fear in approaching God. And yet, the writer of Hebrews says: "Since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus." And that phrase tells us why it is that we can come with confidence. Because no longer do we come on the heels of animals that have been killed, and their blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. No, we come through the precious blood that was shed by Jesus for us.

Many times we have spoken that the blood of Jesus paid the penalty for us, that we are atoned, that we can come confidently into the presence of God because Jesus' blood covers us, has made us clean, has paid for every sin that we have indulged in. And a holy God sees us as holy because He sees us through the grid of the blood of Jesus. And so, the writer of Hebrews says: Come confidently to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus.

v.20 *"by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us..."*

This is a new way that God has initiated for us. It's the establishing of the New Covenant that has come in. We've talked about the New Covenant – it's a new era for us, looking at the Holy Spirit. No longer is the Holy Spirit available to particular people at particular times for particular reasons. In this New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is always available for all people, for all situations. And so, he says, by a new and living way. The animals that were sacrificed, were killed. But Jesus, who gave His life for us, came back to life. It's a living way, not a dead way. It's a living path that has been opened up

eternally for all who want to enter, but by His blood. His blood is the key because it takes care of our unholiness.

And he says, *"... which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh."*

Between the holy place and the holy of holies, was a veil. Scholars tell us that the height of that veil was about 60 feet – six stories high. And it was about four inches thick. This veil separated the holy place from the holiest of holies. One couldn't enter in. And yet, he says that this new way has been inaugurated for us through that veil. How is that possible if there is such a strong thick veil? Matthew 27 tells us that when Jesus died, the Bible says that the veil was rent in two from top to bottom, signifying that Jesus had gone before us and paved the way by giving His life and the precious blood that He shed. A new and living way!

That's why, as we come and celebrate communion, and we take the bread, we are reminded that the access into God's presence is open because of His broken body which signifies the veil. "a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh." So, the flesh of Jesus was the veil that got torn to allow us to enter in. Even as we look at this, we sense the gravity of all of this. Sometimes we can be so flippant about the blood of Jesus and what Jesus did. And yet, when we look at this, we realize just how much, and the theological import of all that is found here.

*"We have a great high priest over the house of God,"*

Remember, he's talking to believers. He starts by saying *'Therefore, brethren,'* meaning all the believers who were there, and that included the ladies as well. But he says, *'we have a great high priest over the house of God.'* We have only one person who is our priest, Jesus, and He has completed the work for us to access God.

v. 22 he says, *'let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,'* How do we come before Him? The writer is saying: Make sure that you come with sincerity, that you don't take Him lightly. We come into this place and we come to worship a holy God. Do we come with sincerity? Can we say that I worship Him with sincerity? That's how we need to come into His presence and with full assurance of faith, to be confident about the faith that we have, that we are assured of what Jesus has done for us. So we come confidently and with sincerity before Him.

He says: *'having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience'*

I love the fact that, as we worship together, it is the Isaiah model that we put in place here – we come as ones who understand how unholy we are in the context of God's holiness. And the moment we realize it, and we say "Woe unto me, for I am a man or a woman of unclean lips," then the coal is taken from the altar and our lips are touched. So we're sprinkled clean by the blood. There's a cleansing that happens even in the context of worship, and must happen. Because at worship, we are confronted by the holiness of God and any kind of sin in our lives will get flushed out and needs to be dealt with.

He says, *'Be sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.'* The allusion here is to the Jews who had so many customs, rituals that had to do with ablutions, and so on. And the writer of Hebrews is just talking about one thing, and scholars agree that he's talking about baptism, that the washing with water meant that you have to remember that as you're sprinkled and your sins are forgiven, that you're also washed clean.

Paul reminds us in Romans 6, about how important it is for us to remember baptism. He says, after talking about God's grace and how freely it is given to us, then it's like we almost say: Oh my goodness, so we can keep on sinning and do what we want, and God can keep on giving His grace. And everybody is happy.

