

Reasons for Assembling

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The sermon this morning will be brief, I trust. I want to make some comments appropriate for this communion this morning from the tenth chapter of Hebrews, a part of which I read in the earlier part of the service. I want to call attention to our position in Jesus Christ. Verses 10-12, by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, and every priest standeth daily ministering offerings, oftentimes the same sacrifices, even though these can never take away sins, but this man after He'd offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down on the right hand of God. There's the one sacrifice. And that means the end of sacrifices, the end of sacrifices. Nobody has offered a blood sacrifice that's been accepted from the day our Lord Jesus Christ said, it is finished. Before that, there were sacrifices plural. Since that there have been no sacrifices offered in blood. There have been many thousands, even millions offered, but none had been accepted. Because to add any sacrifices to the one complete, full, final sacrifice is to do despite to the Spirit of grace. There is one sacrifice.

In verse twenty-one, having an high priest over the house of God, one Priest, and that means the end of priests. The end of sacrifices and the end of priests. We have to keep this in mind. There has not been a time probably since the days before Luther when we were being conditioned mentally by advertising, radio, television, speeches, columnists, news items, pictures, and just a general barrage of propaganda to accept the idea that there is something to be said for the repeated sacrifice of the Mass and the position of priests. There is nothing to be said if we stay by the Bible. There is one sacrifice offered for ever. That means the end of sacrifices.

Therefore, without hesitation and in a spirit of complete charity for the people, but with grief at the error, I say that every sacrifice offered by priests now is an affront to the holy God. However well intentioned, it's an affront. There is no more sacrifices now and there is only one Priest.

So, we come to the end of priests, except of course, that we are all priests. 1 Peter 2:9; we are chosen generation, a royal priesthood. And we are all priests offering up sacrifices unto God, but they're all grounded on that one sacrifice. And the Christian priest offers no blood sacrifice. He offers the sacrifice of praise unto God. And so, we explain that when we say the end of sacrifices, we do not mean the end of personal sacrifices, hardships, such as missionaries endure. Neither do we mean that we are not to offer up the sacrifice of praise, well pleasing in His sight. But we mean atoning sacrifice is no more. Nobody can offer them now. Not all the beasts of the mountains, not all the cattle, the bay face cattle that roam the rich hills and valleys of our West, would be enough to wash one sin away. No more priests.

And we can draw near, verse twenty-two. Let us draw near in true faith with a heart in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled and our bodies washed with pure water so we can come together. Here's what I want particularly to emphasize, that as we draw near to Him, we draw nearer to one another also. Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, verse twenty-five.

That word assembly is a word I'm coming increasingly to love. The word assembly of course only means a gathering together. And it has to be a modified or you don't know what kind of an assembly. When the communists meet, that's an assembly. When the politicians gather their people in to talk to them, that's an assembly. When a group gathers to see a baseball or football game, that's an assembly. But there's a modifier here, the assembly of God. God's assembly, the only assembly God calls, and the only one he has called. It is called the church in English. And so, we are not to forsake the church, the assembling, the coming together.

Now, I want to point out briefly why we should assemble. We should assemble because it's the normal thing. You know, the closer you get to the Shepherd, the nearer we get to each other. When the sheep are scattered all over the meadow browsing and the shepherd issues his peculiar call and they all come running to him, the nearer they get to him, the closer they get to each other. Isn't that beautiful and simple.

So, we come closer to each other by coming closer to Christ. Five men in a church who are apart, if they come close to Christ, each of them will find they're closer together because they've come closer to the Savior. All the creatures of the forest meet at the water. They all come to the same place. And those scattered all over the hills, when they meet at the water, they're close together.

Well, we need each other is another reason, even if we don't feel that we do. The man who feels that he needs other people is normal, but when we feel we do not we're badly in error and something wrong with us. The individual Christian needs the company of Christians incidentally, the company of Christians. And we should come to that company of Christians with receptivity. God will say to a company what He cannot say to the individual, just as He will say to the individual what he cannot say to the company.

Somebody called me the other day, a member of Moody Church. I told Brother Redpath at a luncheon the other day that one of his sheep had been consulting me. And but anyway, she called and she was concerned about some spiritual problem. Well, she said, I attended, I went all through Keswick and I never went back. I never went back to the prayer room because God never meets me in company. And she wanted to know what's the matter with her. And I said, well exactly the same thing is true of me. I never meet God at an altar of prayer. I've had to meet God alone. But yet God has said things to me in the company. I sit here as we sing and the Scripture is read and prayer offered and God says things to me that He did not say to me when I was alone. But He says

things to me alone, that He cannot and will not say to me in a public assembly. So, we need both. We need to come to God alone. But we need also to come to God with the assembly, for God speaks to His assembly what he cannot speak to the individuals of that assembly if they're not present in the assembly.

Now, how much value I can give to a crowd of Christians will depend upon how close I've been to God and how God has spoken to me alone. There must first be personal religion and then communal religion. Our fathers talked about that. You know, I wish that there might be a reingestion and reissuing, a rethinking of all the old Puritan teaching. They had phrases, good, strong biblical phrases that we've lost in our modern day. One of them was personal religion and communal religion. They taught that we had to have God in Christ personally before we dare join ourselves to the assembly and thus join in the worship with a company. So, there's a company that meets. Forsake not the company. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.

