

Draw near to God

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[0 : 00] Well, morning everybody. It's lovely to see you. Thank you for having me. Not that you had anything to do with that, but it's good to be with you nonetheless. It's great to be here. As Adrian said, my name is Luke. I'm from the church up the road, Tokai Community Church.

Nick and I worked together for a while. The doctor says I'm nearly recovered, which is great, but it is a great joy to be with you this morning. I'm going to look at the passage that was read for us from Hebrews chapter 10, and so it would be a great help if you could keep it open in front of you.

That's what we'll be looking at, but why don't we just take a moment to pause, maybe just to focus our mind on the word of God, and I'll pray for us. Father, what a great joy for us to be together this morning. What a great privilege to be able to sit under your word.

And we pray, Lord, that as we come to look at the scriptures now, that in your grace and in your mercy, you would open up our hearts and our minds. That, Father, we would hear you speak to us. Father, we long to hear your voice, the voice of the true and the living God. Speak to us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, things in the Gild household at the moment are quite exciting. We're all very excited because we have the privilege a bit later this year of going overseas on a trip, and we're all very excited.

[1 : 23] Not only me. Actually, I'm not that excited because I've got to carry all the luggage. But the boys and my wife are over the moon. They can't wait for us to go. I don't know if you've planned a holiday overseas. There's so much to... I wouldn't have agreed to it if I'd known there was so much I'd have to do.

But one of the things you've got to do before you can go nowadays is you've got to sort out your passport, and invariably you've got to sort out the visas, don't you? The truth is you can't visit if you don't have a passport. You can't visit if you haven't got a visa.

Now, I was born in England, which means me and my two sons, we've got a purple passport as well as a green passport. And so for us, it's actually quite convenient. We just wave whichever passport is applicable, and we walk through.

Of course, Nikki, shame bless her, only has a green passport. So she's had to do the whole thing of getting all the visas and going. It means she's got to stand in the long queues. She's got to have all the hassles.

We're so excited. I can't tell you. We'll wave at her as we go through customs and say, see you later, Mum. No, we won't. Don't worry. You know, one of the things that surprises me is I've got a family member who's had his passport for 30 years.

[2 : 34] For 30 years, he's had his passport, and he's never left the country. In fact, for 30 years, he's never left the province. I think about the furthest he's got to is Belleville.

And to be quiet, I don't understand that. You see, for me, the fact that I have the passport and the visas says to me, I must travel. I must go. Passport is access, isn't it?

Passport is to get away, and he's got a passport in a cupboard that does nothing. And I don't get that. You see, passports open up the door. Passports give us access to go places we might not ordinarily be able to go.

Well, come with me to Hebrews chapter 10. Trusting that the Lord will forgive me, I want to suggest to you that Jesus is just like that passport. See, Jesus opens up the way for us to go where we couldn't previously go.

Jesus does for us the most incredible thing. You see, according to chapter 10, Jesus gives us access to God. He gives us access to go into the presence of God.

[3 : 39] To stand before the King of kings and the Lord of lords. As you turn to the passage that was read for us at verse 19, you'll see there's a little word, therefore. And he's really saying to you,

look, I'm drawing the conclusion of everything that's gone on before.

And so if you've got your Bibles open and we're to skim back a few chapters, you'll pick up that from chapter 7 onwards, the writer has been establishing for us that Jesus is the great high priest.

He is the one who does his priestly work on the basis of a much better covenant. He enters a much better sanctuary. And he makes a much better sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.

And because of what Jesus has done for us, written in chapters 7, 8, and 9, and the first part of chapter 10, the result is that the writer says in verse 19, Therefore, brothers, Jesus has opened the way.

He's opened the way. He's given us access that we didn't have before. It's the first thing I want you to notice from this passage. Jesus opens the way. See, there was a time where you and I could not just rush into the presence of God.

[4 : 44] I was so glad that Adrian read from Leviticus 16. It's in Leviticus 16 that God says, look, you can't just come rushing in here, Aaron. You can't just come rushing in here, Moses. There are things about you that stop you from coming in.

