**Welcome**

**Announcements**

* Happy 4th of July Weekend
* Love Thy Neighbor
* Seating in Sanctuary
* Wear masks
* Maintain Social Distancing
* Overflow room available
* Only one service at 11:00 until further notice
* New Ladies Bible Study starts on Tuesday
* Church Center App
* We need your email address
* Worship in Giving
* Martha Fund

**Call to Worship -** (Ps.92.1-4)

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord*

*And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;*

*To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning*

*And Your faithfulness by night,*

*With the ten-stringed lute and with the harp,*

*With resounding music upon the lyre.*

*For You, O Lord, have made me glad by what You have done,*

*I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands.*

**Worship Songs (2)**

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Series Slide**

**Preparing for the Return Series**

**“Hold Fast the Confession of our Hope”**

**Hebrews 10.19-22**

**Introduction**

Last week we began a new series of sermons entitled “Preparing for the Return.” The idea behind this series came from several people asking if I thought that there is a connection between COVID-19 and the end times. As I mentioned last week I don’t see a direct connection with COVID-19 and the second coming of Christ outside of the fact disasters and disease are a result of a fallen world that exists in a state of corruption destined to decay. You should understand that the time between Christ’s resurrection and His second coming is considered to be the “last days.” So, the world has lived in the last days for over two thousand years. Jesus told us that during this tome we would hear *of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.* (Mt.24.6-8)

In this series we are focusing our attention on preparing ourselves for the return of Christ. Preparing for the return of Christ is a spiritual matter that every generation of believers should take serious. Even though we don’t know the day or the hour of Christ’s return we know that the return of Christ is closer today than it was in my grandparent’s generation. Closer than it was in my parent’s generation. And His coming is closer today than it was yesterday. Therefore, we should prepare ourselves for the Lord’s return all the more as the day draws near.

The Apostle Peter when teaching about Christ’s return in his second epistle poses a question, since we know the Lord is coming what sort of people ought we to be? And his answer was we should be people holy in conduct and godliness. (2Pt.3.11) Peter writes, *Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.* (2Pt.3.14) Our main text for this series, Hebrews chapter ten verses nineteen through twenty-five, gives us five ways we can *be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.*

Hear now the Word of God.

*Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having 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 stimulate one another to love and good deeds,**not 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.*

**Draw Near**

Last week we saw that since Christ sacrifice Himself on the cross to secure our eternal redemption we are called to draw near to God all the more as we see the day drawing near. This is the first the first way we are to prepare ourselves for the Lord’s return. Draw near to God. Believers are exhorted to draw near to the throne of grace here and now because when the day of the Lord finally comes we will join a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, to stand before the throne and before the Lamb. We draw near to God now in anticipation of drawing near to God on that great day!

**The Confession of our Hope**

Today, I want us to focus our attention of the second way we are exhorted to prepare for Christ return. *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* (10.23) I first want to point out the communal aspect of this entire passage. Everything is written in the plural. Each of these five exhortations is for every believer. These exhortations are communal – congregational – for all the church. Let us draw near. Let us hold fast. Let us consider. The inspired writes speaks about our hearts, our bodies, and our hope. These exhortations are for every believer and we should pursue them all the more as we see the day drawing near.

Whether the writer of Hebrews has a particular confession in mind when he writes “the confession of our hope” is not certain. Many believed that the "confession" mentioned here is not to be identified with the formal confession, creed, or catechism, but should be understood as a reference to the whole body of the Christian faith as revealed in the sacred scriptures.

But a look at confessions found in the New Testament does help us to focus on particular elements of the Christian faith and bring encouragement to our soul. Earlier in the book the writer encouraged his readers saying, “*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”* (Heb.3.1) Here believers are encouraged to confess together that Jesus is the One sent from the Father as our great High Priest.

We see the basic confession of the early church was “Jesus is Lord.” (Rom.10.9)This is a clear confession of faith that every believer must embrace. As the Bible tells us, “*no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.*” (ICor.12.3) The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about a “common confession” leading us to conclude that this confession was very familiar to the early church. This is what Paul writes to the young Pastor Timothy, “*By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.”* (ITim.3.16)

In addition to these three confessions we find five confessions or creeds in the New Testament. Each one of these creedal statements beginning with the phrase “*It is a trustworthy statement*.” Many scholars believe that these trustworthy statements were well known in the early church and recited often in worship services.

