

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25
Title: "Obeying together"
Time: 1/31/2016 am
Place: NBBC

Intro – When I was a boy growing up in Northeastern Ohio, our church enjoyed the ministry of Peniel Bible Camp. Most of my memories of days at that camp are very bright ones. But there was one day that was very dark. It was the day a friend of mine suffered a spinal cord injury and became paralyzed. It happened during a relay race in which two teams were lined up next to the camp lake on the beach, each with a couple of buckets. The race involved running into the water, filling the two buckets, running back to the line, and throwing the water into the face of the next person in line. It was a great game for a hot day.

Jim always put his heart and soul into everything he did like this, so when he went running into the water, he enthusiastically dove into the water head-first with the two buckets in his hands. The dive injured his spine. Because of the injury that occurred, Jim could not pull himself out of the water, and he floated to the top face down. Some thought he was joking for a bit, but then it became clear that Jim needed help. Jim's head was saying to his body, "Get me out of this water!" But because of the spinal cord injury, the body was not getting that message, and it was not responding.

At the center of our passage this morning stand three commands: "let us draw near" (v. 22), "let us hold fast" (v. 23), and "let us consider" (v. 24). An important word in each of these commands is the word *us*. They are commands from the Lord, so they must be obeyed; and they are commands that are issued to us, so they must be obeyed together by all of us. That is the title of the message this morning, "Obeying together."

Our need for obeying together reminded me of that time Jim's brain was commanding the other parts of his body, "Let us get

out of this water!” but the body was not listening. It had to be done, and it had to be done together, but it was not getting done, and so Jim was in a lot of trouble. Christ is the Head of our church, which is His body. He is telling us, “Let us draw near, let us hold fast, and let us consider one another,” and to the degree we are failing to obey together, we are in trouble as a local church. Let’s take the commands one at a time as we challenge our hearts this morning to obey them together.

I. Let us draw near in worship (vv. 19-22).

Ill: Since the days of Richard Nixon, newspapers have reported on fence-jumpers at the White House. Perhaps the most successful of these threats to the safety of the President and his family happened on September 9, 2014, when Omar Gonzalez jumped the fence on Pennsylvania Avenue, made it into the North Portico of the White House, went inside, and was not caught until he had reached the stairs to the private quarters of the First Family. That incident led to the replacement of the head of the Secret Service and the installation of spikes on the White House fence. Clearly, you and I are not allowed to draw near the White House at will.

Appl: For people in both Old and New Testament times, the same was true in regard to the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In fact, during the days of the author of Hebrews, neither Jewish women nor any Gentiles were allowed into the inner court of the temple complex, which was called the court of Israel. The Gentiles were kept further away than the Jewish women, who had their own separate court area. No one but the high priest on the Day of Atonement could go into the holy of holies to worship in the presence of the Lord. But in the face of those facts, our author reminds us of our duty to draw near into the holy of holies in worship. He does so with a confidence in three things:

1. We have confidence in a true heart and the full-assurance of faith as we draw near. What the author of Hebrews has argued

throughout this letter about the temple in Jerusalem is that it was only a copy of the true temple, which is heaven, the dwelling place of God (see 9:24). So the holy of holies made with hands is a copy of God's dwelling place, and heaven itself is the true dwelling place of God. In Hebrews, a *copy* is a representation of what is called *true*. This is what the author means when he says that we need to draw near with a true heart. The true heart is not the copy of the person qualified to approach God, but the real thing. The copy was described for us in 9:13. The copy that symbolized a true heart ready to worship God was the Levitical priest who was sprinkled with animal's blood and whose flesh was purified with the water containing the ashes of the red heifer (Num. 8:7).

So the true heart is the copy's antitype. It is a heart that has been sprinkled by the blood of Christ in the full-assurance of faith alone, and the result is not the cleansing of the flesh, but rather the sprinkling of hearts with the blood of Christ and the washing of the body of Christ, the church, through the new birth by God's Spirit. Religious practices can provide a copy of worship, but only through the heart sprinkled by the blood of Christ, and the body cleansed by the pure water of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration (Tit. 3:5) can a worshipper actually draw near to worship in the presence of the God of heaven. So we worship because of what really happened to our hearts by faith, and because of what Christ and God's Spirit did to make it possible. Are you a worshipper of God who is confident that your heart and life really have been changed by Christ's blood and God's Spirit? Being saved should cause us to worship.

2. We have confidence in Christ's shed blood as we draw near (vv. 19-20). You will remember that on the night of the cross the veil guarding the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom. Our author here interprets that event by comparing the tearing of the veil to the tearing of the flesh of Christ, which produced a sprinkling of blood on the way into the presence of God. So the entrance into the presence of God for worship is

paved with the blood of Christ. We have this new confidence that the way into the holy of holies is open to us because Christ shed His blood for our sins.

It was open to the Old Testament believer as well, for in the eyes of our eternal God, Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8); but if the Old Testament believer was confident about his ability to worship, how much more should we be, having seen what Christ has done for all sinners on the cross? It is in this sense that the way is new and living. It is revealed to the New Testament believer more fully. Still, listen to what David understood about the worship of his God: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). Has that been our worship experience? David knew how to draw near. Do we with our benefit of added confidence and boldness having seen as part of our history the new and living way? Do we see that the opportunity to worship the Lord was provided by the tearing of the flesh of our Savior and the sprinkling of His blood on the way? Does it mean to us what it did to David?

