

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabile.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabile.org).

**Date: March 21, 2010 - Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**Title: “Why the Church Must Gather” - “The Liturgical Seasons and the Story of God”**

**Text: Hebrews 10:19-25**

**Theme: God wrote into His Story the regular gathering of His people for the pursuit of retelling the Story to shield from sin and to enable the quest.**

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

## Reflecting on His Work and the Storyline of the Bible

Date: Fourth Sunday of Lent - March 21, 2010  
 Title: "Why the Church Must Gather" - "The Liturgical Seasons and the Story of God"  
 Text: Hebrews 10:19-25  
 Theme: God wrote into His Story the regular gathering of His people for the pursuit of retelling the Story to shield from sin and to enable the quest.

### Introduction:

God has ordered that His people should gather in geographically definable assemblies with a biblical structure and mission. It is in the context of the collective gathering that the church remembers, returns and restores. The liturgical calendar is a means used by the church gathered to birth an answer to the question, "Why must/does the Church gather?"

The Scripture clearly speaks of the body of Christ as a consequence of His person and work. In fact, the entire Trinity is involved in the formation of this body. It is the Father who calls the body into existence, and it is the Son through whose activity the body finds basis, and by means of the Holy Spirit each member is intentionally placed into the whole (Eph. 1:1-14; 1 Cor. 12:1-6).

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**" (Acts 20:28).

<sup>22</sup> "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things **to the church,** <sup>23</sup> **which is His body,** the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22, 23).

Because His body is both historic (i.e. apostolic) and global (i.e. catholic), there is an authentic "in time" witness to the greatness and goodness of God. Yet despite the body's best intentions, there is equally and always the persistent pull away from the Story by the serpent's seed. Satan's ilk is embodied by an antichrist worldview and fallen flesh. In the church's defense, she has created means so that she might remember the Story in which she lives. It is this annual reminder that enables those who have forgotten to return and to be restored through the renewing of their minds in the Story of God.

Yet many refuse to engage the means established by God and His church to embolden His people in their pursuit and journey. This refusal shows its face by failing to align individually with a biblical community, or in coming, they fail to participate in the life of the community of faith. One is marked by **absence** and the other by **indifference**. Even a casual reading of the New Testament narrative shows the significance and importance of aligning oneself with a geographically defined assembly that seeks a biblical structure and mission. The historic and global church has always been made up of geographically distinct assemblies in various regions of the world. There are those who never align themselves with any local church or who attend various and multiple churches without ever fully identifying themselves with any

one church. This is unfortunate and to their spiritual harm and that of their families. Are there those who appear to prosper spiritually in the absence of local church alignment? Yes, but these are the exception and not the pattern. The New Testament consistently places individual believers into geographically defined communities of faith who follow the oversight of Elders who lead distinct flocks in the carrying out of God's mission by advancing His kingdom.

It is within these local assemblies that are both historic and global that helps us remember the Story. Oh what a privilege is ours to sit with our brothers and sisters in Christ to hear and see the Story through song, study and sacrament. This is why the Church gathers. She gathers to remember once more the one Story from God that makes sense of all our stories.

The church gathers to hear the Story, to remember that God created for His glory and that in creating, He put into play a rebellion against Himself, against whose backdrop His greatness and grace will be publicly displaced. God would crush this unholy insurrection and in crushing, provide the only means whereby the rebel could be restored as His people.

The church gathered is a consequence of God's redemptive activity. It is a part of His Story and thus intentional and planned. The church historic and global gathers on Sunday, and in gathering they retell the Story. This retelling follows an intentional pattern of Advent, Lent and Pentecost. Neither the day nor the means are primary. It is the Story and its retelling that is preeminent, for it is the Story of God in three persons who creates and gathers worshippers for His glory who then will enjoy Him forever. By whatever means, the church gathered is to verbally and visually retell the Story.

One of the great passages of the Bible noting and thus celebrating this truth is found in Hebrews 10:19-25. The larger context provides the setting for this scriptural gem. Hebrews 1:1-10:18 speak of our Lord's priority in God's Story. What follows in Hebrews 10:19 are the consequences of His cross work as they are lived out in the community of faith. The author places his admonitions squarely in the context of a geographically defined assembly that has a biblical structure (Heb. 13:7, 17) and mission. Time and space, however, limit us as to depth and width of study. It is enough to note how the book is written to encourage those who face persecution for faith. The entire theme of Hebrews is the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the invitation to pursue Him in community (Heb. 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22-24; 12:1, 28; 13:13, 15). The author of Hebrews reminds them of this larger Story. God is its author, and He has written each part for His glory and their good. In the midst of this they are to lay aside every weight and sin that would hinder them in their flight with and toward God. It is because of the woman's seed having crushed the head of the serpent that His people are now called upon to join together in their common search of their uncommon God.