*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.* (ITim.1.15)

*It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.* (ITim.3.1)

*It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come*. (ITim.4.9, 8)

*It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.* (2Tim.2.11-13)

*This is a trustworthy statement; He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* (Tit.3.8a, 5-7)

When you combine the confessions of the New Testament together with “the confession of our hope” mentioned in our text you end up with something like this:

The confession of our hope is that Jesus was sent by the Father to be our great High Priest.

The confession of our hope is that Jesus is Lord.

The confession of our hope is that the mystery of godliness is great.

The confession of our hope is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

The confession of our hope is that overseeing God’s people is a fine work.

The confession of our hope is that godliness is profitable for all things.

The confession of our hope is that if we are faithless, He remains faithful.

The confession of our hope is that by His grace we will be made heirs of eternal life.

**Clinging to the Confession of our Hope**

No wonder the inspired writer challenges every believer to cling to the confession of our hope. *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.* The phrase “hold fast” means to “keep firm possession of.” The image is a person being swept away in a raging river finding a tree branch to hold on to for dear life. Or a mother holding on to her child as a tornado passes over her house. The writer used this same exhortation to “*hold fast*” earlier in the book when he wrote, “*Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”* (4.14)

It seems that these believers were being tempted to drift away from the hope we have in Jesus Christ. *For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* (2.1) As a pastor my greatest fear during this pandemic has been that people would drift away from the Lord. My greatest fear has been that God’s people will not hold fast to the confession of our hope in Christ but allow themselves to drift away by disengaging in the study of God’s Word, disengaging prayer, disengaging from private devotions, disengaging from other believers, and disengaging worship. I’ve seen tendencies towards this drifting away during the pandemic in the decline of the number viewing the worship services, the decline in the participation in Bible studies, and the low enthusiasm of parents to disciple their children in the Word of God. How do you know if you are drifting away and not holding fast? One: you begin to pull away from godly influences in your life. Two: You stop praying. Three: You lose focus and desire for God’s Word. Four: You lose the desire for worship. Five: The spiritual things that once energized you no longer matter.

There have always been currents that seek to drive us away from Christ. Currents from within driven by our fleshly desires and currents from the outside driven by the spirit of this age. These currents have always been a clear and present danger to sweep us away from our hope in Christ. What can we do to stop these currents from causing drift us away from Christ? Hold fast to Christ! Cling to the confession of your hope in Christ. Establish Jesus Christ as an anchor of your soul. Pay closer attention to the Word of God more than ever before. Be unwavering in your confession that Jesus Christ is Lord! Never put your self in a position to be driven by the surf of the sea or tossed by the wind. A few weeks ago Barb and I had the opportunity to enjoy a couple of days at a beach house in Palm Coast Florida just south of St. Augustine. The beaches in that area have coquina rocks, which are beautiful but dangerous. The first day we were excited to get into the waves but as time passed we didn’t realize the tide was coming in causing powerful waves and concealing many of these rocks. When I attempted to go back to shore the waves slammed against me causing to fall and crashing me into those rocks. The powerful waves wouldn’t allow me to gain my footing, especially with my handicap. Finally, I return to the shore beaten and exhausted but a lot wiser. I knew that I wasn’t ever going to put myself in that position again.

Brothers and sisters, there are powerful waves and hidden rocks in this world that want to hinder you from enjoying Christ. We all have handicaps that make it difficult to gain our footing so we must make a firm decision not to put ourselves in positions that can harm us and draw us away from Christ.

**For He who Promised is Faithful**

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* (10.23)

As believers we look forward in confident expectation that He who promised is faithful. All the promises of God are exceeding great and precious, free, and unconditional, irrevocable and immutable, and are suited to meet the needs of God’s people whether thing temporal, spiritual, and eternal. Maybe you need a job. *Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

Maybe you need a spiritual breakthrough. *Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* Maybe you doubt the future. *Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* This confession of our hope in the promises of God through Christ is an anchor to our soul, a hope both sure and secure. (Heb.6.19) You can count on it!

**Transition to the Table**

Brothers and sisters, the way we prepare for the return of Jesus Christ is by holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering and doing it all the more as we see the day drawing near. The fact is that we often do start wavering and losing our grip on our confession in Christ. This is why to Lord instituted His Supper. So that we would take time to gather ourselves and recommit ourselves to Christ and His purposes in our lives.

**Apostle’s Creed**

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,**to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jd.1.24-25)