THE HOPE WE PROFESS

Hebrews 10:19–39

Key Verses: 10:23,24

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds…”

Have you ever experienced a gap between what you know and what you do? It’s embarrassing. We know we should exercise but we don’t. We know we should love others but we don’t. In today’s passage the author of Hebrews reminds believers of what we know about Jesus: He’s our great high priest. But he also encourages us to live out our faith in our practical lives. Each day we have a choice to make: to live out our faith, or to shrink back and live naturally. But how can we live out our faith? What specifically should we do? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

The author has been showing us the superiority of Jesus. Jesus is far greater than angels (1:1–2:18) and far greater than the law of Moses (3:1–10:18). Now, from 10:19–12:29 the author strongly urges us to live by faith in Jesus and keep on persevering. To begin, he recaps what he’s been saying.

Read verses 19–21. These verses summarize the author’s main point about Jesus. And a key word here is “confidence.” It’s repeated in verse 35. We’ve all heard of self-confidence. But this confidence is different. It’s a confidence based on who Jesus is and what he’s done. He’s done something so great for us, it’s mind-boggling. Jesus has opened a new and living way for us to enter the Most Holy Place, God’s own presence. How? It says it’s through his body and blood. Through his own blood Jesus entered the Most Holy Place and won our eternal redemption (9:12). And the body of Jesus given on the cross was the perfect sacrifice for sin, once for all (7:27; 9:26; 10:10). This Jesus who died also rose again, and he’s now seated at God’s right hand (1:3b; 8:1; 10:12). He’s our great high priest (3:1; 4:14; 9:11). He always lives to intercede for us (7:25). We need to fix our thoughts on him (3:1). When we do, we gain confidence.

In Greek the word “confidence” means to speak freely, to be courageous and bold. If we think about ourselves too much, we become ashamed and feel too unworthy to say anything. But if we believe in Jesus our great high priest and what he’s done for us, we gain the confidence to approach the holy God. We also gain the confidence to speak to each other and even to non-believers.

Read verse 22. This is the first of three exhortations in today’s passage. The first thing we need to do to live out our faith in Jesus is to draw near to God. The author has already mentioned that based on the better hope Jesus gives us, we can draw near to God (7:19). He encouraged us in 10:1 to draw near to worship. Now he urges us again to draw near to God. But what does it mean? How do we actually do it? Verse 22 begins by saying “with a sincere heart.” “Sincere” means not in name only, or in appearance, but genuinely. The Greek literally says “with a true heart.” “Heart” is in contrast to head. We can think many things about God with our minds, but we need to bring our hearts to God. The Hebrews were familiar with a ritualistic faith where one had to go to a specific place to approach God. But with a sincere heart anyone can draw near to God through faith in Jesus anywhere, any time.

Next, verse 22 says we can draw near to God “with the full assurance that faith brings.” The Greek word literally means “with the most certain confidence.” It can be hard for us to approach certain people, especially if we’ve made them mad, whether it’s a friend we’ve offended, or our parent, our teacher, our boss, or some other powerful, important person. How much harder to approach the Holy God! How can we have the most certain confidence to draw near to him? Verse 22 says “having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.” Sprinkled with what? It’s a reference to the blood of Jesus. Observing laws and rituals can never cleanse our consciences. But trusting in the blood of Jesus by faith actually cleanses our consciences (9:14). We need to confess our sins and claim the blood of Jesus by faith so that we can draw near to God and to one another (1Jn1:7–9). So in our personal prayers, it’s good to always begin by meditating on how holy God is, and on how Jesus shed his blood for us. “Having our bodies washed with pure water” is a reference not to a daily shower, but to being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus (Ro6:3,4). Because we’ve fully accepted his death and resurrection and been baptized by his Spirit, we can now draw near to God and call him “Abba, Father.”

Read verse 23. This is the author’s second exhortation. Once we’ve drawn near to God through the blood of Jesus, it says we have a hope. It also says we “profess” this hope, meaning we’ve told people we personally accept and believe it. We told people we have this hope, but now we have to “hold unswervingly” to it in our practical lives. The book of Hebrews uses this word “hope” seven times (3:6; 6:11,18,19; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1). The world seems hopeless. We ourselves seem hopeless, too, especially because we’re such weak and chronic sinners. But the good news is, Jesus our Great High Priest gives us hope! By faith we can be greatly encouraged because of this hope (6:18) and even glory in this hope (3:6). This hope gives our souls an anchor that is firm and secure (6:19). This hope makes us diligent (6:11). This hope is the best hope there is (7:19).

