

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? (Hebrews 10:19-25)

Most of you will remember when America celebrated its Bicentennial, its 200th anniversary. Of course, that was 1976. On July 4th of that year, everyone was wearing red, white, and blue as we threw a birthday bash for our country. It had been 200 hundred years since 56 founding fathers had signed the Declaration of Independence. For two centuries we had been our own country—the United States of America.

In just four more years, our country will be 250 years old. This week, I begun to wonder, “If the 200-year anniversary is called *Bicentennial*, what do you call the 250th anniversary?” I did some research. You will be glad to know that the U.S. Congress has already worked on this. When Princeton University celebrated its 250th anniversary, they called it their “Bicenquingenary.” That’s a mouthful.

You will be glad to know that suggestion did not gain any traction with our wise representatives in Washington. Even with four years to practice, I don’t think we would get that down. I read that the preferred term is *Sestercentennial*, but that is not what the House and Senate went with. Instead, in 2026, we will observe our *Semiquincentennial*. That has a certain ring to it—*Semiquincentennial*.

There were other things worth celebrating in 1976. It was that year that New Hope Baptist Church of Enid renamed itself Liberty Southern Baptist Church. You might think that we were caught up in the Bicentennial fever of the time, but I think rather that we sought to capitalize on what was going on in our culture 46 years ago. People were celebrating liberty, and we were saying, “If you are looking for true liberty, here is where it can be found.” We chose as our motto 2 Corinthians 3:17, “. . . where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The title of the today’s message comes from a book and film series that appeared in 1976. It was written and narrated by Francis Schaeffer. The full title of his work was *How Should We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. Almost 50 years ago, Schaeffer saw the seeds of what had been planted. Today, we are seeing the full bloom and fruit of those seeds.

In his ten-part film series he traces the rise and fall of Western society. He argues that today’s values are personal peace and affluence. He claimed that such values will tempt us to sacrifice our freedoms in exchange for an authoritarian government who will promise to provide us what we want. He warned that such a government will manipulate us by controlling the information we receive.

Schaeffer drew his title from a line found in Ezekiel 33:10 in which the prophet claimed that Israel, at some point, will come to recognize its own sinfulness. The KJV records their plaintive cry as, “How shall we then live?” The NLT renders it, “How can we survive?”

We have been journeying through the NT letter known as Hebrews. As the title of the letter implies, it was written to Jews. The intended audience were Jews who had embraced the Christian faith. They had come to believe that Jesus was their Messiah. Because of persecution, however, many were tempted to turn back to the Jewish faith.

The author of this letter implores them, “Don’t do that. Don’t that. Stay the course. Continue on with Jesus.” With ample quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures, he shows them that Jesus is superior. He is greater than any of the prophets. He is greater than the angels. He is greater than Moses. Jesus is our true High Priest in heaven. His sacrifice is better. His covenant, the New Covenant is better, much better, than the old one.

Beginning with today’s text, the author of Hebrews begins a new section of his letter. He goes in a new direction. We have to keep in mind that the chapter and verse divisions in our Bible are arbitrary. They are not inspired. They were not put there by the original writers. They were inserted centuries and centuries later. They are extremely helpful. They make it much easier to find a text. Sometimes, however, they cause us to miss the context. We are able to find what we are looking for, but we fail to read what comes before and what comes after. As a result, if we are not careful, we can miss when the tone and the subject matter of a book or letter changes.

It might have been more helpful if chapter 10 ended with verse 18, and v. 19 was the beginning of a new chapter. Up through Hebrews 10:18, the author is saying, “This is what you need to know.” Begin in 10:19, he is saying, “This is what you need to do.”

One expositor explained that here, Hebrews goes “from *doctrine* to *duty*, from *creed* to *conduct*, from *precept* to *practice*, from *instruction* to *exhortation*, all of which mean one thing—the writer becomes very explicit regarding how Christians ought to live.”

That is why I have entitled this message, “How Shall We Then Live.”

If we carefully examine today’s text, we can find three words that are often found in close proximity to one another in the NT. For example, they are found right together in the last verse of 1 Corinthians 13. In v. 13 of that chapter, Paul wrote, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Why is love the greatest? It is quite simple. One day, faith will give way to sight, and that which we hope for will become reality. Love, however, will go on and on and on. With that in mind, let’s read our text—Hebrews 10:19-25.

Have you ever read a formal resolution? Resolutions have a certain format. They began with the word *Whereas*: “Whereas (blah, blah, blah), and whereas (blah, blah, blah), and whereas (blah, blah, blah), let it therefore be resolved that (blah, blah, blah).”