It is because the vicarious, voluntary and victorious provision (9:11-10:21) that we are to draw near (v. 22), hold fast (v. 23), stir up (v. 24), and not neglect the gathering for the purpose of mutual edification and encouragement (v. 25). All such activities are built on and flow from His activity. We can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5). All such activities are to continue

and increase because the Story is coming to its closure “in time”. All of these activities are for His people in order to shield and enable His people to put off and resist sin (10:26).

“These exhortations to Christian practice are not mere moralizing, or admonitions to follow some new external code. They are the believer’s logical and appropriate response to the benefits secured for him by his Lord and priest, Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

What is of interest is how each of these activities are done in community; “Let us”. Is it possible to pursue apart from community? Sure, but why? Why would anyone separate themselves from the community of faith? It is on the heels of this exhortation we encounter the great “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. It reminds us of the “apostolic and catholic” witness. And from this gathered witness (Heb. 12:1), we are to “lay aside every weight and sin and run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). Oh what glorious and weighty truth is found in the common pursuit within the community of faith as we look to Jesus. What “problem” can be so significant for one to withdraw from the community of faith?

### **The Problem:**

The rejection of Christ and His community is always sourced in our own self-consuming focus.

### **Questions:**

1. What place does the local church have in the Story of God?
2. Why is a local church important in His Story?
3. What is the local church a consequence of?
4. What forces keep us from gathering?
5. Is it possible to be an independent and isolated believer? If so, how and why?
6. What has the historic and current church developed to always put the congregant into the Story?
7. Is the author of Hebrews writing to individuals or to the community of faith? Why did you come to your conclusion?
8. Why can the church gather?
9. Why does the church gather?
10. What are all of the “let us” statements teaching us?
11. Is the gathering to be continual?
12. Is our ‘faithfulness’ to the gathering to be increasing?
13. Why is the gathering so important? What is a potential outcome of neglecting the gathering?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know how gathering in a geographically distinct assembly with a biblical structure and mission is for maturity and protection of His people.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to identify ourselves with Christ and His Church.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of living in His community.

## Outline:

### I. Why can we gather (9:11-10:21)?

“Two blessings enjoyed by the believer are isolated: right of access into God’s presence (10:19-20) and the priestly ministry of Christ (10:21).”<sup>2</sup>

“Believers not only have the benefits of a matchless sacrifice, but they also have the services of an incomparable priest. Even though He has opened the way for our direct approach to God, Christ does not cease His ministrations on our behalf. He continues as our great priest, guiding, strengthening, encouraging, and interceding.”<sup>3</sup>

#### A. Christ, our high priest

<sup>11</sup> “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:11-14).

“and since [we have] a great priest over the house of God” (Heb. 10:21).

1. As the one who offers
2. As the one who intercedes

#### B. Christ, our perfect sacrifice (“once for all”)

“and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, **He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption**” (Heb. 9:12).

“Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but **now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**” (Heb. 9:26).

<sup>27</sup> “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this [comes] judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ also, **having been offered once to bear the sins of many**, shall appear a second time for salvation without [reference to] sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (Heb. 9:27, 28).

“By this will we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**” (Heb. 10:10).

“At this point in the Book of Hebrews the argument for the superiority of Jesus Christ is basically over (1:1-10:18). The author now will concentrate on the practical application of the truth that has just been revealed. It is the time for decision, for positive resolution, and for taking a stand in divine grace.”<sup>4</sup>

“This section of Hebrews consists of a series of exhortations based upon the great doctrinal truths set forth previously. These truths, however, must not remain as abstractions, but must issue in appropriate conduct.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. Why do we gather (10:19-25; 12:1)?

“This paragraph is built around three major exhortations (10:22, 23, 24). They all stress constant, accountable activity, and in all of them the author includes himself with his readers as subjects of obedience (‘Let us. . .’). All three are hortatory subjunctives, present active. The first is in the middle voice, but is deponent, thus having active meaning.”<sup>6</sup>

What Christ has done and provided is the cause or basis for His people to gather and pursue. John states it like this, “We love, because He first loved us.” We gather and draw near and hold fast and . . . because He gathered us and drew near to us and held/holds fast to us.

