

GETTING CLOSE

Hebrews 10:23-25

- Last IPM assignment was in Rochester, MN.
- In March, 2020, God had led us to pastor next, we had an encouraging installation service on March 8, our new senior pastor was scheduled to preach his first sermon as our new pastor on the following Sunday.
- There was one minor problem, the Covid crisis blew up in the week following.

- Instead of enjoying a sweet season of meeting with his new faith family, our new pastor was preaching to a camera in an empty room.
- Church as we knew it came to a screeching halt, and God's people, along with the rest of the world, had to learn about zoom meetings, masks, and the rationing of toilet paper at Costco!

- I would like to think we learned a thing or two from this season.
- God allowed this to happen, so what does He wants us to extract from this experience?
- Lesson: Given the right conditions, it is possible for "churches" to be closed. I mean by this, to close buildings used by Christians.
- What will we do the next time?

- I want to speak to this vital question this morning and there is a word in Hebrews 10:23-25 that will help us profoundly.
- But before we look at these three verses, we need to lay some ground work.
- Allow me to define the word “church” and then provide background on the state of the church addressed in the Book of Hebrews.

I. DEFINE “CHURCH”

- The word “church” (ἐκκλησία) simply means “assembly” – a gathering of people.
- This can refer to a secular legislative assembly.
- Can be used of a local gathering of believers.
- Nowhere (114 x’s) is “church” (ἐκκλησία) used of a building.

I. DEFINE “CHURCH”

- 2 Acts 12:5 – *So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the **church** to God.*
- Here “church” refers to a people, in this case, a praying people. They are united in prayer but not necessarily all in one location.

- How do I know this?
- 3 Acts 12:12 – *And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.*
- John Mark’s house was one of the locations where **many** from the church gathered to pray for Peter. But 10k would not fit here!

- A “church” (a group of people) can gather as a defined group in a home.
- 4 ▶ Romans 16:5 – Also greet the **church** that is in their house. (Home of Prisca & Aquila)
- But “church” can refer to a people regardless of whether they are gathered.

- 5 ▶ Acts 8:1 – *And on that day a great persecution began against the **church in Jerusalem**, and **they were all scattered** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*
- Here “church” refers to a people.
- They have been scattered because of persecution but they are all still called “the church.” Here are two synonyms:

- 6 ▶ Acts 11:26 – *And for an entire year they (Barnabus & Saul) met with the **church** and taught considerable numbers; and the **disciples** were first called **Christians** in Antioch.*
- The “church” is also known by the terms “disciples” and “Christians.”
- “Church” is who we are, not a place we go.

- 7 ▶ 1 Corinthians 11:18 – *For, in the first place, when you **come together as a church**, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.”*
- We are the church. Yes, there are times when we “come together” as a church.
- But we are no less the church when we are not gathered.

- Summary: The church is not a building but a people.
- You don't **go** to church, you **are** the church!
- The church can be scattered or gathered.
- But there are some activities that are designed for the gathered church. Heb. 10:23 describes one! You cannot do this in isolation.



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2. STATE OF THE CHURCH

- To understand Hebrews 10:23-25, we need to understand the “faith history” of the group addressed in this brief “word of exhortation” (παράκλησις) (Heb. 13:22).
- The writer of this letter is trying to encourage the saints toward a specific outcome. What?

- Let's get some background based on some glimpses of their history and condition from elsewhere in the book.

- Their salvation story is truly inspiring:

9 *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* ➔

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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 (Hebrews 10:32–34).

- What a great start they made! The writer wants them to recall the glory days!

- They fully embraced the truth and promptly entered a war zone for Jesus.
- Note: They *accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.*
- Their confidence in their future fueled their astounding response to hardship. They lived from a prevailing hope.

- They were still engaged:
- 10 • *Hebrews 6:10 – For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.*
- But their zeal seems to have cooled.
- They had become “dull of hearing” (5:11).

- By this time they should be teachers, but instead they were newbies in need of the basics (5:12-13).
- The risk of drifting away from what they heard (2:1) and of growing weary and losing heart (12:3) were very real.
- So the author’s word of encouragement is about remembering who they are in Christ!

- 11 • *But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul (Hebrews 10:39).*
- He walks them through the “Hall of Faith” (Hebrews 11) to remind them of who has gone before.
- Then (12:1-3) he takes them to the cross for the ultimate faith example:

12 Hebrews 12:1–3 – *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of **faith**, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ➔

12 *For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

- Jesus demonstrated the kind of amazing faith we should emulate. He endured the cross, despising the shame, because He knew that the outcome would be worth it.
- Future joy! Us with Him!

- One more verse and then we are ready.