3. We have confidence in Christ's priestly ministry (v. 21). That priestly ministry was described earlier in this letter (Heb. 4:14-16). We draw near to the presence of God in worship to find grace to help in time of need. That we have confidence in Christ's priestly ministry as we worship means that we believe He will meet our needs in times of worship. It is not that we should worship less when we are needier. Not at all. The needier we are the more we must obey the command, "Let us draw near for worship in the presence of God." Remember how David did this? At Ziklag, when the Amalekites had taken captive the families of his men, including his own family, and had burned their encampment to the ground; and they had wept until they had no more strength to weep; and his men began to speak of stoning him; what did David do? He worshipped. The text says, "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6). Do you know how to get that help when

you need it? We must learn to worship with confidence in Christ's priestly ministry. For all of these reasons, let us confidently and consistently draw near in worship.

II. Let us hold fast the confession of faith (v. 23).

III: There are various ways of measuring the pace of change. One of those is to ask how many years it takes for an invention to be used by $\frac{1}{4}$ of the American population. I saw a chart that answered that. Electricity, invented in 1873, needed 46 years before it was used by $\frac{1}{4}$ of Americans. The telephone, invented in 1876 needed 35 years. Radio, coming in 1897 was in $\frac{1}{4}$ of American homes after 31 years. Television took 26 years after its invention in 1926. The personal computer took only 16 years after its invention in 1975. The mobile phone, invented in 1983 took 13 years. And the internet, invented in 1991, took only 7 years to be used by $\frac{1}{4}$ of the American population. The rate of change is accelerating in our world.

Appl: The Lord here issues a command about one thing that should never change about us – our willingness to hold fast to our profession of faith without wavering. *Wavering* is basically the opposite of *holding fast*. It means *to lay something down* rather than hold it fast. It does not mean that we never struggle as we hold fast. But it does mean that what we believe should not get caught up in the accelerating pace of change in our day. We hold it fast. We are to do so without wavering.

And we are to do so for a singular reason – He is faithful who promised. The word *faith* here is actually the word *hope* (so translated in earlier versions like Tyndale and the Geneva Bible; *faith* is belief in God's truth, and *hope* is belief in God's promise). We hold fast to hope because of God's faithful promise, and that promise is the one we read about in 9:15, our eternal inheritance. We receive it after we have faithfully done the will of God (10:36). And it has always been the motivation of the faithful (11:13). The profession of our faith must not change; it must hold fast; for He who is faithful has promised us that it

will be worth it all someday. We live for heaven's treasures, not this present world.

So is it possible for a true believer in Christ to not hold fast his profession of faith? It is certainly possible for a true believer to not hold fast the profession of his hope, to begin living for this world rather than the next. It is also possible for a professing believer to not really be a believer who holds fast his profession of faith, but the Scripture indicates that those who are truly a part of God's household are also those who hold fast their profession of faith (Heb. 3:6, 14; Luke 8:11-15). We hold fast to the seed, the word of God, and bear fruit with endurance, because of the nature of the soil of our hearts. There is no indication in this parable that good soil can ever turn bad. No, the teaching is that good soil holds fast the seed and produces plants with good fruit. So what kind of soil is in your heart? Will you be one who holds fast your profession of faith? If not, you need to be saved. Are you holding fast your profession of hope by living for the eternal inheritance to come? If not, you either need to be saved or you will know the chastening of the Lord in your life as His child.

Transition: There are many today who are willing to draw near in worship and hold fast their hope, but then with this last command they have a difficult time. Ecclesiastes speaks of a three-fold chord not being easily broken, and we have come to the third strand of this important chord of obedience.

III. Let us consider our assembly (vv. 24-25).

Ill: Webster defines a *paroxysm* as "a fit, attack, or sudden increase or recurrence of symptoms (as of a disease)." One of my 5/6 grade basketball players was at a friend's house waiting to come with him to practice when all of a sudden he broke out into a bad rash. That was a paroxysm.

Appl: That word comes from the Greek word translated *provoke* in verse 24. What our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is calling for

from His body, our church, is a breakout of love and good works. We are to consider one another in such a way that the fellowship we enjoy causes each of our lives to break out in a rash of love and good works.

These go together, don't they? Love without good works is not much good, and good works without love are good for nothing (1 Corinthians 13). How is this done? Very simply: "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves, but exhorting one another." We have a ministry responsibility toward one another that requires that we faithfully assemble and minister to one another. The text is clear that we will need that more, not less, as the day of the Lord's return approaches. And it is also clear that some have the opposite custom. Just as important as worship and as holding fast to what we believe is, so is being faithful to come to our assembly times for ministry to one another. Are you obeying this command, or is it your custom to forsake these meetings?

Ill: There is nothing new about failures to come to church. Adolf Harnack studied this phenomenon among the literature of the early church fathers, and he concluded this: "At first and indeed always, there were naturally some people who imagined that one could secure the holy contents and blessings of Christianity as one did those of Isis and the Magna Mater, and then withdraw. Or, in cases where people were not so shortsighted, levity, laziness, or weariness were often enough to detach a person from the society. A vainglorious sense of superiority, and of being able to dispense with the spiritual aid of the society, was also the means of inducing many to withdraw from fellowship and from the common worship. Many, too, were actuated by fear of the authorities; they shunned attendance at public worship, to avoid being recognized as Christians." Well, some things haven't changed over the last 2000 years in the Lord's work, and we are called to obey together in spite of these real difficulties and discouragements.

Conclusion: Let us draw near in worship. Let us hold fast our profession of faith in God's promises. Let us consider one another and not forsake our assembly times. To do less is to sin willfully (v. 26). When God says, "Let us," and we fail to comply, that is willful sin and disobedience. Where we are sinfully failing to worship, to hold fast, and to assemble for ministry, we must repent, or our church will be left to drown in the deep waters of our willful disobedience.

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching