**Sermon Series**: The Marriage Go Round
**Sermon Title**: All Relationships in the Shadow of the Cross

**Text: Hebrews 10:19-25 -- 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. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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.**

**Introduction**: A **Green Bay Packer's fan, a Chicago Bear's fan and a Detroit Lion's fan**, were about to be executed in front of a firing squad as prisoners of war. As the final hour approached, they decided together that the best thing they could do to preserve their lives was **to attempt to distract their executioners while they escaped**. A short time later the Packer fan was brought in front of the firing squad as the other two were forced to stand by and watch. The blindfold was tied around his head, then the officer in charge of the executions started his countdown: "**10, 9, 8** ... " at the exact moment when he reached "**1,**" **the Packer fan** in desperation shouted, "***EARTHQUAKE***!!" Surprisingly this startled the gunmen who put down their rifles and braced themselves for a violent shaking. In all of the confusion, the prisoner ripped off his blindfold and ran away. Then **the Bear fan** was brought before the firing squad. The officer in charge of the executions again started his countdown: "**10, 9, 8** ... " And just like the first time when the officer reached "**1**," the Bear fan shouted, "***TORNADO***!!" All of the gunmen quickly put down their rifles and turned around searching for the violent wind. While they were thusly preoccupied the Bear fan managed to take off his blindfold and run away as the Packer fan had done. Well, **the Detroit Lion's fan** grinned and nodded his head, convinced that the same strategy would work a third time. A moment later he was brought before the firing squad and the officer in charge went through his countdown: "**10, 9, 8** …" Knowing that timing was everything, the Seattle fan waited until the officer reached "**1**," and then shouted, "***FIRE***!!"

THERE IS SOMETHING EXCITING ABOUT A COUNTDOWN THAT PUTS PEOPLE ON EDGE. It heightens our anticipation, especially if the event it points to is important to us. Whether it has to do with **standing before a firing squad**, **watching the ball in Times Square drop knowing that a new year with all its hopes and dreams is about to begin** or **anxiously staring at the clock as the final seconds of a game involving your favorite team tick off with the outcome still in question**, THERE IS JUST SOMETHING REALLY EXCITING ABOUT A COUNTDOWN.

This morning I would like to share the last message in our preaching series, "***The Marriage Go Round.***" Given the many changes that are occurring in our country in this present moral

revolution, I thought it would be appropriate for us to end this series by thinking about how we can persevere in an **increasingly post-Christian society** while not losing our distinctiveness as followers of Christ. Sadly, I can't help but think that many Christians today are in a similar state of mind as the Jewish believers to whom our text was originally written. Though we know that Christ's return could come at any moment, THE COUNTDOWN HAS BEGUN, the long delay has caused many of us to drift from God and at the same time lose a sense of urgency in accomplishing our mission of reaching the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. And so here we sit **(1) in a world that is increasingly becoming anti-Christian**, **(2) knowing that our citizenship is in heaven**, **(3) longing for Christ to return in the air to rapture His church** and **(4) hoping that we can hang on until it does**.

If this describes your frame of mind I would like invite you to join me as we consider what we as Christians should be doing so that we remain close to God while taking a loving stand on what the Bible teaches, ***particularly when it comes to marriage*** (*since that has been the topic of this sermon series*) and ***specifically with those who would disagree with the Bible's teaching on it, advocating as viable alternatives cohabitation, same sex unions and even polyamorous relationships***.

***As I alluded to a moment ago, the writer of Hebrews was addressing a group of believers who knew they were living in the last days*** (**Hebrews 1:2 -- … in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things**). The countdown for Christ's return had begun. ***However, as time passed and a second generation of Christians was dying off, they were forced to face the real possibility that their timetable for the Lord's return may not have matched His own***. THIS REALIZATION CAUSED THEM TO CONSIDER HOW THEY WERE GOING TO LIVE OUT THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH WHILE ABIDING IN A WORLD THAT OPPOSED THEM. ***So, the author of this letter reminds God's people of two spiritual realities or advantages that result from God RECONCILING US TO HIMSELF THROUGH THE ATONING SACRIFICIE OF OUR LORD that are meant to sustain believers in His service while living between two worlds***. They are … **(1)** we now have the confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus (**verses 19-20**) and **(2)** we have a great priest over the house of God (**verse 21**).

**AS FOR THE FIRST**, you remember that in Ancient Israel not all the people could enter into the presence of God in the place called the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later the temple. It was separated by a veil and only the high priest as the high priest as the nation's representative could enter. And even he had to adhere to strict rules about how and when he would do so. ***This all changed of course when Christ through the veil of His flesh*** (*which like the earthly veil on one side made contact with God and on the other with man*) ***made a permanent way by shedding His blood to cover our sins***. Through faith in His bodily sacrifice on our behalf we have equal access to God. **AS FOR THE SECOND**, Jesus is now the high priest for the community of God's people. He does not merely show us how to get to God ***BUT*** He

becomes the only way to God. **Our Lord takes us with Him into God's presence and ministers on our behalf in heaven**.

