

Keep Pressing On!

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Preacher: David Jackman

[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, which is in the New Testament in the letter to the Hebrews in chapter 10. If you have one of the church visitors' Bibles, that's page 1007.

1007. And we're going to read from verse 19 of Hebrews chapter 10 through to the end of the chapter. And it begins with the great therefore.

This is what we're being urged to do and to think in response to all that the writer has spoken of the greatness of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh.

And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

[1 : 32] For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession than an abiding one.

[2 : 45] Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Amen.

May God bless to us his word. Thank you very much indeed for your warm welcome.

It's always a joy to come and share with you here at the Tron, and we do appreciate your fellowship and the ministry that God has given us together through the work of the Cornhill Courses and in many other ways.

[3 : 45] So thank you so much. It's a great joy to share together with you today. Now please turn with me back to our reading in Hebrews chapter 10, and it's page 1007 in the Church Bibles.

We have a motto in the London Cornhill that we've evolved over the years, which is this, that the secret of the Christian life is cocoa. It's spelled K-O-K-O.

That is, the secret of the Christian life is keeping on, keeping on. And our title this morning, as we look at this passage, is Keep Pressing On. Because the Christian life is a long-distance race. You may recall the story of the tortoise and the hare, how they set out in a competition to run the course to win the race, and the hare, of course, had many more natural capabilities than the tortoise to be the winner of the race.

But he became very conceited. He got halfway. He decided to have a rest and a sleep. And while he was fast asleep, the tortoise plodded on past him and won the race.

[4 : 55] Slow and steady wins the race is the motto. And the Christian life is not dissimilar from that. There are many people who start well. They have a great burst of speed at the beginning.

It looks all very impressive. But it's not sustained. There are others who seem to be running confidently, but they're careless. And this very practical section of the letter to the Hebrews has this purpose in view, to answer the question, what should be our long-term strategy for living the Christian life, for persevering as a Christian?

Let me put it to you this way. Where will you be spiritually in a year's time? You say, well, I don't know. Well, what strategy do you have to be a persevering Christian in a year's time?

Or in 10 years' time? Or in some of our cases, in 50 years' time? The stakes are very high because the outcomes are eternal.

And so I think we really need to listen to a passage like this because it's one of those passages which really exposes the dangers within our lives of just drifting along and not having a clear strategy about the things that are most important.

[6 : 18] You know, earlier in the letter, the writer warns his readers, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? And perhaps the great danger amongst us Christian peoples is neglecting our salvation.

Still affirming it, still believing it, but it isn't shaping our lives. It's not giving us the priorities in our daily experience. And it's very easy if you tie a loose knot around the bollard for your boat to be drifted away from the harbor by the tide.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? So it's a very practical passage, and I pray it will be a help to us all this morning. In front of us in the text, we've got three paragraphs.

Every good sermon has three points, of course, doesn't it? So it's easy for us to take the three paragraphs and look at them together this morning. The first one I want to call a heartwarming appeal, verses 19 through 25.

A heartwarming appeal. We noticed that word, therefore, at the beginning, and of course it links back to the teaching of the whole letter, but especially what has just been taught in chapter 10, and we'll review that in just a moment.

[7 : 31] But here we are being reminded on the basis of the Lord Jesus' perfect sacrifice to atone for our human sin, that we now have to ask ourselves the question, how then shall we live?

What ought our priorities to be? What's our strategy for keeping on, keeping on? And the message comes, the answer to that question, in the form of three clauses in verses 22, 23, and 24, that have sometimes been called the three blessed lettuces of Hebrews chapter 10.

Let us draw near, let us hold fast, and let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds. Let us draw near to God, let us hold unswervingly to our hope, and let us consider how we may spur one another on.

And you may have noticed as we looked at those verses, the three great Christian values, which are there in conjunction with each of these exhortations. So in verse 22, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Verse 23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope. And verse 24, let's consider how to stir one another up to love.

[8 : 56] Faith, hope, and love. Those three great Christian characteristics. This is the Christian life. It's a life of faith. It's a life that is governed by hope, that is rich and full and eternal.

And it's a life that is expressed in love. Love for God and love for one another. So this is the Christian life that we need to keep pressing on in. And the strategy is here in the verses before us. So first of all, he says, let us draw near to God. Notice it's a present continuous tense. You could translate it, let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Now, the opening verses of the paragraph remind us just how great this privilege is. Verse 19, therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of

Jesus, by a new and living way.