Back in the Old Testament, we're told that it's our sin. See, we mustn't forget that our God is a holy God, a righteous God, a just God.

The presence is really to rush into our own death. You see, we can't stand into the presence of a holy God and think we as unholy people will get away with that. Now, if we stand in his presence in and of ourselves, we will incur his judgment and his wrath.

And yet at the end of chapter 9, the writer says to us that Jesus' blood, however, has abolished sin. Jesus' blood has taken sin away. Now we have, did you see it come back to chapter 10?

Now we have a new and living way open for us. New because there's never been such freedom to approach God since Christ.

[5 : 50] New because it's different from anything ever experienced before. Living because it is in fact the only way to life. The only way to true life.

And the writer tells us, and it's been opened by Jesus. In particular, by his body. His death on a cross.

That's what he means when he says through the curtain, that is his body. The thing that used to stop us has been removed. It's been secured to us and opened to us.

Because Christ gave his life on a cross. On the altar, the ultimate altar. That cross of Calvary 2,000 years ago. And as Jesus died.

Remember Mark's gospel? Remember Matthew's gospel? As Jesus died on the cross. They say, the curtain is torn into you. Suddenly we have access.

[6 : 47] The way previously blocked has been opened. The sign that used to say, stay out, was removed and replaced with a sign that said, come on in, all welcome. Jesus is in that sense.

The passport. The visa. The welcome sign. He says to people who were once far off. Come close. Come and be with my father.

Isn't that incredible? You don't seem that excited. Just think about that for a moment. The way that was once closed has now been opened.

And it's opened because of Jesus and what he did on the cross 2,000 years ago. It tells us that therefore there is no access to the father but the son.

There is no way to come into the presence of God except the way that Jesus opened up for us when he died on a cross.

[7 : 47] It's worth just thinking about that, isn't it? Because that's not the message of our modern world. Our modern world wants to say, if you don't worry, all roads lead to Rome. Our modern world wants to say, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

Of course, you do realize you can be sincerely wrong, can't you? Now, Jesus says it's quite clear. No one comes to the father but by me. The writer of Hebrews says there is only one way that has been opened, and that is through the son.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore, dear friends, I need to say, if you are trying to get to God a different way, maybe through your own efforts, maybe through your own works, maybe through how much you put in the bag or how much you serve, if you think that you can get to God based on what you do, you are mistaken.

If your family members think that there is a different religion they can follow, and they'll be okay at the end. I have another family member who says to me constantly, he says, don't worry about me,

Luke.

Me and God have got an understanding. It petrifies me because I actually understand what God says. And I know that his understanding is going to lead him to confusion.

[8 : 54] See, that's not the way into heaven. The way into heaven is when you repent of your sins and you trust Jesus. Jesus is the only way. Now let me just pause at this moment and say to you, friends, is that the way you're trusting?

Is that how you're guaranteeing your access into the throne room of God today? Now let me give you some good news. Because it's all of what Jesus does, it does also mean that you and I can't close it.

You just think about that for a moment. Sometimes we mess up, don't we? Sometimes we make mistakes. Sometimes we stumble and we fall.

Of course, all your friends will say something immediate like, oh, and I thought you were a Christian. And at that moment we're afraid, aren't we? We're afraid that somehow access has been shut. The door's been closed.

Because we did the wrong thing. Now this passage reminds us that Jesus opened the way and nothing you can do can close it. Can I tell you, it's great comfort to me. My wife will tell you I mess up all the time.

[9 : 56] I'm very grateful that when I mess up I don't close the door. I'm very grateful that access to the Father in heaven is not determined by how well I do things. No, it's opened by the Son who gave his life.

And so it's always going to be open for those of us who trust him. So Jesus opens the way and because he opens the way, how should we live? Well, we should live as those along the way. We should live as those who are enjoying this journey to the throne room of God.

In the passage we read, in its original language, there are three let us statements. Let us, let us, let us. One in verse 22, one in verse 23.

