

Let Us Come Boldly

Our last lesson ended with Hebrews 4:11, "*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, [all three rests - salvation & forgiveness, hope and trust in Him now, and heaven when we die], lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*" If we are not diligent to enter God's rest, then we are following the example of disobedience shown to us by Israel in the wilderness: the disobedience of unbelief — a failure to trust God. Don't miss the rest! In these last verses of Hebrews 4, the author shows two ways to enter God's rest: reading His Word and coming before His throne.

His Word Reveals Our Condition - Hebrews 4:12-13

God's Word is Living

It's alive. Since God is the living God (3:12), and His Word cannot be separated from Him, that Word is a living Word. It can never be eradicated. As Isaiah 40:8 proclaims, "*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*" In John 6:63, Jesus tells us, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*"

God's Word is a fountain of life that's always fresh and pure. At times it will wound us and convict us, but it will always heal. We will be better for the truth that it imparts.

God's Word is Powerful

It will do a powerful work in our hearts if we hear it, allow it to expose our sin, and obey it. Only God can create and transform. His Word never returns void - it always accomplishes God's purpose.

Isaiah 55:10-11 "*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*"

God describes the power of His Word in Jeremiah 23:29 - "*Is not My word like a fire?*" says the Lord, "*And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*"

God's Word is Like a Fire

- gives light that reveals our sin and inability to save ourselves by our own righteousness; it lights the way to salvation through Jesus
- lights the way for us to walk and live according to God's will
- can burn and cause pain, but also refines and consumes impurity
- can melt the hardest materials - even a hard heart
- can warm and comfort

God's Word is Like a Hammer

- has the power to build or break; God can break the hardest heart into pieces and make a stony heart into a heart of flesh
- God uses it with precision like one who gets cleaves diamonds; He carefully breaks the right places to bring forth a radiant jewel

Think of a blacksmith. He begins with a hard, shapeless piece of metal. To refine it he must soften the metal with fire and then hammer it to start shaping it. This process is repeated many times before he ends up with something useful and strong like a horseshoe. So God must melt away our impurities and soften our heart so that he can shape us into His image; God's Word is a fire and a hammer that He uses to make us stronger. Stronger for what? To be able to withstand the evil onslaughts of Satan, our enemy. *"Your word I have hid in my heart, That I might not sin against Thee."* (Psalm 119:11) The Holy Spirit uses the power of the Word to save us and then to give us spiritual strength to stand faithfully for the Lord in this corrupt and evil world. Increasing our understanding of God's Word helps us to be more obedient to His will and better equipped to stand against the attacks of the enemy.

God's Word is Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword

The Roman sword was commonly made with cutting edges on both sides. Having two edges made it easier to penetrate, as well as to cut in every way. "In comparing the Word of God to a sword, the writer was not suggesting that God uses His word to slay the saints!" (Weirsbe) However, it is true that the Word cuts the hearts of sinners with conviction. The Greek word translated "sword" here means a "short sword or dagger." Rather than the idea of a long sword slashing through the air with minimal contact, it is a short knife, used close-up so it can cut deeply. God uses this sword precisely like a surgeon using a scalpel. It can divide soul from spirit and thoughts from intents. The idea is that of piercing, or penetrating; the Word of God reaches the "heart," the very center of action, and lays open our motives and feelings. It cuts through our calloused hearts and selfish minds: not to inflict pain, but to give life. Unless your conscience is hardened beyond remedy, you cannot read God's Word or hear it preached faithfully without your conscience being pricked.

God's Word is powerful to expose our sin, never for the purpose of embarrassing us, but always to bring healing. We cannot rid our lives of sin if we aren't even aware of it. The Word reveals to us the things that are not pleasing to God, so that we can repent and receive God's restoration. As always, we must be willing to let God do this. Israel in the wilderness had God's Word, but disregarded it. They continually criticized the Word rather than allowing the Word to judge them and we can see how God had to deal with them. We must allow God to change us.

David Livingstone, the pioneer missionary to Africa, offered to teach one of the chiefs to shoot a rifle and also to read. But the chief replied that "he did not wish to learn to read the Book, for he was afraid it might change his heart and make him content with only one wife, like Sechele" (another chief who had been converted) (George Seaver, *David Livingstone: His Life and Letters*) He wanted to get five wives before he dared to read the Bible and then have to obey what it said! Sometimes aren't we like that as well? We ignore God's prompting to address a sin in our life because we know we will have to change and we don't want to yet. Rather than resisting, our response should be that of David in Psalm 139, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

God's Word is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart

God's Word knows "the thoughts and intentions of the heart," which is a bit frightening, for we know our *"heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9) The word "judge" here ("to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart") does not mean "condemn." It means "assess." If we show somebody a painting and say, "What's your judgment about this painting?" we don't mean, "What's your condemnation?" We mean, "What's your assessment of the quality? Is it good or

bad?" So the Word of God penetrates to the deepest place in our lives and assesses what's there. Is it good or bad?