That is somewhat how this passage is put together. The author uses the word *since* twice in vv. 19-21. He is marshaling together the grounds for what he is going to call the Hebrew believers to do.

- Because Jesus shed His blood for us . . .
- Because Jesus is our Great High Priest . . .
- Because Jesus is far superior to the priests of the Old Covenant . . .
- Because we have confidence to go into God’s presence since Jesus is our Mediator with the Father . . .

“These are the things we need to do,” and then he states them (bam, bam, bam). He calls upon them to do three things. In answer to the question, “How Shall We Then Live?” I am going to say to you, these are the things we are to do.

Let Faith Be the Magnet That Draws Us to Christ

Look at v. 22. In the NT, there are seven specific times that *drawing near to God* is mentioned. Of those seven, six are found in Hebrews. Let's look at a few of those times. Notice 4:16; 7:25; and 11:6.

The only other times those words are used are in James 4:8. That verse is a promise. We are promised that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us.

The key ingredient in drawing near to God is faith. Faith acts like a magnet. The stronger your faith, the stronger the attractational pull to Christ will be. That leads us to ask, "What can you and I do to make our faith stronger?"

Listen to Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." If you want your faith to grow, then you have to feed it? Feed your faith with the word of God, and watch it grow. What rain and sunshine are to plants, such is the word of God to your faith.

The sad fact is that those who have a weak faith, they will not draw near to God. They will stay on the periphery. They are fearful of what God will do to them or worse, what God might want to do through them if they dare to get close to Him. As a result of that fear, they keep a respectable distance. They will show up every now and then, not every Sunday of course, but every once and awhile. They will sit in the back so they can make a quick exit. They have a Bible, but they won't get serious about reading it. That is shame because that is where the power is.

Let me tell you the story of Channing Pollock. He was an American playwright. He died shortly after World War II. He enjoyed a great deal of success over the length of his career.

It is said that one night Pollock was in his apartment with another writer working on a certain play. They worked long into the night. At some point, the other writer asked Pollock if he had ever read the NT. Pollock admitted that he hadn't.

When his friend left, Pollock went to bed, but he couldn't sleep. He was bothered by the realization that he had never read the NT. He got up from bed and searched through his apartment until he found a NT. He read the Gospel of Mark straight through. He got dressed and walked the streets of NYC until dawn. He later confided to his friend, "When I returned home, I found myself on my knees passionately in love with Jesus Christ."

Jesus deserves both our faith and our love, but He will get neither until we give ourselves to His word.

How much of the Bible have you read? Have you made it a regular part of your daily routine?

If you will spend time each day reading His word you will be drawn to Him like a magnet.

There is more that we are called up to do.

Let Hope Be the Anchor That Keeps Us Grounded

Look at v. 23. Pastor John MacArthur wrote, "A hopeless believer is a contradiction

in terms.” He went on to write, “Holding on does not keep us saved any more than good works will make us saved. But both are evidence that we are saved.”

What is the *confession of our hope*? What do those words mean? Listen to the verse in the NLT: “Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have.” We need to talk about our hope. It needs to be a normal topic of conversation.

Back in February, a friend of mine in Stillwater passed on. He was 85. His name was Victor, and he was appropriately named because he lived a victorious, Christian life. His funeral was, oddly, held at night. I had an obligation on the evening of his funeral; so, I went to the visitation the night before to pay my respects. While I was there at the funeral home, Vic’s body was there lying in the casket. A young man approached the casket and began talking to Vic as if Vic was really there. He told Vic about how much he meant to him and how his life was changed because of Vic’s influence.

I recalled a conversation I had with another friend of Vic years before. This mutual friend said of Vic, “I love that guy. I doubt there is a person that Vic meets that doesn’t hear about Jesus within five minutes after they start talking. For most, it is probably less than five minutes.”

It occurs to me that Vic shouldn’t be an exception. He shouldn’t be unique in that regard. We generally talk about what is important to us. Get around a grandmother. Guess what she will talk about? Get around a sport’s fanatic. What do you suppose he will talk about?

If you and I are well-acquainted with our hope, that will be the topic of conversation to which we will often return.

According to v. 23, this hope will keep us from wavering. The reason we won’t waver is that the Source of our hope is faithful. The Source of our hope is Jesus, and from experience we know that He is faithful. He does what He says. He keeps His promises.

Look with me at Hebrews 6:19-20a. Our hope is a Person—Jesus Christ. He will not disappoint. People will disappoint you. Your family will disappoint you. Your friends will disappoint you. Your neighbors will disappoint you. Your boss or your co-workers will disappoint you. You will disappoint yourself. Jesus will not disappoint you.