And actually the last one is actually in verse 24. Let us. It sounds like an English salad. Have you ever had an English salad? When an English person invites you to have a salad, what they mean is they've just thrown three pieces of lettuce in a bowl.

You see, and that's what you've got here. Three let us, let us. Three exhortations to respond in a way that is proper, in a way that is right. If Jesus has opened the way, what should you do?

[11 : 02] Well, have a look at the first let us in verse 22. He says, let us draw near to God in faith. Dear friend, if he's opened the way, seize the opportunity. If you've got the passport, travel.

If you've got the visa, go visit. And you're all saying, oh, it's very expensive. Friends, I know that. But it doesn't cost us anything to draw near to God in faith.

We must seize the opportunity. We must draw near to God in full assurance of faith. You see, by faith, everything has changed. By faith, we can walk into the throne room of God.

Imagine for a moment that I am the state president. I'd like a little bit more respect, please. Imagine I'm sitting in my big office.

Very big office. Who can come and see me? Well, I'm sure people who've made an appointment. Maybe a dignitary. Maybe the Queen of England.

[12 : 02] Maybe some visiting statesman. Maybe somebody who has an appointment. I'll tell you who will also come and visit me because he does this all the time. My 11-year-old son. He barges into my office all the time.

Why? Why does he barge into my office all the time? Because at the end of the day, I'm his dad, aren't I? And he's got access to me. I'm his dad.

And he knows that I'm his dad. And he loves me and I love him. And so the truth is, I'm going to say to him, everybody, stay out. Because he thinks he's got complete access. Friends, we've got that.

By faith, we have access into the throne room of God.

Did you notice he said that? Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. Having our bodies washed with pure water. When you and I realize that God's wrath has been satisfied.

That the penalty for sins has been cleansed through Jesus. When we know the debt has paid, we can approach confidently. We can approach boldly. We can rush into his office.

[13 : 03] When you and I know that we've been washed and purified. When we know that we are now acceptable to God. We can approach him boldly. I want to read you a story.

It's quite a long story, so try not to fall asleep. But it's a great story. And it ties in with what Adrian read from Leviticus 16. It's taken from a book by a man called John Phillips.

Let me read it for you. He says, imagine with me a Moabite of old. Gazing down upon the tabernacle of Israel from some lofty hillside. This Moabite is attracted to what he sees.

So he descends the hill and makes his way towards the tabernacle. He walks around this high wall of dazzling linen until he comes to a gate. And at the gate he sees a man.

May I go in there? He asks. Pointing to the gate where all the bustle of activity in the tabernacle's outer court can be seen. Who are you? Demands the gatekeeper suspiciously.

[14:08] Oh, I'm from Moab, the stranger replies. Well, I'm very sorry, but you can't go in there. You see, it's not for you. The law of Moses has barred the Moabite from any part in the worship of Israel until his tenth generation.

The Moabite looks sad. And says, well, what would I have to do to go in there? Well, you would have to be born again, the gatekeeper replies. You would have to be born an Israelite of the tribe of Judah or the tribe of Benjamin or the tribe of Dan.

Oh, I wish I'd been born an Israelite, the Moabite says. As he looks again, he sees one of the priests having offered a sacrifice at the altar. And the priest cleanses himself at the lava with water.

And the Moabite sees the priest enter the tabernacle's interior. Oh, what's in there? Asks the Moabite. Inside the main section. Oh, the gatekeeper says, that's the tabernacle itself.

Inside it contains a lampstand and a table and an altar of gold. The man you saw was a priest. He will trim the lamp. He will eat of the bread upon the table and burn incense to the living God upon the altar.

[15:17] Oh, says the Moabite. I wish I were an Israelite that I could go in. I would so love to worship God in there and help trim the lamp and offer him incense and eat the bread. Oh, no, the gatekeeper says.

Even I could not do that to worship in the holy place. You must not only be born an Israelite. But you must be born of the tribe of Levi. Of the family of Aaron.

The Moabite sighs. Oh, I wish I had been born of Israel. Of the tribe of Levi. Of the family of Aaron. And then as he gazes. He sees the door close and he says, what else is in there?