IT IS THESE TWO ETERNAL TRUTHS (*that we have access to God through the veil that is Christ's flesh and that He is now our high priest who ministers on our behalf in heaven*) THAT ENABLE BELIEVERS TO DISPLAY CONFIDENCE AS WE SEEK TO RELATE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE TO A WORLD ENTRENCHED IN LIFESTYLES CHARACTERIZED BY LOVE OF SELF RATHER THAN LOVE OF GOD. **In the final four verses of this short passage**, the author gives us ***three pieces of advice*** so that we will remain faithful as Christians while **(1)** engaging a world under the Evil One's control and **(2)** counting down to our Lord's return.

**FIRST, HE SHARES SOMEONE TO DRAW NEAR TO** (**Hebrews 10:22 … 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**). The only way for Christians to live in the world while not becoming a casualty of it is by ***maintaining close and intimate fellowship with God***. This kind of relationship can only be had because of Christ's sacrifice and His current ministry of intercession our behalf. Because of what He's done for us, we are able to approach our Creator with A PURE HEART (**Matthew 5:8 – Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God**) and FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH (*in God's promises*).

In the sacrificial system **under THE OLD COVENANT**, animals were slaughtered and then their blood was sprinkled on the altar to signify the cleansing of the flesh of the one on behalf of whom it was offered. **In THE NEW COVENANT**, through the shedding of Christ's blood, God has ***once-for-all*** cleansed our conscience from dead works so that we can serve Him (**Hebrews 9:12-14**). **This inward cleansing is demonstrated in the outward action of water baptism**, which does not in itself save us, but witnesses that we are fully reconciled to God through Christ.

What is the application for us as we wrap up our discussion on marriage? ***While we await our Lord's return, we know that in order to remain faithful to God's plan for our lives, especially when it comes to our view of marriage, however unpopular it might be in days ahead, we must draw near to Him***. This we ***can*** do with ***confidence*** because our Lord has already cleansed us from sin and given us new hearts just as He promised to do (**Ezekiel 36:25-26 – I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall become clean from all your uncleannesses … and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you**). **THIS IS WHERE IT PAYS TO STOP AND ASK YOURSELF IF YOU ARE DRAWING NEAR TO GOD. *If you are, you're where you should be. If not, I want to warn you that you're in danger of losing your way***. If that's your situation I encourage you to stop where you're at and RECALIBRATE YOUR SPITIUAL COMPASS AS THE DAY OF THE LORD'S RETURN DRAWS CLOSER. In her book, ***A Field Guide to Getting Lost***, **Rebecca Solnit** tells a story related by her friend named **Sallie** who is part of a search-and-rescue team in **the Rocky Mountains**. Sallie still remembers the frantic search for a **lost eleven-year-old boy** who was deaf and losing his eyesight. The boy wandered off during a

late afternoon game of hide-and-seek. Because he was deaf, he was particularly hard to find. ***He had been blowing a whistle given him for just such an occasion, but could not hear how close he was to a nearby stream***. The roar of the water made the shrill sound of the whistle almost impossible to be heard by those searching for him. After a harrowing night on his own, the sun came up, and he started blowing his whistle again. **The search-and-rescue team finally found him, very cold but okay.** Sallie and other search-and-rescue experts say that **THE KEY TO SURVIVAL OFTEN HINGES ON ONE THING: KNOWING AND ADMITTING THAT YOU'VE LOST YOUR WAY.** That's why kids are found more often than adults. Kids don't stray as far. They usually curl up in a sheltered place and wait for their rescuers. And unlike many adults who get lost in the Rockies, kids don't desperately try to save themselves. Instead, **they aren't afraid to stop and admit that they need help**. We can learn a lot from children, can't we? Maybe it's that kind of attitude that Scripture refers to when it says, "**Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it**" (**Luke 18:17**). (**Review: SOMEONE TO DRAW NEAR TO -- LET US DRAW NEAR TO GOD**.)

**THEN, HE SHARES SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO** (**Hebrews 10:23 – Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for He who promised is faithful**). The author's first piece of advice is the starting place for everyone who comes to the Lord. We must draw near to God through Jesus Christ. ***THE SECOND ONE HELPS US TO SEE THAT ONLY THOSE WHO PERSEVERE IN THE LORD*** (*who hang on to the confession of their hope*) ***DESPITE THE DIFFICULTIRES FACED IN LIFE WILL PROVE THE AUTHENTICITY OF THEIR FAITH***. Anyone can jump on the Christian bandwagon and ride it for awhile, but those who are sincere in their confession of Christ and the hope that He brings ***REMAIN*** in Him (**Hebrews 3:14 – For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end**).

