

Main Idea: The torn curtain is God’s answer to why the cross matters. In this message we’re going to consider the account of the torn curtain in Mark 15:33-39 and then the significance of the torn curtain in Hebrews 10:19-25.

- I. Consider the account of the torn curtain (Mark 15:33-39).
 - A. The darkness fell (33).
 - B. The cry was heard (34).
 - C. The people misunderstood (35-36).
 - D. The final breath was taken (37).
 - E. The veil ripped (38).
 - F. The centurion testified (39).
 - G. The women watched (40-41).
- II. Consider the significance of the torn curtain (Hebrews 10:19-25).
 - A. Because the curtain is torn, we have confidence (19-20).
 - B. Because the curtain is torn, we have a priest (21).
 - C. Because the curtain is torn, we have responsibilities (22-25).
 1. We should be coming to God (22).
 2. We should be confessing our hope to the world (23).
 3. We should be considering one another (24-25).

Make It Personal: Am I living like the curtain is torn?

Scripture Song: Let’s sing together Mark 15:38 and Hebrews 10:19-22.

It’s been said that actions speak louder than words and this morning we’re going to ponder one of the most significant actions ever to occur on planet earth. But first, a question. What does God think about His Son’s death on the cross? People certainly have their thoughts. So does God. And He doesn’t just tell us. He actually revealed His assessment of the cross by taking a very specific action.²

It happened at 3:00 in the afternoon on that terrible wonderful day. The Almighty God took action on Good Friday and it provides unmistakable, undeniable evidence as to what He thinks about His Son’s death. That’s when God Himself preached a message, not with audible words but with a shocking, frightening, soul-stirring, hope-giving action. He literally ripped a piece of fabric in two and the world has never been the same since.

The torn curtain is God’s own assessment of the cross. The torn curtain is the Almighty’s answer as to why the cross matters.

There are two points in today’s Resurrection Sunday message and I want to give them to you right up front. First, we’re going to consider *the account of the torn curtain* by looking carefully at Mark 15:33-41. Second, we’re going to consider *the significance of the torn curtain* by pondering Hebrews 10:19-25.

The message of the torn curtain is so significant that we want to send you home with a visual aid. Our woodworking team has worked to make 150 replicas of the torn curtain. We want everyone to take home the torn curtain and continue to think about it and talk about it with others. Our outreach team has been priming the pump as it were for today’s conversation. Thank you brothers and sisters for your efforts.

Why did the curtain tear? And what difference should it make in our lives? Let’s turn our attention to God’s Word and read our first text.

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:33-39

The torn curtain is God’s answer as to why the cross matters. Of course, there’s a context to this ripping of fabric. When did the curtain tear? There were events that led up to this most unusual severing of material and we must see them.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous development of these passages, see the series in Mark’s Gospel and also in Hebrews.

² Oh, He certainly tells us what He thinks about the cross in passage after passage in His Word. Over the years we’ve looked carefully at those passages, such as Isaiah 53 and Romans 3:21-26 and 1 Peter 2:21-25 and many others. But it’s not just what He said. It’s what He did.

I. Consider the account of the torn curtain (Mark 15:33-39).

We see seven events in Mark's account associated with the torn curtain.

A. The darkness fell (33). Notice verse 33, "At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour." Darkness. There's something eerie about darkness. We feel out of control in darkness, vulnerable.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all report the darkness. None tell what caused it. Luke's account says, "For the sun stopped shining (23:45)."³ It could hardly have been an eclipse of the sun since it was the time of the Passover full moon.⁴

Why this darkness? In the Bible darkness often symbolizes divine judgment. You may recall that one of the plagues God sent on the Egyptians in Moses' day was three days of darkness so thick you could feel it. Do you remember what happened right after that darkness? The first Passover lambs were slaughtered.

Let's not miss the connection. On this day we call Good Friday the final Passover lamb is being killed on the heels of darkness.⁵

This is exactly what God had predicted eight centuries earlier through the prophet Amos. Listen to Amos 8:9-10, "In that day, declares the Sovereign LORD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.'"

When Jesus was born a supernatural light pierced the night sky. When He died a supernatural darkness covered the mid-day sun. Why was there darkness? Because of judgment. Why judgment? Because of sin.

