**Series: It’s All About Jesus**

**Sermon: Holy Discontent**

Did anyone watch the State of the Union Address on February 5? Don’t worry, I’m not going to get political this morning. I didn’t watch it. I read it the next day. The President talked about: legislators working together for the good of the country; D-Day; economy; jobs; government regulations; federal judgeships; legal reforms; border security; immigration; women in congress; foreign trade deals; health care costs; rights of unborn; nuclear arms; the war against terrorism; and the prospect of socialism.

These are all important topics that hugely impact our nation. It’s good for us to think about these things and to examine if we as a country are going in the right direction. As I read the speech and the responses to it, I kept thinking about how divided we are on almost every topic, and I thought, *Is this what the State should be about?*

I remember a piece written by C.S. Lewis about the purpose of the State. *The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings*. The purpose of the State is to assist its citizens’ enjoyment of life.

Think of a family sitting around a campfire telling stories and laughing

* friends gathered at a restaurant for dinner
* a woman reading a book in her living room
* a man working in his garden
* thousands of people enjoying a 4th of July parade
* a family reunion picnic at a park
* people coming out to elect government officials

Isn’t the purpose of the State to promote and protect stuff like that? Now think of the parts of the State, laws, governing bodies, armies, police, economics, infrastructure. If they’re not helping to increase, prolong, and protect these moments, what good are they?

What is the purpose of the church? Is it not to promote and encourage men to draw near to God, to be *Knowing and Growing in Christ*? Think of the parts of a church, our buildings, services, ministers, sermons, Sunday school classes, even the Bible itself. If we’re not promoting and encouraging men to draw near to God then what good are we?

We’re studying the New Testament book of Hebrews. No one can say for sure who wrote this letter, certainly it was either an Apostle or a student of one of the Apostles. This trusted authority was concerned that some Christians, instead of drawing near to God were pulling away. Under the intense pressure of both Jewish and Roman persecution some had decided that faith in Jesus wasn’t worth it, and others were leaning that way.

His purpose for writing was to encourage his readers to hold on to their faith in Christ through every good or bad circumstance and experience. Fearing that some were dropping out he wrote a letter both a theological and personal urging them to stick with Jesus.

We come today to chapter 10. Last week Ben led us through chapters 8&9 demonstrating an important teaching. Everyone who has accepted Christ has moved from an old covenant to the new covenant. This new covenant determines our code of conduct. We seek to live like Jesus.

I don’t think anyone here came from an orthodox Jewish background seeking righteousness through the covenant of the Old Testament Law. Certainly none of us were sacrificing animals to pay for sins.

Probably we all came from one of two backgrounds. Some of you were totally outside of church. You didn’t grow up in church and had no religious affiliation. You probably thought you were good people because you were good people. If there is a heaven, you would make it because you were good people. That was your covenant.

Your code of conduct was what worked for you. Maybe it was based on how you were raised. You avoided things you instinctively knew were wrong. You obeyed the laws and tried to be nice to other people. In that you believed that if there was a God, He would be satisfied with you.

Some of us grew up going to church, maybe we attended some sort of catechism or youth group and Sunday school. We developed a code of conduct based on what our church taught.

That was me. When I turned 12 I was able to get baptized so now I could take communion. Honestly, I was no more committed to Christ than my friends who never went to church.

My code of conduct was a mix of what our church taught and what served me. If it helped me have friends or if it made me “feel” good, that’s what I did. I never actually thought that I was outside of Christ, after all, I went to church every week.

Thanks to faculty and other students at Minnesota Bible College, I learned what it means to choose Jesus. That’s when I connected with this New Covenant. Neither the Old Testament Law nor my own personal code of conduct would save me. When I recognized my sin I needed somehow to cover it.

An Old Testament Jew would offer a sacrifice of a bull or a goat or a ram. In my case I would say “*I’m sorry*” and promise to change. As the author of Hebrews wrote,

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship…because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats,* allow me to add saying “*I’m sorry*” and promising to change, *to take away sins.* Hebrews 10:1&4

Whether my first covenant was the Old Testament Law or a covenant I made with myself to live according to my own code of conduct, I will never be right with God. Only by the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood and body, offered once for all (vs. 10), can I be righteous. Only through Jesus can I be good enough to stand in the presence of God.

In verses 19-25 our author iterates his challenge once again, hold on to your faith in Christ through every good or bad circumstance or experience. This morning we’ll look at four actions the author suggests each of us can take that will help us remain in Christian faith even when life is at its worst.

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.* Hebrews 10:19-22

Using images developed earlier in the letter, that of entering the very presence of God through Jesus our Great High Priest and our hearts being made clean and pure, His **first** suggestion is, **let us draw near to God**.

A short Greek lesson. Verbs have tense:

* present tense - *We are drawing near to God*.
* past tense – *We have drawn near to God*.

Verbs also have moods:

* indicative – makes a statement – *We are drawing near to God*.
* imperative – command – *We must draw near to God*.
* subjunctive – a possibility – *We may draw near to God*.

“*Let us draw near to God*” is a present tense, subjunctive mood verb – *Let us be drawing near to God*. Present subjunctive refers to continuing or repeated action. That means that we get to choose and we should choose to be moving closer to God. In this case he’s telling us that we can trust God’s promise, as he established in chapter 6, therefore he encourages, let’s do what we what we can to be close to God.

The **second** suggestion is in verse 23, ***Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess****, for He who promised is faithful.*

Hold unswervingly is another present subjunctive. This is another action we can choose. The same verb Κατεχω was used in Hebrew 3:6, *Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are His house, if we hold frim to our courage and the hope of which we boast.* Coupled with a very rare word ακλινης the suggestion is that we hold on with everything we’ve got.

The Apostle Paul used the same word in 1 Corinthians 15:2, *By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.* Notice that Paul, like the Hebrew author recognizes that some people might not hold on to faith in Jesus.

An action we can take to retain in our faith even in the worst of times is to intentionally hold on tightly. We mustn’t let emotions or discouragement or lack of understanding cause us to let go.

Oswald Chambers in My Utmost for His Highest wrote, *When God gets us alone through suffering, heartbreak, temptation, disappointment, or sickness…then He begins to teach us*. If life is terrible right now, hold on for all your worth to His promise. He will bring you home one day.

A **third** suggestion,***let us consider how we may spur one another*** *on toward love and good deeds.* Vs. 24 Yet again the controlling verb is present subjunctive. Consider, κατανοεω means to contemplate on something. It’s like when you have a problem and you sit and think about how you are going to solve it.

We’re encouraged to actually think of how we might spur one another to behave rightly.

Spur is an interesting word, παροξυσμος carries the idea of a sharp disagreement. That was the word used in Acts 15:39 if you remember, Paul and Barnabas two very good friends, had such a sharp disagreement that it broke their relationship.

Spurring one another may well break a relationship, but not because spurring is bad. It’s because people just aren’t very good at being challenged or scolded.

None-the-less the author believes that spurring one another to do right will help all of us remain strong in our faith.

The last and **fourth** action suggested here is, ***Let us not give up meeting together****, as some are in the habit of doing,* ***but let us encourage one another****, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* Vs. 25

“*Let us not give up*” and “*let us encourage*” are fair translations of these verbs, but this time they’re not subjunctive. They’re participles. They indicate how or to what we might spur one another.

This verse could be translated as an extension of verse 24, *Let us consider how we may spur one another, not giving up the meeting together of ourselves, as some are doing, but encouraging one another*…

Now look at what he’s talking about. He says, “*Let us not give up meeting together*.”

Friends he’s talking about attending worship. Nobody likes someone telling them they should attend church, but this author thinks we should spur one another to regular worship even if it means somebody won’t like it.

Did anyone read the ancient Greek tale The Odyssey? After ten years away from home Odysseus and his warriors were returning to their homes and families. They stopped at the Island of the lotus eaters. The toxin of the lotus plant caused anyone who ate of it to be lulled into satisfaction so that they had no desire to go on, even to get home. One bite of the lotus plant leads to another until you are content just as you are.

A common lotus plant Christians eat is skipping church for just one day. Not a big deal except that that one day makes it easier for the next, and then to justify the one after that. Before long you have gone through months in which you have not once engaged with the body of Christ in worship.

