

Why We Gather for Worship

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Will you join me as we come before our Father? Heavenly Father, what an awesome, awesome privilege it is to come and to meet with you and to draw near to you again this morning.

To encounter you, the living God. You, the one who made all the galaxies and the cosmos and the entire universe, God, beyond what we've even discovered.

You, who, God, know the secrets at the depths of the bottom of the oceans, God. Things we don't even know or haven't discovered. You, the creator, God, and you invite us to come and draw near and to encounter you.

God, it is an awesome privilege to come to you this morning. Thank you for sending Christ, our atoning sacrifice, to die in our place that we can draw near to you, that we can know you and know your love for us.

Father, where could we find such a love as yours? Where could we find such a faithful God? Where could we go to find a life like you give us? You, God, are what our hearts truly need, and in you we find rest.

[1 : 06] In you, God, we see the world correctly. In you, we see ourselves correctly. Our fears and our concerns don't evaporate, but they're tempered, they're reduced, they are mitigated in the presence of your awesomeness.

God, we've come to find hope for tomorrow, even in the midst of the confusion of today. And so we gather to be reminded of our unwavering hope that is in you. Father, this morning we also confess our many sins to you.

Those that we are aware of, those, God, that we are unaware of, we acknowledge, God, just how much of our lives are consumed with self, living for our own glory rather than you, looking to ourselves rather than you.

Father, forgive us, we pray. Thank you for communion. What a beautiful act and demonstration it is of your amazing grace. And God, as we come to your word this morning, we pray that you'll wash us in the gospel.

Open our eyes to see you freshly, to be in awe of you and to trust you. Pray, God, for the next half an hour as we come to your word, that you really will, Spirit of God, take the words on these pages and apply it to our hearts.

[2 : 12] Father, we continue to pray for our city this morning and the unrest we're currently experiencing. Oh, God, give us profound wisdom to know how to live as salt and light in the midst of this.

Father, we confess we don't know how to respond. At times we feel angry. At times we feel confused. At times we feel frightened. At times we feel boldened. Father, forgive us where our hearts' attitudes have dishonored you.

God, where we've not glorified or worshipped your name, whether with our words, with our thoughts, or what we have or haven't done. Glorious God, we do ask you for a solution to the current situation, for people to find each other, to be able to talk.

We pray for soft hearts. We pray for humility. We pray for peace to prevail in our city. Come and do it, God. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

God, we pray for every Hong Konger this morning. Every foreigner. Pray for everyone from across Asia. Mainland Chinese, Singaporeans, Indonesians, Hong Kongers, Japanese.

[3 : 25] Pray for everyone that calls the city home. Come and wash our hearts in your peace, we pray, Lord. Lord, we pray these things, Lord Jesus, in your majestic and your comforting name.

Amen. Amen. Let's listen to God's word being read to us this morning. Thanks, Karen and Pui. The scripture reading comes from Hebrews chapter 10.

Please follow along in your bulletins or on the screen. For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins. But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year.

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

[4 : 50] In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.

When he said above, You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings. These are offered according to the law.

Then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will, We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us, for after saying, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord.

[6 : 13] I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. Then he adds, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. When there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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.

For if we go on sinning deliberately, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

[7 : 58] For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

For Yet a little while, and the coming one will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

[9 : 06] This is the Word of God. Is this on? Great. Thanks, Karen. I know that was a long passage, so thank you for reading it so well.

Okay, this morning, we are starting a three-week preaching series called Why Worship? And we are looking at the question, why it is that Christians gather on Sundays, the first day of the week, to sing songs, and listen to a sermon, and take communion together, and listen to God's Word being read to us.

Why do Christians do this? Why do we gather on Sundays? I'm sure many of us have heard people say, maybe you yourself have even said it, maybe you currently would say, that, you know, I believe in Jesus, I'm fine with Jesus, but the church, I don't see why I need to go to church.

Maybe as we think about that question, why do we gather on Sundays, week in and week out, I wonder what answers come to your mind. Why do you think we gather?

Maybe you think the reason we meet each week is because we need to be inspired and motivated to go out into the week and live moral upstanding lives, to be good citizens, and church is a good place to do that, to teach us the morals.

[10 : 27] Maybe you think that the reason we gather is to hear an interesting or entertaining talk, something philosophical, some psychology or spirituality, something to entertain our minds that are intellectually stimulating.

Maybe it's a moral prep talk to encourage us to be better people. For those of you that are on youth, why do your parents drag you to church each Sunday?

Maybe that's a question you've been asking them recently. So the next few weeks, we're going to look at this question. Why is it that for 2,000 years, Christians of every culture, every ethnicity, in every corner of the globe, have gathered week in and week out, just as we're doing today, and why it is that believers have seen this as one of the great privileges and great responsibilities of being a follower of Jesus?

Now, in order to think about this question, we need to actually think about another question before that. And we need to first answer the question, what is the Christian faith all about?

What is the essence, the most fundamental part of the gospel and the Christian faith? Because once we have clarity on that, we can then understand why it is that God instructs Christians not to abandon this weekly practice of gathering together.

[11 : 44] And in our passage that Karen and Pui read to us today, the passage Hebrews 10 actually answers both of those questions with real clarity. In the first half, it explains to us what is the gospel?

What is the Christian message all about? And then secondly, it's going to say in light of that, why we should gather as Christians weekly on Sundays, okay? So that's where we are going today. Now, today I have three or four points somewhere around there. I had originally had three points, but as I woke up this morning, I'm actually going to make them four points.

And so this is a little bit out, but I'm sure you can follow with me. The first one is this, Jesus, our only hope. Secondly, the gospel for all of life. Okay, that's kind of point one there.

Thirdly, a gospelizing community. I know the word gospelizing isn't a real word. We kind of made it up here, but anyway. And then fourthly, how to come to church, okay? So Jesus, our only hope, a gospel for all of life, a gospelizing community, how to come to church.

[12 : 48] So let's dive in. Firstly, Jesus, our only hope. This morning, we're looking at Hebrews chapter 10. And the context of Hebrews is this. The writer of this book of the Bible, we actually don't know who it is.

Some writer, we've never figured it out who wrote this book, but he's writing to a bunch of Jewish Christians. That's why it's called the book of Hebrews. And he's writing to explain to these Jewish Christians how Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of everything that God did and said and promised to his covenant people, the nation of Israel, in the Old Testament.

And he's showing them how all of the major stuff in the Old Testament, part of the Jewish Hebrew faith, the narratives, the law of Moses, the pictures, the signs, the symbols, the sacrifices, all of that is actually a foretaste or a sample or a sign which is all pointing towards Jesus.

Okay, so here's an example. In our family, we like to have people around for dinner. And Claire, my wife, is an amazing cook. And so let's say it's a Saturday evening and some friends are coming around for dinner.

I know Saturday afternoon and evening, Claire's going to be in the kitchen preparing a whole lot of different dishes. And so what do I love to do?

[14:11] I love to go into the kitchen and just sample the various things, right? Try a bit of this and a bit of this and nibble on that. I love it. Now in some ways, that's what's happening here.

The author is saying, don't you see how everything, the sacrifices and the high priest and the temple, all these things in the Old Testament and especially the law of Moses are like a sample. They're like a foretaste of the real thing that's to come, which is Jesus. They are all showing us in sample form what God is doing in the world. And what is God doing in the world?

He's establishing His rule and His reign. In other words, His kingdom. He is vanquishing or destroying His enemies, including Satan and sin, and He's establishing His kingdom on the earth. But all of that ultimately happens in Jesus. You see, the rites of Hebrews isn't saying, hey, we once thought Judaism was right, but now we've seen Christianity was right, and so I'm asking you to switch religions.

[15:14] That's not what He's asking you to do. He's saying, everything you've heard and seen and understood as you've read your Jewish Bible is good and true and right, but it's all pointing.

It's a signpost. It's a foretaste of the real thing, which is Jesus. And so for 10 chapters, He has been making this point. And so let's see how He gets there as He climaxes His arguments in chapter 10. Look at verse 1. He says, For since the law of Moses is but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, they can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year in and year out, make perfect those who draw near.

Verse 3. For in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins, but it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. So what is this thing that the law of Moses in sample form could tell us about, could give us a foretaste of, but couldn't actually deliver in substance?

Well, He tells us here. It could not take away our sin. It could show us the problem of sin. It could show us how we need a solution and we need a Savior, but it could not solve our problem.

[16:30] It could not make us righteous before God, those who adhere or obey the law. You see, friends, this is the heart of the Bible's message. At the heart of the Bible is this message that as human beings we have this problem.