Then the third reason is that Christ went to the company regularly as often as He could. And I suppose it would be every Sabbath day He went to the synagogue or the temple as was His custom it says. And He didn't find everything as He wanted it there, but He went nevertheless, because He knew the law of the assembly. And Christ promised special blessings to the company where two or three are gathered and so on.

So, He made a special promise to the company. He also made a special promise to those who pray alone. Enter into thy closet and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But He made a special promise to the company. And when we meet, we meet in the historic tradition. I am not a traditionalist, but I'm pretty much inclined to give some credence to the value of that which has stood solidly from the days of Israel down to this present day, unchanged through all the long tradition of Bible religion. And they met, they assembled, they came together in the historic tradition. And when we Christians, if we could only, if we were up looking down, if we were up there looking down and could see history from Abraham to the coming of Christ, we'd see the little companies dotting the map all the way down. We'd see ours, a little company in the historic tradition.

Now, I want you to notice why Christians practice this assembly-going so rarely and some intermittently. Well, I think that there are several reasons. One is a break in internal communion. If I have a break in internal communion, then I don't feel that I want to go with a larger company. If I have broken with God, if I have broken with the Shepherd, I have automatically broken with His sheep, though I may not have had any fuss personally with any sheep. But, if my heart has been cut off from the Shepherd, I have also cut myself off from the sheep.

Then there is secret backsliding, wrongdoings, evils. I never have believed in that subtle power of suggestion used by some public speakers where they will lower their voice and act mysterious,

and talk around and around and try to by the power of suggestion make you feel you've been a very evil person indeed. I don't believe in that whatsoever. I have sat knowing that I wasn't doing a thing and knowing I hadn't been guilty of it, knowing before God I hadn't been guilty of it. And yet, I've had men talk me to a point where I felt guilty because of the low subtle, breathy voice suggestion that probabilities were I'd been doing it.

Well, I don't want to practice that. And I don't want to suggest there's been any secret backsliding. But I do want to say that if the heart back slides, then it's embarrassed when it comes in the company of the saints. To hear two happy Christians with their open countenance discussing the Lord, the man who is secretly backslidden and alienated from God is not, at least in his emotions and feelings, is not very likely to feel comfortable, rather embarrassed.

Then plain coldness of heart sometimes will shut us away from enjoying the church. We ought not only to come to church, we ought to enjoy it. But the coldness of heart will prevent it. And candidly, it simply means that some don't come to church or go to church because they're not interested. They find Christian worship boring.

Now, this is the real reason for they're not assembling themselves together very often or only maybe once a week. But they usually, such persons, usually excuse their conduct by blaming the minister; and I'd be the last one to defend the minister. I listened to two tapes of my sermons here last week trying to get some sorted out to send a man over in Williamsport who wants to make copies of them, and I wouldn't, I wouldn't go to hear myself preach if there was any place else to go. I'd go hear Redpath. But the minister may be to blame. And certainly, we're not all perfect and we preach in a monotone and repeat ourselves. But, you know, that's only an excuse. Yes, it's only an excuse.

The company, the company, the sheep gather around the shepherd. They gather at the water. They gather where the grass is. And as they gather, they come close to each other and they fellowship with each other. And if the minister shouldn't be a Spurgeon, they still feel they want to come together. I have gone out and been in churches where the people were so happy and blessed and warm and loving each other. And there was an enthusiasm and a glow over the congregation. And I knew personally that the preacher didn't amount to much. That is, he was a good man, but he wasn't much of a preacher. And I thought to myself, why? Why is this fellow who is not much of a preacher nevertheless, why does he have a church like this? The answer is, the people were still in the fresh blush of their love for Jesus Christ and they were gathered there to meet the Lord Jesus, and they listened to the minister more or less. And if he failed them, they smiled, prayed for him came back the next Sunday with the same glow because they were coming to meet the Lord.

Or, a second excuse is, blaming the music. Well, I have been one of the worst critics of church music. And I know that a lot of it is not much good really. And some is worse than others. But you

can get along with pretty bad music, if you love the Lord. If there were a picnic on a beautiful July day, why everybody comes, even if the singing wasn't so good. And if the speaker who spoke at vespers in the evening wasn't a Spurgeon, they'd still be there, because they had some other reason for coming. It's good to have a minister who's preaching warms people's hearts and draws them. It's good to have music that can help Christian people to express themselves. But if we have mediocre preaching and mediocre music in the churches, God's people will be there anyway, because they're not going to hear the sermon or the music only. They're going to fellowship the saints. As they come to each other, they come to meet the Lord. And then when coming to meet the Lord, drawing close to the Lord, they draw near to each other.

