

“An Anchor for the Soul: One Another”

Hebrews 3:12-4:1

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 1, 2015

This morning I want you to think for a moment about a couple of questions. First, what was it like for you becoming a Christian? Did you have a specific conversion experience where you knew God was calling you? Or perhaps like me you grew up in the church. There has never really been a time in my life that I didn't know and trust that God is real. Of course my devotion to him has not always been consistent but I've experienced the presence of God throughout my entire life and it continues to grow. Think about *your* experience.

The second question is this: why do you go to church? What is it that motivates you to be a part of this church or any church? What are you hoping to get out of it? Do you come because of the music or the sermons or maybe the punch and cookies? Think about why you're here today.

The reason I want you to think about those questions is because that's what today's passage addresses. In fact, much of the book of Hebrews is about the purpose of the church. Tim Chester is a pastor of a church movement in England and he has written several books about church formation and transformation. He says that the way you understand the story of the Bible seriously affects how you view the church. He says that one way to read the Bible narrative is like this: “God made you to know him, but you have rejected God. Your sin cuts you off from God and brings you under his judgment. But God sent his son to die in your place and reconcile you to God. Now you can know God and look forward to being with him after death.” Chester goes on to point out that this understanding of the message as a story of an individual out of relationship with God brought back into relationship with God, is true but it's not the whole truth. In fact, it's not how the Bible tells the story.

Instead, Chester suggests this version: “God made humanity to know him and to rule over his good creation. But humanity rejected God,

and ever since we have lived in rebellion against him and in conflict with each other.” Then he goes on to point out that God continually works to bring about healing and reconciliation. God chose Noah and his family to preserve and begin a new humanity. God chose Abraham and his family to be his people. “God rescued his people from slavery and made a covenant through which they could relate to him and display his glory to the world.” Here's the thing, though. These people that God had chosen and set apart for himself repeatedly rejected God. That's the story of Exodus 17 that we heard earlier which is repeated in Psalm 95 and again here in Hebrews 3. But God is faithful and he promised that a faithful remnant would remain. It turns out that ultimately Jesus is that faithful remnant. Through his death and resurrection we are now adopted into his family, into the people of God.

So Chester says, “The invitation implicit in this story is not simply to an individual relationship with God (though that is one implication). The invitation is to become part of the new people of God, the bride of Christ.” You can have a relationship with God because *we* have a relationship with God. What this means is that God is extremely interested in our life together. When you become a Christian you make a commitment to all the other Christians. It means that you don't *go* to church, you *are* the church. All of us together are the church. The reason we should be coming on Sunday and at other times is not for what we get out of it but what we each contribute to the others, which is what the writer of Hebrews is trying to get us to understand.

Before we look at what that means for us today, there are a couple of other things we need to learn from this passage. First, we see that God is serious about the problem of sin. Deadly serious. Romans 6:23 says, “the wages of sin is death.” We're warned in verse 13 about the deceitfulness of sin. We're not so much

thinking about particular sins, things we do wrong, but *sin*, which is anything that keeps us from loving God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Sin frequently takes something that God has created and called good and twists it into something self-serving.

Second, the deceitfulness of sin causes us to “fall away from the living God.” Verse 12. When we looked at chapter 2 we were warned about drifting away from what we had heard. Falling away from God is rarely a dramatic event. Rather, we tend to just sort of drift, going along with the world until we no longer see him. Notice that this passage is addressed to believers. “Take care, *brothers...*”

Third, drifting away from Christ, from his teaching, from his church ultimately results in “an evil, unbelieving heart.” That’s the warning from the story of the Israelites in verses 15-19. They had experienced God’s miraculous rescue from slavery in Egypt, deliverance from the Egyptian army by the parting of the Red Sea, leading them with the cloud during the day and the pillar of fire at night. And yet time and time again they refused to trust God to care for them. Instead they complained and grumbled against God. As a result, no one over about the age of 20, except Caleb and Joshua, was allowed to enter the Promised Land. God forced them to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of their unbelief.

But now make sure you listen to this. Unbelief is not the same thing as uncertainty or even doubt. You and I may wrestle with issues of faith. None of us fully understands God’s Word. You may even have some doubts. But the question is this – how will you live your life? Sometimes, when people find out I’m a pastor they will say something like, “I’m an agnostic,” which means not knowing. The thing is, there’s no such thing. You still have to live your life. You have to base your thoughts and actions on *something*. You can choose to live as though God is real and the story of the Bible is true while you seek to find out the truth, or are you can choose to reject it and reject God. But you

can’t just say “I don’t know.” You either say, “I don’t know and I don’t care,” or “I don’t know but I’m going to find out.”

The real question for us today, though, is what do we do? As the church, the Body of Christ, what should we do to avoid the “deceitfulness of sin?” Verse 13 is the key. “Exhort one another *every day*, as long as it is called “today.” Remember I said that when we join the Church we have an obligation to each other. Paul tells us in Romans to love one another like family because we *are* family. We all need to be in relationships with other Christians who will hold us accountable and encourage us to follow Jesus every day. Being a Christian is not always easy. We need the support of each other. John Calvin said, “Unless our faith is repeatedly warmed, it grows cold.”

Think of it like this – do you treat your faith more like a vaccination or a relationship? Probably all of you have had a polio vaccine along with a number of others. How much time this past week did you spend thinking and talking about those vaccines? Probably not much. How much time did you spend thinking and talking with others about Jesus? How much time did you spend talking *to* Jesus? We need each other to encourage and strengthen our faith, to remind each other of how much God loves you and how much he’s done for you.

That brings us to the final point. Verse 14 says, “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” Think back to my original question about your experience of becoming a Christian. No matter how it happened, you were probably pretty enthusiastic about it. You had a hunger for the Bible and a desire to be around other believers. God says we need to maintain that same level of enthusiasm for our entire life. That’s the evidence that we really have come to share in Christ.

This morning, if you find that you don’t have that same enthusiasm for Jesus and for His Church, let me encourage you, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, do whatever it takes, as 2 Peter 1 says, to “be all the

more diligent to confirm your calling and election.” Worship Christ with passion and energy. Get together with other believers for prayer and Bible study and fellowship.

Encourage and exhort one another every day.
Because the Christian faith is a team sport!

Amen