**“Welcome Home!”—Hebrews 10:19-25**

**The Big Idea: In Christ, Our Forgiving Father Welcomes Us into His Forever Family—So Let’s Draw Near to God and One Another with Faith, Hope, and Love**

**The Big Picture: Unforgiven and Unwelcomed**

 *Unforgiven*, the classic Western starring Clint Eastwood, is a dark parable of the unforgiven and unwelcomed soul. This grim and gritty film accurately portrays the despair and emptiness of the human heart in need of grace.

 Eastwood plays the aging gunslinger, Will Munny. In his younger, wilder days, Munny had killed many men. But, as the film opens, we meet a Will Munny who is no longer a gunslinger. He’s been reformed by the love of a good woman, his wife, Claudia. She helped him give up whiskey and hang up his guns, but now Claudia is dead, killed by smallpox. Grieving, poor, and debt-ridden, Munny tries to eke out a living for himself and his two children as a pig farmer on the Kansas plains.

 Then one day, a brash young gunslinger calling himself, “the Schofield Kid” rides into town to remind Munny of his ugly past.

 “I hear tell you’ve killed a lot of men,” the Kid tells him. “Well, up in Wyoming, there’s $1,000 to be had for killing two cowboys. Seems one of ‘em got mad at a woman and slashed up her face. The other ladies in that establishment have posted bounty on the heads of those two cowboys. If you come with me, we can kill those boys and split the reward.”

 “No,” Munny replies, honoring the wishes of his dead wife. *“No more killin’ for me. I ain’t like that anymore, Kid.”* The Kid rides off alone. But then Munny begins to think, “How are my children going to live? How will I pay off this debt? My split of that money sure would go a long way.”

 So he straps on his gun, and he and his friend, Ned, ride off to catch up with the Schofield Kid. As they ride together, the Kid, who is fascinated by Munny’s reputation as a killer, pumps him for stories of his past. But Munny doesn’t want to remember his past sins. *“I ain’t like that anymore,”*he keeps repeating to Ned, the Kid, and to himself, denying the obvious question, *“If he ‘ain’t like that anymore,’ then why is he riding off to Wyoming to kill a couple of cowboys?”*

Together, they track down the two cowboys. Munny shoots one of them, a fresh-faced boy named Davey. It’s a grisly scene. Later, the Kid shoots the other cowboy—Quick Mike. It’s a cold-blooded killing of an unarmed man.

 Later, the killings accomplished, Munny and the Kid sit under a tree outside of town waiting for their reward money. While they wait; they talk. The Kid is full of remorse and in tears. His earlier fascination with killing has evaporated now that he has actually killed a man. Munny, whose soul is stained with the blood of countless men, says:

“Terrible thing, killing a man. You take away all he’s got and all he’s ever gonna’ have.” “Yeah,” says the Kid, his voice choking. “Well I guess they had it comin’.” Munny looks back at him coldly, and tells him, *“We all have it comin’, Kid.”*

It’s a dark moment in a dark film. Munny’s terse comment—“We all have it comin’”—is the statement of a man who can’t escape his past, his sin, or his guilt. It’s the statement of a damned soul. The title is fitting: *Unforgiven*.For this film is about guilt and payback. Everyone in the film is guilty: the two dead cowboys, the sheriff played by Gene Hackman, Ned, the Schofield Kid, Will Munny. In the end, *everyone is guilty, but no one is forgiven*.

*Unforgiven* won four Academy Awards, including best picture because *it touches the very nerve center of our* soul. We’re all guilty. And we all need to hear the story of our Father’s forgiveness. We all long to experience the thrill of our forgiving Father welcoming us into His forever family. Each of us, in our unique way, is a prodigal wandering far from home. Each of us longs for our *homecoming*.

 However, according to the letter to the Hebrews, an immoveable obstacle stands in our way. Our sin blocks the door to our Father’s house because unholy people cannot stand in the presence of a holy God. Our guilt requires payment and our sin requires cleansing. *On our own*, our situation is hopeless.

 But Hebrews 10:19-25 tells us we are *not* on our own. God has a plan—He has *always* had a plan—it’s called *amazing grace*. God’s grace in Christ pays for our sin, forgives our guilt, and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The story of Hebrews, the story of our lives, does not end at a bolted door. Christ’s sinless life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection break the chains of sin and separation. *In Christ, our forgiving Father welcomes us into His forever family*.