Oh, there's a veil. It's a beautiful veil. It divides the tabernacle in two. Beyond the veil is what we call the most holy place. The holy of holies. What's in the holy of holies?

The Moabite asks. Well, there's a sacred chest in there and it's called the Ark of the Covenant. It contains holy memorials of our past. Its top is gold and we call that the mercy seat.

[16:19] Because God sits there between the golden cherubim. Do you see that pillar of cloud hovering over the tabernacle? That's the Shekinah glory cloud. It rests on the mercy seat.

Said the gatekeeper. A look of longing comes over the face of the Moabite man. He said, if only I were a priest. I would have loved to go into the holy of holies. And gaze upon the glory of God.

And worship him there. In the beauty of his holiness. Oh no, said the man. You couldn't do that. Even if you were a priest. Only the high priest can enter the most holy place.

And only he can go there. No one else. And so the heart of the man from Moab yearned once more. Oh, he cried. If only I had been born an Israelite.

Of the tribe of Levi. Of the family of Aaron. If only I had been born a high priest. I would go in there every day. I would go in there three times a day. I would worship continually in the holy of holies.

[17:18] And again the gatekeeper looked at the man. And once again shook his head and said, oh no. Oh no, you couldn't do that. Even the high priest of Israel can go in there only once a year.

And then only after the most elaborate preparations. And even then only for a little while. And so the Moabite man turned away.

For he had no hope in all the world. Of ever entering me. Therefore, brothers and sisters.

Since we have confidence to enter the holy place. By the blood of Jesus. By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain. That is his flesh.

And since we have a great high priest. Let us draw near. In faith. Friends, do you see what your privilege is today?

[18:16] If you love Jesus. Your privilege is to enter. The most holy place. The holy of holies. The great sanctuary.

Your privilege, dear friend. Is to draw near. To the presence of God. I wonder if you know that today. I wonder if you cling to that today.

I wonder if that today. Warms your heart. Warms your soul. I'm sure there will be lots of things. That that would look like. On the ground for you and me.

I think at the very least. What it will mean. Is you and I will be people of prayer. See prayer is the means. Because we physically can't do that today. Can we? But we can by prayer.

The prayers offered in faith. We can stand in the presence of God. And so at the very least. I'm sure it will be a whole bunch of other things. But at the very least. You and I will be people of prayer.

[19 : 16] We will count it a great privilege. To meet. To pray. To pray for evangelism. To pray for our church. To pray for the sick. It will be our greatest privilege. To be able to bring those people. Into the presence of God.

God. We'll call upon him. We will seek his face. We will ask him for help. We'll ask him to guide and teach us. Let us draw near in faith.

Have a look at verse 23. He says. Let us hold unswervingly. To the hope. It's a very interesting phrase. To the hope. He says. To the hope we profess.

You see. The hope in the book of Hebrews. Describes the objective content. Of the hope. It's not just about the hope. It's about what the hope is in. And in the book of Hebrews. It is our present and future salvation.

You see. In chapter 6. Hope. Is all about Jesus. Entering into that heavenly sanctuary. And in chapter 10. He reminds us. That our hope is exactly the same. We too will enter into that same.

[20 : 17] Heavenly sanctuary. Friends. That is our hope. Today. Our hope is that one day. We will stand in heaven. With Christ. That is what the gospel holds out to you.

Dear friend. And we must hold on to it. And we hold on to it. Not because we are clever. We hold on to it. Not because we are good. We hold on to it. Not because of our abilities. Or our conduct. No. We hold on to it. Because he who promised. Is faithful. We hold on to it. Because God says. When you hold on. You'll reach heaven. And God always keeps his word.

Think about that for a moment. Nick sails occasionally. Did you know that? He sails on a yacht. Why you want to leave the firm ground. I don't know. But he does. Imagine his yacht is sinking. Shame. Don't worry.

He's got a life ring. Why does he cling to the life ring? Why does he hold on to the life ring? Why does he do that? Because he knows that all the time he holds on.