And since verse 21, we have a great priest over the house of God. Let us draw near. So the exhortation to keep coming back to God, to keep drawing near to him, is based on what he has already done for us in the blood of Jesus shed on the cross and in the ministry of the Lord Jesus as our great priest who intercedes at the throne of God for us.

[10:19] That is an enormous privilege. This language, of course, takes us back to the Old Testament, to the temple, where the holiest place of all could only be entered once a year by the high priest bearing the blood of atonement.

There was a thick curtain, what the Gospels call the veil of the temple, which separated all God's people, apart from that one man, one day in the year, from the very manifestation of the holiness of God, the most sacred place of all.

And then there was the court of the priests outside of that, which only the priests could enter. These holy places were not open to the people of God. Others had to go there and minister for you.

But look what's happened with Jesus. Since the blood of Jesus was shed on the cross, we have confidence to enter the holy places. We are accepted.

That veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom by the hand of God when the body of Jesus was torn apart on the cross. That's why the verse says, it's through his flesh that we enter through the curtain into the presence of God himself.

[11:29] What a privilege. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus in our place as our representative. Now that's the therefore link. If you look back at verse 10, you'll see that he says, and by that will, the will of God, we've been sanctified, we've been set apart as God's people through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

That's clearly the cross, isn't it? There his body is offered as the sacrifice for sin. Or look at verse 12. When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

He's seated as a sign that his work is complete. He's accepted by the Father at his very right hand. Or look again at verse 14. For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

You could not have anything more complete than that. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is a totally sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places through the blood of Jesus, let us keep on drawing near. Now what does it mean to draw near to God?

[12:51] Well, in one word, prayer. Prayer is the means by which we come into contact with God. It's our response. He speaks to us through his word.

We have the scriptures that are the revelation of the mind and will of God. And he brings us through the scriptures to put our faith in the Christ whose blood cleanses us from sin. To avail ourselves of that new and living way into the presence of God.

New because it wasn't there in the old covenant. The veil was there. That's gone. Living because it's always active, always available to us. And as we go then into the presence of God, which is what we do as we pray, as we've been doing this morning, we draw near.

And he says, let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Because we know that our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

That's the assurance, you see. It isn't whether I feel that I've been forgiven. It is whether I am trusting what Jesus has done in order that I am forgiven. It's an act of faith.

[14:01] And as we put our faith in the work of Christ, so that faith will develop as we realize increasingly what we have through Christ. Freedom from guilt.

Cleansing through the cross from our evil deeds and our defiled consciences. And these are the superlative blessings of the new covenant.

So he says, if you're going to be a persevering Christian, not neglecting your salvation, not drifting away, you've got to keep on drawing near to God day by day.

Don't waver, he says. Don't hesitate. Don't think, oh, I'm not worthy. God knows you're not worthy and that's why he sent Jesus to die for you. Trust him for what he's done.

Claim his forgiveness. Experience the cleansing of the cross. Come with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

[15:00] But you see, it's not even your sincerity and your full assurance that is the key to it all. It's his completed work. And I may sometimes feel that I'm holding on to that by my very fingernails as though my grip was almost gone.

But no, he will keep you in his grip if you keep drawing near to him. Keep on drawing near to God. Keep on keeping on. Because every day we can find that fresh forgiveness and that fresh strength that we need to live differently.

He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. So let me say, first of all, if we're going to be persevering Christians, we've got to be daily praying Christians.

And not just as a formal duty. It is our relationship with God. The most important relationship in your life is your relationship with your creator, who is your maker and your redeemer.

And the extent to which that relationship is experienced depends upon us listening to his voice and responding in our prayer, drawing near to God.

[16:09] You see, all those resources for living a Christian life are available to us through faith in the Lord Jesus. But faith appropriates those resources.

faith comes and finds in God the strength that we need to live for him each day. And so faith is not just a matter of intellectual belief.

It's not just saying this is a creed to which I could sign my name. It's a deep heart commitment that needs to be renewed daily.

Now, we're all very familiar these days with the wonderful technological aids that we have to communication, your iPhones, your iPads and all these other devices. They're terrific.

