

Week 4 – It's Just Me and Jesus – Hebrews 10:23-25

Scripture Reading: 1Peter 2:4-10

Introduction

Country artist, Tom T. Hall, spoke for many when he wrote the 1972 hit "Me and Jesus" – the chorus goes like this:

Well, me and Jesus, we got our own thing going.

Me and Jesus, we got it all worked out.

Me and Jesus, we got our own thing going.

We don't need anybody to tell us what it's all about.

"Just me and Jesus" is a popular sentiment, and you've likely heard someone proclaim with great conviction:

"I can worship God in nature, on the golf course, on my boat, or fill in the blank just as easily as I can in church. In fact, I think I can worship God better on my own."

Others complain that church has become boring and irrelevant to their lives and they don't see any need to get up early on their only day off, get dressed, and make the trek to join into something they really don't see any value in

And some contend that what God really wants is for me to have a relationship with him and that doesn't need to include sitting in a stuffy church building with a bunch of hypocrites listening to a whole lot of religious mumbo-jumbo

And, if worship can happen anywhere, how important can it be whether I attend church services every week?

How many of you have heard some version of that argument?

Is it true?

Is there anything wrong with being a loner when it comes to Christianity, or does a person need to be involved with other Christ-followers to honor and serve God properly?

When we consider how many aspects of Christianity are personal –

Belief unto salvation is an individual decision that each person must make for themselves

Obedience to the commands of Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit is a personal decision

And being good stewards of God's various gifts is something for which each individual will be held accountable

We might well wonder whether it's necessary to involve other people at all and, if so, why it's necessary

Then we come to our focus passage this morning: **Hebrews 10:23-25**, which says –

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to Christians who were in danger of going astray because they were suffering persecution, and the author of the letter is encouraging them to remain strong despite their fears and discouragement

I believe our problem is quite different although the results are the same and, whereas certain members of that original audience were going solo because of persecution, people today tend to do so because things are so comfortable

But the reality is, the Bible doesn't know anything about an unchurched Christian

And a lone-wolf Christ-follower is an oxymoron that simply doesn't conform to the biblical model because the gathering of the saints is fundamental to the purposes of God

Because the reality is that God doesn't merely save people from sin and the ranks of the condemned without also saving them to holiness and the body of Christ

And a body is more than disjointed, individual parts

So, let's dig into the passage before us and discover why "It's just me and Jesus" is the wrong attitude for a Christ-follower to have

We'll begin by first looking at what is meant by "meet together"

I. What is Meant by "Meet Together"?

You will find this phrase translated in various ways in different English Bibles

The New American Standard Version says, "...not forsaking our own assembling together"

The New English Translation says, "...not abandoning our own meetings"

And Young's Literal Translation renders it, "...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"

Clearly, the idea concerns a group of people coming together at a particular location and in this case the people involved are followers of Jesus Christ

And we can rightly presume that worship meetings would be the primary meaning that the author had in mind

That understanding is reflected in the way the Christian Standard Bible translates the verse by rendering it, "not staying away from our worship meetings"

So, while we want to be aware of cultural influences that govern a "proper" worship service, our understanding should be that a formal, official gathering is what is in view and not just a casual collection of the saints

And, as much as I'm grateful for the technology that extends our reach to those who cannot attend in person with us, we have to understand that it doesn't include sitting by oneself or even getting a group together to listen to a sermon online

Joining the service online or downloading and listening to or reading the text of the sermon are great for educational purposes and personal growth but those activities wouldn't fall under the concept of "meeting together" described in the letter

Trust me, I know that we are all forced to miss church from time to time due to illness, transportation issues, out of town vacations, etc. – I had to miss three weeks in a row due to illness earlier this year

And joining together online is a wonderful convenience when one is hindered from attending in person, but our desire should always be to be in God's house worshipping together with God's people

Biblically, we recognize the local church meeting together as a group of believers organized around the proper preaching and teaching of the Word of God, prayer, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table, and church discipline

And it's through those practices that the church fulfills her function of making disciples of Jesus Christ

This means there is a significant, fundamental difference between the meeting together of the church and any other gathering of people

In fact, in **1Corinthians 11:18** Paul begins giving instructions for when the believers in Corinth "*[came] together as a church*" indicating a type of meeting together that is unique even among believers

And meeting as the church is what the author of Hebrews is referring to when he commands believers to not neglect to meet together

