

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, September 16, 2007**

PRIVILEGE AND PERSEVERANCE

Hebrews 10:19-25

“Everything that was written in the past,” says Paul in Romans 15:4, ‘was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.’”

In the providence of God, in the sovereign goodness of God, even though it was written long ago and even though some parts of it may be hard to understand, everything in the Bible is meant for us today. It is not just for us today, as though it had nothing to say to all the generations before us. Sometimes, in our ego-centrism and our infatuation with the “now,” we forget that the universe doesn’t revolve around us. We are not, as the movers and shakers of the Renaissance asserted, “the measure of all things.”

Though the Bible’s message is not just for us today, it remains as authoritative and trustworthy, as relevant and applicable to life as it was when it was first written under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s Letter to the Romans, for example, is meant for us today in 21st century America, just as it was meant for 1st century Christians in Rome. The Letter to the Hebrews, written to 1st century Jewish Christians in a time when their faith and endurance were being tested, is meant for us today as well. God’s Word is meant to teach us God’s truth, to train us in godly living, to convict us, to correct us, and to equip us to serve God. It is meant to inspire us. To encourage us. And to transform us by the renewing of our minds (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Romans 12:2).

This message today is meant to encourage you. It is meant to inspire you. It is meant to remind you of the amazing privileges that are ours as followers of Christ. It is intended, God willing, to stir you up in your soul and to spur you on in the life God has called you to live.

This passage of Scripture from Hebrews 10 is meant to encourage us. It is meant to stir us up and spur us on to a life of worship and witness, a life of fellowship and discipleship, a life of love and practical service in the name of Jesus.

THE BASICS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The basis of the encouragement we are given here in Hebrews 10 is the saving work of Christ on the cross for us. Because of what Jesus accomplished for us there, because of His atoning sacrifice for us, because He carried our sins in His body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24), because of the unchanging faithfulness and all-sufficient grace of God, because, as it says in verses 19 and 20, Jesus has opened for us “a new and living way” to come into

the presence of God through the shedding of His blood for us, we have the privilege of unrestricted access to the God of the universe.

If you want to have an appointment or an audience with the President of the United States, you don't just show up at the White House and ring the doorbell. You can't walk into the Oval Office whenever you want. You've got to have connections in order to see the President. You've got to get through security. And you've got to be available when the President wants to meet with you.

But sinners redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we who have placed our hope for salvation in the person and work of Christ – and Him alone, have the glorious freedom and incomparable privilege to come into God's presence, right into His throne room, with confidence not fear, with boldness not timidity. No appointment necessary. The door is open. The wall which separated us from God has been removed. The sin which disqualified us from coming into God's presence has been covered by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for us. The curtain in the temple in Jerusalem, which symbolized the barrier separating a holy God and sinful people, was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died for us.

The way into God's presence is now open. Not because of any merit of ours. Not because of anything we have done to open the way. But because of the merit of Christ our Savior. Because of what He has accomplished for us. It is a new and living way, a way that is totally dependent on His merit and grace.

Through the saving work of Christ, we have been given a new standing before God and the priceless privilege of open access to the King of the universe. No waiting. He is always available. He welcomes us to come into His presence as a loving father welcomes his children into his arms. Because we *are* God's children through faith in Christ.

This is the ground of the encouragement we are given in Hebrews 10. Our consciences have been made clean by the blood of Jesus. Our guilt before God is gone. Every vestige of it has been renewed. I love the way Horatio Spafford describes it:

My sin – O the bliss of this glorious thought! –
my sin, not in part but the whole,
is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

In view of all this, God's Word urges and encourages us here in Hebrews 10 to take hold of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. Look at verse 22: It urges and encourages us first of all to draw near to God with a trusting heart, with a faith that does not falter, and with a spirit of humility and gratitude that comes from knowing our guilt is gone and our consciences are clear. Is there anything more freeing, more liberating in life than knowing your sins have been forgiven, your guilt has been removed and the state of your conscience wiped clean?

In view of what Christ has done for you, draw near to Him with a heart of faith and take hold of the blessings that are yours in Christ.

Have you come to Him with a heart of faith and a spirit of true repentance for your sins? Have you taken hold of the spiritual blessings that are received by faith in Christ? If not, I urge you and encourage you to do so today. It will change your life forever.

If you have come to know Christ in His saving power but have drifted away from Him for some reason, if you have allowed something to pull you away from God and to curb your enthusiasm for the things of God, I encourage you and urge you in the name of Jesus to repent and return to Him, to draw near to Him once again with a heart of faith and renewed spiritual fervor. And I urge you to do it today. Because you don't know what tomorrow will bring.

Second, God's Word urges us and encourages us to be strong and unwavering in our hope in Christ. Look at verse 23: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful." In *The Message* it reads: "Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps His word."

As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously said to President Bush 41: "Now don't go wobbly, George." Don't go wobbly in your faith in Christ. Don't waver in your trust, even when the storms of life hit hard. Hold onto your hope in Christ, a hope which serves as a firm and secure anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19).

In one of the entries for this week in his magnificent devotional book *Morning and Evening*, Charles Spurgeon speaks of Jesus as "the Lord High Admiral of the sea," and encourages us with these words:

It is well to sail with Jesus, even in a small boat. When we sail in Christ's company, we may not be guaranteed fair weather, for great storms tossed the vessel that carried our Lord (on the Sea of Galilee). We must not expect to find the sea less boisterous around our little boat. If we go with Jesus, we must be content to fare as He fares. When the waves are rough to Him, they will be rough to us. It is by tempest and tossing that we will reach land, as He did before us.

