

(37) THE NEVERENDING AWAITS: HEBREWS 10:19-25

- Focus Idea:** Christians believe that the present order will not last forever. In the end, God will remake the world, turning heartache into joy and restoring life back to the perfection he had originally intended. Because they know that day is coming, believers are encouraged to live and interact in new ways.
- The Context:** The Book of Hebrews is an epistle intended to demonstrate how, and why, the ancient hopes of the people of Israel have been realized in Jesus. Because its recipients were Jewish, Hebrews draws heavily on Old Testament allusions to show its readers that Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah of God. This week's passage follows an extended discussion of sacrifice and priesthood that begins in chapter 5.
- The Characters:** Many scholars believe that Hebrews' audience consisted of persecuted Jewish Christians. These converts were having second thoughts about their faith and were considering returning to the familiar and friendly confines of traditional Judaism. The author of Hebrews is unknown.
- The Core:** A wedding. A marathon. The first day of kindergarten. Your own funeral. These events require preparation. They take getting ready. They require looking ahead and behaving now so that things will go well when the momentous days arrive.
- The author of Hebrews believes that a Day (capital D) is coming. This Day, perhaps an allusion backwards to the Old Testament expectation of a "Day of the Lord" (see Joel 3 and Amos 5) is the church's greatest anticipation. It is the moment when all of the persecutions and pains endemic to life come to a close and God will have the ultimate victory.
- How does one prepare for that Day? What should believers do to get ready? The writer answers those questions with four important prompts in Hebrews 10. These instructions provide a sort of checklist for all Christians who eagerly anticipate God's final victory.
- First, verses 19-22 teach, Christians should draw near to God. Unlike other religions in which people shrink away from approaching ultimate power and reality, believers in Jesus can come close to the Lord because of the work of Jesus Christ. There is reason for *confidence*, the author writes, because Jesus has eliminated the old curtain (Matthew 27:51) of division, the barrier intended to protect a sinful world from a holy God.
- Second, followers in Jesus should "hold unwaveringly" to their hope (vs. 23). This allusion plainly urges a troubled and uncertain church not to return to the old and antiquated ways of Judaism; they need to maintain their faith in Jesus because he, himself, is faithful.
- Third, believers should "spur one another on" (vs. 24) to good works. If God's transformative moment is on the way, they, too, must be about transformative things. Chief among these works is declaring and demonstrating love – even love for their enemies and persecutors.
- Finally, the fellowship of Christians must continue to gather in community. Some, probably as a result of the persecution they had been experiencing, had stopped meeting together. The author knows that strength to meet the incredible temptation to "swerve" could best be drawn from one another in times of worship and support.