And it's a problem that we can't solve on ourselves, by ourselves. And the problem He describes here in verse 4 is that we have this debt of sin. And the problem with sin is far-reaching.

It means the God who made us for relationship with Him, to know Him, and to love Him, and to walk with Him, and to be close to Him, and to find our hope and our rest and our peace in Him, we now no longer know Him, but we're actually under His judgment.

We're under His wrath. And we are cut off from His grace, and cut off from knowing Him and knowing His relationship. But not only that, remember how Augustine said, the problem with sin is that it disorders the loves in our hearts.

And so when we were made to know God and love Him and find our rest and our confidence in Him, now suddenly we love and trust and find our confidence in created things and things around us, our reputation, our jobs, our careers, our children, our bank accounts, ultimately in ourselves.

[17:44] Augustine said, sin caused us to be curved in on ourselves, to look inward and to look to ourselves for our hope. And friends, this is the problem with the world and this is the problem with my world.

And I'm telling you, chances are I think it's the problem with your world. You see, the problem with my world isn't political or economic or family issues. Those things are difficult. That's true.

But the main problem with my world is that I'm so self-centered. I'm self-orientated. My heart is curved in on myself. My life, my heart has been corrupted by this cancer of sin.

And I now love and serve and hope and trust in myself. I saw this a little while ago. Claire and I were having a difficult, I guess a difficulty with a family member, an extended family member.

And I felt like this family member was being very unreasonable to us. And they were accusing us of things that we thought we hadn't done. And it was a little bit difficult and tense.

[18:44] And the more unreasonable this person was being towards us, the more frustrated and irritated and upset and even angry I was getting towards this person.

And so I would, when I was alone at night, I would think about the conversation we had and I'd play it over in my mind. And then I would play an imaginary conversation in my mind what would happen the next time I see them.

They're going to say this and then I'm going to say this and then they're going to say this and then I'm going to nail them with this. Does that sound familiar? Sounds like I'm not the only one that's done that.

And so I was in the midst of all this and the one day I went for a prayer walk and as I was praying about it I just realized how my self-righteousness and my sense of superiority, my sense of moral superiority was actually exasperating and contributing towards the problem.

You see, yeah, sure there's difficulties but it's my own self-righteousness that was actually making things even worse. Remember how Salman Rushdie in one of his novels said, the barbarians weren't just at the gates they were in our skins.

[19 : 54] The problem isn't just out there it's in here it's in my life and friends it's in your life as well. And so God in the Old Testament he gives his people these signs and these symbols and these pictures to show them the problem of sin and the need for forgiveness but the problem is the pictures and the signs can't actually do what they need.

And so verse 3 says these sacrifices there's a reminder of sin but it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to actually take away sin. And yet this is where the astonishingly good news of the gospel comes in because of God's radical love for us.

He didn't leave us to our own devices. He didn't leave us to ourselves but he came to us in the person of Jesus. He died on the cross. He took our sin upon himself so that we can be washed free so that we can be set free because of him.

But friends Jesus didn't only die to save us from the penalty of our sin but also from the power of sin. Look at how the writer says this in verse 11 if you've got your bulletin with you.

He says this under the old covenant every priest would stand daily at the service offering repeated the same sacrifices which can never take away sin.

[21 : 08] There's our problem again. But verse 12 when God when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins dying on the cross rising again ascending to the heavens he sat down at the right hand of God the Father until his enemies should become his footstools for his feet.

See the author here is giving us this amazing picture that Jesus dies he ascends to heaven and then what does he do? He sits down he's at rest he's completed his job.

You see friends Jesus isn't in heaven today running around scurrying to and fro trying to juggle a billion prayer requests and hoping he doesn't drop any balls hoping like mad that things in Hong Kong work out and in America work out and that at the end of the day his kingdom will finally be established.

No friends what did he do? When he got to heaven the author says he sat down job done having accomplished what he set out to do having established his kingdom and destroyed his enemies he sat down job done.

Remember that song we sometimes sing in this church when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within upward I look and see him there who made an end to all my sin.

[22 : 33] And so when Jesus is on the cross he cries out it is finished it is paid in full or as our verse 11 says here when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down.