When the storm swept over Galilee's dark lake, all hearts feared shipwreck. When all human help was useless, the slumbering Savior arose and with a word transformed the riot of waves into the deep quiet of calm. Then all the little vessels were at rest.

Jesus is the star of the sea. Though there be sorrow on the sea, when Jesus is on it there is also joy. May our hearts make Jesus the anchor, the rudder, the lighthouse, the life boat, and even the harbor.

His church is His flagship... The Lord High Admiral is her great attraction.

Let her follow in His wake, mark His signals, steer by His chart, and never fear while He is within calling distance. Not one ship in the convoy will be wrecked. The great Admiral will steer every vessel safely to the desired haven.

This morning, let us by faith slip our cables off the dock for another day's cruise and sail with Jesus. Winds and waves may not spare us, but they will obey Him. Therefore, whatever squalls may occur without, faith will feel a blessed calm within.

He is ever in the center of the weather beaten company. Let us rejoice in Him. His vessel has reached the haven and so will ours.

- September 14, Morning

Do you feel weather beaten in your soul today? Do you find yourself in the midst of a storm of trials? Does it feel like you are being battered by the winds and waves, and you're hanging on for dear life?

Don't let go of Jesus. Hold on to the hope that is yours in Christ, for He is faithful. And He is able to bring you through even the fiercest storm and the most severe trial. I urge you and encourage you to hold onto the hope you have in Him. Because this hope is not based on wishful thinking. It is based on the unchanging character and unfailing promises of God.

Third, God's Word urges us and encourages us to be creative in our thinking and to see how inventive we can be (*The Message*, 10:24) in motivating one another and spurring each other on in a lifestyle of love that expresses itself in acts of kindness and compassion and practical service. Look at verse 24: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

The word used for love here is the word *agape*. It is the same word Paul uses to describe love in 1 Corinthians 13. It is the kind of love whose paradigm is the cross where Jesus gave His life for us.

How can we motivate and stimulate one another to a consistent lifestyle of this kind of love and good deeds?

We can encourage one another with our words, because words are powerful. Our words can be a gift that inspires another person to press on.

We can encourage one another with our example. By modeling this quality of love and putting it into action in practical ways. Let your life be a living example of the power of love. Not to win the praise or admiration of others, but to inspire others to love and to bring honor and glory to God.

Finally, God's Word here in Hebrews 10 urges us and encourages us not to withdraw from the fellowship of Christ's followers. It urges us not to neglect meeting together in

God's name. It urges us not to pull away from the body of believers. It urges us and encourages us not to let other activities or interests or priorities keep us from meeting with God and each other.

Some of the 1st century believers to whom Hebrews was written had gotten out of the habit of coming together for worship and fellowship and instruction in God's Word. We are not told why it happened. There may have been a hundred reasons, just as there may be a hundred reasons why some Christians pull away or drop out of church today. Or a hundred different things with which God has to compete for our attention. For our allegiance. For our affection.

God's Word urges us and encourages us to encourage one another to persevere in fellowship. To persevere in corporate worship. To persevere in the pursuit of spiritual growth. To persevere in bearing witness to the gospel in our lives. And to persevere in the work of ministry God has given each of us and all of us to do.

Let me say this about worship: I'm glad you're here to worship the Lord today. For many of you it is a godly and God-honoring habit. You're here week after week, month after month, and your consistency is an encouragement to me and other members of our church family. For others, your attendance may be more hit-or-miss, and maybe you are not as consistent or faithful as you were at one time. If that is true for you, I want you to hear what Louis Evans, Jr., longtime pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, wrote about the importance of meeting together for worship:

Worship is the event in which we become radioactive for God. When we are not in the collective worship with God's people, we have missed an exposure to God and, having missed it, we lose our radiance.

Like radioactive isotopes, Evans said,

We have a very short half-life. Get us away from the worship of God with other (believers) and our radioactivity dissipates quickly and we lose our effective radiance.

For the honor of Christ, and for the sake of your own spiritual health and vitality, don't forsake the assembly of God's people for worship. Encourage one another by your presence and perseverance and your passion for the things of God. Encourage one another with your worship and your witness. Encourage one another with your fellowship and prayers. Encourage one another with your words of encouragement and blessing. Encourage one another to go deeper with Christ and to grow stronger in God's Word.

Encourage one another to pursue spiritual growth through regular involvement in Sunday School and Bible study. Today we're beginning a new series of Sunday School classes for adults. And there are classes for children and youth as well. If you or your family are not already actively participating in this ministry of discipleship, I urge you and

encourage you in Jesus' name to get started. Even today. You will grow spiritually. And you will encourage others by your presence, by your example, and by your commitment to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

We who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we who belong to Him by faith, have been given priceless privileges and untold spiritual blessings in Christ.

Let us never drift away from God or the fellowship of His people. Let us never lose heart or lose our grip on the hope we have in Him. Let us never become weary in doing good or showing love to others. Let us never pull away from meeting with God and each other.

But let us persevere in worship and witness, in fellowship and discipleship, in the work of ministry God has entrusted to us. And let us encourage one another in all these things. Until the day of Christ's return. To the glory and praise of God. Amen.