Gathering

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[0:00] But let's pray again and let's ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is living and active, that it is your word that lays bare the secrets of man's hearts.

So we pray again that your word would be reaching out to us and working in our hearts, enabling us to draw near to you again, our living God.
We pray that today we will not harden our hearts, but that we will allow you to speak to us so that we can indeed worship you with all our hearts and mind and soul.
All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Did you know, brothers and sisters, that you are in heaven right now? By showing up this morning, you have come to the heavenly Jerusalem to join with thousands and thousands of angels to come to God and to his son, Jesus.
And all of you are looking at me right now and thinking, has pastor gone mad? You know, wherever we are right now, we are clearly not in heaven. I mean, no offense, but we're not exactly gathering in the prettiest church hall in the world.
[1:18] And there's not even air conditioning, never mind the angels. And yes, we are meeting with God, but then again, I can meet with him in my bedroom, can't I? In fact, maybe that's what I should have done instead.

Not only would there be air conditioning, but my bedroom chair is way more comfortable than anything they've got at church. And the premium coffee I can make is definitely way better than anything they serve.
Well, you're in the same shoes as those whom the writer to the Hebrews is speaking to. You see, when this first century Christians went to church, they too weren't exactly gathering in the most impressive places.
They weren't any impressive cathedrals or modern auditoriums then. And so they were most likely gathering in someone's house.
And even if they were those towering cathedrals, they probably wouldn't want to congregate there because they're currently being exposed to insult and persecution.
[2:24] Hebrews 10.32-34 makes that clear. And so here they are, feeling weak and fragile, looking around and unable to shake off the sense of how unimpressive they look, how unremarkable this Sunday meeting of the US felt.

In fact, some of them had already given up on meeting together. Why bother even together when it seems so inconvenient and insignificant?
Now, that's probably one of the biggest questions this pandemic has shown up, hasn't it? Why do we even bother together?
Let's imagine for a moment that COVID is completely eradicated from the face of this earth. There are absolutely no health-related reasons why you shouldn't come and gather in person with God's people on a Sunday.
But someone asked, why should I? Sure, there was a long-ago era, let's call it 2019, when people actually came together, hundreds of them in this church hall, in fact, and they sang together, sat together, even shook hands and shared refreshments together.
[3:46] How wonderfully old-fashioned. But we don't live in that age any longer. Now, we live in the age of the podcast, the age of the live stream, the age of the metaverse.

Surely gathering together in this way is obsolete? COVID has revealed that we should move on with the times, update our methods. And besides, pastor, didn't you say last week that church is a people who belong to Jesus?
And that if I trust him, I'm automatically part of his people. Isn't that enough? Why do we bother together?

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Well, this morning, I hope to offer a biblical answer to that. Today, we're in the second of our six-week series, Church Reset, where we're exploring some different facets of what it means to be and do church.
And today, we're going to see why the Bible tells us to gather. Now, there's probably more than one way of answering this question. But for today, I'll let the writer to the Hebrews in particular get plenty of airtime.
[4:59] But just like last week, we'll take a few stops around the Bible as well so that we'll get the fuller picture. So let's dive in and let me build a case.

Why do Christians bother together? Well, firstly, because that's what church is. That's what church is. Let's begin by thinking about that word, church, for a moment.
It's right there in Hebrews 12, verse 23, to the church of the firstborn. But if you were to look in some other English translations, the ESV or the NLT, for example, you would see that instead of the word church, the word assembly is used.
And that's because the Greek word there is ekklesia. And that's what ekklesia ordinarily means, an assembly or a gathering. In fact, ekklesia can be used of all kinds of gatherings.
Now, come with me to Acts chapter 19, for example. There, in Acts 19, we learn that a silversmith named Demetrius was unhappy with Paul's preaching of the gospel because it affected his trade-selling shrines.
[6:16] And so he began stirring people up. And soon a mob formed and came off the pole. And in verse 32, you can see on the screen, that mob is referred to as an ekklesia.

