

WORSHIP THAT COMES WITH A WARNING LABEL

## Hope-filled Worship

Hebrews 10:24-25

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**LISTEN:** <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/worship-that-comes-with-a-warning-label-hope-filled-worship>

***[I want to remind us of the "sail" we are working on as we are Setting Sail congregationally: God-centered worship. Our preferred future is one where FBC honors God with extravagant love, seeking God's mysterious and loving presence individually and together. We love God.]***

The Book of Hebrews was written late enough in the first century that already people had started to lose interest and drift off. Why? Some became apathetic. Some were proud and thought they could go it alone. Others feared persecution for their faith. Why do people miss church today? They see the church as irrelevant, or they've had a bad experience in church. Maybe they are ashamed because of some failure. Maybe they're busy and distracted. But I want to suggest another reason. People have lost hope. Discouraged and despairing, they just don't see the use. So let me ask you. When you feel hopeless, do you draw closer to God and others through worship or do you pull away and cocoon?

Why do we need hope-filled worship? Think about this. Throughout middle school and high school, I played the trombone. I didn't play it well; I just played it. But I remember, especially in the 6th and 7th grades, the band instructor would rub his forehead and say, "You know, if you guys would practice at home, we would all sound much better together." Worship is a lot like that. We can worship anywhere. But if we worship regularly in private, we all make a richer contribution when we are together. But the other part of that analogy holds, too. My band instructor would say, "If you miss band practice, everyone is robbed. We need everyone."

So I want to go on record. Yes, we can worship at the Lake or on our deck with cup of coffee. God is everywhere. But having said that, there really is no substitute for corporate worship, doing God's music together.

The writer of Hebrews tells us we are to "provoke" one another to love and good works. The word means to stimulate, push, prod, stir up each other. It is only used one other time in our New Testament, when Paul and Barnabas had a "sharp" contention, a provoking argument. Now take a moment and think about the people in your life who make you better, who encourage you. Isn't there imbedded in those relationships some sense of accountability? That's "provoking."

And why do we provoke each other? Verse 25: So that we will not neglect meeting together as is the habit of some. The word "habit" in the Greek is "ethos," or accustomed ways or prevailing pattern of behavior. Did you watch the Olympics? The discipline of the athletes always leaves me in awe. Day after day, week after week, months and years of discipline. We aren't very

disciplined, are we? Someone saw a stalwart member of the walk in the door of the church one Sunday morning during a driving rain and said to her, "I see that this morning, you decided to come to church." The dripping-wet lady replied, "I didn't decide that this morning. I decided 50 years ago when I became a believer."

Verse 25 continues: "encouraging one another..." Will Willimon once asked a black pastor friend why it took his African American church 2 hours to worship on Sundays. The pastor replied, "Unemployment among our young adults is at 50%, the high school dropout rate is high. On Monday through Saturday, our people are told, 'You are nothing, nobody, you don't count.' So it takes me approximately 120 minutes to tell them that's a lie!" Encouraging one another!

But what's the motivation to continually gather for worship? Guilt? I hope not. Works salvation? Earning points with God? No. The motivation is what Christ has done for us, is doing for us and will do for us. What has he done for us? Verses 19-20: When he died, the veil in the Temple was torn, as his flesh was torn, signifying that we may all come into God's throne room and have a personal relationship with Christ. What is he currently doing for us? Verse 21: He is our Great High Priest has named us priests to each other (Carlyle Marney).

What will Christ do for us? He will return and claim us as his own, completing history his way. Verse 25: "as the Day approaches." On Feb. 4, 1945, a prison camp in Manila, holding entire American families, was liberated. A lady named Sasha remembers it in an interview with Ken Burns for his documentary, "The War." As the prisoners heard the Allied troops marching nearer, each day they anticipated liberation. Sasha's little brother would lay out his "gate suit" each morning, believing this was the day. The suit he would wear as he walked through the gate, free at last. When the Allies finally came, Sasha's mother only weighed 73 pounds. She was so weak, her husband had to carry her. But just before they walked to freedom through the prison gate, she made him carry her back to their barracks. She had forgotten to put on lipstick!

"...encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (v. 25). The Day is approaching and each worship is a dress rehearsal for the day we walk through the gate. We worship because Jesus has risen. We worship because Jesus is coming again. We worship because we have hope!