***Many people believe that the book of Hebrews teaches that a Christian can lose his salvation***. It makes much more sense to me in light of many other verses in the Bible that affirm the security of the believer, I see that the purpose of the letter is not to warn Christians that they can lose "eternal" life, but to point out that not everyone who claims to follow Christ is in fact a Christian. ***Some are mere pretenders who at the first sign of persecution or suffering run the other direction as fast as they can***. In **the Parable of the Sower**, Jesus talks about **seed that fell on rocky places**. This represents the person **who hears the word and receives it with joy, but since he has no root he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he falls away** (**Matthew 13:20-21**). In **Matthew 7:21** He says, "**Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven**." One of my favorite commentators, **F. F. Bruce,** says that true believers distinguish themselves by clinging to Christ. "***Our hope is based on the unfailing promise of God; why should we not cherish it confidently and confess it boldly***?"

Wise people DRAW NEAR to God and HOLD FAST to Him despite what comes their way. In the days ahead, you can be certain that ***the debate about right and wrong*** will only intensify as more and more people **call evil** "**good**" and **good** "**evil**." Will you be one of those that abandon

the faith out of fear of reprisal or will you remain faithful to the end? A while back, 21 Egyptian Christians were reportedly martyred for their faith by ISIS terrorists. They died **with** Christ rather than turn ***against*** Him. **Franklin Graham**, Billy's son, said of this tragedy, "**As we mourn with the families of those 21 martyrs, we'd better take these warnings seriously as these acts of terror will only spread throughout Europe and the United States**." Just something to think about. (**Review: Someone to draw near to -- God; Something to hold on to – the confession of our hope**)

**FINALLY, HE SHARES SOMETHING TO STIR UP IN ONE ANOTHER** (**Hebrews 10:24-25 – Let us consider how to stir one another up 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 … of Christ's return … drawing near**). As life gets harder, we must draw near to God and hang on tightly to the confession of our hope. ***This will not happen unless we meet together regularly for two purposes***:

A. **To stir up one another to love and good works**. Certainly, these are to be reflected in our concern for each other, but they shouldn't be limited to this. We should be demonstrating love and goodness to all that the Lord brings our way (**Galatians 6:10 – As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those of the household of faith**).
B. **To encourage one another as we await Christ's return**. Life is hard (*at least at times*). Everyone needs encouragement, especially Christians. It should be our practice to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ especially as the countdown to our Lord's return continues … 10, 9, 8. 7, 6, …

***How do these exhortations apply to a series on the defense of marriage in a rapidly changing culture***? As the tide of a culture immersed in self-worship continues to turn against Christians, we have to decide how we're going to engage our lost neighbors with the Gospel. A few years ago, I listened to an interview with **Rosaria Butterfield**, a former practicing lesbian and tenured professor at the University of Syracuse who is now a Christian author and wife of local church pastor. During her time living as a part of the homosexual community, she experienced born-again believers as UNGRACIOUS AND FEARFUL PEOPLE These two words should not be the ones that describe us! LOVING AND TRUTHFUL, yes, but not ungracious and fearful. Here are some thoughts she shares about what Christians must consider if we're going to gain an audience with those who think very differently so that we can continue to use our influence to lead the lost to Christ.

- **We are living in the midst of a moral and civil crisis and at the moment it appears that the church is losing**. That's okay, however, because when we, Christians, think we're losing, we pray more and are humbled. We focus less on moral proclamations condemning our culture and more on **Gospel presentations** that offer to redeem those enslaved to it. ***The goal of our witness is not to improve one's lifestyle, but to transform it***.
- **We need to increase our effectiveness in evangelism by matching the strength of our words with the strength and integrity of our relationships with unbelievers**. Jesus was a

friend of sinners. They felt welcomed by him and even went so far as to invite our Lord into their homes. **When was the last time any of us spent an evening in the home of unbeliever just because we've initiated a relationship with them and attempted to demonstrate Christ-like love to them**?

- **We would be wise to remember that the worst sin of a gay person or a cohabitating couple is UNBELIEF**. **Whatever is not of faith is sin**. Any act of disobedience is grounded in unbelief. It is a statement to God that His plan is not the best one and may not be in our BEST INTERESTS. This is a failure to trust that God is good.
- **We need to understand that these behaviors are symptomatic of deeper spiritual issues**. Just like a heterosexual men and woman who seeks out intimate relationships with the opposite sex in an attempt to satisfy their need for love, so those who struggle with same-sex attraction may be seeking to deal with pain caused by a void in their lives as well.
- **We need to become an integrated and loving community that can embrace couples who have rejected Biblical marriage**. Having said this, we do not have to ***accept*** anyone's sinful behaviors, so that the person who HOLDS TO AN UNBIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE OR SINGLENESS can go unchallenged about his or her lifestyle. We dare not SUPRESS the truth to IMPRESS those who disagree. On the other hand, ***we must speak truth in love***, not to injure but to heal.