And so in this instance, ekklesia is referring to a gathering of violent people. And then a little later on, one of the city authorities appear to calm the mob down, telling them in verse 39 that if they have any grievances against Paul, they can settle it before a legal assembly.
Next slide, please. Once again, that phrase, legal assembly, you can see on the screen, is simply ekklesia. And so ekklesia, ordinarily speaking, simply means an assembly or a gathering of people, whether it's a mob or a law court.
So how did ekklesia also come to be translated as church? Quite simple. Because that's what church essentially is.
A gathering and assembly. More specifically, it's the assembly of Jesus Christ. And that's how our Lord defined it.
[7:41] For it's the word that the Lord Jesus himself uses when he wants to refer to his people. So come with me to Matthew 16, verse 18.

Here, Peter has just declared for the first time that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. And in response, Jesus says this.
And I tell you that you are Peter. And on this rock, I will build my church.
And the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Or more literally, he says, on this rock, I will build my ekklesia.
There's that word again. I will build my assembly. And so notice what Jesus is doing here. He doesn't just tell us that he wants to build a people.
[8:43] Rather, more specifically, he tells us what kind of people he's looking to build. He will build a gathering. That's the word he chose.

Ekklesia. Ekklesia. And notice what kind of ekklesia this is. Not just any ekklesia, but his ekklesia. I will build my church.
And so he's building a people who will gather in his name. And so here is one initial implication from our brief study of this word.
It's quite common to hear people say that church is a people, not a place. And that is true as far as it goes.
You heard me say it myself last week. The church is a people who belong to Jesus. But now, we see that that is not all there is to it.
[9:47] It's actually more accurate to say the church is a people belonging to Jesus who regularly gather in a place. Let me say that again.

The church is a people belonging to Jesus who regularly gather in a place. It's what makes a church a church.
So, just like a basketball team has to gather together to play in order to be a proper basketball team, so a church has to do the same in order to be a church.

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It's just part of its DNA. One writer puts it this way. The gathering of the people, you could say, gives definition to the people of the gathering.
And so, in other words, yes, the basketball team remains a team even when the game is over and they don't gather together again until the next game.
[10:50] But, if it never ever gathered to play, it was never a team in the first place. And so, a church is a church outside Sunday, outside this service.

But, if it never ever gathered together, it cannot claim the name church. After all, remember last week, we said that we are one new humanity in Christ belonging to each other.
But, that can only be true in any meaningful way if we are regularly gathering together. That's why Christians in countries where they are heavily persecuted still risk their lives to gather together.
So, why bother to gather? Well, on one level, the answer is very simple. Without gathering, the church isn't properly church.
Now, we might wonder why. Why does Jesus envisage his people as an assembly in particular? What's so special about gathering?
[12:09] You see, when we hear the word assembly, what do we typically think of? Let me tell you what I think of. I think of school assemblies. And apologies to all our school teachers, but those assemblies are typically pretty dull and draggy as we doze off from listening to the headmaster drone on about being good students and whatnot.

But when it comes to the assembly of Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us it's nothing like those. for what is happening as we gather.
Well, let's come to our second point for today. And we'll spend a little longer here because it's at the heart of today's sermon. Why do we gather? Because it's our greatest privilege.
It's our greatest privilege. In Hebrews 12, verse 18 to 24, the writer is comparing and contrasting two mountains.
In verses 18 to 21, he doesn't name this mountain, but it's clear that he's referring to Mount Sinai and especially the events recorded at Mount Sinai back in Exodus chapter 19.
[13:30] And then in verses 22 to 24, he talks about another mountain, Mount Zion, which also receives significant attention in the Old Testament.

So let's figure out what's happening in Exodus 19 first before we come back to Hebrews chapter 12. And what I want you to see first of all is that Sinai is a privilege.
Why so? Well, to understand that, I need to take you on a very brief tour from Genesis 1 to Exodus 18. You see, from the very beginning, we must understand God's intention has been to gather and dwell with his people.
That's why he created Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2. And that's why he asked them to multiply and fill the earth so that more and more people could enjoy his presence with them.
God wants to hang out with us. And that's why when sin enters the world in Genesis 3, it is absolutely horrible.
[14:41] It completely disrupts God's purposes. It has an anti-gathering effect. Adam and Eve are separated from God, away from his presence.

They don't even enjoy each other's presence, as we know. And later on, Cain is doomed to wander as punishment for the murder of his brother.
And sin's perverse effect is especially seen at the Tower of Babel, where the people attempt to gather together, but not to magnify the name of God, but to magnify their own selves.
And the result? Well, when you want to gather together to replace God, rather than to worship him, it never ends well.
There is more scattering. Well, humanity keeps on splitting and dividing and fracturing, even to this very day. Just look at today's society.
[15:47] humanity. But God still intends to gather a people back for himself. And that's why he comes to rescue, because he wants to once again dwell with his people for his glory.

