

Together Apart

Hebrews 10:19-25

April 19, 2020

Please read Hebrews 10:19-25 before going further in this transcript.

Today we're beginning a new sermon series called, "Following Jesus during Tough Times." This current COVID-19 pandemic has led to some pretty tough times in our world today. At the end of Matthew 7, Jesus shares the parable of "The Wise and Foolish Builders." When the storm came, it revealed the foundation that each of them had built on. The storms of this life have a way of revealing what our lives are truly grounded on. (It's like a stress test to see how prepared we are.¹) Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, provides a strong foundation on which to build our lives.

Last week we celebrated Good Friday and Easter. We celebrated Jesus, "the Lamb of God," who takes away the sin of the world. We focused in on how Jesus died for sin, once and for all. We talked about how Jesus conquered death so that you/I can conquer death, and live a new life. This morning's Scripture reading from Hebrews 10, is a great follow-up from last week.² When Hebrews 10:19-20 begins with the word, "**Therefore**," it points us back to Easter, "**Therefore**, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body..." In other words, once we have placed our faith in the risen Christ, we have confidence: incredible, reassuring confidence! As Christ-followers, this confidence gives us a solid foundation for our lives. And now, Hebrews 10 teaches us that SINCE Easter has given us this confident foundation, LET US, THEREFORE... do something. But, do what exactly? THEREFORE, LET US... do what? This morning we're going to focus in on exactly what this "after-Easter" passage is calling us to do.

Please turn in your Bible to Hebrews 10:22. Over the years, I've learned to really enjoy words and languages.³ Specifically, things like syntax and parts of speech. I've enjoyed learning that words have particular nuances like voices and moods. I'm not sure why or exactly when I became interested in these kinds of things; but it probably had a lot to do with learning Biblical Greek.⁴ You see, when I was learning Biblical Greek, I realized something a little embarrassing about myself... I didn't really know English very well. For example, can you believe that I didn't even know what a hortatory subjunctive was!?! (I know! How crazy is that right!?)

Hortatory simply means "urging someone else to join us in a course of action."⁵ So we can use words to encourage or exhort another person. Most of us use hortatory subjunctives all the time, without even knowing that we're doing it.⁶ For example, perhaps you've said something like this:

- > "Hey guys, LET'S listen to the livestream together!"
- > "Hey, LET'S go to the store and see if they have any toilet paper!"

These aren't really questions and they're not exactly commands. They are hortatory subjunctives: they are "urging someone else to join us in a course of action."

Subjunctive suggests that something is "uncertain but probable."⁷ It has to do with the "mood" of a word. In other words, I'm not certain, whether or not, you will join me in this thing that I am urging you to do. But, it seems probable that you will, so, I'm exhorting you to jump in with me on this! Most often Hortatory Subjunctives are in the 1st Person Plural: As in WE, let's do this thing, US, we together. I'm not just saying that I plan to do it, and I'm not just telling YOU to do it. I'm saying let's do

¹ Consider Proverbs 24:10.

² If you have time later today, read Hebrews 10:1-25. It describes in great detail "Christ's Sacrifice Once for All."

³ If you'd told me back in high school that I would ever feel this way, I NEVER would have believed you!

⁴ The technical term is Koine Greek. "also known as Alexandrian dialect, common Attic, Hellenistic or Biblical Greek, was the common supra-regional form of Greek spoken and written during the Hellenistic period, the Roman Empire, and the early Byzantine Empire, or late antiquity." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek)

⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 464.

⁶ The fact is, we don't need to understand the linguistics of something in order to say it, especially when it's in our mother tongue.

⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 461.

this thing TOGETHER. That's a 1st person plural hortatory subjunctive. Here is why this matters: Hebrews 10:22-25 has three of these Hortatory Subjunctives.⁸ The 1st one is in Hebrews 10:22.

1) Together, let us draw near to God. "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." The author of Hebrews, is urging us, TOGETHER, to join in THIS course of action: draw near to God.⁹ Verse 22 clarifies 2 things: draw near with a sincere heart and draw near with the full assurance that faith brings. Since we've placed our faith in the risen Christ, we now have confidence to draw near to God. We are cleansed from a guilty conscience and we have been purified. But why do we need to do this TOGETHER? After all, I can draw near to God by MYSELF. Each day I have my own personal quiet time. I don't need other people to help me draw near to God. I've taken personal responsibility to do that on my own. Well, that's good. We should have a personal faith in Christ that isn't dependent on others. However, the context for this text, is the 1st person PLURAL hortatory subjunctive. So the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the HS, is urging us to join TOGETHER in this course of action. God's Word is calling us to draw near to God TOGETHER! We find the 2nd Hortatory Subjunctive in Hebrews 10:23.