Jeremiah 17:10 goes on to say *“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.”* So God’s Word even discerns between our thoughts and our motivations. Some things we do may look really good to us and everyone around us, a wonderful appearance on the outside. But God knows why we really did it - was it out of a pure motive or one of the flesh? Jesus warned in Matthew 6:1, *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”* (Loss of reward) As Pastor Sean taught Sunday, the closer we are to Jesus, the more our motivation will be to bring glory to Him rather than ourselves; we want to be so close to God that pure thoughts and intentions become our nature.

The author then moves from God’s penetrating Word to God Himself, who sees everything. It is impossible to hide from God! Adam and Eve tried to hide from Him after they sinned, but they couldn’t do it, and neither can we. Our life is an open book to Him. There is not one thought you ever thought or will think that He does not know. David said *“You know my thoughts before I think them.”* Everything is open and naked before Him. God knows everything I do and why I do it. “Laid bare”(open) is used only here in the New Testament, and rarely anywhere else. It means to expose the neck, like a sacrificial victim’s neck is exposed just before the knife slices the jugular vein. The idea of the two words together is that we are naked and helpless before God. There is no escape from His all-knowing gaze. Sin is always a bad choice, because even if we fool everyone on earth, and think that we got away with it, we didn’t fool God for one minute! So God knows us thoroughly - everything we’ve ever thought or done; Psalm 130:3 sums it up: *“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”* The next verses will answer that question.

Our Compassionate High Priest - Hebrews 4:14-16

We have in Jesus a Great High Priest, and His priesthood was better than Aaron’s.

Aaron	Jesus
was a man	is both God and man (Son of God)
was a High Priest	is the Great High Priest
entered into the Holy of Holies on earth	entered into heaven itself
made multiple sacrifices for sin	sacrificed Himself once and for all
could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement	is before the Father making intercession for us at all times
he was mortal and died like all men	He is enthroned in heaven at the right hand of God; His throne is one of grace
no one was allowed into the holy places other than priests and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies	every believer in Christ is invited to come boldly before the throne of grace

Because Jesus is superior to Aaron, we should never give up our profession of faith because we are going through testing and trial. The Hebrew Christians were tempted to give up their confession of faith in Christ and their confidence in Him. By returning to the Old Testament system, they would be telling everyone they had no faith in Christ which would bring reproach to Jesus' name.

Even greater is the fact that Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses - literally "to suffer along with." He feels and can identify with us because He lived as a man. Sometimes we may think that because Jesus is God, He can't really know temptation like we do. In a way that's true because Jesus never took on a sinful nature so there was no temptation from within, no inner desire to sin. However, He knew the strength and fury of outward temptation in a way we will never know. We are tempted and eventually give in but He never did. Only the one who never gives in to temptation knows the full force of it. He knows what we go through and He has faced worse. Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses and temptations but He does not sympathize with our sin: He made a way for us to escape.

Because we have a High Priest who is both omnipotent and compassionate (all-powerful and caring), we can come boldly to His throne. Boldly here does not mean proudly or arrogantly. Boldly means we can come:

- constantly
- without reservation or fear
- without fancy words or pretense
- with confidence
- with persistence

We can come expecting mercy (not getting what we deserve) and grace (getting what we don't deserve) in our time of need. The cross opened the door to the throne room for those who believe on Jesus Christ. Because God sees Jesus in us, we are acceptable and God does help us. No request is too small because He wants us *"to be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer...let your requests be made known to God."* (Philippians 4:6) There was no need for the Hebrew Christians to go back to the old sacrifices by the priest because Christ made the way for them to come boldly before God to get help. And He provides rest for us when we allow Him to work in us.

Charles Spurgeon sort of summed it up with these words: "We have a Friend at court; our Bridegroom is on the throne. He who reigns in heaven loves us better than we love ourselves. Come, then, why should we hesitate, wherefore should we delay our approach to His throne of mercy? What is it we want at this moment? Let us ask for it. If it is a time of need then we see clearly from this verse that it is a time when we are permitted and encouraged to pray." Don't wait - enter in.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..." Ephesians 1:3