And so friends what that means is that if you are in Christ and you've surrendered to him and you've come to him it means your sin has been totally dealt with your record of sin has been done away with it is finished your debt is paid in full your sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west or as Malachi says they've been thrown into the depths of the sea never to be recovered again.

It means friends that if you are in Christ you have no reason to ever feel unworthy unloved unlovable ever again because Christ has dealt with your sins totally and utterly forever.

except if you're anything like me when I look at my life something doesn't feel quite right about that because on the one hand the Bible says Christ deals with our sin it's completely done with he is perfected for all time I stand before God the Father perfect because of Jesus but as I look into my own heart I see that I'm very far from perfect there's all sorts of rubbish in my heart there's defensiveness there's judgmentalism there's self-moralism and superiority and so what do we do with this dichotomy on one hand the gospel says you are washed you are clean you are sanctified but on the other hand the gospel says you're still a work in progress how do we deal with this dichotomy and that leads us to the second point which is that the gospel doesn't just save us for eternity the gospel is for all of life look at how the writer says this in verse 14 this is one of the most important verses to understand the Christian life look at what he says he says for by a single

offering

God has perfected or Christ has perfected for all time those who are busy being sanctified the word sanctified means to be made holy to be made righteous to be cleansed to be made like Jesus so here we see by a single offering by a single sacrifice Christ has perfected for all time holy in Christ's sight those who are busy being sanctified or another translation says those who are busy being made perfect you see that on one hand Christ's sacrifice makes me righteous before God but on the other hand God is still at work in my heart and making me more like Jesus and friends this is the Christian life this is the hope of the gospel that Jesus deals with our status before God but he's also at work in our hearts that slowly sometimes too slowly in my own life very slowly over time my heart starts to look like him and so look at how he says this in verse 15 and 16 he says for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified this is as the Holy Spirit said this is the covenant

[25 : 52] I will make with them I will put my laws into their hearts and I will write them on my minds and remember their sins no more now here's the question how does this actually happen how does God do this how does God grow us and mature us and to make us more like Jesus because friends you can be a follower of Jesus for 30 years and still be a baby Christian just you know length of time doesn't necessarily equate to maturity so how does God actually grow us and mature us and to sanctify us and to make us more like Jesus and the answer is this it happens as we see with the eyes of our hearts the glory and the beauty and the majesty of Jesus as we are humbled by his awesomeness and as we turn to him in faith and repentance in other words as we see who Christ is and the gospel gets deeper into our hearts and in light of God we recognize our sinfulness and we turn to him in faith and repentance

God actually reorientates the orders of our hearts and makes our hearts to become more like Jesus he sanctifies us and grows us and works in us so let me give you an example when we experience a conflict in our lives okay so let's say you've got a family member like a little while ago I had and someone who challenges you and they accuse you of things and they are unreasonable what happens in our lives well if you're anything like me you feel defensive you start to justify ourselves we start to think about what they've done wrong we maximize their wrongdoing and we minimize our own wrongdoing now why do I do that what's going on in my heart why do I do that the reason I do that and the reason friends possibly why most of us do that is because I'm trying to find my justification in the fact that I'm not such a bad person I'm trying to make myself feel good about myself because I'm not secure in the love of Christ

I don't like the fact that I'm a sinner but that Christ's love is enough for me and so I'm trying to feel good about myself and find my justification in the fact that though I'm not perfect at least I'm not as bad as those people down there does that make sense and so what do I need I need to see Christ I need to be humbled by his awesomeness and I need to come to him in faith and repentance and as I do that Christ works and softens my heart so that actually I approach that person with a completely different spirit I see that actually maybe they are not the problem after all maybe I'm the problem and friends we do this in a million ways we do this with our kids we do it with our career we do it with finances we look to all sorts of things to justify us but the hope of the gospel is that Jesus doesn't just wipe our slate clean and give us a second chance he's actually at work in our lives and he's changing us to make us more like him friends the gospel isn't just that Jesus says I'll pay your debts and now you pull yourself back together again the gospel is a power that not only saves us but it sanctifies us believing in Christ and the gospel not only forgives us of our debt it changes our hearts to become more like him as we see the majesty of Jesus and believe in him and that's why friends as a church we make such a big deal of the gospel it's why everything we do is centered on this centered on the wonder of the gospel because loving and trusting and hoping in Jesus is not only the way into the kingdom of life it's also the way of the kingdom of life it's not only the way by which you become a Christian it's the way by which you grow as a Christian it's not just the way that you get saved it's the way to be sanctified learning to live by faith in Jesus and his gospel the fact that you and I are sinners but we are loved by God and he joyfully and willingly died for us that's the Christian life that's what the whole

