

Hebrews 10:19-25
Ezekiel 36:16-38
Psalm 42

“Faith, Hope, and Love: Our Priestly Calling”

April 18, 2021

What is the problem in Ezekiel 36?

“they defiled” the land “by their ways and their deeds.” (v17)

So the problem is sin.

But the next line adds “Their ways before me

were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity.”

What on earth does that mean?!

Their ways – before me – were like the uncleanness of a woman –
when she is having her period.

If you are not careful, you might think that Ezekiel is saying that menstruation is sinful.
But that’s entirely backwards!

Menstruation illustrates our problem.

Because our problem is that we are a bloody mess.

“The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.”

Menstruation is what happens when an egg does *not* become a baby.

We often talk about how woman is uniquely made to bear children.

But, of course, the average woman will menstruate

at least two or three hundred times in her lifetime.

Only a few times will she actually get pregnant.

So several hundred times in *every* woman’s life,

there is a reminder that we are a bloody mess.

I suppose that in an unfallen world, Eve’s menstruation would have had a very different meaning –
and probably a very different experience.

But after the Fall, and especially after the *Promise*

that the Seed of the Woman would crush the head of the serpent –

the bloody experience of menstruation became connected with our condition.

The very process that is at the heart of conceiving and bearing children –

by which the Word would become flesh and dwell among us –

is also a symbol of the futility of humanity apart from that Word!

God’s purpose was for his holy name to dwell among us!

But our sin kept us apart from him.

So when Ezekiel says that our ways are like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity, the point is that what if our entire life was one giant period? – a never-ending bloody mess?!

What if life was all period – and never babies?
What if there was no cleansing?
What if we stayed unclean forever?

This is why we sing Psalm 42 in response!
Just as Ezekiel speaks of how God will sprinkle clean water on his people and cleanse them, so Psalm 42 speaks the roar of God's waterfalls cascading over me.

In the midst of the misery – in the midst of our isolation and tears –
God is the one who acts to save us and bring us near to himself.

Sing Psalm 42A
Read Hebrews 10:19-25

The problem of Ezekiel 36 has been dealt with!
No longer are we unclean!

God has done what we could not do for ourselves!
Jesus has opened the way to God!
Our hearts have been sprinkled from an evil conscience –
our bodies have been washed with pure water –
we have been baptized into Christ – cleansed from our sins –
and we now *enter* the heavenly holy places by the blood of Jesus.

So now what?!
Now we draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,
we hold fast the confession of our hope,
and we consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.

Faith, hope, and love.

It is remarkable how many biblical passages talk about “faith, hope and love.”
1 Corinthians 13 is perhaps the most famous.
But Colossians 1 is also structured around the three,
as is 1 Peter 1, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Galatians 5:5-6, and Ephesians 1:15-18.

Augustine and others have written manuals of Christian living
structured around these three.

Faith, hope and love.

What is the relationship between these three?

The more you think about them, the more convinced you become
that these three – faith, hope, and love – are inextricably bound together
in the Christian life.

In 1 Cor 13 Paul says that the “greatest of these is love”
because love is the one that will endure,
after faith becomes sight—and after our hope is fulfilled.

In Colossians 1 Paul suggests that hope is the foundation of the three,
because Christ is that hope that is laid up in heaven for us.

And in Galatians 5, Paul says that faith is the way in which we appropriate that hope,
a faith that works by love.

Hebrews 10 also draws these themes together
in order to take all that he has said about the work of Christ
and apply it to your life in Christ.

And verses 19-21 lay the foundation:

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers,^[c] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,*
²⁰ *by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,*
²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*

For several weeks now we have been focused on Hebrews exposition of the
new priesthood, the new covenant, and the new sacrifice.

Now we see the result of all this.

Therefore, brothers,
because of all that we have said about priesthood, covenant and sacrifice,
we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.

We get to enter the Holy places—
which holy places?

Obviously not the earthly holy places.

We get to enter the heavenly holy places—

because we enter by the blood of Jesus, which was offered in the heavenlies.

This is the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain,
that is, through his flesh.

Stop for a moment.

Think through the implications of what Hebrews is saying.

In the OT the high priest entered the holy of holies once each year.

No one else got to go in—ever!

What kept the people out?

That veil—the curtain of the temple.

The opening exhortation in 6:19-20,

said that we have a hope that “enters into the inner place behind the curtain,
where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.”

But not only has Jesus gone behind the curtain,

now Hebrews says that Jesus’ flesh is the curtain.

The curtain of the tabernacle was made of blue and purple and scarlet yarns
and fine twined linen (Ex 26:31; cf. 2 Chron. 3:14)

There is still only one way to enter the Most Holy Place.

You must pass through the curtain.

As the quotation from Psalm 40 last week said,
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me”

The body of Jesus is the curtain through which we must pass to enter the presence of God.

He is the priest.

He is the sacrifice.

