

Life Together

“Part 3: Worship”

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on November 11, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** This fall we have been looking at what should happen to a person after they become a Christian. The most important question that every person must answer is, **“How can I, a sinner, be forgiven of my sins and reconciled to God?”** The answer to that question is, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”**
 - The most important thing a person ever does in their life is to humble him or herself before God and say, **“Jesus please forgive my sins and save me.”** The good news of the Bible is that every person who does this is forgiven, saved, and reconciled to God.
 - To use the language of Remembrance Day, every person is a POW in the prison camp of sin. But God sent Jesus to defeat sin, death, and the devil and to set free all those who call on him.
- But what happens next? What happens once you are free? This fall we have seen a consistent pattern in the New Testament. We have seen that two things happen after a people become Christians; namely, they are baptized and they join a local church where they live out their Christian lives.
 - So this fall we have been talking about what it looks like to be a member in a local church. Clearly, being a member does not simply mean getting your name on a list. Membership is a *living commitment*. It is like getting married. Just as marriage comes with certain privileges and responsibilities, so does being a member of one of Jesus’ churches.
 - So far we have seen that we are to love one another and to maintain the unity of the Spirit.
- Today we come to another very basic truth of what it means to be part of a church. The thesis which we will see in our passage today is this:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 2) It must be the habit of every Christian to participate in the corporate life of the church.**
 - There is a wonderful place for one on one meetings but today’s focus is on the corporate life and worship of the church. It is about being committed to the corporate gatherings as one of the key ways that we grow in our spiritual lives.
- This passage of scripture from Hebrews is seeking to do two things in our hearts and minds. First, the writer wants us to be convinced of the thesis that we just gave, which is from verse 25. We will take some time to explain this verse. But second, and even more importantly, the writer also wants us to be persuaded by the reasons behind the thesis.
 - These reasons are very compelling and the writer wants us to see them and be utterly persuaded by them.
 - So two parts this morning: Becoming convinced of the thesis and becoming persuaded by the reasons.

“MEETING TOGETHER”

- So let’s begin with **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Part 1: Becoming convinced of the thesis.** Let’s take 10 minutes or so to unpack the thesis which is in verse 25.
 - The first thing I want you to notice in verse 25 is that **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Christians are commanded to meet together.** Look at verse 25. **READ 25 - not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**

- What was the writer referring to when he told us to not neglect “**meeting together?**” Is he saying, “**Make sure that you spend time with other Christians. Have coffee with them. Watch hockey games and go shopping with them?**” It may involve that but that is not what he is getting at.
- This phrase “**meeting together**” refers to a “**formal meeting**” or an “**official assembly.**” This meant a few things in the early church:
 - First, it meant gathering corporately on the first day of the week to worship. Christians met on the first day because that was the day Christ rose from the dead. Their corporate worship included prayer, preaching, teaching, singing, giving of money to the ministry, taking the Lord’s Supper and baptizing people as they came to Christ.
 - In Acts 2 we read, “**they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**” I think the first meaning of meeting together is corporate worship on Sunday.
 - Secondly, meeting together also meant gathering together in people’s homes for instruction, care, and worship. This is why Community Groups are a vital part of our corporate life at Central.
 - Third, meeting together meant gathering in corporate prayer. In the New Testament, believers joined together for prayer. This is why on the first Sunday of the month we gather before the service for corporate prayer.
 - Finally, it also meant gathering together for special occasions, to address specific issues such as discussing new ministry initiatives or disciplining an unrepentant member.
 - In short, meeting together means that a Christians joyfully devote themselves to the *corporate life* of the church starting with Sunday worship and spilling into the other aspects of corporate life.

“NOT NEGLECTING TO MEET TOGETHER”

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Second, Christians are not to neglect meeting together. READ 25a - not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.**
 - Evidently some Christians were neglecting the corporate life of the church and this is seen as a serious spiritual weakness. Why would they do this? This verse does not say but the rest of the book gives some pretty obvious clues and the reasons are much the same as today.
 - Some did not want to be seen with Christians because then they would be associated with them and face social harassment or in their day persecution. They wanted a private religion, a personal relationship with Jesus but the writer is saying that Christianity is as much corporate as it is individual.
 - Others were simply lazy. They were perhaps the kind of people who simply did not plan their lives well. They filled their week with all kinds of things and then were simply too lazy or too busy to join in Sunday worship or other corporate life gatherings.
 - Still others did not come because their hearts were turning towards unbelief. They were falling away from the faith.
- This makes me think of a letter that a pastor received in the mail. It read:

Dear Pastor:

You often stress attendance at worship as being very important for a Christian, but I think a person has a right to miss now and then. I think every person ought to be excused from Sunday worship for the following reasons and the number of times indicated

Christmas Holidays 2 (the Sunday before & after)

New Years 1 (the party lasted too long)

Easter (we get away for the holidays) 2

Canada Day Long Weekend 1

Labor Day (need to get away before school starts) 2

Thanksgiving (we visit family) 1
School closing (kids need a break) 1
School reopens (one last weekend while the weather is good) 1
Family reunions (mine & wife's) 3
Time changes (spring & fall) 2
Sleep late (stayed up too long Saturday night) 9
Deaths in family 2
Sickness (one per family member) 5
Business trip 1
Vacations (weekends and summer) 6
Bad weather (ice, snow, rain, clouds) 2
Kid's sports 4
Unexpected company (can't walk out) 2
Anniversary 1
Specials on TV (Superbowl, etc) 3

Pastor, that leaves two Sundays per year. So, you can count on us to be in church on the 4th Sunday in February and the 3rd Sunday in August, unless we are providentially hindered.

Sincerely,

A dedicated church member

- The writer to the Hebrews is saying to us, ***“Do not be like that. Do not neglect meeting together. Discipline yourself with your time and work. Do whatever it takes to make sure that you not fall into the trap of neglecting the corporate life of the church.”***

“AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME”

- **(SHOW SLIDE 6) Third, Christians are to make a habit of meeting together. READ 25 - not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.**
 - Meeting together should not be sporadic. It is to be a defining feature of our lives. In fact, it should be strike us as very odd when a person does not show up in the corporate life events of the church.
 - Let me ask you, ***“Would it strike people as odd if you were missing from corporate meetings?”*** If not, this verse is for you.
- I hear Christians all the time say they want to be like Jesus and yet they hardly show up even for Sunday worship. Donald Whitney writes,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 7) “Do you want to be like Jesus? Do you realize that Jesus made it His regular practice to attend the public worship of God?...Luke 4:16, ‘And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day’ . . . If Jesus believed that participating in public worship was that important, so should we.”¹**
 - So let me ask you, ***“Would you say it is your custom, your habit, your pattern, your routine, to participate in the corporate life of the church?”***
- Now that is the thesis. It must be the habit of every Christian to participate in the corporate life of the church.
 - But we would be totally missing the point if we took this as some rule that God is just imposing us and that we have to follow because he said so. As we come to part 2 the writer to the Hebrews wants us to see that all of this is for our own joy.
 - So let’s move now to part 2 of the message: **(SHOW SLIDE 8) Part 2: Becoming persuaded by the reasons.** There are two reasons, one positive and the other negative. Really, they are just two sides of one coin.

¹ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*, 20-21.

THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- **(SHOW SLIDE 9) Reason 1: Habitual participation in the corporate life of the church puts us on the path of spiritual growth.**
 - The church is the means to grow you to be like Jesus Christ.
 - As we make it a habit to gather corporately we are putting ourselves on the path of spiritual growth which is the path of our greatest joy.
- Where do I see this in the text? I see it in the connection between verses 19-24 and verse 25. **READ 19-21** - ¹⁹**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,** ²⁰**by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,** ²¹**and since we have a great priest over the house of God.** Now since this is true - in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, at least three things are to happen:
 - First, we are each invited to draw near to God, to intimate relationship with Him, to joy in His presence. **READ 22** - **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**
 - Second, in verse 23 we are called to persevere and hold fast to Christian truth in this constantly shifting world. **READ 23** - **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.**
 - Third, we are called to stir each other up to love and good works. **READ 24** - **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.**
- But here is the question: how are you to do this? How do you grow deep in your relationship with God? How do you persevere in Christian truth and hope in a culture where truth is relative? How do you learn to love and live a God-pleasing life?
 - Clearly this text is saying that you cannot grow in all of these things by yourself. It is saying these things will not just happen on their own. No, what is the means by which you grow?
 - **“Let us not give up meeting together.”** The means to spiritual growth is in faithfully attending and engaging in the corporate life of the church. Notice the corporate language here - **“let us.”**
- It is only as we come together that we are challenged, encouraged, and helped to grow, and persevere in the hope of the gospel.
 - Commentator Donald Guthrie puts it like this: **“Close and regular fellowship with other believers is not just a nice idea, but an absolute necessity for the encouragement of Christian values.”**²

A FIERY SERMON

- A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a very cold evening and the pastor found the man alone at home, sitting in front of a blazing fire.
 - Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. The silence continued for some time.
- After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a blazing hot piece of wood and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still not saying a word.
 - The fire on the wood slowly died down. Then the glow and heat of the coal diminished until it was a dead and cold. Still, not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting.
 - Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead piece of wood and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Within seconds of touching the coals around it, the piece of wood began to glow and then it burst into flames.

² Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews*, 216.

- As the pastor prepared to leave, his host said, **“Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I will be back in church next Sunday.”**
- So why should you habitually participate in the corporate life of the church?
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 - Because this is one of the primary means that God has given to grow you into spiritual maturity. It is for your joy and your growth. The second reason is the flip side of the first.

THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL DISASTER

- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) Reason 2: Habitual neglect of the corporate life of the church puts us on the path of spiritual disaster.**
 - The great concern of the writer here is that he sees spiritual erosion beginning to take place in the lives of his readers. Their hearts are growing cold, they are not following Christ as closely as they should. They were missing out on great blessing and flirting with spiritual disaster.
 - Oh listen to this warning brothers and sisters because our generation is in the same position.
- If you read the rest of this chapter you discover that these Christians had started out very well in their Christian life. But now they are in danger of falling away. They need to learn how to persevere over the long haul.
 - The same thing is stated back in chapter 3:12: **(SHOW SLIDE 11) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**
 - An unbelieving heart is one that turns away from God. One of the greatest battles we face as Christians is the war on unbelief. Unbelief means we stop trusting in God, stop loving him. We start to believe that sin and this world will satisfy us more than God. This is a very real temptation for all of us. We must ask then, **“How do we fight against a heart of unbelief that turns away from God?”**
 - The answer is in verse 13. **(SHOW SLIDE 12) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** We need each other. But what is the context for this exhorting of one another? The exact same word is used in our passage in chapter 10: **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.**
 - Our corporate meetings and corporate life together as a church is the primary means by which we each receive encouragement.
- We desperately need each other. We need the encouragement of the church. If we isolate ourselves, are hardly around each other, neglect corporate worship, and corporate life, we place ourselves on a path where our hearts grow hard and we fall into unbelief.
 - To neglect this is like a soldier, in hostile territory, thinking he can leave his platoon and survive on his own. He may do just fine for a little while but he won’t survive very long.
 - He won’t know where it is safe to be. He won’t be aware of enemy traps. He won’t have the encouragement of others when things turn bad. He will be totally outgunned when he encounters the enemy. And if he gets wounded there won’t be anyone to help. A lone soldier is most likely a dead soldier.
- May I share my heart with you for a minute. One of the most discouraging parts of my 16 years as a pastor is watching Christians whom I love wander off from the church and end up badly wounded or shot.
 - I have watched this play out over and over. None of them do this intentionally. They just start to drift away. They’re too busy. They lack commitment. They use their weekends for all kinds of other things like camping, kids’ sports, athletic races, homework, or just sleeping in.
 - It all seems easy to justify at the beginning but slowly their hearts grow cold. Many fall into obvious sins they never would have done before. Marriages start to fall apart. Some end up rejecting Christ entirely. Others say they are Christians but their lives look

- exactly the same as their non-Christians friends. I have never met a rock solid mature Christian who lived their Christian life on their own.
- On the flipside, the strongest and most mature Christians are always those who are utterly committed the corporate life of the church.
 - They are well trained. They know God. They know where the enemy's traps are set. When they fight battles with sin they do it with the added firepower of their brothers and sisters fighting alongside them. When life on the front line is discouraging they don't quit because their fellow soldiers are there to encourage them. When they do get wounded, they have others to dress their wounds and carry them back to safety.
 - All of this is about your own spiritual growth. It is about your joy. It is about defeating the sin in your life. It is about enabling you to persevere in the battle so you can enjoy an eternity of glory in the presence of Christ.
 - Have you not experienced the joy of what we are talking about? How many times have you come to church with your heart feeling dull and unfeeling towards God but by the end of the service you are ignited again? How many times have you not wanted to go to Community Group or a prayer meeting and yet come away so full of God. Have we not had worship services here where God has met us in ways that are unspeakable?
 - What would happen if you missed those services? You would have missed the blessing and the joy that came with them. This is about rules. This is about joy, growth, encouragement, and fullness of life.

CONCLUSION

- A man wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. He wrote, ***"I've gone for 50 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."***
 - This started a real controversy in the ***"Letters to the Editor"*** column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks with people writing back and forth. The whole thing stopped when one letter to the editor was printed.
 - It said, ***"I've been married for 50 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 55,000 meals for me. But for the life of me, I cannot recall hardly any of them. So I think I've wasted my time in eating and my wife has wasted her time in cooking them at all."***
- ***And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.***