And then also, this failure to attend church or this sporadic intermittent church attendance, we blame on unfriendliness of the people. Our church here over the past years has been criticized for being unfriendly and praised to the skies for being the friendliest church in the whole country. The truth is, that it's neither the most unfriendly or the friendliest, it's just about what you are if you're visiting. If you're visiting here today as a guest in the Lord's house and you don't know us, you can get away without meeting anybody if you hurry. Or, if you'll wait around and grin a little, there'll be twenty-five people ask you your name and where you are and where you go to church. It depends, he that would have friends must what? Show himself friendly. Sure Brother Tozer, remember that.

Then, we also when we break out, break off with God and get cold in our heart, we start blaming hypocrites. Well, certainly they are hypocrites. Jesus had a few or at least one very serious one in His flock and Peter had a couple. He got rid of two of them in a rather drastic fashion, Ananias and Saphira. But even after they were gone, they still had some. The Church has always had them and always will, people who pretend to be Christians and aren't. But if I'm going to stay away because of that, why I am breaking the rules of the kingdom and the commandments of Christ and the pleadings of the Spirit and the historic tradition of course.

I never know when I enter a bus and sit down, I may be sitting beside a communist. I never know that I may be sitting beside a man who's got a gun under his armpit. He's a dropper, a fellow sent out to bump off the enemies of some gangster. I don't know that. But I'm not going to leave the United States, the greatest country in the world because we got some gangsters in it, and because there are some vermin called communists crawling in out of the woodwork. I am not going to leave the country and say no to everything American. I thank God for all we have. And if my vote will help Tuesday, why, I want to clean things up. But don't let's blame the hypocrites, because they're not to blame. God will handle them. And you come and make them ashamed by being a happy-faced Christian.

And then when we break off with God, lose internal communion and have secret backsliding and start intermittently attending the assembly of the saints, we blame the church building, it's too

cold or it's too hot, or it's too drafty, or it's too noisy, or it's too uncomfortable. But, if you want to see a baseball game, you'll go if it's 103 in the shade, and no shade. And if you want to go to a football game, you'll go if it's 32 and overcast and rainy. So, let's not please have any of that hypocrisy, that it's the building, or it's too cold, or anybody else's, oh, it's too hot or it's too drafty, it's too noisy. All right, but can you say that when the Lord comes? Can you say that when the Lord comes? When the Lord Jesus Christ and you meet, and he looks through you with those flaming eyes, can you say to Him, Lord, I'm sorry, but it was too drafty. It was too uncomfortable, or it was too noisy, the babies cried.

Well, we conclude. We should be at the assembly. We should be there not only once, comfortable Sunday morning, but we should be there Sunday night, and we should be there wherever there's a prayer meeting also, because we've got something to contribute if we're a Christian. I don't mean money either. I mean, you've got something to contribute that's more valuable than money even. And you have something to gain. Don't forget it. You have something to gain. And don't forget that we'll find the Shepherd where the sheep is. If you can't find Him, go where the sheep are and you will find the Shepherd because He's where they are.

And Paul said when ye become together, when ye become together. Now there's the good New Testament expression. Christ fed the multitude in companies. Remember, they sat down in companies and He fed them in companies. And Paul said, when ye come together do so and so. How blessed it is that we can come together. How blessed it is. I know what Brother McAfee meant. He teases me a lot. And I do like books. And you get the benefit of it incidentally. But I love the assembly of the saints and I love the songs of the saints. I don't always join in the singing because I don't have too good a voice and if I preach twice in a day and sing along with it, I'm pretty scratchy by nightfall. So, I listen rather than sing for my throat's sake and my other infirmities. But I love to hear and join in with the saints as they sing the songs of Zion. I love to hear Brother Van Kepel quote the Psalter. I love to hear somebody lead out in prayer. I love to hear the sonorous tones of the song leader and then the sweet sound of the music. I love it my friends, I love it.

And if God were to come to me and say I'm going to take you away from all that and you'll never hear it again, I'd grieve till I died, for I love the assembly of the saints. But sometimes you have to get away from the saints to get to God on certain things. For the Lord will say things to you alone that He won't say to you with the saints buzzing around you. But as I said before, He will also say things to you among the saints that He couldn't say to you if you were alone. So, we've got to have both, not one or the other, but both. And so, we need to thank God how blessed we are. Let us give thanks that we can be together today and we can celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Now, the Catholics would say transubstantiation; this is the very body and the very blood. We cannot agree with that though we appreciate their effort to try to get close to God. Lutherans

would say, back of, underneath and behind there is the Presence and that gets a little nearer. We want a little more than mere symbolism. We don't want to say only this symbolizes. It's a little more than that. Yet, we know a cracker when we see it and we know grape juice when we taste it. So, we'll not pretend that it's Jesus Christ body. But we will say, somehow, through the mystery of the Presence, through the mystery of the imminent Presence, by our obedience to Him in remembering His death till He come, He imparts something to us when we obey it. So, as we receive the bread and the wine, we do it with intelligence, but let's do it also with faith. Knowing that while it is bread and it is wine, somewhere underneath it and back of it, there's a Presence, that holy, loving presence. The presence of Jesus Christ the Shepherd, more wonderful than all Mount Hermon and the mountains of praying. Zion, the Perfection of beauty is present. Let us rejoice.