

Advent Vespers
December 5, 2012

Hebrews 10:19-25
1-8-17-592

The Advent Call to Persevere

- I. To draw close to God.
- II. To hold fast to our hope.
- III. To encourage one another.

Dear Christian friends,

In my Bible these verses have the HEADING – “A Call to Persevere.” Those words are an EDITOR’S SUMMARY of **this section**. And it’s a good summary. These verses are are “a call to persevere.” **Perseverance** is MORE than simply being patient. Perseverance is PUTTING UP with a **lot of garbage** AS you keep going.

As we wait for Jesus to come again we have to PUT UP with a lot. As we heard on Sunday these **last days** will not be easy. **So** we have THE ADVENT CALL TO PERSEVERE. **With Advent perseverance** we are 1)to draw close to God, 2)to hold fast to our **hope** and 3)to encourage one another.

I. To draw close to God.

This letter to the **Hebrew** Christians is JUST THAT – a letter addressed to **Hebrew – Jewish – Christians**. They had grown up OT believers but had heard – and BELIEVED – the good news that God HAD KEPT His promise and finally sent Jesus as our Savior.

But now these **Hebrew Christians** were being persecuted for their Christian faith. They were tempted to go back to the **OT way** of life. That would make their lives a LOT EASIER. This whole letter is a CALL for them to persevere in their Christian faith. What they had in Jesus was SO MUCH BETTER than what they **had with Moses**.

We have an example in these verses. OT worship centered around the **temple** and **priests offering** sacrifices. That temple pictured God dwelling among His people – especially that INNER part of the temple called the **“Most Holy Place”** or the **“Holy of Holies.”** But NOBODY was allowed into that Most Holy Place! ONLY the high priest could enter it – and he COULD ONLY do that once a year and ONLY IF he came with blood. **OT worship** pictured the people’s need for a SACRIFICE that really could pay for all their sins. Animal sacrifices offered by sinful priests just COULDN’T DO that.

But we have Jesus – our PRIEST – and our SACRIFICE! That is what Christmas is really all about – the Son of God born a true man – the Savior of the world. This letter to the Hebrews emphasizes over and over that Jesus’ innocent death on the cross FULLY PAID for **all sins** of **all** people. We don’t need ANY MORE temple or priests or sacrifices. We HAVE JESUS and His one ALL-SUFFICIENT sacrifice. Trusting in Jesus we **“have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.”**

With Jesus as our **“great high priest let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”** OT worship also involved various WASHINGS and **sprinklings**. They pictured our need to be CLEANED UP. With Jesus we have REAL cleansing – His blood **“cleanses us from all sin.”** We have Holy Baptism THROUGH WHICH the Holy Spirit washed away our sins and clothed us with Jesus’ holy life.

WHY would anyone **want to turn away** from all that? Yet the ADVENT CALL to **persevere still rings** out – **“Let us draw near to God.”** In these **last days** the devil will throw up ALL KINDS OF OBSTACLES to come between God and us – to keep us away from God.

Take Christmas as an example. The devil loves Christmas AS LONG AS **Jesus gets ignored**. So the devil works hard to shift the **Christmas focus** OFF of Jesus and ONTO the **presents** – the **parties** – the **decorations** – **Santa**, etc.

During Advent we WAIT – not just for **Christmas** but for Jesus' SECOND COMING. The **waiting won't be easy**. We need to PERSEVERE –

II. To hold fast to our hope.

“Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, since He who promised is faithful.” Advent is a **season** of HOPE. Hope means we have something to LOOK FORWARD to. So what are we **looking forward** to? It finally comes down to ONE of **two things**. In the future either this world will end or you – I – will die. EITHER ONE – there's only one way to **get ready** for it – by trusting in Jesus **and** STAYING CLOSE to Jesus. Trusting in Jesus as our Savior we LOOK FORWARD to going straight to heaven when we die. **Trusting** in Jesus we LOOK FORWARD to Jesus coming again in glory and taking us **body and soul** to be with Him forever in heaven. We really don't care WHICH ONE **comes first** – EITHER WAY we'll **be with Jesus** in heaven. Either way we are GUARANTEED WINNERS.