2) Together, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Once again, let's join TOGETHER in this course of action: Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, BECAUSE God is faithful to keep His promises. There are a LOT of things going on in this world right now, that might cause us to swerve away from our hope: Things including: - Health concerns related to COVID-19. - Isolation and loneliness from all of this social distancing. - Educational challenges. - Event cancellations and disappointments. - Financial insecurity and job loss. - Shortages of food and other supplies. - And I'm sure that there are other things that could be added to this list. It would be easy for any one of these things to cause us to swerve off course. But we can rest secure in the unchanging reliability of our Heavenly Father. God is faithful to His promises. Always. Every time.¹⁰ Our faith in God gives us a confident foundation. This circles right back around to verse 22, "the full assurance that faith brings." There is nothing "subjunctive" or "uncertain" about the full assurance that is guaranteed by God's persistent faithfulness.

Even though we need to be apart from each other for a little while, we never need be apart from the presence of God.¹¹ The Psalmist explains it this way in Psalm 139:7-10, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." God's got the whole world in His hands¹²; so even if our lives feel like they are swerving out of control, God's right hand is holding us fast. Our God is an immovable rock, who anchors our lives.¹³ So despite all the crazy, difficult things going on in our world right now, let us hold unswervingly to the hope that we profess!

The 3rd and final Hortatory Subjunctive is in Hebrews 10:24.

3) Together, let us consider how we may spur one another on. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Let's join TOGETHER in this course of action: Let's CONSIDER HOW we can SPUR one another on. I don't know about you, but it seems a little extreme, to use a spur on another person. Spurs are what you put on the back of your boots to motivate horses, but NOT people!¹⁴ But there is a particular intensity that this word is trying to convey. Frankly, there are times when we get a little lazy with our faith. We can grow apathetic. This doesn't

⁸ Pastor Eric told me that some people refer to this passage as the "lettuce (let us) patch." 😊

⁹ In fact, the author of Hebrews is including himself in each of these activities. He is, in effect, exhorting us 2,000 years later to join along in living out our faith.

¹⁰ Here's perhaps a startling reality, any idea that we were ever in control of all of these things was an illusion. What is NOT an illusion, is God's faithfulness to His promises.

¹¹ See Romans 8:37-39.

¹² Right kids? That's why we sing, "He's got the whole world in his hands..."

¹³ See Hebrews 6:19a. The wise person builds their house on the rock! Matthew 7:24-29.

¹⁴ Παροξυσμός = "rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking ... i.e. to encourage someone in love Hebrews 10:24." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 780). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.) Acts 15:39 uses this same Greek word in a little different context.

necessarily mean that we are committing a bunch of horrible sins, but it may mean that we are committing sins of omission. In other words, sometimes we are leaving things undone that God wants done. So, it doesn't help for us to make the argument, "but I'm not doing anything wrong!" THAT's not the point. The point IS, "what are we doing that is right? How are we stewarding our time, talent, and treasure toward love and good deeds?"¹⁵ Hebrews 10:24 is a call to be proactive!

To be clear, the focus is not so much on "spurring" as on "considering." In other words, we are being exhorted to THINK. To CONSIDER with our minds HOW to spur each other on. As we "shelter in place" a while longer, let's think of some ways to spur each other on. This will take some creativity, but, with a little effort, there are actually a LOT of good ideas out there. Here are just a few...

Ways to Spur One Another On:

1 - Mail a personal note. Any one of us can send an encouraging note in the mail. I know we can email or text. But there is something special and exciting, about going out to your mailbox and finding a personal note.¹⁶

2 - Deliver supplies. If you are healthy and able, offer to pick up groceries, medicine, or other supplies for someone who may be at risk and can't go out in public right now. Be careful to wear a mask, and stay 6' apart, and so on.

3 - Embrace technology. Invest some time in learning to Zoom or Skype or do Facetime, etc. Then, use that technology to encourage other people around you. We can also help others figure out their technology hurdles. I was so blessed to hear the story of one of our church families who were livestreaming the Sunday service and found out that a friend didn't have a computer. So now, each Sunday, they call each other up on the phone. As they are livestreaming the service to their home, they hold up the phone and send the audio over to the other person's house. What a great way to encourage one another!

4 - Zoom the Prayer Meeting. Tonight, Pastor Eric is leading a prayer meeting at 6:30 p.m. There is a link on our website if you want to join. Let's make sure that Pastor Eric isn't praying alone tonight.

5 - Embrace opportunities for spiritual conversations. Staying at home and slowing down a bit, has given all of us some extra time to reflect on what matters in this life. This is a great time for us to share with our friends and family about what God means to us.¹⁷ This next one idea be the most challenging one in this entire list...