The local church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God – it is God's tool in this age for continuing the earthly ministry of his Son

And when we recognize that God doesn't simply save someone from sin but also saves them into the Body of Christ, we come to understand that God does not mean for us to remain alone and to function independently

Let's consider some of the metaphors for the church we find in the Bible

Romans 12:4-5 tells us that individual believers make up the **body** of Christ

In **2Corinthians 6:18** we see believers described as the **family** of God and in **Ephesians 2:19** believers collectively are called the **household** of God

In **1Peter 2:5** from our Scripture reading we see that believers as individual stones make up the **temple** of God

Elsewhere believers are said to be a **flock** and each of these metaphors individuals must be joined together

Bricks or stones strewn across the ground are not a building and when we see an arm or a leg that aren't connected to a body we instinctively know something is amiss

Likewise with a fragmented family or a scattered flock – we rightly understand that something isn't right because those entities are meant to be together – being joined together is their natural order

We all have reasons for missing the gathering together of our local church such as illness but, as the author of Hebrews indicates neglecting to meet together can become a habit

And, sadly, it has become a habit for many believers so let's look next at why we should endeavor to meet together

II. Why Meet Together?

The foremost reason we should not neglect to meet together with our fellow believers because God's Word commands us to do so and our desire should be to be obedient

That seems obvious, doesn't it? Every true Christ-follower should be doing what God wants him or her to be doing

But the author of Hebrews gives us two other reasons in this passage

First, he says that believers meet together to *"stir up one another to love and good works"*

Actually, he begins by saying we need to consider how to do that which means we must first take note of one another and discern the need for such stirring up and it's by being together that we come to know one another's needs

I once met with someone who had been absent from church attendance for a prolonged period of time and I asked them what they thought the purpose of the local church was

They answered that it was to help them when they were in need

So I asked how anyone in the church would know of their need and how would they know of anyone else's need if they weren't ever at church

The use of the phrase "stir up" seems to indicate that loving one another needs to be induced or incited; that it won't just happen but that we will be moved to love each other as we meet together

In other words, as one commentator put it, love needs stimulation and society

The word translated here as love is the Greek *agape* which, as we know, is the sacrificial performative love that is exemplified by the cross

But have you ever considered that such love can't be practiced in isolation?

It's the same with good works if we understand those to be things done for the benefit of another

Faith, prayer, Bible study, and some of the other Christian disciplines may be able to be practiced by a solitary individual but love and good works require community

Second, the author says we should meet together in order to so that we might be *"encouraging one another"*

We need to be sure that we understand that the word behind our English "encourage" is a strong word of exhortation

It's on the order of pleading or seeking with a sense of urgency and intensity

Remember, the original audience of this letter were discouraged and in danger of turning away from their faith
 When we're discouraged or depressed our natural inclination is to hunker down – to stay in isolation away from other people

I know that's true for me – when I'm feeling low or blue I generally want to be left alone by myself

But I've found that's a sure fire way to cause my discouragement or depression to flourish and the encouragement of my fellow believers is the antidote to it

Recently, when I fell ill and was forced to be away from all church activities for three weeks, I was shocked by the difference being back among God's people made

Just being in the mix and receiving your love and encouragement made all the difference in my recovery

I told some of you and it's true that while I credit the doctors, nurses, technicians, and medicines for getting me to the point of *feeling* better, it was when I returned to be with you all that I actually *got* better

Many people stop going to church regularly or even at all because they say they don't get anything out of it or the church wasn't meeting their needs

But I want you to notice that both of the reasons in our passage describe what each believer should be doing – not what each believer should be receiving

Each is to be mindful and considerate of others, each is to be stirring up others to love and good works, each is to be encouraging and exhorting others – lifting them up and cheering them on

Of course, if each believer is doing that, someone is the recipient but we shouldn't be coming to church only or even primarily for what we can get from others but what we are commanded to give to others

The meeting of the saints is meant to be a mutual aid gathering and we should be there to do our part to aid our spiritual siblings even if we seem to “get nothing out of it”

I've only ever seen them in pictures but I understand that the redwood trees in California are the largest living organisms on earth and the tallest trees in the world

Some of them are 300 feet tall and the tallest of them all measures over 379 feet

One would think that the root system of a redwood would be quite robust reaching far down into the earth but their root system is actually very shallow only extending from 6 to 12 feet deep