You say, "I thought Jesus was sinless." He was and is. Yet on the cross He took upon Himself the sins of others and the judgment they deserve, just as the prophet foretold, "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6)."

"For the wages of sin is *death*" (Rom. 3:23). That's what happened to Jesus during those 180 minutes of darkness. He experienced spiritual death as a substitute in the place of sinners. Kent Hughes explains, "Wave after wave of the world's sin was poured over Christ's sinless soul. Again and again during those three hours his soul recoiled and convulsed as all the lies of civilization, the murders of a thousand 'Killing Fields,' the whorings of the world's armies, and the noxious brew of hatreds, jealousies, and pride were poured on his purity."⁶

And so, Jesus hung there in the darkness, thirty minutes, then an hour, then another thirty minutes, and another hour. For three hours the darkness remains and Jesus says not a word.⁷ Then, after three hours of eternal suffering, Jesus shattered the silence. This is the second event in the torn curtain story.

B. The cry was heard (34). Verse 34 says, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*' [that's Aramaic] which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

Jesus actually spoke seven times from the cross. His first three sayings occurred before the darkness came. First He said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34)." Then,

³ The Greek verb *ekleipo* means "to cease, depart, or fail," such as the *eclipse* of the light of the sun.

⁴ Observation by Wessel, p. 782.

⁵ Observation by Kent Hughes, p. 206.

⁶ Kent Hughes, p. 207.

⁷ "Wave upon wave comes to his convulsing soul. He who had never known a millisecond of separation from the Father and the Holy Spirit is alone," says Kent Hughes, p. 207.

“Today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Followed by, “Woman, behold your son...Son, behold your mother” (John 19:25-27).

Jesus spoke the final four sayings *after* the darkness. His fourth saying is recorded both here and in Matthew 27:46, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” His fifth, “I thirst” (John 19:28). His sixth, “It is finished” (John 19:30). And His seventh and final words were, “Into Your hands I commend My Spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Again, Mark records only Jesus’ fourth utterance. These are perhaps the most tragic words ever spoken. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Listen carefully to Him. He does not pray, “My Father,” as He had in the first saying from the cross, “Father, forgive them...” or as He will in the last saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.” Instead, He calls aloud, “My God, my God!” citing the first words of David’s messianic psalm.

Look back at Psalm 22. It speaks of the *silence of God* in verses 1-2, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, *but you do not answer...*” The psalm highlights the *holiness of God* in verse 3, “You are enthroned as the Holy One.” This is why God was silent! The psalm reveals the *Messiah’s rejection* by hateful men (6-8, 12-13). The psalm records a vivid description of the *horrors of crucifixion* (14-18).

In those dreadful dark hours, Jesus was all alone. He who had enjoyed eternal fellowship with His Father now experiences alienation from His beloved Father. “Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil,” says the prophet Habakkuk of God (Hab. 1:13). Indeed, God cannot look upon evil.⁸

We’ve seen two events thus far, including *the darkness* and *the cry*. But there’s more.

C. The people misunderstood (35-36). Notice verse 35, “And some of the bystanders hearing it said, ‘Behold, he is calling Elijah.’”

Bible commentators suggest the mix-up is due to the similar sound of *Eloi Eloi* and *Elijah*. The people at the cross heard Jesus say *Eloi Eloi* and thought He was calling for help from *Elijah*. Mark specifically records for us the *Aramaic words* that Jesus uttered. He wants us to know that the Jews at the cross heard the words in their mother tongue. They heard what He said as He cried out to God in the anguish of His forsakenness. But they thought He was calling for Elijah.

Verse 36 tells what happened next. “One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.” John’s account indicates Jesus actually verbalized, “I thirst” and then received the sponge drink (John 19:28-30). We can imagine why after enduring the fiery wrath of God. Then they wait to see if Elijah comes to take Him down.

This brings us to the fourth event. In addition to the darkness, the cry, and the misunderstanding, there was the final breath.

D. The final breath was taken (37). Verse 37 says, “And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.”⁹ This was unexpected. Typically, crucifixion victims hung on crosses for days, getting weaker and weaker, until they were unable to raise their chest to bring in air, and they suffocated. But Jesus did not suffocate. The text says He let out a *loud cry*.