They can put you in touch with people all over the place in a moment of time. But, if you don't charge them up, they won't work. Eventually, the power runs out and however clever the technology is, if there's no connection to the energy supply, there won't be any benefit from what you have in your hand.

[17:16] It's a bit like that in the Christian life, isn't it? We need to keep drawing near because the Lord Jesus is the energy supply. I need to be plugged into him day by day.

And not only at the beginning of the day, but all through the day in every situation. Those prayers that we send up to him, that consciousness that we have, how much we depend on him, that faith that says, Lord, I'm trusting you to help me in this situation.

keep drawing near. And then he says, secondly, let us hold fast the confession of our hope, verse 23, without wavering.

See, it's easy to wobble. It's easy to give up. It's easy to neglect this. No, he says, hold it fast. One translation says, unswervingly, the confession of our hope.

Because if we're going to keep pressing on, we need to take the long view. In our case, the eternal perspective. You see, the readers that he's exhorting, they were being tempted to turn back.

[18:20] They were being tempted to give up because the battle was hard. They were facing persecutions and difficulties. They had already suffered, as we saw in the passage a little later on.

But at the moment, the great danger is that they will not be persevering. And so he says, just as you every day draw near and avail the sacrifice of Jesus to bring you into relationship with God, to plug you into his life and strength.

So you need to have every day that perspective of the glorious future that is ahead. Don't swerve off the course. Keep running for the eternal kingdom. And if the race seems too difficult and too long, then the alternative of living for ourselves and our comfort and security will soon become too attractive and we shall just lose our perspective and we'll start living for this world rather than living in the light of the world to come, the eternal world.

Jesus said, heaven and earth, by which he meant the whole creation, there's nothing else than the heaven and the earth, heaven and earth may pass away, but my word will never pass away.

That is where the eternal value is. So he says to them, if you want to be a persevering Christian, keep drawing near, but don't lose your grip on that sure and certain hope of the everlasting kingdom of life and light and love.

[19:50] Oh, people say you can be so heavenly minded you're no earthly use. Well, the problem of the church today is that we're so earthly minded that we're not much used to heaven. We need to be focused on the eternal.

We need to live life in time in the light of eternity. And I know it seems a long way ahead, especially when you're young and you think, I've got all my life before me, but we all know as we get older how

quickly that goes by and we will never be persevering Christians if we don't have clearly the eternal values of the everlasting kingdom.

That will then spur us on to live in time as verse 24 tells us, considering how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Do you see the proof of love is not kind words? It's good works, deeds. Anybody can say kind words. The proof of love is the actions.

And he says, and it's very interesting, isn't it, verse 24, that it requires careful thought about how to motivate one another within God's family here at the Tron or any other local congregation we're a part of to keep on loving, to keep on loving one another, serving one another, encouraging one another as verse 25 puts it, and that future perspective of the day of God is what will stimulate us to live now in the light of that, building one another up and strengthening one another.

[21 : 26] So as we meet together like this Sunday by Sunday, we're fulfilling that injunction. We're not neglecting to meet together. Obviously some people were and he's saying don't because you need one another.

You need to encourage one another. We're not lone rangers. We're not meant to exist as solo individuals. It's an old illustration but it's a good one that if you take one coal out of a fire and put it on the side it will very soon lose its heat, it will grow cold and inert.

But when you put it back into the fire it regains its ability to create heat and to fulfill its purpose as it were. And so it is with us. You cannot exist as a Christian apart from other Christians.

We belong to one another. We need one another to encourage one another, to build us up, to do good works to one another and together as the people of God in the world. And so being strong in faith and being firm in hope will make us active in love as we encourage one another to live in the light of the day of Christ and all that he has for us in the future.

Now before we leave this first paragraph and you'll be relieved to know that the first point is much longer than the next two points. But before we leave this paragraph let me say do you see how this pressing on strategy is 100% Jesus focused?

[22 : 52] it is his sacrifice that gives to us the faith to go on trusting and go on believing.

His sacrifice if you like fuels our faith. That's the energy. And then it's his obedience to God's will his faithfulness that shapes our hope that all those promises will be ours because he's proved to be faithful.

And it's his coming that motivates our love as we see the day approaching. It's all very Christ focused. A few weeks ago I came across a Chinese proverb about what gives fulfillment and happiness in life and there was quite a lot of wisdom in it I thought.

