

YOU HAVE NEED OF ENDURANCE

SERIES: THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON

By Steve Zeisler

The attention of the world was focused recently on the summit in Iceland, the meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev. It was called a summit because of the elevated position of these two men, the heads of the most powerful nations that have ever existed on the face of the earth. All the world regarded the meeting as a heroic opportunity to do good and perhaps change the course of history. Yet, no summit meeting of political leaders can ever meet the needs or claim the allegiance of a human heart.

The same observation could be made of sports or entertainment figures who are, I suppose, heroes of a sort. In recent weeks the sports pages of newspapers seem to have devoted themselves to discovering what football quarterback Joe Montana ate for breakfast. We read in lengthy detail of every step he took and every breath he breathed following his back surgery. But we did not find that this heroic figure of the football world has any capacity to challenge or encourage the inner man. Human heroes are always watched and cheered from a distance.

What a difference we discover between the heroic figures of politics and sports of our day and the heroic figure of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, as we have been discovering him in the pages of the book of Hebrews! In opening up for us the way into the presence of God, in his tearing apart the veil that separated us from the God of the universe, Jesus has done what no one else could possibly do. What an awesome, magnificent, heroic accomplishment! How dramatic are his words, quoted in Hebrews 10:9, “BEHOLD, I COME TO DO THY WILL.” Observe the magnificent entryway he achieved that we might go boldly into the heavenly tabernacle, the very presence of God:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11, 12)

“His own blood shed for us...” That was the cost of the magnificent entry offered to us that we might come into the presence of God. Jesus Christ fought the battle, shed his blood, and won freedom for us. He is our great heroic figure who accomplished for us the desire of our hearts.

In contrast to other heroes, however, what Jesus did for us does require a response from us: He demands our allegiance. We just can’t stand aside and view his work from a distance, feigning an emotional or intellectual appreciation for what he accomplished in our behalf. We are not allowed that luxury. Jesus’ saving sacrifice requires a response from us.

The section of Hebrews that begins with Hebrews 10:19 has an interesting juxtaposition of statements about drawing near to God. Verse 19 says, “Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...” and then, Hebrews 10:22, “...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...” This confident, full assurance of faith and freedom to enter the presence of God is something Christians ought to rejoice to do. But then, just a few verses further on it says, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). There are some who will be terrified to approach God. They are haters of God, and are sealed in their rebellion. They denigrate the work of Christ and trample it underfoot.

Everyone must come close to God, whether with joy or fear. Being an onlooker, an observer who refuses to take sides is not an option. There will be no seats for viewers at the great final drama.

In today's passage we will see that we also have a need for endurance, not momentary enthusiasm. The measure of whether we are in Christ or not comes from a life that is characterized by enduring qualities.

Chapter 10 of Hebrews, beginning in verse 19, sets forth what is the Christian's possession by virtue of Christ's sacrifice:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near.... (Hebrews 10:19-22a)

The two "since" clauses in this verse summarize the great work of Christ on our behalf. Since the veil has been removed, and our High Priest attends us—since these things are true—"let us draw near." What is our possession? What do the "since" clauses teach us? They declare that the veil has been removed. That is, there is no longer any barrier between God and us. We legally have the right to enter his presence. No one can deny it to us. Furthermore, we have a Great Priest who ushers us into the presence of God. Not only do we have a right of entry, we have the loving ministry of a personal Savior who goes with us as we spiritually draw near to the Lord.

Last week I visited a friend who is the chief executive officer of a high-tech Silicon Valley company. Like most companies in this field, his company has stringent security requirements for visitors. In order to be allowed beyond the receptionist's desk, for instance, your name has to appear on a list, which indicates you are cleared for entry. Furthermore, you must prove your identity by providing evidence of it. After fulfilling all these requirements, I was granted the right to proceed beyond the receptionist's desk. But just as they were pinning a badge with my name on it to my lapel, my friend came down to the receptionist's area, put his arm around my shoulder and personally escorted me to his office. Not only did I meet the legal requirements, I was permitted to enter because my friend, the boss of the company, had the authority to take me anywhere he wanted. He ushered me into the inner sanctum.

That is what the writer of Hebrews says is the Christian's possession. We have met the requirements. There is no barrier, no veil to hinder our entry into the heavenly tabernacle. But, more than that, we have one who loves us, our High Priest, who ushers into the presence of God, the very source of life itself. The heroic ministry of Christ has accomplished these things for us.

What, then, should be our response? We find it in three statements, in Hebrews 10:22-24, each of which begins with the words, "let us": "let us draw near...", "let us hold fast...", and, "let us consider..." Here is what our threefold response should be to the ministry of Christ in our behalf. The first is a response to the person of God himself; in the second we are called to minister in the world among those who do not know Christ; and in the third we are called to minister in the church among our brothers and sisters. Let's look at the first response:

...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

Let us draw near to God. Let us become his intimates, living lives that are pleasing to him. Our minds can be fully assured, giving us freedom to think as we ought. Let us think in biblical terms and have a clear understanding of the redemptive acts of our sovereign God. Our conscience can be cleansed so that we sense the approval of God as well as know it intellectually.

Even our bodies can be “washed with pure water.” There is even a cleansing of our activity, of our physical bodies. The Lord has prepared all these wonderful things for us. Ought we not draw near to him?

Consider some of the things people have done in an effort to “draw near to God.” Periodically we hear of someone wealthy and powerful throwing everything to the winds and entering a monastery in a desperate effort to do what the writer of Hebrews exhorts, “draw near to God.” Others set out on long pilgrimages, seeking teachers who may help them draw near to God. Those are examples of people taking extraordinary measures to find God by leaving a world that has no place for him.

Now, while there may be occasions when radical steps are necessary, perhaps for a period of time, that is not the main thrust of this verse. We do not draw near to God by abandoning the world and our fellow men. Running away and living in a cave won’t do it. Our Lord wants us to stay in a world that needs him, to stay in association with people who reject him. Drawing near to him has to do with the choices we make in the world in which we live.

Every aspect of our lives should be touched by the Spirit of God. Being in church on Sunday morning or spending a weekend at a Christian retreat should not be tremendously unlike our everyday world during the week. Entering into Christian fellowship and worship should not seem like traveling to a foreign country.

“Let us draw near to God” so that during the day we live by his power. We allow his mind to inform us, we are sensitive to what he points out to us and grateful for even the hard times he brings because we know trials strengthen us. Let us be intimate with him throughout the day in all of our circumstances. He calls us to this kind of response because of what he has done for us. He accomplished that heroic salvation at utter cost to himself. Let us make the choice then to draw near to God. Now, look at the second exhortation:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful....
(Hebrews 10:23)

We have made a public confession of Christ so those who surround us—our families, our fellow workers, our neighbors, have the right to measure us by that confession. Here we are exhorted to hold tight to it. Don’t waver, don’t slip away, don’t vacillate, don’t play games with it. Let us remain firm and solidly committed to our public confession so that the name of Christ is honored by what we say and do.

The Greek word even has the idea that we “hold forth” our confession. Say something about it, in other words. Those of you who are married made wedding vows to each other. You made a public confession and the vows you made included a commitment to faithfulness, to support, etc. Those vows will come under pressure at times. There will be anger, hurt and divisiveness, and it will be difficult to sustain the marriage commitment. At other times temptation enters the picture and our vows are tested. If our marriages are to remain healthy, however, we must hold fast. But how much greater is the vow you took, the public confession you made to be a servant of Christ. As we make our way through the world, therefore, we must “hold fast” and “hold forth” our commitment to Christ.

The third logical outcome of Christ’s work for us that we should respond to concerns our responsibility to church life and our responsibility towards one another in the body of Christ:

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24, 25)

Two problems in church life—complacency and arrogance—are addressed in this verse. As Christians, our commitment to loving one another and using our gifts can falter because of either. We can become complacent so that we demonstrate very little active love and responsibility for one another. Our Christian ministry becomes routine and lifeless. The writer warns us to be thoughtful in these areas. What can we do to stir up reality and stop being complacent? How can we fan the flames of our faith and service back into life? What can you do to help those close to you live a life characterized by love and good works?

Look carefully at what he is saying: “Stir one another up to love and good works.” He is not saying to stimulate one another up to write esoteric theological treatises, or begin to practice obscure religious liturgies or other “religious” things that do not minister to people’s needs. Rather, we are told to stir one another up to love, *agape* love, that magnificent compassion that finds a way to do good in all circumstances.

The word for “good” there means intrinsically good, even beautiful works. The local paper published an article about the ministry of Green Pastures last week. The story testified to Christ in the beautiful good works of people who care for handicapped children in that home. That is the kind of thing we should be stirring each other up to become involved in. Let us consider this week what would promote love and good works among the believers with whom we have influence.

Arrogance is the second problem addressed in this verse. If we would respond to Christ and minister among believers, we need to be enemies not only of complacency, but arrogance also. “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together,” we are told. Do not reject and turn your back in arrogant superiority on other believers. Do not imagine you know so much and you are so spiritual that you have advanced beyond the unwashed masses, the ordinary struggling Christians around you. Don’t ever think you do not have need of those kinds of people. “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together.”

