

Why Do We... Gather on Sundays?

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[0 : 01] Today's passage is from Hebrews 10. Starting in verse 19, we read, 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 his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near 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 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.

This is the word of God. Thank you. Amen. Thank you so much, David. That's great. Welcome. Good morning. Okay, that's passable.

Good morning. My name is Chris. If you don't know me, I'm actually super excited to just be back gathering physically. Obviously, many of you know that we're going to be leaving in about a month or so time, so we were...

I am so excited that we can actually be here physically to see each other, even to say goodbye in the next month. But this morning, we are actually going to get into God's word, into what is actually an amazing passage.

[1 : 21] But I would love us to pray together as we come and really get into God's word. Father, just thank you for the incredible privilege that we can be your people here gathered this morning.

Thank you. Whether we're here or whether we're watching online, Lord, I just thank you that you have drawn us to yourself. We didn't come because we were great. We didn't come because we somehow earned the right to be here.

We came only because of a pure gift of grace. And I pray that you would just speak to our hearts this morning. I pray that you'd encourage us this morning. I pray that you teach us how to be your people, how to worship you, how to have our lives centered entirely on you.

And I pray, Lord, even in the midst of all the different challenges and changes and things that are going on in our city and our world, Lord, I pray that you just give us such a big vision of who you are, that we have a heart that is at rest in you, that we have a heart that knows that he who has promised is faithful to us and you are trustworthy.

So open our ears to hear your voice, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. When I was about 19 years old, I went through a period of about three months where every time I came to church, every sermon I listened to, I fell asleep in.

[2 : 53] And it got so bad that I remember one particular time that I was, you know, it's halfway through the sermon, like some of you may be even right now, and suddenly, you know, you feel the heaviness come on, right?

And you start kind of nodding. I think in Cantonese you say, do you? Don't you? Like fishing. You go fishing, right? You start nodding. And sitting next to me was this very, very proper English lady. She was very proper. And I could feel, and I was fighting, okay? But I was losing. And I could feel myself, and I was leaning over, and you know when you are very relaxed, you can start to drool and dribble.

And so I was leaning over, and suddenly I woke up, and I was almost in her lap, like this. And I wanted the whole ground to swallow me up, and I went back up.

And the amazing thing was, this lady next to me, she was the epitome of properness. She was like, keep calm and carry on. She didn't even blink an eye.

[4 : 03] But from that moment on, I never slept in another sermon. Now, why do I tell you this? I tell you this because I, as I look back, I was going to church regularly.

I had a habit of going to church. Even if it made me fall asleep, I still went. But actually, habits, though they are important, in fact, though that the spiritual life is actually shaped by forming godly habits, they're essential to us, the thing with habits that can be a problem is sometimes you can forget the why behind the what.

You can forget the very reason that you're coming. You can actually lose your why, and if you lose your why, you'll become dry, and maybe you'll end up falling asleep, whether physically or actually spiritually.

And sometimes we miss the life out of things that we do regularly because they've become ritual, and we need to recover the why so that these things which are supposed to bring us life do bring us life, as they're called to.

And so we're going through a series over the next four weeks just looking at some of the fundamentals of what we do as a church and why we do them. And today, I'm just going to start by looking at a question that in one sense should be a no-brainer.

[5 : 32] It's the question of why do we gather on Sundays? And as I've been looking at this, this has actually been very, like, just encouraging and challenging to my own heart through this.

And actually, we planned this series long before we actually got to meet physically. So actually, I'm super excited that we can talk about this today. So why do we gather on Sundays? Well, in brief, I want to say because there's a war on.

There's a war for your heart and for who you worship. There's a war for whose voice will be loudest in your ears. There's a war for which community will be your primary place of belonging.

And that can either be Christ or it can be something else out there, but there's a war on. And the book of Hebrews is written to a group of Christians, Jewish Christians, Christians, who their wider community around them was pressuring them to go back to the values and the practices of Judaism to leave Jesus behind.