**I. Remembering What We Have in Christ: Forgiveness and Welcome—Hebrews 10:19-20**

 As you hear about amazing grace, you might be thinking, “Awesome! Bob is going to preach a great message to the *unsaved*—to those who do not yet know Christ personally, to those who have never entered the door to the Father through Christ.”

 Well, yes, this message applies to those who do not yet know Christ. However, this message—the message of the gospel, the message of forgiveness, the message of the Father’s open arms is very much a message for *believers*. Hebrews 10:19-25, our Scripture passage for this morning, starts with the words, “Therefore, *brothers*”—Christians. The message of our Father’s forgiving, welcoming heart is a message that we must remind each other of daily. It is a message that all people—believers and those who do not yet believe in Christ—desperately need to hear.

**A. Embracing Our Forgiveness in Christ: Hebrews 10:19**

 We begin by hearing and embracing the message of our forgiveness in Christ. The author of Hebrews describes it like this in Hebrews 10:19. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus…”

 The truth that we can stand in the presence of a holy God is so astonishing that when we look at our sin, we find it difficult to believe. I’ll never forget counseling a believer who was struggling with a besetting sin who told me, “*Pastor Bob, some sins are so deep that even the love of God can’t reach them*.” Though we all know that those are lies from the pit of hell, this tormented Christian woman believed them. She believed that her sins were so deep that she was doomed to live an unforgiven life—even as a Christian.

 I don’t think she’s alone in believing that lie. Satan wants us to think that maybe Christ could forgive us for our sins before we were believers, but not after we come to Christ. Satan wants to keep us cringing when we think of our holy God and our sinful lives.

 Rather than cringing, the author of Hebrews wants to keep us *confident* when we think of God and the forgiveness we have in Christ. That’s why he said, “…since we have *confidence*…” The word means holy boldness. It pictures the absence of fear in speaking to royalty, the courage to enter the King’s presence.

 Imagine that somehow you scored an invitation to meet the President. Maybe it was years ago and you were invited to meet President Reagan or President Bush. Or, maybe it’s next week and you’re invited to meet President Obama. Most of us would be a tad intimidated at the thought of meeting the President of the United States.

 Now, multiply that infinitely, exponentially, and you may begin to feel how the recipients of this letter felt when they thought about entering God’s presence. That’s what’s being talked about here. The *holy place* means the holy of holies. In the Old Testament there was a Tabernacle or Temple, and inside the outer courtyard was the holy place, and further inside, separated by a veil, was the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies, *God dwelt*. No one could enter into the Holy of Holies except the high priest and he could do so just once a year to offer sacrifice for the sins of the nation. And even the high priest entered with fear and trembling.

 In the Old Testament, no one could see God and live. When personal sinfulness collided with God’s infinite holiness, death was the result. So any thought of entering God’s holy presence was met with dread and cowering.

 But here’s what Hebrews 10:19 is telling us. Instead of “Stay away or die!” it is “Come near and party!” Not only can we walk up to the President confidently and shake his hand. We can stand confidently in the holy presence of the God of the universe and look Him in the eyes and know that our every sin is forgiven. Think about this: *because of Christ you can look God in the eyes*. Where normally the shame of our sin would cause us to refuse to make eye contact, now Christ lifts our chin and points our gaze to our forgiving Father’s loving eyes.

 But never forget the last words of verse 19: “…*by the blood of Jesus*.” In ourselves, in our sin, we *ought* to be terrified of our holy God. Without Christ’s shed blood, our sin results in shame and separation. But when we accept Christ as our Savior, we’re accepting His blood as the cleansing for our sin. It is His blood that cleanses us whiter than snow.

 Before we explore Hebrews further, I’d like to pray for us that we could accept our acceptance in Christ.

“Father, thank You for Jesus. Thank You for His sinless life, His shed blood, and His resurrection. Thank You that when Your holy eyes look upon us, You see Christ and His holiness rather than our sins. Father, I’m sure there are believers here today like the Christian woman I counseled. They believe that some sin they have committed, some sin they keep committing, is too deep for the love of Christ to reach them. Help them to know that Christ died for every sin they committed in the past, committed today, or will commit tomorrow. Help them to have confidence—holy boldness—to enter Your holy presence because they know that Christ’s blood reaches and cleanses every sin. Because they know that You forgive them of their every sin. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.”