And we see this again and again in the first half of Exodus. Look at Exodus 3, verse 12, for instance, should be appearing on the screen. And God said to Moses, I will be with you.
And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.
And so God is saying, look Moses, I'm going to use you to redeem my people. But, salvation is only half the story.

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once you have been saved, you are to gather together on Mount Sinai to worship me. That is the goal of salvation.
[16:53] Or look at what the people sing after God defeats the Egyptians in the Red Sea in Exodus 15, verse 13. In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed.

In your strength, you will guide them to your holy dwelling. And so notice again that redemption has a purpose.
God redeems his people to lead them to his place of residence, to his holy dwelling. And Sinai is a privilege because for the very first time since the fall, that happens.
You could almost call it the very first church service. As Stephen kind of does in his speech in Acts chapter 7, God's people are gathered together in the presence of God.
They experience his presence tangibly. There was thunder and lightning, smoke and rain, rained down, the trumpet sounded, and they heard the voice of God directly.
[18:11] This was a day no one would forget. In fact, Moses made sure that they never forgot it. Later on in Deuteronomy, he keeps referring to this day again and again.

And I put the verse references on your sermon outline. And he keeps calling this day the day of the assembly. Why?
Because he wants to remind them that it was in the midst of this gathering, this assembly that they encountered God.
That's the privilege of Sinai. But hang on, pastor, you say, if Sinai is such a privilege, then why does Hebrews 12 verse 18 to 21 describe it like a hindrance?
And in fact, if we look at Exodus 19 itself a little closer, it's obvious that not all is well. And you're right. Because now I want you to see not just the privilege, but the problem of Sinai.
[19:26] You see, before the people could meet with God, they must take two full days to be consecrated. And they can't just approach Mount Sinai or even touch the foot of it.

For if they do, they will be put to death. And on the third day, as God comes, there is an all-out assault on the census.
Jesus, in Hebrews 12, verse 18 to 19, the people were not experiencing the thunder and the lightning, or the trumpet blast as we would fireworks display.
You know, it doesn't feel like a celebration. This isn't New Year's Eve with people looking and going, wow, amazing, encore, encore.
No, on that day, no one was shouting encore. They were just shouting in fear. Hebrews 12, verse 19 tells us that the people who heard it back, no more, no more.
[20:38] And Moses himself, in verse 21, says, I am trembling with fear. You see, that's what gatherings under the old covenant was like.

It was simultaneously wonderful and terrifying. It was wonderful because the loving God is drawing near.
But it was terrifying because the holy God is drawing near while we are still sinful.
who? And that's what Sinai is to remind them of, that God is near and yet still in many ways inaccessible.
And throughout the entire Old Testament, the assemblies at the temple reminded them of this same truth as they gathered at the temple three times a year for the festivals. God is near, he dwells with them and yet still in many ways he is inaccessible because you need sacrifice and atonement and cleansing and all those things to even step in.
[21:58] That's the problem of Sinai. It really is the problem of us. But now, but now, the writer of Hebrews says, Church, you have a greater privilege when you gather, Hebrews 12 verse 18, you have not come to Mount Sinai.

You, church, do not gather like an Old Testament gathering. When you gather, you have not come to a place which fills you with terror and leaves you begging.
No more. No more. No, you can draw near to God as he draws near to you. When you gather, you no longer have the problem of Sinai.
For church, when you gather, verse 22, you gather at a different mountain altogether. Mount Zion.
Now, what does he mean? Well, he doesn't mean that we're gathering at a physical Mount Zion right now, obviously not. Rather, it's about what Mount Zion represents spiritually.
[23:21] In the Old Testament, Mount Zion is repeatedly mentioned as God's dwelling place. It's sometimes also identified as the city of the great king.

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And now the writer is saying, when you gather as church, you are participating in a great spiritual reality.
You are participating in some sense in the dwelling place of God, the place where the prophet says that all the nations would stream to. after all, you yourself are God's dwelling place.
Do you remember Ephesians 2 verse 22 last week? In Christ, God says, it should be on the screen, we are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.
You yourselves are God's dwelling place. Now, Sinai and Zion are not completely different.
[24:30] At both mountains, the people are gathering to meet with a holy and awesome God. Notice that in verse 23, that this God is the judge of all, and down in verse 29, he is a consuming fire.