And many were giving in to the pressure. And so they were going to the synagogue on the Saturday, but then they would skip worship with the Christian church together on the Sunday because there was just too much at stake for them.

[6 : 49] And you know, sometimes we can have similar pressures on us in our performance-driven, consumeristic, self-focused world. There is pressures on our hearts every single day and throughout our week.

And Hebrews is coming to tell his readers and to talk to us, he's saying, Jesus is better than everything else out there. Jesus is better than the Jewish system, the priest, the temple, everything there.

Jesus is the one who's really going to give you what your heart is longing for. It's the fulfillment of everything that is out there and people are longing for.

And one important part of fighting this battle for your heart is gathering together regularly as a church. And so I'm going to just look at this topic and we're going to go through the passage so I have it open in front of you in just two points.

First one, since in Jesus. And the second one, let us. Okay? We'll unpack those so you have an idea of what that's talking about. But since and let us.

[7 : 52] Okay? So, let me start off in verse 19. It says, Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living world, that he opened for us through the curtain, that is his flesh.

And since we have a great high priest over the house of God. And I'm going to stop there. This is an amazing verse. In fact, it's kind of recapping and picking up on something the author has been saying for over ten chapters.

And the last six, he's gone through the entire Jewish system of worship. And the system of worship right at the center was the temple. The temple, which was, and the representative, and the place that was at the center of the temple was the holy of holies.

The place where God's presence was said to dwell. Where heaven came down to earth. And there was this incredible heavenly hotspot of God's presence.

And he, as the creator of all things, is the source of life for his people. And his presence is where life is found. But security was tight to get in.

[9 : 15] You see, it was reserved, access was reserved only for those who reflected God's beauty and God's glory and God's purity who were perfect and holy themselves.

Because you don't allow muddy shoes on a pristine white carpet. And you don't allow muddy sinners into the presence of a gloriously pure and holy God.

And you would die if you did. And to prevent that from happening, there was a huge curtain which would separate people with two angelic bouncers on it.

They would prevent anybody else from entering into this holy of holies. only one person, the high priest, once a year could enter only after he's purified himself through offering sacrifices for his own sin, sprinkling the blood on his clothes as a sign of cleansing and washing himself completely to make him pure.

Only then he could walk in with an offering, a sacrifice, a substitution for the people's sin which was offered on the altar so that the forgiveness of God, the life of God could come and flow to his people again.

[10 : 35] And they'd repeat this every single year because it was just a temporary system. Because none of us are worthy to have access into the presence of God by ourselves.

None of us. because you know, about a month or so ago I received an invitation. It was an invitation to meet with the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and some other politicians, MPs, in the Houses of Parliament in London at the annual prayer breakfast there.

And as I got this invitation I felt some kind of a little bit of nervous like excitement. You know, I'm kind of trying to keep it calm because I'm British. But I'm kind of, you know, what a privilege to be in the presence of like important famous people.

Because I'm like a nobody, right? I'm just, you know, Chris. But there's one condition for this. I can only go into this place if my future MP, my future politician goes with me or I go with her.

She's my access to get into Boris' presence. And by the way, she hasn't replied to any of my emails because I think she's too busy or disinterested so I don't even know where I'm going to go.

[11 : 59] But Hebrews has been saying to us and is saying in this verse, we have one who isn't too busy for us, is not disinterested in us. We have one who the most sinful, the most shameful, the most unworthy people, through him have access into the presence of one who is far more important, far more influential, far more powerful than any politician, than any prime minister or presence.

We have access through Jesus into the presence of the very source of your life and breath right now, the one who holds the entire universe in his hands, God himself.

And he says, Jesus came as our perfect, sinless, great high priest and he became our sacrifice. He died our death and it says through Jesus' blood, his blood was sprinkled on our hearts to cleanse us, all those who put your faith in him, to cleanse us from every sin, to cleanse us from every stain, to cleanse us from everything which might come between you and God.

He's removed every barrier. We're counted righteous in Christ before him. We can enter through every layer of security but only if we're with Jesus, only if he's our Lord and Savior.