**B. Embracing Our Father through Christ: Hebrews 10:20**

 It truly is amazing grace that we have forgiveness in Christ. But it gets even more amazing. “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” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

 Because Christ opened the way home, we not only have forgiveness, we also have a Father who invites us into His forever family. I know for me, for a long time I only understood half the picture of my salvation. Here’s how I pictured it. God is a holy and righteous Judge. I’m on trial before Him because of my sins. God is about to pronounce me guilty when Christ steps up and says, “Charge me instead. Put Bob’s sins on Me, and put my righteousness on Bob.” God the Judge accepts His holy Son’s payment on my behalf and declares me “Not guilty. Pardoned. Forgiven.”

 That’s pretty amazing, right? But my picture used to stop there. God is the Judge; He forgives me; then He sends me away on my own and says, “Next case.”

 But that’s not at all the full picture of our salvation. That’s not the picture painted by Hebrews 10:20. In the biblical picture, Christ takes me by the hand and leads me into the Father’s house, walking me into the presence of God. When we enter the living room, the Father, my Father, is not in His judge’s robes. He’s in His family attire. And when He sees me, it is just like Luke 15 and the parable of the prodigal son. The Father runs to me, throws His arms around me, and kisses me. He puts the family ring on my finger and ushers me back home!

 Through Christ, God is not only the Judge who forgives you. He is your Father who *welcomes* you. He has *always* loved you. That’s why He sent His only begotten Son to die for you. And now with the barrier of sin demolished, nothing stands between you and your loving Heavenly Father. You can meet God person-to-Person, son or daughter to loving Father. It’s not simply, “Come on in, the water’s fine!” It’s, “Come on home, everything is *fine between us*!”

 A few years ago, Shirley and I heard the father of Rachel Scott at a banquet. Rachel was one of the victims killed during the Columbine High School shooting. A committed Christian, the morning of that horrific shooting, she was in her car driving her friends to school. They were listening to a Christian song on the radio. Rachel was so in love with God and she so knew that He loved her, that she pulled the car over. Got out. And starting dancing. Her friends were staring at her. When she got in, they asked, “What in the world were you doing?” She said, “I was dancing with my heavenly Father.” Rachel’s dad, fighting tears, told the audience, “That’s what my baby is doing right now. She’s dancing for all eternity with her heavenly Father.”

 Before we continue, let me pray for us, that we would all dance with our heavenly Father every day.

“Father, thank You that You are not just the holy Judge who forgives us and then sends us away. Thank You that because of Christ we have 24/7/eternal access to You. Please help us all to know that You are not the cosmic Killjoy who wants to stomp us and crush us in your holy wrath. Help us to know that You are our loving Father who already spent Your wrath on Your Son. There’s nothing left but love and mercy. Help us to freely and confidently cry out to You, “Abba, Father, Daddy!” Help us to dance with You Jesus, to dance with You Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the eternal dance of family love. In Jesus’s name, Amen.”

**II. Applying What We Have in Christ: Draw Near to God and Draw Near to One Another—Hebrews 10:21-25**

 Beginning in Hebrews 10:21, the author shifts gears. He’s been talking about spiritual reality—unlike Clint Eastwood, we’re no longer unforgiven and unwelcome. We have forgiveness and welcome in Christ. That’s our spiritual reality…now…live like it. We are to apply that truth each day in how we relate to *God and others*.

 **A. Drawing Near to God in Faith: Hebrews 10:21-22**

 He says it like this in Hebrews 10:21-22. “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.”

 Why are we forgiven and welcomed? Because Christ is our *high priest*. In the Old Testament, the high priest represented the people before God. When the high priest, once a year, entered God’s presence in the Holy of Holies, symbolically every Israelite entered with the high priest. Christ is our great high priest. He represents us before His Father. Christ is ever present with the Father, as we saw last week, seated on the throne of grace praying. When we enter the throne room in prayer—we are fully welcomed because our sins have been placed on our high priest, Christ, and our Father remembers our sins no more.

 This is what the author means when he encourages us to draw near to God with full assurance of faith because our hearts have been sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. This is extremely practical counsel here. Let’s make sure we understand it.