When we preachers confront you for not attending church it’s not for our egos. Trust me, I’d much rather not ever challenge anyone about not being in church. But I realize that regularly meeting with the Body of Christ helps you keep your faith in Jesus strong even, and maybe especially when life is dumping on you.

Now don’t get mad at me. I going to show you what God’s Word say. Look at this warning in vv. 26f, *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

There is no separation between verses 25 and 26 as in our English Bibles. That artificial separation makes it sound like he has changed subjects. He has not! The specific sin he’s writing about in vs. 26 is the sin about which he just wrote in vs.25, *giving up meeting together*.

Remember, he’s writing to Christians who have accepted Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. With a sternness almost unparalled in the New Testament he challenges Christians who are guilty of the sin of not worshiping.

When he wrote *no sacrifice for sins is left,* I think he was looking back to Deut. 17:2ff where God says if someone is proven to have turned from Him, *take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.*

I’m certainly not suggesting that people who skip church should be executed, but I’ll bet it would motivate people if we did. Rather look at his logic. Skipping church is a deliberate act, and if it is a sin as this passage suggests, it’s a deliberate sin.

He warns, *If we deliberately keep on sinning…no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment.* If we’ve turned from God there is no other way to absolve us of our sins.

Let’s go back to chapter 6 to a similar warning we looked at a few weeks ago. It seems some of you were a bit confused with what we were teaching.

*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.* Hebrews 6:4-6

I told you earlier that verbs have tense and moods. They also have voice, active or passive. This verb is active voice and present tense, “*If they are falling away*“. That means he’s speaking of someone who is in a state of falling away from Jesus. It’s continual and on-going.

If so he can’t be brought back to repentance because he is actively and currently crucifying and shaming Jesus. He can’t be brought back because only Jesus can forgive sins. There is no one else who can. But he’s rejecting Jesus.

Hebrews doesn’t say that a Christian who falls can never be brought back to the truth. If that was the case why even write to people who have stumbled in faith under the pressure of persecution? You can come back, but you have to stop falling away.

Now back to chapter 10, *If we deliberately keep on sinning…no sacrifice for sins is left.* If we reject Jesus there is nothing else. We’re left to face the consequences of sin. If you don’t believe in Christ it doesn’t matter does it? But if you believe in Jesus Christ, any sin, in this case the sin of skipping church, is serious business.

In the rest of this chapter the author reminds his readers of times when they (we) faced difficult circumstances and experiences yet didn’t quit our faith*.*

*You stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.* Vv.32f

And so he pleaded, *Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.* *We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.* Vv. 35&39

At the risk of being a bit prickly I want to tell you about a concept “acedia”. Although it’s never used in the Bible it shows up in the writings of early Christian. It’s a Greek word formed by combining “α” which means “no” and “κεδος” which means “to care”.

Acedia (ακεδεια) means “*I don’t care*”. One author wrote, “*Acedia is like morphine. You know the pain is there, yet you don’t give a d---.*”

Acedia describes Christians who read or hear preached stuff like Hebrews 10 but shrug it off. *It doesn’t matter to me. I really don’t care*.

Instead of giving in to acedia I challenge and encourage you to what Brian Jones, preacher at Christ’s Church of the Valley in Philadelphia calls “holy discontent”. Don’t be content in any sin, but be holy discontented with anything less than a life-changing relationship with our God.

I teach you this because…

* It matters that you hold tightly to faith because if you’re not now being tested, you will be.
* It’s what the Bible says and I believe you care what the Bible says or else you wouldn’t be here.
* I believe the church’s purpose is to promote and encourage you to move ever closer to God.

These four suggestions will help you remain in faith:

1. Draw near to God. You know things that you can do to get close to God. We call them spiritual disciplines. Remember God didn’t move away from you. If you’re not close, that’s on you. Do something about it.
2. Hold tightly, or unswervingly to what you believe. You can trust God, He won’t let you down.
3. Think about how to motivate each other. Maybe we have to poke each other to do right. It hurts but it’s better than letting a brother or sister drift away, or than drifting away yourself.
4. Make gathering with the Body of Christ for worship an absolute priority.

My friends, let us never be *of those who shrink back and are destroyed.* Rather, let us be *of those who believe and are saved.*

Use these four suggestions. They will help keep your faith in Christ strong in even the worst circumstances and experiences.