The proverb says there are three things that you need if you're going to lead a happy fulfilled life. Firstly something to do that's worthwhile. Secondly someone to love and thirdly something to look forward to.

There's a lot of sense in that. Something to do someone to love something to look forward to. Well all three are here in this paragraph. Keep drawing near.

[24 : 08] Keep loving one another. Keep holding on to your hope. You see something to do keep drawing near to God. You can build your relationship with God as day by day you come to him in your prayer.

Someone to love the Lord himself but also one another as we stir one another up to good works. Something to look forward to. That great hope that's ahead.

Hold fast the confession of our hope. Now that exhortation then would make a sermon on its own but it would be unfaithful to the passage if I didn't quickly draw your attention to what follows on. Because at verse 26 there is a big shift that is a big shock. And at verse 26 we move from a heartwarming appeal to a heart stopping alternative.

A heart stopping alternative. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

[25 : 11] Now we need to be very careful and we need to understand clearly what this is about because it's a very strong warning in verse 26. What he describes as sinning deliberately or one translation says sinning willfully is the equivalent to an Old Testament phrase which was translated literally as sinning with a high hand.

That is not sinning through ignorance and weakness or even our own deliberate fault but sinning against God in a determined rebellious way.

Deliberate rebellion. And he's saying that is the danger of these Hebrew Christians who are turning away from Christ back to the Old Covenant. You are actually he says deliberately rebelling against what God has done in the Lord Jesus.

Now we've got to get it right for them then if we're going to get it right for us now. So it's very important that we see that that's what he's talking about here. That's why he quotes the law of Moses in verse 28 when he says there was no other provision or sacrifice than that which was given in the law.

The sacrifices are part of the law and the forgiveness for Old Covenant believers came through the appropriation of the sacrifices that God provided. Now if you in the Old Covenant deliberately turned your back on that and said I'm not going to avail myself of that.

[26 : 36] I'm going to live my life my way. I don't care about the law of Moses. Well there was provision in that law for the death sentence to be applied against those who were rebellious deliberate high-handed rebels against God's word.

Now he says the new covenant is superior in every way to the old covenant. So verse 29 is a logical deduction. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, profaned the blood of the covenant and outraged the spirit of grace.

See what he's saying is in the old covenant there was no other way of forgiveness. Now look in the new covenant if you turn back if you don't persevere if you don't keep running the race there's no other way that you could possibly be forgiven.

There is only one sacrifice for sin forever and to turn from that would be to expose myself to the righteous judgment of God.

I would be making myself his adversary. Verse 27. His enemy. So there is a very real warning here that it's possible to start well and we've all probably sadly met people who seem to have such a clear Christian faith and so much promise and where are they today?

[27 : 54] It's not just that they've drifted away. They're determined not to have anything to do with Christ. They've turned their back on him. See apostasy is a terrible possibility.

Now we know that the Lord knows those who are his but only the Lord knows. We say that there is a doctrine of the preservation of the saints. That the saints the believers in Jesus will be preserved from time into eternity.

Well that is quite right. The perseverance preservation of the saints is something that's built into New Testament assurance. But the corollary of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is that saints persevere.

And we have to be people who are continuing to run that race. Now please don't feel some of us may have very tender consciences. Oh dear this is talking about me. If you have any concern about this it must mean that you couldn't possibly have committed these sins because no one who has committed them would have the slightest concern about it.

They've turned their back upon God. They've trampled his work underfoot. So don't allow your sensitive conscience to convict you in an unreal way about your situation.

[29 : 10] This is what turning away from Christ looks like. And he wants his readers to know that that is a possibility. That they can't just say oh it doesn't apply to us.

And he wants them to know that there is no other way of forgiveness for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. So there's a motivation here to keep pressing on isn't there.

Not to go back. Not to give up. We set the text in the context. We see that they were in danger of going back to Judaism. But now he's calling them to keep going on the Christian race.

And we mustn't go back to our pre-Christian lives. He's calling us to keep going too. And so lastly there is a heart changing application. A heart changing application.

Do you see what he says in verse 32? Recall the former days. You see they've been through it. They were enlightened. That means they came to faith. And as Christians they endured a hard struggle.

[30 : 14] They'd suffered. Sometimes they were publicly exposed to reproach and affliction. The next verse says. Or they were partners with those who were being ill treated. They visited their friends in prison when they were shut up because of their Christian faith.

