

Let Us Not Give Up Meeting Together

Hebrews 10:15-25 (NIV84)

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ¹⁶ “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” ¹⁷ Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” ¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² 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. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 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.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19) Wait, Jesus. In remembrance of you? Why would we forget you? Why would we need to remember you? Are you going somewhere? The disciples’ questions are pushed back from their lips as they eat the portion of the bread Jesus gave them.

While still chewing, Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them as well. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20) “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:29) Confused hands reach for the cup. The wine washes down the bread, but it’s hard passing the lump forming in their throats. The realization is within grasp, but still elusive. Jesus is talking as if we won’t have another meal with him. He’s telling us that we will do this to remember him.

After his Supper was over, Jesus would spend more hours that night teaching his disciples. He would make it explicitly clear that he is going to leave them, that he is going to die, that he is going back to his Father in heaven. The disciples are filled with grief. Losing Jesus? This is more than we can bear! In less than 24 hours, Jesus would give up his spirit. He would die. He would return to his Father in heaven. He would leave his disciples.

When was the first time the disciples had that Holy Supper after Jesus had it with them first? Would they already have partaken that Saturday after Good Friday? Would they have had it on Easter Sunday after Jesus appeared to them, risen from the dead, alive and well? Would they have had it sometime over the 40 days when Jesus continued to appear to his disciples before going back into heaven again? We could make some guesses, maybe even some educated ones, but the fact is that we don’t know. We don’t know the first time Jesus’ disciples took that bread and told their fellow believers, “Take and eat; this is Jesus’ body given for you. Take and drink; this is Jesus’ blood shed for you.”

What memories would come flooding back the first time Peter took that bread in hand? Would he picture Jesus’ face as he looked at him after Peter had denied Jesus three times on Good Friday even though he adamantly confessed that he would never do such a thing, that he would rather die than deny his Jesus? Would the disciples remember how Judas left the room before the supper? Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly” and yet they all thought he was just going out for supplies. A couple of hours later Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and they didn’t even stop it! They ran! They deserted Jesus.

As the memories of that first Maundy Thursday into Good Friday resurfaced, would they have put the bread down and left the cup where it was? Would they be thinking of leaving, that this supper was too painful to partake in? Would they be able to look their fellow disciples in the eyes, knowing how greatly they had all failed Jesus? Would they have thought about giving up meeting together?

The recipients of this letter to the Hebrews were considering giving up meeting together, not because they had painful memories associated with the Lord’s Supper, but because of their upbringing. They had been Jews. It had been life by the law. The males had been circumcised. They had lived by the kosher diet, avoided the animals who were called unclean. They worshiped on the Sabbath, went the Temple and offered their sacrifices as required by God’s law. This is how we worship. This is what God wants us to do. This is how we will be forgiven and accepted by God.

Now they were being told that those sacrifices being offered day in and day out could never take away their sins or any sins, for that matter. Instead, a priest offered himself as one sacrifice for sins, and by this one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy. By this one priest, who is Jesus, God tells us that he remembers our sins and lawless acts no more. Where these sins have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. It's all done. It's all taken care of.

Yet, the allure of the old way of life was calling to them. It felt right to offer those sacrifices. It was what they had always done. Why change now? Should they give up meeting together or go back to their Jewish way of living, to their Jewish faith?

What tempts you to stop meeting together with other Christians? Is it reliving past failures, confronting how you failed Jesus, like these disciples on the first Maundy Thursday evening did? Is it failure to live up to what God has called you to be? Is it a desire to go back to something you grew up with, like the Hebrew Christians, the original audience of this letter? Is it something else? Are you tempted to stop meeting with other Christians because life has taken hold of you, your world is simply too busy, you let other things in life dictate whether or not you come to church? Have you been hurt by a brother or sister in Christ or have you hurt a fellow Christian? Are you unable to look at them, feel guilty when you see them? And for these reasons, you are tempted to give up meeting together.

To you, to the Hebrew Christians, to the disciples, God had it written, "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." (verse 25) We are all tempted to give up meeting together as Christians. We all have reasons for considering it. Some we might say are justifiable. But God's encouragement is simply, "Don't. Don't give up meeting together. I know that some of you do this. It's their habit to stop. But you, don't you do it."

Why not? Why should we not give up meeting together? I've been hurt. I've been wronged. I can't stand the guilt. I want to be somewhere else. But there is a day of judgment, a day of reckoning, coming. God will judge you and me. He knows that if we stop meeting together, the dominos will fall. When we stop meeting together, we are not fed and nourished with God's undeserved love for us. This means that our faith will weaken. We will start to lose grip of the hope we profess, our faith in Christ Jesus as our Savior. Our good deeds done out of love for him will start to fade and become less. We will become distant to God. Our consciences will eat at us. Uncertainty will be our future, uncertain of what we believe, uncertain that God will deem me worthy to enter the Most Holy Place – his dwelling, heaven.

This is why God encourages us to not give up meeting together. When we meet together as brothers and sister in Christ, we encourage one another to remain faithful to God, to the hope we profess. When we come together for worship, we are reminded that we have been washed with pure water, that God has cleansed me of all my sins in baptism. When we gather together for the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that his body and his blood split that temple curtain in two, that no longer would God's presence be hidden from the people. Now we can all freely access God. No sin holds us back any longer. When we eat that bread and drink from that cup, our hearts are sprinkled with his blood which cleanses us from a guilty conscience. By his supper, Christ blood covers all the betrayals, all the failures, all the pain we've caused to others, all the sins we have committed.

When we partake in the Lord's Supper, it's not to leave us ashamed for what we caused Christ to go through, but it is meant to put it in our hearts and on our minds that God will remember our sins and lawless acts no more. The giving of his body and his blood means that our sins need no other sacrifice. It's done. We are saved. We are forgiven. Our consciences are cleansed. By his body and his blood we know that we will enter the Most Holy Place, God's dwelling, heaven.

This is why Jesus told those disciples to have this Holy Supper after he was gone. He knew that their hearts would be overwhelmed with sorrow, sadness, and guilt. Jesus' Supper replaces all of those feelings. His supper gives us confidence, that we know where we stand with God because Jesus' body and blood has removed the sins that separated us from him. We know that his body and blood has cleansed our guilty conscience so that we know that nothing will bar us from heaven when our judgement day comes. We know that our faith will pay off because he who promised is faithful. We continue to meet together to partake in Jesus' body and blood and be made all that much more sure of this.

Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, since our hearts have been sprinkled by his blood and has cleansed us from a guilty conscience, since our bodies have been washed with pure water, since God is faithful, 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. Amen.