A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED FOR US

Hebrews 10:19-39

Key Verse: 10:20 “by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.”

 In the previous lesson, we learned that Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice for the atonement of our sins. In the era of the Old Testament, high priests offered an annual sacrifice for the sins of himself and his people using animals’ blood. But it is impossible to cleanse the sin of men, who have the image of God, with animals’ blood. So, Jesus offered his own blood once and for all for our eternal and perfect salvation. What a blessing it is for sinners like us!

 The author of Hebrews calls this a new and living way opened for us. A new and living way makes the old way obsolete. In today’s passage the author concludes this new and living way with an exhortation and warning for the believers. He exhorted three things and warned us of three things. Let us study what they are and how to apply them to our lives.

First, let us draw near to God. Look at verses 19-22. “***Therefore, brothers and sisters, 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 and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water***.” In the past, the people of Israel would not draw near to God or even call his name freely because of the fear of God. While they were staying under Mount Sinai, God set up limits so that they might not touch the mountain, where God would come down with fire. (Ex 19:11,12) Sinful men couldn’t come near the Holy God. So, only a high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year for the forgiveness of sins. The barrier between the holy God and sinners was as thick as the curtain which separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. (Ex 26:33)

 But now Christ Jesus removed the curtain through his death. When Jesus died on the cross, the thick curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mt 25:51) Jesus opened the new and living way for sinners to come to God without fear. (Jn 14:6) The curtain was like the Berlin Wall that separated West Germany from East Germany. When the wall collapsed, the Germans could cross the border freely without any fear. Now, those who have faith in Jesus Christ have the confidence to come to God. Of course, we cannot enter the Most Holy Place because we are sinful. But we can come to God through our high priest Jesus Christ who opened the new and living way for us. The opposite of fear is confidence. Confidence comes from faith in Jesus Christ.

 We will study about the heroes and heroines of faith who came to God with confidence in chapter 11. Let us think about Apostle Paul. As we know, Paul was an enemy of God who persecuted and killed Christians. He was the ring leader of anti-Christians. Before he met the Risen Christ, he was on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians. How, then, could Paul, this enemy of God, call himself a servant of Christ and an apostle of God? (Ro1:1) Where did his confidence come from? It came from his faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross to forgive his sins. He had absolute faith in God’s forgiving love through Jesus Christ. He said in Romans 5:8, “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.” He continues in 8:35, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*…” No one and nothing could separate Paul from the love of Christ. Paul had such confidence in the love of Christ. So, he could overcome all kinds of hardships, persecution, misunderstanding, and even death.

 We need confidence in our life of faith. We need confidence in whatever we do, wherever we go, and whoever we meet. David had confidence in fighting the Philistines, even confronting Goliath with a slingshot. Where did his confidence come from? His confidence came from the Almighty power of God. He believed that the Almighty God of Israel was with him. Missionary David Livingston went to Africa with confidence, believing that the Lord would be with him always to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:20) One of the main problems modern Christians face is the lack of confidence. Whatever they do, they show their lack of confidence. So, they are not sure what they chose. Some give up even before they try because of fear. But the Scripture says, “*For God did not give us the spirit of timidity, but the spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.*” (2 Ti 1:7) When we pray and call on the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit provides us confidence to do his will. Verse 35 says, “***So do not throw away your confidence. It will be richly rewarded***.” Two of our young leaders will start a new college life: Grace Choi at Mizzou Medical School and Deborah Park at Case Western Univ. in Cleveland OH. Let us pray for them to have the confidence to draw near to God. Let us pray for them not to throw away their confidence, but to live by faith to the end. Amen!

 We need absolute faith in Father’s love. Jesus said, “*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*” (Mt 7:11) God gave his One and Only Son Jesus for us. What else would he spare for himself? He gave all things for us through Jesus. Therefore, let us draw near to God with confidence and a sincere heart. God wants us to come near to him. In the past, God was the object of fear, wrath, and judgment. But now through Jesus Christ, who opened a new and living way, God is the object of love, grace, and mercy. Let us come to God with assurance and sincere heart. We can come near to God through prayer. We meet God personally and deeply in prayer.