Mark doesn’t tell us what Jesus cried, but John does. John 19:30 says, “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘*It is finished*’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up

⁸ Herschel Hobbs wrote, “If you can imagine every sin that has ever been or ever will be committed being reduced to one nauseous mass, then you can grasp the horror of that which was nailed to that cross...See them as one bundle of writhing snakes! Smell their putrefying odor! Then we begin to get some fair idea of the revulsion that was in the holy heart of God.” Hobbs, p. 53.

⁹ Matthew 27:50 says He “yielded up his spirit.” John’s account states, “He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (19:30).”

his spirit.” *Finished!* In the Greek, it’s one word. *Tetelestai*. It means “complete.” According to Jesus, He had not died as a victim, but rather, in His death He had finished something. What had He finished? He had finished the work He had come to earth to accomplish.

These are His words in the theme verse of the book, Mark 10:45. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, *and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” That’s what He had finished, the ransom payment necessary to set sinners free.

And then it happened. Notice verse 38, “And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”¹⁰

E. The veil ripped (38). The curtain was torn. What curtain? This is the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in God’s temple. No one but the high priest had ever entered the Holy of Holies. It was off limits. Until this day.

Note the *direction* of the tearing. “From top to bottom.” This is God speaking, not with words but action. Undeniable, unmistakable action. The Sovereign One above sees the bloody death of His Son and rips apart the barrier that had stood between sinful people and His holy presence for centuries.

Don’t miss the *timing* of the tearing. Verse 34 says that it’s the ninth hour which is 3:00 in the afternoon. That’s also the time of the evening sacrifice in the temple. As Jesus hung on the cross mid-afternoon, the priests were busy at work in the temple doing what the priests had done for centuries, when all of a sudden, the great barrier between the holy place and the most holy place ripped right down the middle!

It’s not surprising that in the months following, “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith,” as Acts 6:7 states. J. Vernon McGee suggests that some of those very priests saw the curtain rip the day Jesus died.¹¹ I don’t doubt that he’s right.

What did that torn curtain indicate? It communicated two powerful realities. One, Jesus’ death removed something. Two, Jesus’s death opened up something.

First, *when Jesus died, He removed the barrier between God and man.* As Kent Hughes explains, “The veil into the Holy of Holies was supernaturally slashed in two as if a great sword had fallen.”¹²

Second, *when Jesus died, He opened up access to God.* It wasn’t just symbolic either. It was reality. Before 3:00 there was a barrier in place that had been there for centuries. Off limits, it said. But no longer. Because of Christ and His atoning sacrifice, there is now direct access to God.

Think of an *access road*. If I told you, “That access road will take you to the park,” what would happen if you got on the road? You’d end up in the park! On Good Friday Jesus provided the *way of access* into the presence of God. It’s the only access road that will take you there. “I am the way,” Jesus had said. “No one comes to the Father except through me,” (John 14:6).

Yet how does the natural man respond? He hears about the access road but refuses to take it, insisting he doesn’t need it, that he has another access road to God. Is that what you’ve been doing? Perhaps you’ve heard that Jesus died for sinners, but you’ve refused to acknowledge that *you* are a helpless sinner. You keep telling yourself that you are a *good person*, that surely God will accept you into His heaven, after all you’ve done.

If that’s the case, my friend, here’s the question you must answer. Why did God tear the curtain? If you and I are already good enough to enter His presence, why did He rip the curtain? If He accepts the best we can do, why did Christ endure the horrible cross?

¹⁰ Matthew adds that “the earth shook; and the rocks were split,” and furthermore that “the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life (27:51-52).”

¹¹ J. Vernon McGee, p. 193.

¹² Hughes, p. 209.

My friend, if there are other access roads like the one you *think* you are making, then Christ was a fool and died for no good reason. That's what belief in alternate access roads means. When we create them, we are saying, "Jesus, you didn't need to go through that agony for me, maybe for others but not for me. God is going to accept me anyway. I don't need You nor Your cross."

Oh my friend, I plead with you. *Look at the torn curtain, believe in Him, be saved!*

Perhaps you're still not convinced. "I need more," you say. Okay, Mark presents a sixth event that demonstrates the immediate effect of the cross.