He is the access place which he's opened the door, he's opened the curtain into this holy place of the King of Kings. His sacrifice is enough for the Father to declare anyone who comes to him welcome.

[13 : 47] Anyone. You know, when Jesus died, that curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom. It didn't tear if I can speak, tear from bottom to top because it was God's initiative to break the curtain because we could never do it.

He moved towards us because his heart is for us and he wants to draw us into a relationship of intimacy in his presence together with him.

Which means, this verse says, since we have confidence, we can come confidently into the holy place.

That means there's no hoops to jump through. There's no trying to sell yourself with God. There's no trying to clean yourself up before you come before him because you cannot do it enough. Jesus has done it all for you.

You come confidently into the most holy place. But then he also says here in this verse, we come not just as individuals into the presence of God, we also come as a new family into the presence of God.

[14 : 56] Do you notice he says here, he says, therefore brothers, and he says, we have confidence into the holy place through the curtain. And then he says, since we have a great high priest over the house of God.

Do you know what the word house means? The house is basically the household. It's actually temple language. It's his church.

It's his people. We have one who didn't just come to bring us into his presence as individuals, but he died so that we had come to God not as guests but as family. together as his family.

And so the fruit of the gospel message is always the creation of worshiping communities who enjoy the presence of God together and can call one another brothers and sisters because of him.

We come since Jesus has done it all because of the gospel message we've gone from unworthy outsiders to family members welcomed into intimate fellowship with the king of kings through Jesus sacrifice and therefore the author of Hebrews says since that is the case that is the reality then he comes and says let us not let us let us and there are three let uses here in this passage he says firstly let us worship God together he says 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 now this is taking a lot of Old Testament language that Jewish language but the word for draw near is the word for worshippers who came into the temple to offer a sacrifice of worship to God you know we gather on Sundays to worship

[16 : 55] God we come with sacrifices not to earn God's approval not sacrifices of trying to do enough no sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise for all that he has done you see that doesn't just mean that we sing songs although it includes that it means that entire worship is and we give worth to God worship means to give worth to we give worth to God we center our lives and everything we do on him and the Sunday sermon encourages us to reorient our lives back to him that's actually why we have the call to worship together to call us back to reorient our lives to him and we do it together but I don't know why did you come this morning that's a good question I've been asking myself that you know they did a little survey in the US some pure research and they found that three of the four top reasons for Christians in the US going to church were these one to provide a moral foundation for my kids two to become a better person three for comfort in times of trouble those aren't bad reasons many of us might like to add to that because we like the community or because we like the preaching or because we like the music all of those things are legitimate in some way but if that's your main reason for coming do you see the focus is on me which is what I call food panda church or delivery church

I don't want to be kind of I'm not selling something here food panda church is convenient for me you order what you want you know I expect a good music delivery good sermon delivery and if the order's right and it comes to my door and it's fine then we're happy and if not then we complain and go oh the sermon was boring this morning or whatever it was or we church hop to different places to try and get what we want but the Hebrews is saying church isn't about you church isn't about you you're invited into the presence of a holy god imagine just kind of going up to like the I don't know the queen or whoever and you're kind of going oh it's all about me everyone's going to look at you and go I think you've lost like perspective because we come we're invited into his presence to worship the god of the whole universe to encounter him the living god and when we do that it lifts our eyes off to ourselves and actually we find that actually he blesses us and brings us the life that we actually really want when our focus is on him not on us and so we come to worship him on a Sunday how do we come he says this he says with a true heart do you know what a true heart is a true heart is one that isn't just going through the motions a true heart isn't just turning up like I used to because that's what you do a true heart doesn't come casually either into the presence of god you know in the past people used to come to church in suits and ties you know some people still do nowadays we all kind of come in shorts and flip flops and all that kind of stuff now I don't think I think god cares very little about your clothing in so much he cares far more about your heart than your clothing right so don't kind of start looking around but actually I think some of us we can come to church in shorts and flip flops in our hearts right we come 30 minutes late we kind of casually walk in with our starbucks in hand hoping to hear a nice inspiring message and then we try and get out before the music is like the last song so we can get to the car parking space because we get out with our car park because we've got a lunch appointment now is that about the worship of god or is that about us we come with a true heart or maybe we come and you know and I've done this before you know you just had a big argument with your wife or your spouse or your parents or you've got