So God hasn't changed, change. But here's the difference, the writer says. Zion is like an upgrade on Sinai. When you gather as church, you get all the privileges of Sinai without any of its problems. Just look at the descriptions in verses 22 and 23. It's full of unfiltered delight and joy, with none of the fear or terror described earlier.
Now, this is really the New Year's Eve celebration, isn't it? And the writer is saying to the Hebrew Christians, look, I know right now, as you gather in the back room of somebody's house, huddling together, trying to keep a low profile from your persecutors, it all looks pretty rubbish.
but listen to God's word. This is what you really have come to. And by the way, the tense in verse 22 to 24 is important.
[26:00] It's not you will come, it's you have come. It's your present reality right now.

You have come, Hebrew Christians to Zion. And so have you KEC. When you entered the hall this morning, you are joining together with thousands and thousands of angels, verse 22, to have a party.
Because you and I can now stand in God's presence without any barrier. And as you gather, you are actually glimpsing our heavenly future, where we will all be gathered, not virtually on YouTube, but in body and soul, from every tribe and tongue around God's throne.
That's what Revelation 7 pictures for us. When we gather, we are in a small way fulfilling God's intention to gather a people for himself, and in a larger way, anticipating the final fulfillment of that intention in the new heavens and the new earth.
My brothers and sisters, when we gather, we are simply exercising the greatest privilege of all. God is always present.
[27:30] That's gloriously true. And yet, when we gather, we enjoy God's presence with us in a unique way. We could never on our own.

1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 4, although spoken in the context of church discipline, hints at the same reality. This is what Paul writes. So when you are assembled, and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, and you say, wait a minute, hang on, Paul, surely Jesus' power is always present?
Yes, absolutely. But God has given the gathering the pride of place where he will be especially present. I don't know if this analogy works, but it's a bit like the difference between watching a concert on TV and actually being in the stadium.
And if that is true, that means we will never just go through the motions when we are gathered together. How can we if our gathering is nothing less than a supernatural event?
But as we enjoy this privilege, it's important to remember our next point. Thirdly, we are gathered in this way by Jesus alone.
[29:02] We are gathered in this way by Jesus alone. The one thing I haven't mentioned yet is why? Why are we now at Zion and now not at Sinai?

Why can we experience God's presence without fear? The answer is verse 24, because Jesus is now our mediator. He has shed his blood for us.
The blood of Abel cries out for justice and judgment. It is a cry that must be heard. But if that is the only cry that God hears, then we are all doomed, because none of us can meet God's just standards.
We will be consumed by the consuming fire. But the blood of Jesus cries out too, on our behalf, speaking a better word of atonement and forgiveness.
Because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, by being the perfect priest and becoming the true temple of God, the place where God dwells, we can approach this fire and not be burned, only refined.

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[30:15] That, in a nutshell, is what Hebrews is all about. Hebrews 10, verse 19 to 22, in fact, sums up the whole theology of Hebrews nicely in just four verses.

Because Jesus has opened the way to the most holy place, God's dwelling place, by his blood. Because he is the great high priest, we can draw near.
And that's why our names are written in heaven, in 12, verse 23. That's why we can participate in this heavenly gathering. It's Jesus alone.
And that's important. I've just shown how God uniquely meets us when we gather together from the entire Bible. But it's important to see that we can meet God and be in his presence only because of Jesus alone.
So that means we cannot manufacture the presence of God. We can build the most beautiful cathedral in the universe. That won't bring us into the presence of God.
[31:22] God. We can have the best music band ever. That won't bring us into the presence of God. We can try to get the atmosphere right, whatever that means. Usually it involves the lighting. Or we can have the most charismatic preachers, the most friendly ushers.

That won't bring us into the presence of God. We cannot bring heaven to earth. It is Jesus alone who brings us into this gathering in the heavenly Jerusalem.
But that is good news. because it also means even though we are masked, socially distanced, unable to sing as loud as we want, unable to offer physical touch anyhow we want, looking anything but impressive, we can rejoice.
Because God doesn't meet us on the basis of how great our gathering looks. It is okay that the SOP strip us of some of our extra bells and whistles.
For then, it gloriously showcases the real truth. God meets us on the basis of Jesus alone.
[32:41] God meets God meets him. So what does all this mean for our gatherings today? There are quite a lot of things we could say, but for the remainder of our time, I just want to draw out two applications.