F. The centurion testified (39). Verse 39 says, "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'"¹³

Notice who is speaking, a *non-Jew, a Roman Gentile*. Jesus' death removed not only the vertical barrier but a horizontal one. Romans hated Jews. But this Roman, a man who earlier mocked and nailed Jesus to the cross, now changes his assessment. What made the difference? Mark is very specific. *A Gentile man was impressed by how Jesus died*. This centurion had seen plenty of men die, but never one like Jesus. Typically, men cursed him from their crosses, but Jesus asked God to forgive him. And while others died as defeated men, Jesus died as one in control, and actually gave up His spirit the very moment He willed to do so.

"Surely this man was the Son of God!" he declared.

The skeptic today says, "Only weak and gullible people believe in God." *Not so!* says the Roman centurion. *I am not a weak man, but I'm here to tell you that this man was the Son of God.*

Mark finishes his crucifixion account by recording a seventh rather curious event.

G. The women watched (40-41). Notice verses 40-41, "Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there."

Why does Mark give us this information? For good reason. Some critics say Jesus didn't die but merely *fainted*, and didn't rise from the dead but merely resuscitated in the cool air of the tomb. It's called the "swoon theory." But Mark makes it clear there were witnesses who saw Jesus die, *many* of them, women to be precise, a point that shows the high regard the Bible has for women. And the same three women Mark names here at the cross will be at the tomb on resurrection morning (16:1). They saw Him die. And they saw the proof that He's alive too.

Thus ends Mark's account of the torn curtain. It's worth noting that three of the four gospel writers include it. "The curtain of the temple was torn in two," says Matthew 27:51. "The curtain of the temple was torn in two," says Mark 15:38. "The curtain of the temple was torn in two," says Luke 23:45.

The torn curtain sent a powerful message. For over 1400 years if you wanted to be right with God you went to the tabernacle and later to the temple in Jerusalem. You approached God through a priest with a sacrifice. But that changed on this Good Friday. Now your eyes can see a place you've never seen before. Your feet can take you, if you choose to go there, right into the Holy of holies. You have direct access to God. The old religious system is obsolete. God just opened a new way for all people to come to Him.

¹³ Luke's account indicates he also said (Luke 23:47), "Surely this was a righteous man." Matthew's account informs us that the centurion and the other soldiers "became very frightened (27:54)."

Or did He? Some said yes. Other said no. Some Jews actually constructed a new curtain. Think about that. They fabricated another piece of material, put it in place, and kept on using the temple.

This is essentially what religion does. All religion. Billions of people say the curtain is still there. Oh, there are different religions (Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, etc) and they all have their own version of a curtain. But their fundamental message is the same. You need a religious system. You need to do something to reach God, to merit His favor. You need a priest. You need to bring a sacrifice, or do something meritorious. You cannot go directly to God through faith in His Son alone. So say the religions of the world and billions of people who adhere to them.

Are they right? No, they are not. How do we know? Actions speak louder than words. God Himself answered that question when He tore the curtain. Or did He? The truth is, actions can be misunderstood.

Did you ever see “Touchdown Jesus”? Twenty years ago if you were driving on I-75 north of Cincinnati, you couldn’t miss it. It was located at Solid Rock Church in Monroe, a 62-foot statue of Jesus with His arms head high above His head, like a football referee signaling a touchdown. And then in June 2010 a lighting bolt hit it and destroyed it.

So what did that action mean? You could interpret the destroyed statue in lots of ways. Maybe the critics are right. Maybe it’s a sign that Christianity is a hoax, that Jesus isn’t real and can’t defend himself. Or maybe it’s a message from God. Perhaps He’s saying that He is displeased with that church and it’s a sign of His judgment. Or maybe He is pleased with the church, but just wants a different statue. He’s reminding us not to get locked into the past but do something new for Him. Apparently, someone thought so. A couple of years later in 2012, they replaced Touchdown Jesus with a 52-foot high statue with a different hand pose. This statue gained the nickname “Hug Me Jesus”.

My point again is this. Actions can be misunderstood. We need divine explanation to make sense of divine action. This is the role the epistles play. The Spirit of God used Mark and the other gospel writers to tell us *what* happened, but He used the New Testament epistles to tell us *why*. And there’s no epistle that answers the why question more clearly than Hebrews.¹⁴

We need the book of Hebrews! It’s why we’re studying it right now on Sunday mornings. Hebrews answers the question for us as to the significance of the torn curtain. Come and join us in for this series if you don’t have a church already. We’ll be in Hebrews 5 next week, the Lord willing. But today, I want us to consider carefully the explanation of the torn curtain in Hebrews 10.