6 - Serve those you are sheltering with. I know that by now, they may be driving you absolutely NUTS! But, if ever there was a time to "bear with one another in love," it's NOW. I don't mean to be sacrilegious in any way, but it's interesting to note how certain Bible verses read a bit differently in our COVID-19 context. For example, consider Ephesians 4:1-2, "**As a prisoner for the Lord**, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; **be patient, bearing with one another in love.**" Some of us probably feel a little bit like a prisoner in our own home. But what a great time to put God's Word into practice. The NKJV translates the word "patient" as "longsuffering." You ain't kidding Brother! Here's the last idea that I'll mention today:

7 - Answer the sermon-discussion questions. In this week's bulletin, you'll notice that we've provided some questions to get you thinking more deeply, about how to apply God's Word to your life. These are similar to our "Life Group Q's" but they are designed for anyone and everyone to use. So, find a friend or a family member and go through these questions together. Do it with people living under the same roof, or call up a friend and discuss them over the phone or computer.

There is still one verse left from today's passage that we haven't talked about yet. Hebrews 10:25 says, "**not giving up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."¹⁸ The *NKJV* may sound more familiar to

¹⁵ Consider Ephesians 2:10.

¹⁶ On a side note, let's allow this time of social distancing to build our empathy toward those who are homebound. Or those who are confined to jail or prison. Even after this "stay-at-home" order is lifted, there will be many who will still need to stay-at-home. They will remain in a certain level of isolation and social distancing. Let's allow this time of COVID-19 to motivate us to remember our ministry to the homebound or to those in jail, or whatever else it may be.

¹⁷ Consider Acts 8:4, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."

¹⁸ Notice how "Day" is capitalized. Here we have yet another motivation for godly living UNTIL Jesus returns. I would also urge you to note what the author of Hebrews talks about after chapter 10. Chapter 11 is the "Hall of Faith" chapter. Some headings say "Faith in Action." Hebrews 11 gives one

some of us: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together....”¹⁹ The *ESV* translates it, “not neglecting to meet together...” In other words, we are mistaken if we think that our faith is only OUR personal business. Our faith is also communal; it’s not just about ourselves. That’s part of what makes this social distancing so difficult.

But just how literally should we take this verse? Does closing down the church building, mean that we are giving up and forsaking what God is calling us to do? Is it wrong for us to be practicing social distancing? The simple answer is “No. Social distancing is not a sin. If anything, social distancing is serving. We are loving one another and loving our neighbors, by doing what we can to slow down the spread of this COVID-19 virus. The fact is, we have NOT “given up meeting together.” That’s what we are doing each Sunday, just via livestream. It’s not ideal, and it’s not permanent; but we are temporarily gathering in a different way, as best we can, under the circumstances.

Even so, many of us are asking: WHEN will we meet together again as a church? And that’s a fair question. Just this past Thursday our Elders met together via Zoom to pray and to discuss this very question. So, here’s the answer: we’re not sure yet. At this time, our Elders have decided to continue to follow the recommendation of the Center for Disease Control and the Minnesota Department of Health, which means not gathering in large groups for a while longer. We will continue to pray about this, and to monitor the data. We will update our plans again in early May. Until then, I know this is disappointing. All of us are VERY MUCH looking forward, to when we can gather together again, here in our local church building, for worship, for instruction in God’s Word, and for genuine face-to-face fellowship!

Lord willing, one day soon, we will gather together again in this sanctuary. And, when we do, when it’s safe for us to meet again in this building, let’s attend church like we’ve never attended it before. Let’s make gathering at the church building one of our top priorities. Let’s attend with consistency, more than just once or twice a month. Let’s demonstrate our gratitude and appreciation, for the rich fellowship that God has given us in the body of Christ. It’s been said, “You don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone.” Now that we know what we’ve got in the local church, let’s not take it for granted ever again! Let’s not just show up on time for church, or even 5-10 minutes late. Let’s plan to arrive early, so that we can fellowship before the service. And rather than bolting out of here right after the benediction, let’s linger for a while.²⁰

The longer that this social distancing goes on, the more we feel our need for fellowship. It’s almost as if God has designed us, as people, for relationship. That’s because He has! Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus is designed, by God, to be done TOGETHER. So, it’s not wrong for us to be unhappy about being apart. It’s good that we are craving community and getting antsy to gather again. But, until that time, let’s embrace any opportunity that we can find, to be together while we are apart. Brother or Sister in Christ, let’s embrace all 3 of these Hortatory Subjunctives:

Let us draw near to God, TOGETHER.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, TOGETHER.

And TOGETHER, let us consider how we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

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example after another of men and women who lived out their faith. And if these dear saints, who were under the old system of earthly priests, if they could live out their faith in those days, then surely you and I can live out our faith in these days!

¹⁹ What the *NKJV* is revealing here is that this Greek word can be translated “to forsake, to abandon, or to desert.” ἐγκαταλείπω = “to separate connection with someone or something, forsake, abandon, desert.” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 273). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

²⁰ David Mathis, *Tabletalk magazine*, July 2019, p. 27.