The first is found in Hebrews 12, verse 25. See to it then, you do not refuse him who speaks. Don't refuse him who speaks.
You see, when we look at the gatherings in the Bible, whether in the Old or the New Testament, what is it that they have in common? It is the fact that God speaks.
It is God's word that is at the center. Consider that gathering at Sinai. As God's redeemed people gather, what do they do?
Notice they don't come first to sing. Or to pray. Or to adore. Or any of the other activities that we typically associate with a worship gathering.
[33:45] They gather first to listen. They listen as God told them about their redemption from Egypt. In other words, they listen to the gospel.

They listen to how they were his treasured possession. How he intended to make them his holy nation. They listen to his word, promise. And then after that, they listen to his call for obedience, how to live for him, as they heard the Ten Commandments.
That is the word they heard. The gospel that God is both their saviour and their master. And it's what Moses stresses in Deuteronomy 4, verse 10, when he recalls the day of the assembly.
And that doesn't change in Hebrews 12. We are to listen to our God who speaks through his living and active word.
We behold and praise him as God speaks through his son, the perfect radiance of the father. That's what Hebrews 1 tells us.
[34:56] Now, of course, we gather to sing and to pray as well. That's the topic of two of our sermons in this series. But what is of first importance is that as we gather, we attend to God's word.

We don't harden our hearts but allow his word to work in us, even today. We submit to it even when it is hard. And what does it look like for our gatherings in particular?
Not to refuse him who speaks. Well, we do so when we keep the central focus in our gatherings on the word. Now, that doesn't mean that we just have long sermons and nothing else.
Rather, it just means that the word shapes, informs, and reverberates across all the elements of our gathering. Or if I could put it this way, it means that in the gathering, what we should do is to read the word, preach the word, sing the word, pray the word, and visualize the word.
Let me briefly touch on each of those in turn. We read the word, and that's why Paul instructs Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 verse 13 to devote yourself to the public reading of scripture.

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[36:14] And that's why we have formal times of scripture reading in our service. For as God's word is read, what is happening is that it is actually uniting a church as one.

When we collectively listen to God's word at the same time, with a shared commitment to believe it and to obey it, it binds a church together.
It glues our relationships together. It gives us a basis to operate together. We also preach the word. We listen to what God wants to tell us through his scriptures.
Today, we don't preach mere opinions. We open the Bible and then we try to bring out what is in it. That's what I'm trying to do right now. With Hebrews chapter 12, we don't make the Bible relevant, we just show its eternal relevance.
Because the Bible is God's voice. And sermons cannot work generically or individualistically. They are for particular congregations, not nameless random individuals.
[37:18] That's why last year when I was preaching to you online with almost no one in the room, it felt so wrong. We sing the word, and this I'll leave until my sermon on singing in a few weeks' time.

We pray the word, that is we pray in accordance with his revealed will in the Bible, with how he wants us to pray, and what he wants us to pray for. And again, we'll discuss this more in a few weeks.
And we visualize the word, by which I mean we baptize, and we take the Lord's Supper together. For in both, we see a clear symbol of the gospel, when people die and rise again in Christ as they are plunged into the water and brought back up, and as people take the Lord's Supper together to remember not just that they belong to Jesus, but they belong to one another.
And I hope you see that's why we try to do all that here at KEC. Why? Because we don't want to refuse him who speaks.
Here's our second application. It's found in Hebrews 12, verse 28. Offer acceptable worship. Offer acceptable worship. Now when we hear that, we immediately think, of course, of singing.
[38:39] But actually, in the very ninth chapter, Hebrews 13, what Hebrews 13 does is offer us a glimpse into what acceptable worship looks like. And notice how broad it is.

13 verses 1 to 3 talks about hospitality, and that is a theme we'll touch on next week. Verse 7 talks about honoring and imitating your leaders. Verse 9 talks about resisting false teaching.
Verse 15 talks about praising God, and verse 16 talks about doing good to others. Now that is all part of worshipping God acceptably. So it's not just singing to God, it's about our relationship with other believers with whom we gather together.
And so let me just finish by homing in on that horizontal dimension. This is going to be the last verses that we're going to look at for today. So please turn with me to Hebrews 10, verse 24 to 25. It'll be good to have that open in front of you. Let me read it. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.
[40:04] Now as you read that, did you notice how the writer frames the contrast in verse 25? Either we give up meeting together or we encourage one another.