“It is one thing to have spiritual possessions (10:19-21); it is another to enjoy them (10:22-25). The former is based upon Christ’s objective work, whereas the latter is tied to the subjective response of obedience within the believer. Three basic commands are enjoined upon the believers.”<sup>7</sup>

“The Christian Gospel affirms that God has done certain things for us. It then asks us to believe God and act upon all that He has done.”<sup>8</sup>

“The author has employed the familiar triad of faith (v. 22), hope (v. 23), and love (v. 24) in this section.”<sup>9</sup>

### A. We gather to draw near (10:22).

We can draw near because we have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. “Those accustomed to the Old Testament ritual might hesitate to do this. Then the emphasis was upon the fact of sin as an offence to God. Now there is a new emphasis. To refuse to do so is actually to spurn His grace and to insult the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

### B. We gather to hold fast (10:23).

We gather to hold fast to a common hope. What is our hope? Our hope is that the Story written by God and given to us is true.

C. We gather to stimulate one another (10:24, 25).

It is interesting to read how the Holy Spirit uses us to accomplish His work. He calls us; He invites us to be this positive goad to provoke His people toward love and good works and encouragement.

What an incredible thought. How often are there those who “stir up” or “provoke” a fellowship toward division and discouragement? Yet this text says, “Provoke people to love another and good deeds.” The fellowship should be a place where people are encouraged and you need to be an instrument of encouragement, not discouragement.

When you fail to identify yourself with a community of faith and become a part of what God is doing, you discourage those around you. When you commit to a community of faith and support her activities, you encourage those around you. Does this not sound simple?

“Although we should be willing to stand alone if necessary, God usually brings His children together into assemblies where they may labor and pray together.”<sup>11</sup>

“The command to ‘consider’ implies thoughtful perception and serious concern.”<sup>12</sup>

D. We gather to run with endurance the race (12:2).

There is only one imperative in our text (“Let us run with endurance”) and the other (“Let us lay aside”) is a participle.

1. We run well by laying aside every weight and sin which clings so closely
2. We run well by looking to Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith

III. How do we gather (10:25)?

Our commitment to gathering should be continual and increasing “as we see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:25). Some fail to come and others have turned away. Why do they not come? ? Some do not come because of public persecution and others because of failed faith.

“The readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews were living in the tragic days just before the destruction of Jerusalem. In such times it was both wise and proper for Christians to remain together, exercising a united testimony to the Gospel.”<sup>13</sup>

Now is not the time to faint and grow weary. We are called to endure and continue. In fact, we are called to increase in our commitment to the pursuit.

I find it unfortunate that when people are hurting their tendency is to withdraw from God and His Church, when He and His church is the one thing they should pursue with force.

#### IV. How important is the gathering (10:26-39)?

The author of Hebrews speaks of those who “sin willfully” (v. 26), “set aside” (v. 28), “trample under foot” (v. 29), “throw away their confidence” (v. 35) and “shrink back” (vv. 38, 39). The outcome of such awful activity is severe judgment and ultimate destruction. The author is not assuming his audience is of this ilk (v. 39). Yet the call is sincere and passionate. I think all of the warning passages throughout Hebrews speak to the idea of leaving Christ as seen in leaving “His church.” Notice the language of 2:1 (“lest we drift away from it”), 3:12 (“leading you to fall away from the living God”), 6:6 (“fallen away”), and 12:25 (“do not refuse him who is speaking”). Although it sounds foreign to our hearing, “We must not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some” (Heb. 10:25). It is similar to those we noted in John 6 who profess Christ and are described as disciples but who will not “eat and drink” and leave because they are offended. They are false Disciples of Christ. “True believers press on with the full assurance of faith.”<sup>14</sup>

I am not saying Waukesha Bible Church is the only church. My desire for all those who leave is for them to immediately find another geographically distinct assembly and place themselves under the biblical structure of Elder/Deacon and engage in the mission of Christ in and through His Body.

The author of Hebrews believes better of them and thus calls them to endure and hold fast. Again, a divine means of keeping us from such horrific consequences is to gather with His people and call each other to remember and endure.

#### **Shepherding the Sheep:** (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

For the sake of your soul, you are called to gather with His people for the purpose of pursuit.

1. If you do not identify with a community of faith, then do so.
2. If you are already attending, then engage.
3. If you are already engaged, then continue and encourage others in their pursuit.

Why? Because “we have a great priest over the house of God” (Heb. 10:21). Amen and Hallelujah!

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<sup>1</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary*, 197.

<sup>2</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews*, Baker, 168.

<sup>3</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary*, 199.

<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews*, Baker, 167.

<sup>5</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary*, 197.

<sup>6</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews*, Baker, 167.

<sup>7</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews*, Baker, 170.

<sup>8</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary*, 201.

<sup>10</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 83, 84.

<sup>11</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews*, Baker, 172.

<sup>13</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 90.