13 Hebrews 3:12–13 – *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, **unbelieving (ἀπιστία) heart** that falls away from the living God. But **encourage (παρακαλέω) one another** day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

- The author of Hebrews is concerned that the faith of these amazing folks may be flagging.
- So he wrote a brief word of encouragement to help them recharge their faith.
- He calls them to do the same, to encourage one another to fix their hope on what Jesus has promised and live with faith aflame!
- No we are ready for our passage! ◆

14 3. A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

- Hebrews is a brief word of encouragement (παράκλησις) to those at risk of flagging faith.
- Mutual encouragement (παρακαλέω) can fuel faith.
- In 10:23-25, the author calls the church to embrace the παράκλησις protocol.

- 15 Hebrews 10:23–25 – ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not 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.
- Let's zero in on some key elements in each verse.

- 16 • ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;
- Let us hold fast = not letting it slip away.
 - “But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and **hold it fast** (κατέχω), and bear fruit with perseverance.” (Luke 8:15)

- 16 • ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;
- “Confession of our hope” = our declaration, “My hope is in the Lord.”
 - “Without wavering” = unqualified and undiminished.
 - I could not be more convinced than I already am that living all in is worth it.

- Hebrews 10:23 is echoed elsewhere.
- 17 • Hebrews 3:6 – *Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are, if we **hold fast** our confidence and the boast of our **hope** firm until the end.*
- The pressure to compromise, to dial back zeal, is on.
- Here is the justification for flaming faith.

- 18 • *²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;*
- Here is the reason for unwavering faith!
- Jesus – who promises all who believe in Him will receive eternal life – is absolutely trustworthy.
- You could not make a better life investment!


- 19 • *²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,*
- Here is a second calling.
- Yes, make your own faith like bedrock but also do some pondering pertinent to others.
- Ask yourself, “How can I help people in my circle to love and do what God desires?”

- 19 • *²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,*
- “Stimulate” has a bit of an edge to it.
- Become a spiritual life coach who pushes those in your circle to take it to the next level.
- Help them take loving and doing (IJN) up a notch!

- 20 • ²⁵ *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another;*
- Forsaking assembly was the route some were choosing.
 - Presumably, this was one of the ways that flagging faith was expressed.
 - “Stimulating eo to love & good deeds” cannot be accomplished in isolation.

- 20 • ²⁵ *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another;*
- “encouraging one another” (παρακαλέω) requires the church to assemble.
 - We assemble to encourage one another.
 - What does it mean to “encourage?”

- To encourage means to appeal to someone to do what is right (1 Thess. 4:1) in a way that gives another every advantage to do what is right (1 Timothy 5:1).
- It also involves ministering comfort to those facing distress and affliction (1 Thess. 3:7).
- True encouragement is word-driven (Titus 1:9)

- 21 • *but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*
- Here is the clincher.
 - “the day” refers to the return of Jesus.
 - “you see” indicates that a growing sense of the imminent return of the Lord should energize us for a ministry of mutual encouragement.
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4.A NEW METRIC

- The church is not a building but a people.
- You don't **go** to church, you **are** the church!
- The church can be scattered or gathered.
- But when we gather, you are called to encourage.

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4.A NEW METRIC

- As the day of the Lord approaches, the need for mutual encouragement will ramp up.
- In the future, it is possible you will not be able to "go to church."
- But finding ways to minister one-on-one encouragement is critical to faith aflame.

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4.A NEW METRIC

- A gathering of the church is not just about the music or the sermon or being with friends.
- These things are not bad. But if there is no mutual encouragement, something vital is missing.
- As the day draws near, we will need E!

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4.A NEW METRIC

- Yes, I like to play with words.
- Title: Getting close!
- As we get close to the day, we better get close with encouragement.
- A church that doesn't gather to encourage one another is a sitting duck for disaster.

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4. A NEW METRIC

- We may not be able to meet like we are right now as a large group in a highly visible facility.
- Our non-negotiables! We are the church. We will not forsake gathering together somehow. And as often as we do, the language of biblical encouragement will flow freely among us.



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5. THE PARAKLESIS PROTOCOL

1. Search the Scriptures to find words of encouragement that minister to your soul.
2. Journal your journey and relevant words.
3. Come to every gathering of the church prepared to minister encouragement.

5. THE PARAKLESIS PROTOCOL

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2 Corinthians 1:3–4 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all **comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our affliction so that we will be able to **comfort** those who are in any affliction with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God.*

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5. THE PARAKLESIS PROTOCOL

4. Ask the Lord to reveal someone who needs encouragement.
5. Ask questions to learn of another's faith challenges or need for comfort.
6. Share what you have learned can bolster faith in a similar situation.