We don’t have time now to do a thorough exegesis of this text. That will come in the future when we reach Hebrews 10 in our series. But for today I want us to see the bottom line. What does God say is the significance of the torn curtain?

II. Consider the significance of the torn curtain (Hebrews 10:19-25).

¹⁴ A brief explanation about the development of this part of the sermon. I dictated to myself the essence of the preceding six or seven paragraphs last night at 3 AM which is Friday morning March 13 after waking up from a deep sleep. I had been working on this message yesterday. Is it accurate to say the Lord “gave me these words”? Some people say that “God speaks to them”. Did He speak to me just now? No, certainly not in the same sense that He spoke to the writer of Hebrews, for God no longer speaks to people the way He did to the biblical authors. Their words were God-inspired and their biblical words are totally without error and infallible. The words I’m dictating now (that God “gave to me”) are not like this. Yes, I can say that everything is from God according to Romans 11:36, including what I am writing down now. But I cannot say that God spoke to me for I certainly did not hear an audible voice. And even if I had an auditory experience with my ears, I could not say that God spoke to me as he did to the prophets and apostles in the Bible. To say so would minimize what they experienced and inaccurately represent what I experienced tonight (see what Peter himself says about experience in 2 Peter 1).

The book of Hebrews was written about thirty years after the curtain tore on Good Friday. By this point, there are thousands of Jesus-followers all across the Roman empire. But some of them, Jewish in background, are wavering. They're facing persecution and thinking about going back into the old secure ways of Judaism.

We don't know who wrote this letter. We do know why. He calls this book his "word of exhortation" (13:22). How do you encourage a follower of Jesus who isn't sure that following Jesus is worth it? By doing what this writer did. Remind them of the truth about Jesus. And guess which truth about Jesus the writer highlights in our text?

Notice Hebrews 10:19–22, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us **through the curtain**, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

There it is. There's the subject that can fortify a weary soul. Think about the torn curtain, says the writer. And he uses the first person plural pronoun "we" throughout this passage. The writer includes himself in this call for application. He says *we have* two resources and a set of important responsibilities all because of the torn curtain.

A. Because the curtain is torn, we have confidence (19-20). Verse 19 says, "Therefore, brothers, 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."

We have *confidence*. That word is found four times in this book. In Hebrews 4:16 we're told, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with *confidence*, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." We see the word again in Hebrews 10:35, "So do not throw away your *confidence*; it will be richly rewarded."

Why do we have confidence? The answer is given in the first nine and a half chapters of Hebrews. We have it *because of Christ*. Hebrews shows us that Christ is the supreme one, superior to angels, to Moses, to the priests of Aaron. So if we know the One who is supreme, we have reason to experience *confidence*.

What's true of this confidence we have in Christ? First, *it gives us access into the holy places*. Literally, "boldness for the entrance into the holy places."¹⁵ It's plural. We can enter holy places. We can enter His holy presence now in prayer and enter His holy presence in heaven when we die, and we can enter these holy places because of Christ.

"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and **confidence**," says Ephesians 3:12. 1 John 5:14 declares, "This is the **confidence** we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

Under the old covenant, only priests could enter holy places, and only the high priest into the Most Holy Place. But that's changed. *We* can enter there now. We, common, ordinary people like us, we who have violated God's law and don't deserve the privilege, *we can enter holy places*.

How can that be? How can we have such confidence? *It's ours because of Christ's blood*. Christ's blood has done for us what the blood of goats and calves could not do.¹⁶

But it's not just His blood. *It's ours because of Christ's body*. "Through His flesh," says the preachers at the end of verse 20. This is the same reality the writer mentioned earlier in verse 10 (NIV), "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

¹⁵ *Young's Literal Translation*.

¹⁶ Hebrews 9:14, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

Notice the words right in the middle of verse 20. *Through the curtain*. That language represents what happened in the Jewish tabernacle. The high priest (and only the high priest) would go *through the curtain* into the Holy of holies. We now can enter God's presence because a way has been opened for us *through the curtain*. And what is that curtain? The writer tells us, "That is, *through His flesh (NIV 'body')*."