 The number one reason we don’t spend time with God in prayer is because of our guilty conscience. We know we are forgiven and saved, but we also know that we keep on sinning. And Satan lies to us and says, “Even as a Christian, you can’t talk to God unless your Christian life is perfect. He doesn’t want to hear from you. He’s ashamed of you. You should be ashamed of yourself. Don’t you dare enter God’s holy presence.”

 The author of Hebrews says, “No. No. No!” The author tells us that by *faith* we are to believe that when we pray, the Father sees and hears the righteousness of Christ. Yes, we do have to be perfect to enter God’s presence. Guess what? *In Christ* we *are* perfect.

 The very action we most need to take when we’re sinning is to pray! Yet a guilty conscience and Satan’s lies drive us away. Our guilt and our guilty conscience are cared for in Christ. So pray freely and confidently as a child to your Father.

 This is exactly what we’re told to do in Hebrews 4:16. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” It’s not the throne of *judgment*. In prayer we go to the throne of *grace*. And even in the midst of losing battles with besetting sins, because of Christ we find from our Father mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

 Let’s go to that throne of grace right now.

“Heavenly Father, thank You for defeating Satan and his lies through Christ who is the Truth. Thank You that even when we are in the midst of sin, You invite us to Your throne of *grace*. Thank You that when we come to You in prayer, You receive us because of the righteousness of Christ. Thank You that when we enter Your throne of grace, we’re not sitting in a corner; we’re sitting on Your lap! Thank You that in Christ our guilty conscience is cleansed whiter than snow because of the pure blood of Christ. Thank You that our conscience can rest at peace with You through Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.”

**B. Holding onto Hope: Hebrews 10:23**

 The author next reminds us what we learned last week from Hebrews 3:1. There we were encouraged to fix our eyes continually on Jesus. We don’t’ simply look once at Christ in a crisis and then turn our eyes away—that’s *snapshot* Christianity. We keep focused on Christ throughout the crisis—that’s *video* Christianity.

 Here he tells us to continually anchor ourselves to Jesus. He says it like this in Hebrews 10:23. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Remember the context that we discussed last week. These believers were going through all sorts of trials, suffering, and persecution. In the midst of their trials, they were tempted to quit looking to Christ.

 In the context of trials and temptation, they are to hold *unswervingly*. The Greek word behind *unswervingly* means without wavering, unleaning, unfainting. It pictures a ship tossed at sea and needing to be securely anchored—all the time.

 Notice what our anchor is—our anchor is Christ. He is the reason we can hold onto hope—because *He who promised is faithful*. What has God promised? Hebrews 13:5 tells us. “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” And because of that promise, what do we do? Hebrews 13:6, “So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”

 In early church history, when Chrysostom was brought before the Roman emperor and threatened with banishment if he remained a Christian, Chrysostom replied:

“You cannot banish me for this world is my father’s house.” “But I will slay you,” said the Emperor.” “No, you cannot,” said the noble champion of faith, “for my life is hid with Christ in God.” “I will take away your treasures.” “No, you cannot for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.” “But I will drive you away from man and you shall have no friend left.” “No, you cannot, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you can never separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to hurt me.”

That’s holding onto Christ our anchor of hope in the midst of trials. Let’s pray about anchoring our hope in Christ.

“Father, two weeks in a row You have encouraged us to keep our focus fixed on Christ our anchor of hope. When tempted to despair, remind us by Your Spirit of the truth of our eternally secure hope in You. Remind us of John 10:28-30. ‘I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.’ When our grip grows faint, empower us to have complete confidence in the strength of Your Grip. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

**C. Encouraging One Another in Love: Hebrews 10:24-25**

 Last week, in Hebrews 3, after reminding us to fix our focus on Christ, the author urged us to encourage one another. This week, after reminding us to keep our hope always anchored to Christ, the author urges us to…*encourage one another*. Here’s the consistent message of Hebrews: *our walk with God is a community project*.

 It’s pictured like this in Hebrews 10:24-25. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 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.”

 First, we’re told to consider one another. It’s the same word used in Hebrews 3:1 that was translated as “fix your focus on.” As Christians, we are not only to focus on Christ; we’re also to focus on one another.

 It seems like an easy command at first, but in real life it’s hard to do. We all have a bent toward a self-centered focus. One marriage counselor described it like this: *“In most struggling marriages it’s two tics and no dogs.”* Let that one sink in for a second. A tic sucks the life out of its host. A marriage with two tics and no dogs equals a marriage where both spouses are self-centered and sucking the life out of the other.