He is the Holy Place.

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.

This is how the Christian message is both completely inclusive – in that it comes to *everyone* –
but also entirely exclusive – in that it calls all people everywhere to come *to Jesus*.

We have a great priest over the house of God.

This echoes the language of chapter 3:6 (Christ as the Son faithful over the house),
and 4:14, Jesus, the Son of God who is the great high priest.”

(All the themes of Hebrews are coming to their climax!)

Verses 19-21, then, set the stage.

It summarizes the “therefore” nicely for us,
reminding us of “the point” of the last four chapters.

We have confidence to enter the holy place through the blood of Jesus,
the great priest over the house of God.

That “confidence” brackets the larger passage (10:19 and 10:35),

starting with “since we have confidence” (v19)

and concluding with “therefore do not throw away your confidence.” (v35)

Your confidence is grounded firmly and finally upon the once-for-all work of Jesus.

Your entrance into the Holy Places is based solely upon what Jesus has done.

But that doesn't mean that you are irrelevant.

What you do *matters*.

As Hebrews 12:14 will say,

“strive for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Hebrews holds together two things that many would wish to drive apart:

the finality of the once-for-all work of Christ on our behalf,

that is the source of our confidence;

and the necessity of our response of faith *and obedience*.

It is *because* we have been given access to the Heavenly Holy Places,

that God's law is truly placed in our hearts and written on our minds. (10:16)

And in light of this, Hebrews offers three exhortations in verses 22-25:

let us draw near

let us hold fast

and let us consider how to stir each other up to love and good works

(And just for fun, Hebrews 10:19-25 is all one sentence in Greek!)

1. Faith: Let Us Draw Near (10:22)

²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

The order itself is important: draw near, hold fast, and consider.

You cannot hold fast to something that is far away!

If you are far away, drifting further and further away,

then you will not be very effective at paying careful attention to it!

So the first thing is to draw near.

This is priestly language—drawing near to God in the holy place.

You are able to do that which all Israel could not do.

You are able to draw near to God himself.

You draw near to God in prayer and in worship.

You are not left at a distance from God—

gazing from afar.

But *how* do you draw near?

There are two things that Hebrews says about this:

One, “With a true heart in full assurance of faith”

And

Two, “With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed with pure water.”

What is a “true heart”?

This is what was promised in Jeremiah 31—that God would give his people a heart of flesh,
removing their hearts of stone.

Or as Ezekiel 36 said, “I will give you a new heart.”

The true heart is that new life that has been given to you in Christ.

When the new covenant comes, God gives his people a new heart.

And since Hebrews has demonstrated that the new covenant *has* come,
therefore we may draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

In other words, there is no reason to doubt God’s welcome of you.

You may draw near in full assurance of faith.

But as we said, drawing near is priestly language.

When the priests drew near, they had to be washed with water and sprinkled with blood.

Therefore we draw near, as priests,

“with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Hebrews talked about the sprinkling of the blood in Exodus 24 (9:18-22),
where Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the covenant.

That blood was unable to cleanse the conscience of the worshipers.

It promised the forgiveness of sins –
but it could not *accomplish* the forgiveness of sins.

But Jesus’ blood sprinkles clean our hearts,
even as the water of baptism washes our bodies.

This shows us the two parts of baptism—
the outward sign of water, and the inward work of the Holy Spirit.

We are able to draw near to God

because we have received the cleansing of the new covenant,
a cleansing that is not merely outward, but also inward.

Your baptism is your priestly consecration that sets you apart for your priestly service—
a service characterized first as “drawing near”

with a true heart in *full assurance of faith*.

We’ll spend several weeks looking at faith – since chapter 11 of Hebrews
is all about faith!

But here the focus is on *assurance* of faith –

and indeed, *full* assurance of faith.

The idea here is the most certain confidence.

We draw near to God with *full assurance* of faith.

We have the most certain confidence –
not *because* of our faith –
but *because* of Jesus.

And this then leads into verse 23:

2. Hope: Let us Hold Fast (10:23)

²³ *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

We are called to “hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering.”

It is no accident that baptism and confession are placed together here.

To “confess” is to “say the same thing” – (homologia)

and we are called to hold fast the confession of our hope–

and our hope is nothing more or less than Jesus

(6:18, and the hope set before us,

4:14 and the confession of Jesus as the great high priest in the heavens)

We are called to maintain a firm confidence in the objective work of Jesus for us.

There may be times when you wonder, why does the pastor keep focusing on what Jesus did!

I want to know what I should be doing.

Well, what *are* you supposed to be doing?

Hebrews says that you need hold fast to the confession of your hope!

What is *hope*?

Hope is what you are looking for – what you are waiting for.

Hope is about the future.

What is it that motivates you to do what you do?

What is the hope – what is that future – that you look forward to?

For some, that hope is a good job – getting married – seeing your family thrive...

Those are all good things.

But they do not make for a solid *hope*.