Second, let us hold unswervingly to hope. Look at verse 23. “***Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.***” Here the word, ‘unswervingly’ means ‘steadfast’ or ‘straight, not turning left or right.’ Don’t swerve while you are driving (don’t change your direction or turn your course suddenly). Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. What is your hope? When I asked people this question, most of them took some time to answer. This means that our hope is more noble and meaningful than just eating well, becoming rich, or retiring early. Someone said that people live by eating dreams. What is your hope and dream? If you have dreams and hopes, hold onto them unswervingly until they are achieved. Heb 6:19 says, “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure*.” All hope on this earth, which we call ‘earthly hope,’ is temporal and limited. When our dreams come true, they do not last long, but disappear soon until we are disappointed. But hope in the Lord Jesus is eternal and unlimited. According to Peter, this is the living hope in Christ Jesus, kept in heaven. (1 Pe 1:3,4) Because our hope is living and eternal in heaven, let us hold onto it unswervingly until we reach heaven. God who promised our hope is faithful. Amen!

Third, let us spur one another with love and good deeds. Look at verses 24-25. “***And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.***” Here the word ‘spur’ is used for ‘encourage’ or ‘stimulate’. Spur is a device with a small spike attached at the heel of a horse rider to urge a horse forward. When a horse rider kicks with his spur, the horse feels an “ouch!” and begins to run. So, it is interesting for the author to use the word ‘spur’ instead of ‘love’ or ‘serve’. We need to encourage and challenge each other. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another by spurring them. (Pro 27:17) People are not the same and do not need to be the same. Everybody has his or her own unique character, personality, and preference. So, among Christian coworkers and even between husband and wife we have conflict because of these differences. The word ‘conflict’ in Greek means ‘difference.’ These differences may spur one another.

 We don’t like to meet those who are different from us. We want to avoid those who may cause conflict. But the Bible says in verse 25, ‘*not giving up meeting together*’, which means ‘continue to meet whether you are different from each other or whether you like it or not.’ We must not fight or argue until we depart in fury and anguish. But we need to meet to spur one another with love and good deeds. We need to challenge and be challenged by each other. Conflict that spurs one another with love and good deeds is positive and constructive. Thank God for helping us meet together in the midst of this pandemic. Thank God for our encouraging of one another with love and good deeds. Last Friday, some of our members attended Danny Lanier’s funeral ceremony. The next day, they also joined the Bible retreat in the heat of the day. Thank God for their sacrificial love and brotherhood in Christ. Amen!

Now in verses 26-32 the author warns those who are deliberately sinning against God and falling away from their faith. We call this a warning against licentiousness and apostacy. Look at verses 26-29. “***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. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God***.” By God’s mercy and Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross we are saved. This is the marvelous grace of God for sinners like us who do not deserve it. Therefore, we must live a life worthy of God’s grace. But some believers keep sinning even after they received the grace of God. They may say, “we may sin all the more so that the grace of God may increase”. (Ro 6:1) But, the author of Hebrews says that the destiny of those who are deliberately sinning is the wrath of God and his divine judgment.

In chapter 6:6 those who practice apostacy are described as those who are crucifying the Son of God all over again. In chapter 10:29 they are described as those who trample the Son of God underfoot and who insult the Spirit of grace. This is a severe warning against those who fall away from their faith and go back to their old sinful life. If we keep sinning, we are not only crucifying the Son of God Jesus, but also trampling him underfoot and insulting the Holy Spirit. How serious it is when we keep sinning against God!

The recipients of Hebrews were not like that at the beginning. When they believed Jesus the first time, they persevered all persecutions and hardships. They endured even the confiscation of their property to keep their faith. (32-34) But, little by little they began to compromise with the world, losing their faith and confidence, and were driven away from Jesus. So, the author encourages them to repent and persevere to the end. Look at verses 35-36. “***So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”*** We should not throw away our confidence. This is because we will be richly rewarded when we believe that God is love and that he is with us forever. When we persevere and keep doing the will of God, we will receive what God has promised to each of us. We must not fear suffering. Because suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. This hope never disappoints us. (Ro 5:3-5) When we keep doing the will of God by faith, we will be richly rewarded, and we will receive what God has promised to us. Verse 38 says, “***But my righteous one will live by faith***.” Amen!