“...as you see the day drawing near.” The day of the return of Christ is nearer, nearer perhaps than many care to think. Knowing that, we ought to all the more thoughtfully consider how we might stir up one another, being diligent to retain enthusiasm for our assembling together and being part of one another. Someone has described the problem we have in this community, where people commute great distances to work and even to church, resulting in less opportunity to fellowship together, as “time-share” Christianity. It’s like buying two weeks a year for life in a resort condominium. Our relationships are experienced only in special settings with long periods of time between them. What can we do to counteract that? What can we do to have loving and vital Christianity expressed among us’?

The next paragraph speaks of the frightening condition of those people who hate Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews spoke of drawing near to the day of the Lord’s return, he was reminded that, in fact, when Christ returns there will only be two categories of people. What he is hoping to do is remind the readers that there is no such thing as neutral ground:

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ““ VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, ““ THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

Many would like the opportunity to look on at the two strong responses made to the gospel. On one hand they might observe those who are genuinely excited about Christ. They are aware of their spiritual gifts, they are involved in ministry and they love one another. Then there is another group of people who hate the Lord. They have thoughtfully considered the

gospel but they absolutely hate it. They would trample on the blood of Christ. They would crucify him again if they were given the opportunity. They are committed as Satan is committed to eternal rebellion against God. The observers imagine themselves to be a third category, neither for nor against the cause of Christ.

But the author of Hebrews is saying that there is no middle ground. Every single person who has ever drawn a breath will be among those who love and serve the Lord or those who reject and hate him. If we are Christians, this warning should not make us fear that we will somehow “lose” Christ, but it should sober us. If we are in any sense dilettantes with the things of God, if we are in any sense holding them at arm’s length, assuming we will get around to it later, we are fools. If we are really Christians, we must get serious, because that middle ground does not exist.

The return of the Lord is approaching, the day of the final division of humanity. As every day draws us nearer and nearer to that time, so much more ought we to be concerned to be people who, in the words of these three “let us” verses here, are people who draw near, who hold fast their confession in the world, and who thoughtfully consider ministry toward one another.

The last paragraph of Hebrews 10 raises the importance of endurance in our faith. Here I think the issue being spoken of is what could be called “cheerleader” Christianity. This is a faith that is filled with life and bounce and pep and energy during the game, but is forgotten about later. That sort of thing is not honoring to God.

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting 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 was promised. FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING 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. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:32-39)

The writer of Hebrews was writing to, and I am speaking to, people who are not primarily among those who “shrink back,” those who are going to find themselves in cold-blooded, hate-filled rebellion against God at the end. But these verses are intended for Christians who have lost their heart and have let themselves become deceived into being lukewarm. The expectation is that the word of God will stir them up to life.

The present-day “yuppie” generation was characterized in the late ‘60’s and early ‘70’s by a willingness to do away with both prestige and possessions. They marched to end war in Southeast Asia and racism in this country. They were willing to live at poverty level, to be thrown in jail and to approve of those who were thrown in jail. Almost all the people who lived that way once are more materialistic than their parents ever were. They are more in love with this world and the things of this world, and committed to their own prestige. They would no more act radically if it cost them something than they would fly to the moon. The enthusiasm was temporary. The idealism for a season passed. Now most of my contemporaries are on to something else.

We must question ourselves to see if your faith has faded in a similar way. If we began it with joy, willing even to forsake prestige and property, have we lost our heart? Do we also require the admonition, “You have need of endurance?”

The issue of the return of Christ has come up more than once in this chapter. If we stop valuing what Christ did for us, the day of Christ's return will seem infinitely far off. Faith will seem difficult and boring. If we have stopped marveling at the blood that was shed for us, that our sins are forgiven, then we will have lost our energy and enthusiasm for the Christian life.

But the other condition is a renewed and growing gratitude that people like us could be saved, and that we have a High Priest who welcomes us into the presence of God. Our gratitude for that, our desire to be his and to live as we ought to live before God, before the world and before brothers and sisters in Christ should not diminish. The day of the Lord is near at hand. It is exciting to think about that. "For in yet a very little while He who is coming will come, and He will not delay." A sense of anticipation remains for those who love what Jesus has done for them.

The attention of the world was riveted on every grimace, every handshake, every paper that was shuffled back and forth at the Iceland summit. But however heroic that occasion, whatever the individuals accomplished there, it does not lay claim to us in the same way that the much loftier summit does, the occasion when Jesus entered the heavenly tabernacle and made way for people like us. That occasion commands our response in a much different way. We have laid before us the response that we might make. Let us be a people who give Jesus entry to our life, to our thinking, to our actions, to our understanding, to our conscience.

Let us draw near to him. Let us be the kind of people who hold fast our confession. May the vows we have made to belong to Jesus be regularly renewed and spoken of in the world in which we live. Let us be people who thoughtfully know how to promote life and take the time to consider what we can do to overcome complacency and battle arrogance. "For yet just a little while, He who is coming will come, and He will not delay."

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