It's like Paul pre-empts that question or that thinking, and he says, "God forbid. Heavens, no! How can you who have been baptized think like that? what does he mean. He says that the symbolism of baptism is this: when you go into the water, then you go in. You're dead, just as Jesus went into the grave. Then we're in that grave just as Jesus was. And then we come out into a new life. That's what baptism is, that you can never go back through the water, back to your old position. You're a new creation. So he says, anytime you're tempted with those things, remember your baptism. One of the most beautiful things that I love so much about being your pastor, is the baptism. I love to see the radiance on the faces of those who come out of the water. Somehow, it's like the 'doxa' of God is on them. *Your conscience should be sprinkled by the precious blood of Jesus and your bodies washed.*

*v. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;* When we look at our lives and we look at some of the problems that come upon us, or when the winds of adversity come and things are really in a bad place. Maybe some of you are in that position right now – you're between a rock and a hard place. What do you do? What is your knee jerk response to difficult situations? Is it to hold fast the confession that I am a child of God? Or is it to turn and run and find a corner and say: I'm going to wait this out, by myself? He says, "Hold fast the confession of faith."

You have made a confession saying that you have given your life to God. You've bought into all that Jesus has done for you. There's a wonderful union that has happened, and now you stand on solid rock. And that solid rock, as we see in Matthew, when Jesus talks about the wise man and the foolish man, is what will help you through adversity. To stand firmly on that rock and say: I know whom I have believed, and I know that He is able to carry me through. I know that! How do I know that? He says: Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. God has promised to take care of you, and God is a faithful God. That's just who God is.

The bible says that even when we are faithless, God is faithful because He cannot deny Himself. He is who He is – a faithful God. And when you stand, beloved, in the midst of adversity, you're actually standing right there on His hand. The Bible says that no one can pluck you from His hands. No one, no situation, no circumstance. So maybe today, it's time to do a reset. Maybe today it's time to say: I've backed away from God when I should really have pushed in, pressed in towards Him and held onto every promise that He has made to me, and for me.

*v. 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,* That's what church is all about. He's now moving from a very individual kind of talk to one that involves what we will do in community. He says there's an important thing that must happen – that as we come together in community, we ought to stir one another up in love, stimulate one another to love and good deeds

I wonder whether we do that, beloved. It's a good question to ask: If the whole idea in coming together today is to not only meet with the Lord, but at a horizontal level to be able to stir one another, encourage one another, inspire one another. How important it is for us to be here, because God, in His wisdom, knows that there is one person coming here who desperately needs to be encouraged. And He knows that there's another person coming here who can say those encouraging words to this person. And when that happens, there's a wonderful sense of God's will taking place.

But what if we just come here for ourselves? The idea is – I've come here, I'm worshipping. I liked a couple of the songs, not the others so much. I know somebody has come in - and we have this kind of thing where we look around but don't really focus. And then when it's over, we just walk away. I wonder whether God is saying: Stop. I have an assignment for you today. It's to stir somebody up in

love, encourage somebody else so that something good can come out. That's the whole idea. That's what must happen in the church. It's not about what we get, which is half, 50%, but it's what we can give to one another, to the body of Christ.

Then he says in v. 25, *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some.*

You and I cannot stimulate one another if we don't come to church. It's important. And he says, almost tongue-in-cheek, *as is the habit of some.* It's like he asked the Holy Spirit: Can I just take a dig at some people here? And he got that permission and he put that in – as is the habit of some. Some had got into the habit at that time, not to come to church. And he's saying it's vital that you are here. That's what church is and must be.

When we were in the US, before we returned to India to start the church, I used to watch a television show called 'Cheers'. It was set in a bar, where at the end of the day, there would be 5 or 6 people who would gather together, and chat and talk and so on. But the signature tune of this show was "I want to go where everybody knows my name." I used to think that should be the signature tune of the church. I want to go where everybody knows my name, where I'm known, I can meet people. They smile at me, I'm welcomed, I don't feel alone. I receive an encouraging smile or a word or a handshake or a hug. This is my place. This is home for me. And the writer of Hebrews is saying: That's the synergy that comes when we come together, that we stimulate one another in love and good deeds.