[21 : 15] He'll be okay. You do know that, hey? Okay. Just checking. See, when you hold on to the ring. But is it because you are clever? Is it because you are treading?

No, it's because of the ring. That's what God says. He says he has made you gospel promises. He has offered you the life ring. The gospel promise is that if you trust his son Jesus, you will partake in heaven.

That is his gospel promise to you. He says if you hold on to that ring, that ring will always lead to heaven. If you'll allow me to mix the metaphors. See, that's what he's saying to you and me today. He says, look, hold on unswervingly to the promise of heaven. Don't let go. Hold to it without wavering. Don't give up. You see, that's what Jesus has done.

He's opened the way for you to go into heaven. Why would you let go? Why would you give that up? Again, I'm sure there are lots of ways that this could look like on the ground.

[22 : 11] But at the very least, it means that you and I will be people who persevere. We will be people who persevere. See, the truth is difficulties will come. We stopped reading at verse 25.

But if you were to keep reading just a few verses later, you would see down in verse 32, 33, and 34, that the writer is quite clear that struggles and hardship will come to these Hebrew people. He knows that.

He knows they will come. But believers on the way, believers who are following Jesus, what do they do? They keep going. True believers don't let the struggles of life undermine their faith.

They do not throw away their confidence in Christ. No, they persevere in faith. They cling firmly to the light ring. They hold to the cross. They don't let go.

I don't know how your year's been. Maybe as you sit here today, maybe it's been a hard year. Maybe there's been illness in the family.

[23 : 10] Maybe there's been struggle in the family. Maybe there's been hardship and difficulty. And maybe as you've gone through it, there have been times where you thought, you know, it would be far easier just to let go.

Just to let go. To drift away into the ocean. Dear friend, can I tell you that's not the Christian way. The Christian way is to persevere. The Christian way is to press on. I've been in ministry for 25, 26 years. I think I've had my hardest year in ministry this year. Let me tell you, there have been days where I've thought, ish, let me go fishing rather. My wife's got a job. She can keep me in the life I'm accustomed. I'll go fish. Be way easier. That's not the Christian way, is it? No, we persevere. We endure. We carry on. Because we know that our God is faithful. His promises will come to pass. [24 : 11] Everything he says he will do for you and me, he will. Yes, I know there are bad days. Yes, I know there are struggle days. Yes, but dear friends, listen to the words of the scriptures. Will you hold unswervingly to the hope that is ours? The hope of heaven. That we too will be with Jesus. Look at the third one, let us quickly. Let us draw near in faith. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope. And verse 24, let us spur one another on in love. The writer focuses our minds and our energies on each other. And what he's doing is he's urging you and me, he's inciting you and me, he's provoking you and me to live out our faith and our hope in love towards one another. It's worth noticing, isn't it? If you have a look at the screen behind me and all three of the sentences are up. Did you notice there? Faith, hope and love. It is the mark of the Christian life, isn't it? You see, that's what it means to be a Christian. [25 : 18] He tells us this last one. He says, look, what you need to do is you need to stimulate each other, you need to motivate each other, and you need to find tangible expression of care and conduct within the Christian community. What you need to do is love each other. That's what it means to be on the way. You've got to ask yourself, how will we spur one another on to love and good deeds here? How will we do that? Well, he tells us the one way that you won't do that is if you stop meeting. That's why he says don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. You have to keep meeting, dear friends. We can't neglect this. John Wesley writes, the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. See, you can't be on your own. If you're on the way, you're on the way with others. You want to meet them, and you want to encourage them, and you want to spur them on. We cannot do that. You cannot spur somebody else on unless you meet with them, can you? But whether that's a small group, as your Bible studies start again this week, or whether it's the church group on a Sunday, unless you meet together, you can't encourage one another. [26 : 18] You can't spur each other on to love and good deeds. It's one of the reasons why we meet here today. We meet so that you will be encouraged, that you will be exhorted, that you will leave here excited about following Jesus this week. That's part of our job as pastors, is to spur you on to love and good deeds. Of course, it's not just our job, is it? It's your job too. It's your job to see the person who's sitting on their own and say, let me get alongside them and spur them on to love and good deeds. Let me encourage them and exhort them. There's an urgency to this. He says, and all the more as you see the day approaching. See, Jesus is coming back. Let's not be found not doing what we're supposed to do. So friends, have a look around you. I don't know who of your visitors here today. I don't know who of you are struggling here today. I don't know who of you are going through what here today. But I'll tell you this, if this is a church, we need to love each other. We need to spur each other on to love and good deeds. Let's look around. Let's spot the visitor and meet them. Let's see the brother or sister who's struggling and get alongside them. Let's find ways of spurring them on. [27 : 22] You see, if we're going to pray and if we're going to persevere, then we must also participate. We must participate. We've got to do this together. Here's what one writer says. He says, Christian assemblies are intended to have a positive and helpful outcome. The basic idea is that Christians should meet together to strengthen and stimulate one another. Close and regular fellowship with other believers is not just a nice idea. It is an absolute necessity for the encouragement of Christian values and conduct. Dear friends, can I say to you, don't stop meeting with your church. Grab every opportunity. It's so exciting to hear you're going to try and reach the community. That's fantastic. Do that together.