When it gets hard to PERSEVERE look ahead to what God **has promised** us. Read Revelation 21 and 22. ***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea no longer existed. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. From the throne I heard a loud voice that said, ‘Look! God’s dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away.’ The One who was seated on the throne said to me, ‘Look, I am making everything new!’ He also said, ‘Write, for these words are trustworthy and true.”***

“He who promised is faithful.” Christmas is more proof that God always keeps His promises. God may TAKE HIS TIME **as we see** it. At times it may LOOK or FEEL **as if** God has forgotten us or He's breaking His promises – but that's JUST NOT TRUE. God keeps His promises **at just** the RIGHT TIME according to HIS **schedule**.

The devil wants to convince us that we CAN'T TRUST God. The devil will make us ALL KINDS of **his own** promises. He'll **promise** us a GOOD TIME – an easy life, etc. He will promise us WHATEVER IT TAKES to **get us** to give up on God. But UNLIKE GOD the devil never keeps his promises. His promises are ALL LIES. So we have the ADVENT CALL to **persevere** - ***“Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, since He who promised is faithful.”***

The writer broadens his ADVENT CALL to **persevere**. As we wait we ALSO NEED...

III. To encourage one another.

“Let us also consider carefully how to spur each other on to love and good works. Let us encourage each other.” Nobody is an ISLAND UNTO HIMSELF. Our actions – GOOD or bad – affect other people. Parents' actions and **examples** – GOOD or bad – affect their children. A child's actions affect the other members of the family. It's the SAME WAY in the neighborhood – at work – at **school** – AND at church. **Each one** of us needs to CAREFULLY CONSIDER how we are **affecting** other people. Am I encouraging OR **discouraging** people in their relationship with God?

God put us here FOR EACH OTHER. We are a SUPPORT GROUP for each other – here to ***“spur one another on toward love and good works.”*** Jesus tells us, ***“A new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you.”*** The sinful nature loves to GOSSIP about other people – to pick

on people – to be disrespectful – SELFISH – LAZY. The sinful nature can put up a REAL FIGHT. **How we need to encourage each other in our **Christian faith and life!****

God wants us to produce **“good works.”** Jesus tells us, **“I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him he will bear much fruit.”** Paul told Titus that **“(Jesus) gave Himself to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own EAGER to do what is good.”** God’s forgiveness is **never** His PERMISSION to keep on sinning. God’s forgiveness OPENS UP a whole new life for us – a life lived FOR GOD.

The ONLY WAY for us to grow in **love** and **“bear much fruit”** is for us to regularly be in God’s Word. So we have the call to PERSEVERE and **“not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.”**

The devil will try whatever it takes to KNOCK God’s Word out of our HANDS – heads – hearts. He had all kinds of EXCUSES for **not going** to church every week – for not reading our Bibles at home – for not staying for Bible class, etc. **His excuses** SOUND GOOD to our sinful natures. Skipping church is **often** the FIRST STEP in falling away from Jesus.

Why do we **“meet together”** for church? The BIGGEST reason is to hear and learn God’s Word so we can GROW in our faith and STAY CLOSE to our Savior. We worship to PUBLICLY praise and thank God for His blessings – to seek God’s blessings in prayer. We also gather to ENCOURAGE each other in our Christian faith and life. I need church EVERY WEEK. **I need** it 1)to BE ENCOURAGED in my faith and also 2)to ENCOURAGE my fellow Christians. If I’m skipping church I’m NOT JUST HURTING **myself**. I’m also hurting my fellow Christians BY DISCOURAGING them in their faith.

Each one of us NEEDS THE ENCOURAGEMENT to **“meet together”** in worship. **“The Day is approaching.”** The devil knows he has ONLY SO MUCH TIME to destroy our faith in Jesus. He has ready allies in the world and our sinful natures. HOW do wolves, for example, **attack**? They go after the LONER – the WEAK one. It’s easier to **take down**. If that **“roaring lion”** of the devil can ISOLATE us from our **fellow Christians** – can get us away from **God’s Word** and **house** – it’s a LOT EASIER for him to get us to completely fall away from Jesus and end up in hell. SO **“let us not give up meeting together, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

Advent eventually ends and Christmas comes. Then the WAITING IS OVER. So too with Jesus’ **second** coming. EVENTUALLY Jesus will come back – we have His promise. It **can be** a HARD WAIT so we have this ADVENT CALL to **persevere**. God helps us to **heed** it! Amen.

Hymn #17