Bible is all about that's what it means to be a Christian and so that's why in the New Testament Paul writes to the Romans these bunch of people that are Christians and he says I can't wait to come to you so that I can preach the gospel to you why does he need to preach the gospel to them they're already Christians because as the gospel gets deeper into our hearts that's how we live out the

gospel that's how we become the people God's called us to be that's why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians and he says to this gospel community he says at the end of the letter now brothers I thought I'd just take a few minutes just to remind you of the gospel why does he need to remind them because if they're going to become the people that God's called them to be they need to be reminded day in day out of the gospel now all that brings us to the question what does this have to do with Christians gathering on Sundays okay all that's by way of introduction now let's finally start the sermon okay not really point three why do we gather on Sundays the reason we gather is because we are a gospelizing community in other words the essence of what the church does is that we wash each other with the gospel week in and week out let's look at verse 19 to 25 together look at what the writer's going to say here he's going to say therefore in light of everything we've said for ten and a half chapters in light of who Jesus is and how he died on the cross to save us and to forgive us in light of the fact that he has perfected for all time those he is busy perfecting therefore let us xyz okay so as we read this look out for where he says therefore let us okay let's read verse 19 together he says this therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of

Jesus verse 21 and since we have a great high priest over the house of God that's Jesus let us draw near to God with a true heart and full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water let us secondly hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering knowing that he who promised is faithful and thirdly let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day of Christ approaching okay did you see that he said therefore in light of the fact that Christ is at work he's busy sanctifying us Jesus has died for our sins but he's also died to change our hearts and he's making us more like him therefore let us draw near to God let us hold fast to the hope of the gospel but thirdly let us stir up and encourage one another how so how should we do that verse 25 by not neglecting to meet together as some people do but to encourage one another and all the more as we see the day of Christ approaching you see friends why do Christians gather every single week yes we gather to worship that's true but worship isn't just singing songs remember how in Corinthians

[33 : 25] Paul says let everything you do be worship whether you're eating dumplings or drinking bubble tea or you're going to work or you are proposing to your girlfriend let everything you do be an act of worship so we come to church to worship but not just that's not the only reason we come we come to be blown away by the wonder of the gospel and who Christ is so that as we go into the week Monday to Friday we can live lives of worship we can go to the office as an act of worship we can engage with our colleagues as an act of worship we can serve the poor and help out and love our neighbors as an act of worship you see friends if you and I are going to become anything like the men or the women that God has called us to be you and I need to be living from the security of the gospel and we need to be living out the gospel day by day seven days a week but you know what the gospel leaks it leaks from our hearts and so on Sunday you come to church and you're washed in the gospel and you're secure in who Christ is and his love for you and then on Monday morning you wake up and you've got to get the kids ready for school and you're ready for work or you've got an assignment to hand in and you go off and by Monday lunchtime your boss is shouting at you and a client is upset with you and suddenly you're getting a little bit worried and anxious that things aren't as good as you thought they were and by Wednesday the stock market has crashed and you're seeing your wealth come down and you're pulling your hair out and by Friday you've done something wrong

I don't have much hair to pull out but if you're a female you're pulling your hair out and by Friday you've said something dumb to somebody or you looked at something you shouldn't have looked at or you lied to somebody and you feel like God hates you and he could never love you friends in that moment what do you need when you come to church on Sunday I'll tell you what you don't need you don't need a pep talk or a motivational or inspiration talk saying you can be a better person you don't need some inspiration telling you how to look after yourself or five ways to make your life successful what you and I need friends is to be washed by the incredible gospel that yes we sinners but Christ loves us and he loves us so much that he went to the cross for us and even this week things are going to go wrong again but he still loves you because his love for you isn't based on what's in your heart it's based on what's in his heart for you we need to be washed in the gospel

friends every week we are washed by an anti-gospel message every week in our city we are told that God helps those who help themselves we live in a extreme meritocracy don't we in Hong Kong you get ahead by working hard and being richly rewarded and if you do the right things and you don't mess up