You see they'd gone through a great deal hadn't they? Insults, attacks, misrepresentation, deprivation. But what kept you going he said when in those early days you hit this anti- Christian

tidal wave in your lives?

Well look at the end of verse 34. you knew that you yourselves had a better possession. That is an abiding one. A better and lasting possession.

So as they had faith in the atoning sacrifice. As they had hope in the coming saviour and the kingdom. As they lived in love for their brothers and sisters.

He says that put everything in perspective for you and you knew that that better possession that was yours in Christ was eternal. Is eternal.

[31 : 22] It's an abiding lasting possession. So then. Here is the heart changing application. Verse 35. Therefore do not throw away your confidence.

Which has a great reward for you have need of perseverance. So that when you have done the will of God. You may receive what is promised.

That's a tremendous encouragement isn't it? Don't throw away your confidence. What confidence? Look at verse 19. We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.

It's the same word. It's the confidence you have as a Christian that you're accepted in Jesus. That you have access to the Father. Don't throw it away he says. It means that you have an absence of fear.

You have courage and boldness. God is not going to let you down. He's not going to screen you out. He's not going to let you go. As John Newton said his love in time past forbids me to think he'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.

[32 : 27] No he won't. He'll bring you home to glory. So keep trusting. Don't throw away your confidence. Because verse 36 you have need of endurance.

You know verse 36 in many ways could be the key verse for the whole of the letter to the Hebrews. Live life now in the light of eternity. You have need of endurance.

It is a long race. It does require commitment. You do need energy. But God will give you all that to enable you so to do the will of God that afterward verse 36 says you and I may receive what is promised.

That's what I mean about living now in the light of the future promises. Living now on earth as a citizen of the eternal kingdom. So now it's persevering in doing the will of God.

But then it will be fulfillment and glory. Now it's living by faith not shrinking back. Then it will be full salvation. Now it's picking up the cross to follow the Lord Jesus.

[33 : 38] Then it is fullness of joy in his presence. Now we see a poor reflection as in a mirror. Then we shall see him face to face. So verse 39 is a word of great assurance as well as warning.

We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed. He's persuaded of that. He's saying we the readers of the letter we Christian people we're not going to be people who shrink back are we? Well if we're not going to be those sorts of people what do we have to be?

We are of those who have faith and preserve their souls. There's the assurance. There are ultimately only two ways to live.

Only two destinations. And we are those who have faith. Faith in the finished work of Christ. Faith in the glorious hope of the gospel.

Faith in all that God has promised for us. So friends as we close we live in an insecure society don't we? An anxiety provoking culture where it often seems as though evil has the upper hand.

[34 : 45] And where we can easily experience a loss of nerve. We're easily distracted from God's truth and we're prone to be discouraged. All those things are true.

And all too readily those tides will drift us away from our moorings if we're not tying strong ropes to our faith, our hope and our love.

And this is a call to ultimate certainty based on ultimate commitment but not my commitment to God but his commitment to us.

That is the great assurance. That he responds to all my human need and weakness as he speaks his word and pledges his promises and covenants his faithfulness and commits himself to us.

And nowhere is that more clearly seen than in the cross of the Lord Jesus. So do not throw away your confidence. That comes to you because of what Christ has done.

[35 : 50] And it has a great reward. You have need of perseverance so that when you have done the will of God in faith and love and hope when you have lived that Christian life step by step like the tortoise plodding along day after day but energized by him and motivated by the vision of his glorious kingdom.

you may receive what is promised. So keep on pressing on in his strength and remember that we are not of those who shrink back but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. And if you want a treat this week to know all about faith chapter 11 follows doesn't it? It'll be good to read it and to apply it to our own lives. Let's pray.

Just a moment of quietness in which we can make our own response to the Lord. So Father we ask that you will help us to keep drawing near.

Moment by moment. Hour by hour. Day by day. Keep us drawing near. To the throne of heavenly grace. That we may obtain mercy and find grace to help at every time of our need.

[37 : 20] Please keep us unswervingly pressing on towards that hope. That sure and certain hope of your everlasting kingdom. And help us to encourage one another and to work out how we can do it better in our groups and our prayer gatherings and our fellowship time as the family of God.

And we are going to help us to love expressed in good deeds. We want to be persevering believers Lord. Please help us to keep on keeping on in your mighty strength and for your praise and glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.