just resentment you've got stuff that's going on in your heart and we come in and then we raise our hands Jesus I love you and God looks at us and he says don't you realize I've done everything that you need to cleanse you so you don't have to put on this show for me I hate that I want you to come with a true heart and you know only sinners are invited do you know that only sinners like you and me are invited so that means before you come maybe you do it in the car maybe you do it on the bus maybe you do it as you are walking down the slope in Ebeneza take a trigger for you every Sunday to prepare your heart and go God search my heart I want to come with a true heart for you this morning and then pray God I want to meet with you this morning I want to worship you I want it to be about you not about me and if we do that the author says you come not just with a true heart but we come with full assurance of faith because you know out there you've always got to prove yourself you've always got to and you know you never fully measure up so you've always got to keep up your appearances you've always got to look because everything's fine because a performance driven world says come when you're doing well come when you're doing okay but in

Jesus church it's messy people whose kids aren't always well behaved who sometimes feel depressed who are sometimes hurting who are sometimes grieving who sometimes don't even feel that that like coming to church on a Sunday very much but in Christ no matter what week you've had no matter how you've messed up we can come not fearfully not casually but confidently because we know we don't come because we performed well this week we come because Jesus has done everything for us to gain access into his presence we come because he died so a sinner like me and like you could be washed and cleansed and our hearts sprinkled from that evil conscience so that we can be the one place in this city where we can stop pretending because he is the one place in this city where there is confidence to come no matter where you are and so when someone comes and says how are you doing this morning do you know it's okay to say not great because actually that place we draw near you know and we can pray for each other encourage each other but that place where we draw near it's because of him and what he's done it's not because of how great we are or how well we're doing but no matter how well and if some of you are struggling right now

[23 : 55] I know the temptation is not to come because you just feel like oh but actually here is the one place you need to be because it's the one place where the grace of God wants to come to you we come with true hearts and full assurance of faith with him at the center to worship him let's draw near firstly secondly let us hold on to the word of God and let it wash us with the word of God he says let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful he's saying to the Jewish and the Hebrew Christians who attempted to go back just to orthodox Judaism he's saying to them hold fast cling to the doctrines cling to the gospel message the teaching that you heard cling to who Jesus is and what his word tells you he is that he's saying don't be

I think there's a Cantonese phrase which is like one foot on two boats which is like wavering between two lovers between the world out there and Christ don't be like that he says because throughout the week you know your heart you're being preached at constantly do you know that every day you're getting a sermon like a hundred sermons you're being given GPS directions for how to steer your life you've been told put yourself first or you'll miss out work harder or you'll get left behind listen to your feelings take control of your life you be you and your heart gets captured by that performance oriented self focused society around and on Sundays we gather back together as the family of God to listen to God's word to have our hearts rewashed in the love and the grace and the call of

Jesus on our lives again so his voice is big in our ears and his love is big in our hearts so that we can go out whatever circumstances you're going through right now knowing that he who promised is what faithful you can trust him because every other GPS in your life will lead to a dead end but his word in your life is a faithful word of promise which will be that ultimate true trustworthy GPS that will always get you to your destination the destination of life the destination of blessing the destination of who we were always meant to be in him that's why we gather to have his word shape our hearts so that we can hold fast on it throughout our weeks and trust him now by the way let me just kind of speak into this for a second you can hear the word of