But how can we not just give lip service to this hope, or just know about it with our heads, but really live out each day with this hope? It says we have to “hold unswervingly” to it. Our Lord Jesus warned us about this. He said “the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things” can come into our hearts and choke out our hope (Mk4:19). What may be even worse, we can succumb to all kinds of godless, negative messages that rob us of all hope. To hold unswervingly to our hope in Jesus, we need to remind ourselves of it each and every day. Again, our personal prayers are the best place to start. We need to meditate on the great hope God has given us in Jesus, the living hope of our eternal inheritance kept in heaven for us personally (1Pe1:3,4). Honestly, how much time do we spend each day thinking about this hope? Or how much time are we spending meditating on other hopes?

Why is this hope so sure? The author says in verse 23b, “for he who promised is faithful.” Sometimes things can seem to be going from bad to worse. More rejection. More hardship. More conflict. More disappointment. But as we think about what God has promised us in Jesus, we become absolutely sure of this hope. Why? Not because of ourselves, or our situation, but because of who God is. God always keeps his promises. God is extremely faithful to his promises. The book of Hebrews repeats this word “promise” 18 times. God promises that we will enter his eternal rest in Jesus (4:1). He promises us an eternal inheritance in Jesus (9:15). To hold unswervingly to our hope, despite all the distracting and discouraging things we have to face, we need to remind ourselves of his promises and believe his promises every day.

Read verse 24. This is the author’s third exhortation to us. It’s interesting that he uses the expression “Let us consider…” It’s the same Greek word the author uses in 3:1 when he says to “fix our thoughts on” Jesus. What are we fixated on? Usually it’s ourselves. But if we’re going to really live out our faith in Jesus in our daily lives, we need to get fixated on how to spiritually encourage others. The phrase “spur one another on” is very interesting. In Greek it means to provoke or even irritate. It’s obnoxious to be irritating others all the time, especially when it’s in the name of spirituality. Pray more! Repent more! Read your Bible more! Go fishing! But here it means we shouldn’t be kicking but nudging each other lovingly. We should also pay attention to what we should be encouraging each other to do. The goal should always be love and good deeds. We live out the hope we profess in Jesus as our lives are filled with love and good deeds. It means how we treat people. We should constantly be showing people God’s love and doing good deeds. Honestly it can be draining, because many people are endlessly taking. But as we’re renewed in our faith and hope in Jesus, we can keep on loving even very difficult people, and we can keep on doing good deeds even when they’re ignored or unappreciated.

There’s another important practical aspect to living out our faith and hope in Jesus. Read verse 25. According to this verse, church meetings are very important. Of course we can schedule too many meetings. Some meetings are only administrative. Sometimes church meetings can be discouraging, especially when we feel ignored or despised. Some people go to church meetings very strictly to prove their own righteousness. But the main purpose of church meetings should be to encourage one another spiritually. Before we go we should pray to be encouraged, but also to go there to encourage others. Today many people look for churches that will suit their own needs. According to verse 25, this is the wrong mindset. We should go to church meetings to encourage one another. We can encourage each other in many ways, but we should especially remind each other that the day of Jesus’ coming is approaching.

In verses 26–31 the author gives another dire warning. If we’re not struggling to put our faith in Jesus into practice, we’re in danger of sliding back into our sins. There are two kinds of sins: those that come from weakness or ignorance, and those that are willful sins. Willful sins are deliberate. We know it’s wrong, but we do it anyway. It’s spiritually very dangerous. We should ask God to keep us from willful sins (Ps19:13). Why? Because sinning deliberately makes us lose our fear of God. Today we live in a culture where nothing is sacred. People mock everything and everybody and commit sins boldly. But as God’s people we should fear him. According to verse 31, God is living, he will judge his people, and he’ll definitely deal with all those who rebel against him. We need to remember that Jesus shed his precious blood to sanctify us and make us his holy covenant people, and that he gives us the Spirit of grace to help us in our struggle against sin. We all need this healthy warning.

In verses 32–34 the author urges his audience to remember their previous life of faith. When they first received the light of Jesus, they were suddenly thrust into a great spiritual conflict full of suffering. They were publicly exposed to insult and persecution and stood clearly with other suffering Christians. They even joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property, holding on to their hope of better and lasting possessions in heaven. It’s easy to get tired after suffering and sacrificing. So we all need to hold onto our confidence in Jesus. Read verse 36. Even in the greatest trials and sufferings we need to be patient and hold on to our faith in Jesus. The author goes on to inspire us. Read verses 37–39.

Today we learned we need to draw near to God through Jesus our Great High Priest. Read verses 23,24 again. May God help us to live out our faith in Jesus practically. May God help us fight the good fight, to hold unswervingly to our hope in Jesus, to keep showing love and good deeds, and to keep encouraging each other.