Hong Kong says your life will be a success friends every week we are told an anti-gospel message that our hope for the world is found in political solutions economic solutions or academic grades friends that is a false gospel it is a false hope and unless you and I are washed in the true gospel the cultural waters in which we swim are going to change our thinking and change the way we approach life friends we need to come and find our hope in Jesus again friends what happens when things go wrong in our life the child is diagnosed with some disease you lose your job a spouse is unfaithful to you what happens when things go right in your life you make a billion dollars and you've got more money than you know what to deal with what happens when your picture is on the front cover of all the business magazines the front page of the newspaper and you're heralded at a success what's going to stop you getting proud and arrogant what's going to stop you thinking that you're better than others friends we need to be washed in the gospel week in and week out and so the writer of the Hebrews after spending ten chapters describing the length and the breadth and the fullness and the height and the wonder of the glory of the gospel

Jesus' death on his cross and our hope in life and death says this therefore do not neglect to meet together but gather and encourage one another and all the more as you see the day of Christ approaching three or four weeks five weeks ago you might remember we preached the book of Habakkuk and we got to Habakkuk chapter three and the final verses of Habakkuk chapter three are this incredible prayer where Habakkuk says God even if the fig tree fails if the vines produce no harvest if the storehouses are empty if the trees are bare if the cattle are lost and everything is going wrong in other words if everything in my life is stripped from me I will still rejoice in you I will take joy in the God of my salvation and we looked at that passage together and that Sunday night after we looked at that I was alone and I thought to myself I don't know if I could say that

I know that's a bad thing for a preacher to say but I thought to myself I mean I want to be able to say that but if everything was stripped from my life man I get grumpy just when like a little bit gets stripped from me never mind everything but I want to be that person I want to be able to say God I'll trust you no matter what things happen to my family I'll trust you I want to be able to say that but I'm not there and that Sunday night I realized you know what I need you and friends you need me because the way we get the gospel deeper into our hearts isn't just by living individualistic isolated lives we get into a gospel community that can wash us week in and week out with the gospel and so that song when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within I need someone else I need you to lift my eyes to see him who's seated on the throne who has dealt with all my sin I need to be washed in the gospel and so do you and I so practically how do we do that well

[39 : 46] I'm so glad you asked that question if you I want you to grab your bulletin we are almost done grab your bulletin and you'll see as you open it up on the top left hand corner we've got an order of service we've called it the flow of worship and you'll see there are three main parts to our Sunday worship service the first is adoring God it's where we fix our eyes on God the second part is being renewed by the gospel and then thirdly response and commitment and so the way we've actually ordered our Sunday worship service is that we follow the gospel narrative we don't just come to church and do three nice songs and interesting talk and then go home we actually follow the gospel narrative we start off by fixing our eyes on God adoring Him and so the song leaders actually choose songs that start off with us fixing our eyes on the majesty and the glory of God remember this morning we sang how great thou art this is who you are we sang of the wonder of who God is and then having seen God we move into a time of being washed in the gospel of acknowledging our sinfulness and we do that through prayer we do that through communion of acknowledging the fact that we don't have it all together and then we are washed in the hope of the gospel that despite that

God loves us and we do that through listening to the sermon and listening to the scripture reading and sometimes taking communion after the sermon and then after that we sing response songs and then we say a benediction which sends us out to go and live out the gospel into our city in the week maybe one way of saying it is that each week we gather in order to sing the gospel and preach the gospel and hear the gospel and pray the gospel and see the gospel acted out in communion and so one practical thing in that regard is what it means is if if you do happen to come late to church I

know that doesn't happen in this church I'm just saying the church down the road it means that if we happen to walk in here at 1045 and we come straight into a time of communion and we're acknowledging our sin we haven't first seen the wonder of God in a few years and so we walk straight into the service saying yes God I'm a sinner but it's hard to confess sin without first having seen the majesty of God and so actually the way we order our service is with intentionality it takes a gospel flow finally last point is this how do we come to church how do we actually come to church well I want to just tell us two brief things first thing is this come to church with your heart prepared I know that in Hong Kong culturally Sundays is a little bit of a lazy day right it's the one day of the week some people get to sleep in traditionally people go for breakfast with families and Sunday mornings and I understand this and so it's really easy for us just to kind of roll into church like we half on holiday but I want to encourage us not to do that and the reason is because we're coming to encounter the living God and so the best way to do that is actually to prepare our hearts to meet with God you know imagine you invited by some world dignitary the queen of England or some president of a country to meet with them if that was me friends we probably wouldn't roll into Buckingham Palace you know a little bit late sleep in our eyes yawning yo queen sorry just excuse me I'm just getting ready if that was me I would get there early I'd be ready I'd be prepared I would be thinking about what I'm going to say friends every Sunday we come to encounter the king of the universe the glorious majestic God and the best way to come is our hearts prepared and one of the best ways to do that is to actually spend time on Sunday morning in the scriptures and in prayer when I was younger