God online right nowadays there is a thousand amazing preachers you can listen to the best in the world out there you don't have to come into water mark and get the B grade you can go out and

watch everything online but there is a community of holding fast together to God's word which means that the word of God will always do you good wherever it's preached but there is something in the word of God coming to us in this season in this time to this group of people in this place which is culture shaping which is shaping this community so together we hold fast to his word so don't substitute you know listen to other sermons praise God but don't substitute that for actually the word of God coming together to us as a community let us draw near to worship God in the light of who

Christ is let us hold fast to his word and be washed in his word and then thirdly let us encourage one another and I love this part he says in the light of who Jesus is as our great high priest and we are his family 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 so as you see the day approaching you know Jesus died to break down the vertical barriers between us and God and the horizontal barriers between each other so the church is meant to be the one place where the grace of God is displayed by drawing together a random bunch of motley people who would never be in the same room together normally if it wasn't for

[29 : 08] Jesus to draw them into the same room together so that we learn how to love one another you know the world out there tells you to focus on yourself think food panda church can become where the world has got into the church and into our hearts and we can be tempted to go through some of these thought processes let me give you a few you can be tempted to go hey let me when I come on Sunday let me just kind of sit next to my friends talk to those I know I'm an introvert I've had a hard week it's super awkward talking to some people or maybe you go why do I need to come on Sundays because I go to CG anyway or maybe you go hey it's just more convenient to watch online I've just got other stuff going on in my life and for those of you who are watching online I'm not bringing any judgment to you guys right now so there's no condemnation for those who are in

Christ and there may be a hundred legitimate reasons to be online well there may be you could be sick you could be elderly relatives there's a lot of reasons there's a lot of grace that we have but the reason why in the last wave we actually cut the live stream and we will again cut live stream when it's appropriate to do so is that we want us as a church to know that online church can tend towards doesn't always but can tend towards being food panda church where it's more about us and more about our convenience and actually really coming to love and serve each other and you know the difference of being in the room together than just when we were on Zoom right Zoom was great for just the season but man I'm so glad to see your beautiful faces and to hear you sing together man that encourages my heart so let us not just go to that can you come to

CG and not come on Sundays well you can I mean Sundays is not everything we talk about it all the time family is not just a gathering okay family is family it's relationships but let me say this your CG could be a place where it's just convenient for you with the people you like the time you like the things that you like that suit you but actually Sundays is the whole church gathered different life stages people who are different from us where we're called to get out of ourselves and learn how to move towards each other in a way that displays what Christ has done for us let me say after about 40 years of seeing hundreds and hundreds of people who have kind of skipped Sundays and I'm not saying just occasionally I'm saying on a regular basis they just kind of come occasionally what I've seen is about 95 times out of 100 that has always been a symptom of people being in a bad place or not a great place with

God and often I've seen them just walk away because their hearts have got captured pulled by their career pulled by their comfort pulled even by their struggles and they end up losing the war that Christ wants to bring us victory in and so what the gospel calls us to change what we think about we stop thinking of ourselves and Hebrews says let us consider consider means think about think about what myself no think about others think about how to stir each other up to love and good works stir up is a really strong word in the Greek it means to provoke someone to get under their skin did you know that you want to be thinking how you get under each other's skin but what are we to do it you meant to be so filled with Jesus love that you want this love to get under the skin of each other so that they go from being food panda consumers to the delivery crew of

Jesus love to everyone around that's what God calls us to so that when we come I mean let me just ask you this morning this is a challenging question for me when you came this morning did you think about praying about who you could encourage this morning brief moment of conviction

because I want us to encourage us that as we prepare our hearts before we come in confession and in saying God I want you to speak to me I want to worship you this morning I also want us to take every Sunday to pray God let me sit next to someone or let me show me who you want me to encourage this morning you know I was chatting with a couple of water markers this week and it reminded me of a time a story where a friend of mine in the UK we call him Peter and he used to come every