You catch that. The writer didn't say either we give up meeting or we keep on meeting. Instead, he says the opposite of giving up meeting together is to encourage one another.
And by framing it that way, he has given us an insight into another central purpose as to why we gather. together. We don't just come together to have private quiet times with God on our own. That's not the point. We come together to spur one another on as to how to live for Jesus. And that is part of what it means to worship God acceptably.
That is the ministry with which God is entrusting every single believer with. We don't just meet together to exalt God. We meet together to edify one another. And when we give up meeting together, what effect will it have on others?
[41:30] It will discourage them. You see, either we give up meeting together or we encourage them or either we encourage them or we give up meeting together which would have a discouraging effect.

When we give up meeting together, we are actually making it harder for one another to live for Jesus. Now, is that worship God finds acceptable?
I doubt it. So, my friends, we must not give up meeting together. But what does that look like in the age of COVID-19?

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you see, I understand that all of us are in different situations. Some of us are immunocompromised, some of us have loved ones who are, some of us have multiple young children whom we want to protect and whom the SOPs currently don't allow to come, although we hope that will change in the very near future.
We are all in different situations with some of us being unable to meet to the same extent that others can. and so we cannot give a one-size-fits-all solution.
[42:49] However, there are two mindsets with which we can approach this situation. The first way is to think, oh good, COVID gives me a get-out clause.

God doesn't want me to put myself at risk or put others at risk, right? So Hebrews 10 doesn't apply. But when we approach it this way, we are violating the spirit of Hebrews 10 verse 24 to 25.
We are treating it as a burden, as something optional, as something trivial. But that is not how the writer to the Hebrews thinks of it. Look at how he starts verse 24.
Let us consider. That means let us give serious attention to this matter. Let us work out how we can best obey this command.
Not let us consider how we can get out of this command. So instead, here is a different mindset with which to approach Hebrews 10, 24 to 25.
[43:54] We can ask instead, given my present circumstances, what is the best and wisest way I can maximize relationship?

And so instead of looking for get out clauses, we look instead for maximum application. We ask God, how can I best fulfill this command to the best of my ability?
Maybe I can't pursue relationships with the same depth, with the same amount of time, or in the same way I used to, because the way I meet with others for now looks a little different.
But what can I still do to maximize, in my circumstances, my encouragement of others? Is it by developing a social bubble, assessing my attitude?
Is it, am I being overly fearful? Is it by learning to use Zoom? Well, whatever it is, you know best. But what can I do to maximize my encouragement of others?
[45:02] And by the way, this doesn't apply just to COVID times. Even before COVID, parents of young kids had to face the same question.

And so this morning, that's a good question to ask yourself, especially for those of us not here in the hall. We need to come before God honestly and ask, am I fully obeying Hebrews 10 verse 24 to 25 to the maximum in my present circumstances?
Or am I just looking for a get out clause and excuse not to gather in person with other Christians? Am I in danger of offering unacceptable worship to God?
You see, the live stream is a blessing for those who honestly cannot gather. It really is. It connects them to the gathering in a way that you couldn't in previous centuries.
But it is actually a danger for those who can. And so you need to ask God today, which one is it for you?
[46:23] So my brothers and sisters, let me say this again. Did you know that you are in heaven right now? By showing up this morning, you have come to the heavenly Jerusalem to join with thousands and thousands of angels to come to God and to his son, Jesus.

You are exercising your greatest privilege. And as we enjoy God's presence, made possible by Jesus alone, let us also spur one another on so that on that final day, no one will be left behind and we will all still see each other at the ultimate gathering.
Let us pray. Amen. Father, praise you so much that we do not come to a mountain that is filled with darkness, gloom, and storm where we quake before you with fear.
Thank you instead we have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to thousands upon thousands of angels in festal gathering, to the church of the first bond, because our names are written in the Lamb's book of life.
Thank you so much that Jesus is that mediator of a new covenant. So, Father, we pray, Lord, that we will respond rightly, we will not refuse you who speaks, we will not harden our hearts, but because we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us be thankful and worship you acceptably with reverence and awe.
[48:09] All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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