That's what happens when God's people come together. I am so thankful that we have our live streaming which goes out to people who are unable to come to church. But that's the only reason that we live stream. For if I can say this as gently as I can, it is not meant as a convenience. It's meant to be there for you when you find it impossible to come because of something that has happened – illness for example. Otherwise, beloved, the Word of God invites you to be present together so that church happens here. And so, I really want to invite you to think through that.

There's more than what you get from church; it's about what you give. And how many people come here expecting something, God to speak to them in some way. It could be that they are coming here and just saying: Gosh, how I wish I could just see a smile directed towards me. Maybe through the week, it's been just nothing but anguish, fighting, conflict, no joy, no happiness, nothing. I'm coming to church today and I want to have somebody look at me and smile. And when somebody does, how that person's spirit is lifted. God has ordained a reason, a purpose, why each one of us is here even today. He has a purpose.

And he says: *"but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."*

In other words, there'll be a full stop to this period at some point, where we won't be able to come together or do all the things that we do on earth. That time will be over. So why don't we make the most of it? As I was praying into this sermon between the two services, I felt the Lord saying: I want you to just settle on 'draw near'. There are many people in this congregation who stand far away from the Cross. You're Christian, you're singing, you're doing all the things, but you stand far away from God today. For some reason, whether it's because you got hurt about something, because the burden is weighing too heavily upon you, that you're in dire straits, something. But you're far away. And I believe that the Lord wants these words to rest upon you. Draw near! Come near with confidence. Get close to the flame. It's only in the midst of the flame that we are purified, not away from it.

I wonder today, whether there are some of you who are standing far away from the Cross and saying: Lord, I don't know. I'm a Christian and all of that. I say my prayers, but these things that are happening with me are too much. When they get resolved, if they ever do, then we'll connect again.

I believe God's word for you, beloved, today is 'draw near'. Would you draw near? God wants to meet with you, God wants to lift your heavy burden, God wants to give wisdom into your situation, God wants to restore back to you the peace and joy that is the heritage of His children.

And so, I want to pray for you this morning, but I also want you to be bold. I always think that there's something very beautiful about getting up and coming to the altar. The altar is a very specific place; it's saying: I'm leaving the place where I am, and I'm coming here. I'm treating this as the foot of the cross. And at this place, I want to let go of my burden. I want to release this situation that has been weighing so heavy. I want to draw near to you. I want to arise and go unto my Father.

So beloved, can I invite you to stand? And if the Spirit of God has been speaking to you and you're saying "Draw near is the word for me today", then I want you to just step out from where you are and come and kneel at the altar. I want to pray for you in closing.

Heavenly Father, on these precious ones, Lord, who are here, who have drawn near to you, I ask that immediately You would let the fresh wind of Your Spirit flow through their hearts, letting them know Lord, that You have welcomed them into this place. Then Lord, I want to pray boldly before You today. I want to pray that You would minister to each one very, very particularly. You know each one's heart, You know each one's struggle, You know where they are emotionally, financially, physically – You know everything. Oh God, would You touch them in beautiful healing irrevocable ways, giving wisdom to them. And even as You do that, Lord, would You pour out peace and joy upon them in great measure. Lord, that is the heritage of Your children, and give it to them Lord. let burdens be shifted from their shoulders to Yours. I pray that they would just consciously let go of the burden and let You take it, even in the lightness of Your yoke. Lord, I pray that there would be an inexpressible joy that envelops them. Come, Holy Spirit, would You do that in our midst? We will wait in silence, Lord, so that You can do Your work in our midst.

How beautiful is Your presence! How glorious, Lord, are the things that You give us. May Your Holy Spirit rest upon each of these ones in fresh, new invigorating measure, Lord, that through this day and the days ahead, they would be able to walk in the power and the authority of Your Spirit, and enjoy the peace and joy that belongs to them. In Jesus' precious name we pray.

Amen.

\*\*\*\*\*