And the only thing that keeps a redwood standing is the fact their roots extend about 100 feet out from the tree and are intertwined with the roots of all their neighbors making a bit matted network that allows them to withstand the winds and storms they encounter

Redwoods need each other to remain standing and so do Christ-followers

That's true whether we are living in times of persecution that lead to fear and discouragement or times of peace which can lead to unconcern and apathy

Because either can result in people neglecting to meet together

And when we neglect meeting together we miss out on the benefits that can be ours through gathering

Let's look at some of those benefits now

III. Benefits of Meeting Together

First, meeting together with God's people provides us with mutual nurture and support as we see in **1John 3:16-18**

The stirring up and encouragement we looked at a few minutes ago would fit in this category so we won't spend any more time detailing this one

Second, meeting together gives us the opportunity to use our unique, God-given gifts to serve others

As we see in **1Corinthians 12:4-7** God gives a variety of gifts and areas in which to use those gifts to the various members of his body

But notice in verse 7 [**1Corinthians 12:7**] that those gifts aren't given solely for the benefit of the recipient

Rather they are given "*for the common good*" which means they are given to serve within the church – they are given for the benefit of the church which means that God intends for those gifts to be exercised when his people meet together

Our **third** benefit is actually has different facets that all come under the heading of protection

First, there is the safety net of mutual accountability that God wants to take place as we see in **Colossians 3:16** which speaks of "*teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom*"

Then there is the protection from false teachers and false teaching that comes partially from that mutual accountability and partially from being under the preaching and teaching of people who make it their lives work to study the Bible

We see this in passages like **2Peter 3:17** and **Hebrews 13:17**

And meeting together with God's people helps to provide balance in your Christian walk and keeps you from veering off to extremes as we see in **Proverbs 27:17** which speaks of the checking and correction that occurs between believers

The **fourth** benefit is that meeting together with your fellow believers at church provides biblical education and training for you and your family as we see in **Ephesians 4:15-16** and **Proverbs 22:6**

Those first four benefits all fall under the heading of the "one another" commands we find frequently in the New Testament such as:

Love one another – 1Peter 1:22

Welcome one another – Romans 15:7

Instruct one another – Romans 15:14

Care for one another – 1Corinthians 12:25

Serve one another – Galatians 5:13

Bear one another's burdens – Galatians 6:2

Be patient with one another – Galatians 4:2

Be kind to one another – Galatians 4:32

Forgive one another – Galatians 4:32

Speak the truth to one another – Colossians 3:9

Encourage one another – 1Thessalonians 4:18

Confess your sins to one another – James 5:16

Pray for one another – James 5:16

And this is just a partial list

But, again, those are commands that require believers to be together if they are going to obey them

The **fifth** and final benefit I want to mention is that going to church each and every Sunday provides you with ready identification that you are a follower of Christ [**Ephesians 2:19**]

Trust me, whether they agree with you or not, your neighbors notice when you head out to church each Sunday

One of my neighbors even commented one Sunday on how long Kathy and I spend at church when she saw us leave at 8am not to return until around 2pm

We had to laugh and tell them that we had also gone to lunch in there but the point is, they noticed

And your neighbors notice too and consistent attendance at the worship services of the church is therefore a part of being salt and light in this world as we read about in Matthew 5

Conclusion

The fact is, we were saved for community – to become the body of Christ

We are God’s family, God’s flock, God’s building and we can only thrive in the company of other believers

Because as **Ephesians 2:19** reminds us we

“are no longer strangers and aliens but [we] are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”

And each time we neglect to meet together with one another we put ourselves at risk because as we read in **1Peter 5:8**

[Our] adversary the devil [is prowling] around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour

And we are vulnerable when we are alone

You heard me say often that we gather together on Sunday morning in order to have God repair us from the week behind and to prepare us for the week ahead

That’s not just a catchy phrase – it *is* actually why we meet together to worship our God because worshipping together has great power to repair us from the damage done by our encounters with the world and to prepare us to re-enter the battle anew

And gathering together has been the practice of the church since the church was first founded in Acts 2 as we read in **Acts 2:42** the early believers *“devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”*

There are times and occasions when everyone must miss attending a worship service such as when we are ill but neglecting to meet together can easily become a habit that we must continually fight against

We don’t know how much longer we have before the Lord reappears but we know the Day that is approaching is closer now than ever before so let’s endeavor to follow the command to meet together often

Let’s pray

1Peter 2:4-10 (page 1014)

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"

and

"A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.