Raymond Brown explains, "Just as the heavy temple curtain was torn from top to bottom on that first Good Friday, so that pure and spotless body of Christ was rent for us."¹⁷ Warren Wiersbe explains, "When His flesh was torn on the cross, and His life sacrificed, God tore the veil in the temple."¹⁸

There's no barrier now, beloved. Those who come through Christ can come with confidence right into God's throne-room. The implications are breath-taking. I don't have to work my way into God's presence. I don't have to try and impress God with my good deeds and thereby merit some time with Him. I have confidence because of Christ.

I like how John Calvin sums it up. "No one will find God unless the Man Christ is his way and his door."¹⁹ Unless Christ is our way and our door, we will never find God. But if He is, then we have *confidence*. Yet there's more, a second resource.

B. Because the curtain is torn, we have a priest (21). Verse 21 says, "And since we have a great priest over the house of God..." Again, the writer is picking up a theme he has developed in great detail earlier in Hebrews. "We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God," he tells us in 4:14. And he takes the next six chapters to explain the superiority of Christ's priesthood, concluding in Hebrews 10:12, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

A priest is a mediator, a go-between who represents people before God. Think of a toll bridge. To pass the toll bridge one must possess the required ticket. The priest had the ticket. Our priest, Christ Jesus, has the ticket.

We learn a couple of things about our priest in verse 21. First, *He is in a class all by Himself*. Previously, the writer referred to Jesus as a *high* priest, but here he calls Him a *great priest*, literally a *mega* priest. There's none greater than priest Jesus. There's none like Him. By virtue of the perfect life He lived and the vicarious death He died, He distances Himself from all other priests.

Secondly, *He is over God's House*. He's the top, the highest, the ruler, the head. And because of His exalted position, He has the right to grant us an open invitation into the presence of God. As Wiersbe explains, "The Old Covenant high priest *visited* the holy of holies once a year, but we are invited to *dwell in the presence of God every moment of each day*."²⁰

Amazing. Because the curtain is torn, we have both confidence and a priest. We who are not holy in ourselves can approach the One who is holy through His holy Son. What are you doing with what Christ attained for us? Are you living in light of the confidence your great priest has attained for you?

You say, "I'm not sure. What would it look like if I was?" Here's the answer.

C. Because the curtain is torn, we have responsibilities (22-25). These responsibilities go in three directions: to God, to the world, and to each other.²¹

¹⁷ Raymond Brown, p. 185.

¹⁸ Warren Wiersbe, p. 315.

¹⁹ John Calvin, p. 141.

²⁰ Warren Wiersbe, p. 315.

²¹ The writer uses three specific verbs to indicate that we are to come to God (22), confess something to the world (23), and consider each other (24-25). As we'll see these three verbs are in the present tense indicating our responsibilities involve ongoing activity. Hence, the first is not simply, *come to God*, but we should *be coming* to God.

1. *We should be coming to God (22)*. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”²² God didn’t provide us with a priest so that we would remain distant from Him. He intends for us to *come to Him* (the verb is present tense) and never stop coming to Him.

We’re to come *with a true heart*. Not with proud pretense, but always with humble sincerity. We’re also to come *in full assurance of faith*. Not quaking in our boots. Not wondering if we really have the ear of the Almighty. Come with complete certainty.²³

“But how can I come to God with such confidence?” you ask. “I’m a sinner!”

That’s true. And it’s true of me as well. But if we’re in Christ God doesn’t see us as a sinner, and here’s why. Verse 22 says we draw near “with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

He seems to have in mind a promise God made back in Ezekiel 36:25. “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.” That’s God’s prediction of what He would do under the new covenant. *I’m going to make my people clean inside out.*

Now through Christ that’s exactly what He has done. He uses the cleansing agent of the blood of Christ to remove sin stains from a sinner’s heart and quiets his guilty conscience. And He washes the sinner’s body by the work of His Spirit so that the sinner’s now-cleansed-body may be used for His kingdom purposes (see Titus 3:5-6).

So now, we come to God, and we do it continually with a true heart and in full assurance of faith, always acknowledging that He, not we ourselves, made us clean.

2. *We should be confessing our hope to the world (23)*. Verse 23 says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”²⁴

This happens in a couple of ways, through our *lives* and our *lips*. First, our lives are to show that we truly believe that Jesus is Lord. Is it apparent to those watching us that Jesus is *our Lord*? Do we have marriages that reflect His Lordship? Do we raise our kids in ways that reflect His Lordship? Do we work our jobs in ways that reflect His Lordship? Do we choose entertainment that reflects His Lordship?

But not just our lives. Our lips too. Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 3:15, “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Who have we talked to about Christ in the past month? With whom have we shared, “I am a believer in Jesus Christ. My hope is in Him and I believe that He alone offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life”?

You say, “I want to be a better witness, but I’m such a fearful person.” I have good news. Notice how verse 23 ends. “For he who promised is faithful.” We don’t find our strength by looking within ourselves. We look to the Faithful One and put our total trust in Him and His promises.

3. *We should be considering one another (24-25)*. Notice verse 24, “And let us *consider*.” Stop there. Back in 3:1 we are commanded to “fix our thoughts on [to *consider*] Jesus.” Now we’re told to do the same thing with someone else. Who? Verse 24 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”

²² The verb *proserchomai* is a compound of the words “come” and “to.” We’re supposed to *come to* (there is no indirect object, but it obviously refers to God).

²³ The word is translated “with deep conviction” in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. That’s how we’re to come to God. As the writer instructed us earlier in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us then approach the throne of grace *with confidence*, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

²⁴ Romans 10:9 says that if we make a verbal, heartfelt profession that Christ is Lord, we are saved. But that certainly shouldn’t be our final verbal profession. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said that we are to be His witnesses. Here the writer tells us we’re to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.

Fix your thoughts on Jesus. That's obviously a command. And so is this. Fix your thoughts on each other. For what purpose? As the NIV says, "*To spur one another on to love and good deeds.*"

Years ago, when Sherry and I worked with teenagers we called it "positive peer pressure." There ought to be a lot of it in the church. When we hear that a brother is about to make a decision that will harm his testimony, we ought to look for ways to turn the tide. "Oh, my friend! Are you sure you want to do that? Is the money worth it if it takes you away from your church and family? Let's pray about it right now."

Is missing church that big of a deal? It's actually such a big deal that the writer puts it on the table as application number one in verse 25. "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."

He doesn't merely say, "Don't neglect the Sunday morning worship service." But rather, "Don't forsake the gathering of God's people," the implication being, *whenever* that gathering occurs. And notice the word "habit." Not participating in church services is a habit that we're prone to develop, one we must resist and help each other resist.

According to Calvin, the writer has in mind Jewish believers who didn't like the fact that Gentiles "were a new and unaccustomed addition to the Church." He explains, "The Jews thought that this was an insult to them, with the result that many seceded from the Church thinking that they had a just pretext as a result of this mixture."²⁵

When a person misses church, he nearly always convinces himself that he has "a just pretext." The preaching isn't good enough. The music doesn't inspire me. The people aren't friendly. But the writer of Hebrews will accept no such reasons. *Let us not give up meeting together*, he says.

And here's all the motivation we need. *The Day is drawing near*, he says. What day? The Day when Christ returns. And on that Day, when we look into His eyes, into the eyes of the One who left His home in heaven in order to come and give His life for us, we'll be glad we gave our all to Him.

I'll say it again. The torn curtain is God's answer to why the cross matters.

Make It Personal: Am I living like the curtain is torn?

Friends, according to God's Word, people who believe the curtain is torn, come to God, confess their hope to the world, and consider one another.

Closing Song: #220 "*He Lives*" (all three verses)

Gift: Announcement about gift of the Torn Curtain

Discussion questions for families to use in our homes today:

1. The torn curtain is God's answer to why the cross matters. Take time to read again the account of the torn curtain in Mark 15:33-41.
2. According to Mark's account, what curtain tore? When exactly did it tear? How did it tear and why is that significant?
3. Use your sanctified imagination for this question. What effect do you think the torn curtain produced on the Jewish leaders on Good Friday? On the priests in the temple? On the common people? On the Romans?
4. Take time to read again Hebrews 10:19-25. What is the significance of the torn curtain according to this passage?
5. What difference should the knowledge of the torn curtain make in our lives? What do you plan to do in light of what you learned about the torn curtain?

²⁵ John Calvin, p. 143.