I used to think Sunday is the one day I don't need to have a devotional got like an hour devotional here right but actually I know somebody that every Sunday wakes up and just spends a few minutes praying through the Psalms just one or two Psalms it's not deep Bible study it's not in depth study but it's preparing our hearts that when we come to church we're ready to encounter God from the get go come with an expectation here's another practical thing as you come down the ramp into Ebenezer as you leave Pocfulum Road whether you're walking down the ramp or you're driving just pray a prayer say God I need you today I'm coming to meet with you God come and wash me in the gospel today I pray I need you really practical way here's a second practical thing so first thing is come to church with your heart prepared secondly come to Sunday worship ready to encourage and serve remember how our passage it says this because of the richness of the gospel let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds not neglecting to meet together but rather encouraging one another one of the greatest things that you can do for your fellow brother and sister is to come to church ready to bless them and love them and serve them

Colin Marshall is an Australian writer and he writes this he says church is a gathering of God's people to hear his word and respond in faith and obedience in this gathering we are a fellowship with each other through the blood of Jesus and because of our fellowship we seek to serve each other we use our gifts and our abilities to strengthen one another and to build Christ's church all believers are involved in building the church not just the leaders the new testament consistently teaches that in the growth of the body of Christ each part must do its work because of this we aren't to see ourselves merely as a part of an organization called Watermark Community Church but as servants of God's people eager to meet the needs of others even if it means sacrificing our own in many ways because we're part of a family I know that most of us and actually Watermark is probably one of the best churches I've ever encountered in terms of numbers of people serving it's incredible I think almost everyone is serving but sometimes we can think that serving means just joining the sound team or joining kids ministry or the pack up team and those things are good but I want to encourage us that serving means more than just being part of a roster or a volunteer team it actually just means showing up and so I want to encourage you every Sunday come to church with this attitude today I'm going to bless and strengthen and encourage someone today I'm going to pray for someone today I'm going to help point someone's eyes to

[46 : 27] Jesus and wash someone in the gospel and so all that requires that we come to church ready prepared early ready to meet God and encourage each other as we come to a close let me close with this the final section Hebrews chapter 10 we're not going to look at it too much but the author goes on to say he says believers don't you realize that as followers of Jesus it's almost definite that you're going to encounter suffering and persecution and he says remember the time when you first trusted in Jesus you had your property taken away from you and you joyfully accepted it because you realized you had a better inheritance one that can never be taken from you inheritance in Christ friends in this city and in our lifetime there are going to be troubles and there

are going to be reasons to lose hope there's going to be challenges there's going to be suffering there may even be persecution friends what you and I don't need is a motivational talk what we don't need is a pep talk an inspiration telling us to be nicer people friends when the furnace of life comes when the storms of life come or when abundance and prosperity comes what you and I need to know is that the

God of heaven is in control of all things and he has our lives in our hands and that he loves us and he's for us because Jesus died on the cross for us friends we need to be humbled by his awesomeness and built up in his love we need to be washed again and again and again in the good news of the gospel and that's why we gather on Sundays let's pray together I want to invite the band up and let me pray for us and then I'll invite anyone that particularly wants prayer to come and join us heavenly father we confess god that the gospel leaks from our hearts father we confess there are moments when we are so in awe of you and so astounded by you that we say things like god I'll do anything for you I'll go anywhere you want god you have my life and yet just a couple of days and weeks later god we find ourselves so consumed with ourself and our own agendas father we need you we find ourselves from time to time overwhelmed god by the hopelessness that seems to pervade us father lift our eyes again we pray god as we come to you as we draw near to you as we sing these songs of worship and adoration god open the eyes of our hearts to see you open our eyes to see where our true hope lies christ come and wash us in your love we pray come and humble us with your majesty and build us up in your love we pray christ come and have your way amen doing you you you you you