 The author of Hebrews is saying, “Look, since you’ve been given life in Christ, fullness in Christ, forgiveness in Christ, acceptance in Christ, peace, faith, and hope in Christ, quit focusing on yourself and start focusing on others!” Maybe we could call that “a relationship with two Christians and no tics!” It’s a Christlike and Christ-empowered relationship with people who know one another deeply and unselfishly. That’s how we’re to relate in the church.

 Next, the author says we are to focus on considering how to *spur one another on*. Spur is a very strong word in the Greek. It means to provoke, agitate, stir up, stimulate, or prod. It was used in a negative sense in Acts 15 of the sharp disagreement or contention that caused Paul and Barnabas to go their separate ways.

 Here, of course, it’s used for the positive purpose of stirring each other up toward love and good deeds. Just because it’s positive, doesn’t mean it’s wimpy. Throughout the New Testament, we’re encouraged as brothers and sisters in Christ to boldly speak the truth in love to one another. According to this passage, we do so by reminding each other of everything we have in Christ. When a fellow Christian is acting selfishly, we ought to say, humbly yet boldly and lovingly:

“We have no excuse for being self-centered. Jesus paid it all. He sacrificed everything. And He left us an example to follow. Not only did He leave us an example—He left us the Holy Spirit who fills us with our Father’s forgiveness, acceptance, and peace. Since we have everything we need in Christ, of all people as Christians we should unselfishly love others. On the basis of what Christ has done for us, we should love others sacrificially.”

That’s what it sounds like to consider how to spur one another on to Christlike love and good deeds.

 The author continues his application in verse 25, “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.”

 He starts with a negative—stop abandoning each other. That’s literally what the phrase “give up meeting together” means—to abandon, forsake, let down, desert. It pictures leaving behind, leaving in the lurch.

 We all know when that typically happens—when someone offends us, hurts our feelings, or sins against us. We’re there for them…as long as they are there for us.

 That doesn’t sound much like Christ, does it? It doesn’t sound like the first part of this passage. In Christ we have forgiveness and acceptance. In Christ we have a throne of grace. Shouldn’t we provide to one another a taste of Christ’s grace when people offend us, hurt our feelings, or sin against us? Shouldn’t we offer forgiveness, acceptance, and grace to one another? I know I need it. I know we need it. Because Christ never leaves us or forsakes us, we need to stand by one another even in the midst of suffering and sin.

 The author concludes on a positive note. “Let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” First of all, what “Day” is he talking about? In the Greek it is not just any day, but *The Day*. And when the Bible talks about *The Day* it means *The Day* of Christ’s return.

 Life is hard. As we see life and the world getting worse and worse, we know that Christ’s return—*The Day—*is drawing closer and closer. So, we’re to encourage one another to keep running with perseverance the race set before us. We say:

“Look, I know you’re tired. You’re exhausted. But the finish line is in view. One day—*The Day*—you will see Christ face to face *and it will be worth it all* to fall into His embrace and to hear His, ‘Well done, my good and faithful son, my good and faithful daughter.’”

 That’s what it means to encourage. We talked about the identical word last week in Hebrews 3:13. Encourage means to come along side and help. So, we’re not just in the stands telling others to keep running. We’re right there with them, running alongside them, stride by stride, shoulder to shoulder. Both of us with our eyes fixed on Christ and on our forgiving Father with His arms open wide saying, “You can do it! Keep running to Me and for Me and in My power!”

**The Final Picture: The Whisper Test**

 In *The Whisper Test*, Mary Ann Bird writes:

 “I grew up knowing I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech.

 When schoolmates asked, ‘What happened to your lip?’ I’d tell them I’d fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.

 There was, however, a teacher in the second grade that we all adored—Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy—a sparkling lady.

 Annually we had a hearing test. Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would have to repeat it back—things like ‘The sky is blue.’ or ‘Do you have new shoes?’ I waited there for those words that God must have put into her mouth, those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, “*I wish you were my little girl*.”

 Because of Christ, God says to every person deformed by sin, “You are My daughter.” “You are My son.” To each of us, through Christ, our Father says, “You are forgiven. You are cleansed. Welcome home!”