It's so exciting that your Bible studies are starting again. Maybe you've never been to one of the Bible studies. I don't know what they're going to be like. I don't know what they're going to be like. But can I say to you, go.

Go. If it's full of Christians, it'll be okay. There'll be at least one or two nice people there. Go. Find a group. Go. You know, maybe you're one of those Christians who comes to church every second or third or fourth week.

[28 : 31] You kind of pay your membership dues and you pop in once a month. No, don't do that, dear friends. Make church a priority on a Sunday. Plan your life accordingly. Make sure you're here.

See, if we don't gather together, how do we spur each other on to love and good deeds? Dear friends, the writer says to us, look, Jesus opened the way.

The question is, will you live as those on the way? Will you draw near in faith? Will you hold unswervingly to the hope? And will you spur one another on in love? Because the truth is, dear friends, some people won't.

Some people won't. Despite the fact that Jesus opened the way. Despite the fact that he's told us what living on the way looks like. Not everyone will follow him. Some, some even from the visible church, will give up meeting together.

And it might be that you know them. It might be that you look around the room, you can see those people who've stopped coming. They started coming every second week. And then every third week.

[29 : 35] And then once a month. And then once a semester. And now you see them with the other regulars on Christmas Day. They've stopped coming. You see, the truth is, they'd rather continue in their sin than accept Jesus' sacrifice.

And as they do that, they trample his work. They insult the spirit of grace. And verse 27 says, They face a fearful expectation of judgment. And of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Remember what we said right at the start? There is no other way than the way Jesus has opened. Dear friend, anybody who's not on this way will face the wrath of God.

It is why you must do everything in your power to tell them the way. It's why you must invite not one friend to Friday night's movie. Invite a whole family.

Invite your whole office. Invite hundreds. I don't know who's picking up the bill for the food, but they'll cover it. Invite, invite, and invite. Because friends, listen to verse 27 again.

[30 : 43] They face a fearful expectation of judgment and a raging fire that will consume them. See, if they will not accept the way, if they will not live along this way, they face judgment.

Dear friend, make sure that's not you. Make sure it's not you. You heed the warning today. The writer pleads, don't throw away your confidence.

Don't turn from your Christ. Now you show today, dear friend, you show that you are living this new and life-giving way. You show that you're on the way of faith, of hope, and love rooted in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You show that you're on the way because you pray and you persevere and you participate in the body of Christ. You show that you're on the way of faith and salvation.

Dear friends, Jesus has opened the way. Let's go. Let's go on the way. Let's pray. Father, take your word, we pray, and write it on our hearts.

[31 : 49] Help us to value and appreciate and not take for granted what Jesus did on that cross so many years ago. And because of what he did, Father, let us draw near in faith.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we have. Let us spur one another on to love and good deeds. Father, let us be people of faith on the way of salvation.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.