You may misunderstand Him. You may have to wait for Him. He may not do things the way that you expected Him to do them, but in the end, He will not disappoint you. You can trust Him, and He will be an anchor for your soul.

Years ago, I heard a song by Ray Boltz entitled, “The Anchor Holds.” Here are just a few of the lyrics:

I have been young
But I am older now
And there has been beauty
That these eyes have seen

But it was in the night
Through the storms of my life
Oh, that’s where God proved
His love to me

The anchor holds
Though the ship is battered
The anchor holds
Though the sails are torn

I have fallen on my knees
As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds
In spite of the storm

Have you faced a storm recently? It could be a financial storm, a marital storm, a family storm, a vocational storm, a health storm, a spiritual storm, or some other kind of storm.

If you have found yourself battling the headwinds of a storm recently, you can be certain that you will before long. It may be a storm fiercer than anything you have ever encountered. You can be equally certain that Jesus will be your anchor in that storm, and He will be equal to the task. He will hold, and He will hold you.

Let Love Be the Oil That Brings the Church to Health

Look at vv. 24-25. The author of Hebrews has addressed the matters of faith and hope. Now, he turns his attention to love. In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul writes about “the work of faith, the labor of love, and the steadfastness of hope.” Faith, hope, and love cause us to do something. They move us to action. When love is present within a church body, that body will act in a unified fashion. When love is lacking, that church will fail to work together.

In 1982, before I turned 18, I bought my first car. It was a 1976 Plymouth Duster. That was something else that came about during our Bicentennial. There is often a special bond between a young man and his first car. I have to admit, however, that my Duster was high maintenance. When I wanted to go out on a Friday night, she might decide that she didn’t want to leave the driveway. More than once she left me stranded on the highway.

I also have to admit that at 17, I didn’t know how to treat a car with respect. No one had ever taught me how. I never saw my dad check the oil in his car; so, I never checked the oil in my car.

One day I was at home, and my mom had called the plumber over to work on something. This was soon after my brother-in-law’s old car had died with black smoke pouring out of the hood. My mom asked me if I checked the oil in my car. I admitted that I never checked the oil in my car. That got the attention of the plumber. He proceeded to give me an unsolicited tutorial on the importance of making sure the engine had the proper amount of oil.

I appreciated what he had to say because no one in my family had ever talked to me about that. He used a visual. He had me rub my hands together and had me note how the friction created heat. He then explained how the when a piston is going up and down

within a cylinder that it needs oil to lessen the friction of metal rubbing against metal. He said that without oil, those two pieces of metal will get so hot that they will literally melt and become melded to one another.

You may find this hard to believe, but friction can happen in the Church. People's personalities and faults will rub against one another. An oil is needed to lessen the friction. Without oil, the church will cease to function.

The oil the church needs is love. Without a doubt, love is the essential oil that a church needs. Love is an oil that has medicinal qualities. It keeps us healthy.

I have heard it said that every church is in one of three situations. Every church is either presently in a crisis, just coming out of a crisis, or about to head into a crisis. The duration and damage of the crisis will be determined by the amount of love within the congregation.

John Piper preached a sermon on this very passage. Listen to what he said:

If Jesus said that in the last days the love of many would grow cold, and if He counsels us how to triumph over that coldness, namely, by not neglecting to meet together but rather meeting and encouraging each other and stirring each other up to love, then we should listen to Him. We should follow His counsel. Not to follow His counsel here is very presumptuous and foolish and dangerous.

This text is not such much a mandate for big corporate worship services as it is a mandate for regular small groups of Christians to get together for mutual encouragement. We know this because verse 25 says that the meeting together is for "encouraging one another." It's not just for a pastor to encourage you; that's important, and I believe preaching is God's will in the church. But something more than that is implied here in this phrase "one another."

. . . So, if we just took these two verses—24 and 25—we could say that the biblical rationale for small groups is that they are meant to stir Christians up to love and good works. The way this stirring up happens is by encouraging each other. And the practical way of insuring this kind of mutual encouragement that stirs up love is meeting together.

There are 168 hours in a week. I don't think that meeting for one hour a week looking at the back of someone else's head is enough. Sunday School is important. Wednesday night prayer meeting is important. I also believe that a group Bible study in someone's home would go a long way towards encouraging one another. Let's not neglect that. That would be worse, far worse, than never checking your oil.

Faith is a magnet. Hope is an anchor. Love is an oil. How shall we then live? We are to live by growing and using faith, by holding on to hope, and by liberally, generously spreading love wherever we go. How shall we then live? Live faith-filled, hope-filled, and love-filled lives.