They are flimsy pegs that cannot hold the weight of life.

The only hope that endures is Jesus.

You need to hold fast to Jesus.

He *is* the confession of our hope.

You need to cling to who Jesus really is – and what he really did!

Why?

Because he who promised is faithful.

It is that hope that will keep you going when all other hopes fail and wither.

When you are tossed to and fro by the trials and temptations of life,

what are you holding fast to?

“I was a good person...”

“I tried my best...”

Or will you be gripping tight to that confession,

“Jesus is Lord!”

“He is my hope!”

“He is faithful to the end!”

So we draw near to God with full assurance of faith.
We hold fast to the confession of our hope.
And *because of these things*,
we love.

3. Love: Let us Consider How to Stir Up One Another (10:24-25)

Yes, love is the one of these three that will remain.

But love is rooted firmly in faith and hope.

And a love that does not flow from faith and hope,
is no true love at all.

Only when you have drawn near to God in faith,
and only when you cling to Christ, the confession of our hope,
can you truly love.

And so let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Now the focus turns.

So far the focus has been upon our relationship to God—
as our faith and hope are in him—
but now we are called to consider each other.

Those who have drawn near to God,
those who are holding fast the confession of their hope,
must not forget about each other.

²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

How often do you consider how to stir each other up to love and good works?

Notice that for Hebrews, the question is not simply how can *you* love God and neighbor.

The question is how can you stir up *one another*?

You see, when we are focused on *ourselves* – what should *I do*?

we lose sight of how we are a priestly people – connected to one another.

Jesus said that the world would know that you are his disciples by the way that you love each other.

What should the world say about you?

Does your love for one another reveal that you are a disciple of Christ?

It is easy to get caught up in your busy schedule

(and to make sure that your schedule stays that busy!).

And your schedule can include lots of ‘church people’ and ‘church projects’!

But just being busy with church people is not what Hebrew is talking about.

Stirring up one another to love and good deeds starts with *knowing each other*.

One of my seminary professors would always say, “love, know, speak, do.”

It starts with *loving* the person –
but of love cannot remain ignorant!
So you have to get to *know* the person – you have to do a lot of listening!
Only then can you *speak* and encourage them to *do* something.

We need to stir each other up to love and good works.

There are two participles in verse 25 that flesh out the meaning of verse 24:

“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some”
This refers to the regular gathering of the church for worship.
Sunday was a business day in the Roman world.
It would have been easy to miss worship and say, “well, I had to work!”
That may be true occasionally, but Hebrews warns against making that a habit.

Absence from worship and fellowship has dire consequences.
The “for” that starts verse 26 seems to suggest
that absence from worship and fellowship is the first step of “sinning deliberately.”
If we draw near to God in our worship,
then it is here, in our worship, that we are refocused on the confession of our hope,
Jesus Christ.
And yes, you can draw near to God anywhere!
But Hebrews says that what we do when we “meet together”
is at the heart of that love that binds us together in Christ.

Faith, hope and love are not three unrelated things.
You cannot have one without the others.
And if you lack one, then the others are missing as well.
If you say you have faith and hope, then love must be present as well.
And if you do not love your brother, whom you have seen,
then you cannot love God whom you have not seen (1 John 4:20)

The second participle, is
“But encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
Hebrews 3:13 urged us to exhort each other “daily,”
which may suggest that the church gathered daily at this time.
I suspect that we are probably all too immature
to handle daily meetings at this point in our life together!

But we’re doing better than we used to!
We have morning prayer at the Caylor House on Tuesdays.
We have morning prayer at Academy on Wednesdays.
Shepherding groups and Village provide for evening prayer on Thursdays.
And there are lots of other gatherings – both formal and informal –
that provide opportunity for encouraging one another

as we see the Day drawing near.

The idea of encouragement is crucial.

We need encouragement.

This includes loving reproof, admonitions, warnings.

We need to be called and exhorted to walk in the good way.

What are you doing to encourage others?

Different people have different needs.

Some people get really quiet when they are discouraged.

Other people get really bouncy to try to put you off the scent.

But when you see someone who needs encouragement to walk in the right way,
just remember, “love, know, speak, do.”

Love them.

Know them – listen – seek to understand.

Then speak – and encourage them to *walk* with you.

Why?

Because of what comes next.

“The Day” draws nearer.

And (read v26-31)

We’ll look at this in more detail next week,
but this is why we need to encourage each other.

No, God’s elect will never fall away,
but God ordains both the end and the means.

And *we* the means that God uses at keeping his elect from falling away!

I *know* it was the encouragement of Mark Kirchgastner
who was God’s agent in keeping me from falling
during my freshman year of college.

He pursued me – he loved, he sought to know me – he understood me!

And so when he told me, “Peter, you think you much!” –

I realized that he was right.

Faith, hope and love.

The greatest of these–

the one that endures through all time and eternity–
is love.