[34 : 24] Sunday and he used to sit by himself and like literally he would come early but he would just sit by himself and then at the end of the service everyone else would be the most socially awkward introvert I've ever met in my life okay some of you are introverts none of you are like Peter and he also had a speech impediment and it was really hard to understand him and one Sunday I said to Peter hey it'd be great if you could actually you know there's a lot of people who are just by themselves here if you could go up and just say hi to them the next Sunday out of the corner of my eye I saw Peter going up to two Taiwanese international students I think it was their first time there and there was this most gloriously awkward moment because their English wasn't great and they couldn't understand a word that he was saying because his speech impediment was so bad but actually you saw that they super appreciated someone actually just reaching out so they were trying really hard to have this conversation and as

I looked at it I saw that is the gospel displayed that is worship going on right there because with all the real tangible barriers that he had God had got hold of his heart and now he wanted to walk through them and reach out to someone and there was an encouragement I was so encouraged by that that right and that's when he gets the glory we don't have to be all beautiful sometimes it's messy sometimes it's awkward but let me encourage us some of us came this morning and you are struggling some of us came this morning and you're exhausted some of us came this morning and you're hurting some of us came this morning and you're lonely this is what it means to be the body of Christ we come in a mess and quite frankly if I can just be honest for a moment for us as a family in this stage at the moment

Sundays is the most exhausting day of the week it really is with two young kids you know one kind of murder and the other the other just melting down because they haven't had a nap it's like some of you parents know this and sometimes I know particularly for my wife as well there's so many distractions you just can't concentrate and sometimes you can go away going well what was the point of that but actually I want to say to any of you who are in that situation don't give up because actually what your heart is willing to sacrifice for is what your heart will be shaped to love and your kids will see that in time and they will see that actually God's people because of what Jesus has done is precious in your life and is more likely to become precious in their life too and so as a church with all of our mess can I encourage us in the light of who

Jesus is that we're willing to be awkward that we're willing to get over ourselves to go up to a parent who is struggling to go and just say hi to someone to go and say hey how can I pray for you in like 10 seconds because you know the kid's screaming but let me just pray for you because some of us need that this morning some of us need us to be able to stir one up and encourage each other because you may be the very difference between someone beginning to walk away from Christ and someone experiencing his love which draws them to himself why do we gather on Sundays we gather because Jesus has given us an invitation that is like no other invitation that we can come into the presence of God people who don't measure up like you and me can find utter acceptance here with him belonging to his family and as we come to worship him as we come to be washed in his word again and encouraged let us then encourage each other and as we do that you know Jesus is coming back he says the day is drawing near let's not neglect meeting together but Jesus gets the glory through that because it's all about him let me pray maybe you just want to take a minute while the band comes up to just reflect on how you see even this morning there's many realities that are going on in our lives and Jesus knows where you are he doesn't call you to come perfectly he calls you to come messily but actually just to come some of us need to just be respond with thankfulness again for the utter privilege that actually we can meet as a church family around the world there are so many people who are struggling to do that what a privilege some of us need to remember while

[40 : 05] Jesus died that we could come into his presence some of us need to repent where we've made it actually all about ourselves some of us need to allow Jesus to just come in and move us out towards each other to encourage each other just take this minute now just to pray in response and

if you're struggling Jesus knows your heart just cry with whatever words you have to him can realize all Thank you.

Father, I pray. And thank you for the fact that we can come into your presence.

That we can have intimate fellowship with you. Lord, sometimes Sundays feels very ordinary. It doesn't feel like anything spectacular. But thank you, that's exactly where you work.

Thank you that you want to work in our church right now, Lord. I pray that you teach us what it means to have you right in the center of our lives.

You teach us that we don't have to come just because it's the habit that we have. But we can come because it's the privilege that we have. Lord, make us a community which really knows how to love one another.

[42 : 23] That even on this Sunday morning, Lord, we don't rush in and rush out. Lord, we actually take time to greet one another, to encourage one another, to pray for one another. And we can spill that out into the rest of our week to grab coffee with each other and love each other.

But Father, we just need you. There are so many things in our lives which pressure us. We feel the war. But thank you, Lord, that the worship of you is so much better than the worship of anything else.

Fill our hearts afresh. Change us, we pray. Come by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.