

A Priest—That You Might Find Rest

Hebrews 4:14-16

Halifax: 30 October 2022

Introduction:

Today I am going to preach to you from the last part of Hebrews chapter 4, vv 14-16.

- Some people argue that this should be the beginning of chapter 5.
 - They say that because here at the end of chapter 4, the author of Hebrews begins a long discourse about the priesthood of Christ.
 - I agree that chapter 4 verses 14-16 does transition to that discourse to be sure, but I would argue that these verses are a beautiful wrap-up of the discourse that began in chapter 3 where we were told to consider Christ as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.
 - Here at the end of chapter 4, we are exhorted to hold fast our confession—to keep on in our profession of Jesus.

Since this is a wrap up of the section that began in chapter 3, I want to begin our Scripture reading there today.

- Let's do that now.
- Here is the word of God, beginning in chapter 3, verse 1:

Heb 3:1 – 4:16: Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ² who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house. ³ For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God. ⁵ And Moses indeed *was faithful* in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, ⁶ but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. ⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. ¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in *their* heart, and they have not known My ways.’ ¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ” ¹² Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing

from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵ while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” ¹⁶ For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹ So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

^{4:1} Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. ³ For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: “So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’ ” although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For He has spoken in a certain place of the

seventh *day* in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; ⁵ and again in this *place*: “They shall not enter My rest.” ⁶ Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example

of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account. ¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

- That gives you an overview of this section that we have been considering that is filled with warnings to continue with Christ so that we might enter God’s rest.
 - We have sung Psalm 95 in connection with this section.
 - Next week, we will be taking up a new Psalm of Focus.

This morning, I want to draw your attention especially to the last three verses of chapter 4. Here it speaks about Christ as our priest.

- Let me read this part to you again, beginning with verse 14. Hebrews 4:14-16:
 - ¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let’s jump right into our text:

I. “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest.”

- Did you know that?
 - There are some churches today that have men that they ordain as priests. I would not want to be one of those men because God has not called anyone but His Son to be a priest in His church since He came 2000 years ago.
- We don’t need other priests because He has presented to God the ultimate sacrifice that takes away our sin. He gave Himself to be that sacrifice!
 - He does not need to be offered again. He was offered once for all and now He has the honour of being the only priest that God has called in the New Covenant.
 - Those who ordain priests today do so without warrant from God. They cannot produce a single verse to show that there is any such office in the New Testament because we have a priest.

- A. We have a priest, and that is a good thing because we have just been shown in the passage we studied last week how much we need one.
1. Last week we looked at verses 12 & 13 and we saw how God’s Word exposes our condition.
 - When we truly hear it, it penetrates the very depths of our being.
 - We see that we are guilty sinners before our Maker.
 - We see that everything about us is naked and open before Him.
 - He shows us unflattering things about ourselves that we never even knew.
 - We are like the woman at the well from Samaria who, after speaking to Jesus, said, “Come see a man who told me everything that I ever did.”
 - He uncovers what we try to hide, even from ourselves.
 - He does this in mercy to show us our need of salvation.
 - Otherwise, we would never come to Him for mercy and help.
 2. When His word exposes us, we realise that we cannot—not one of us—enter into the blessing that God prepared for us when He created us.
 - We have seen in Hebrews 3 & 4 that that blessing is called God’s rest because it speaks of the blessing that God prepared for us when He made us and made the world and then rested on the seventh day because His work was finished.
 - He invited us from the very beginning to enter into the blessing of the world that He completed for us—to enter into His rest.
 - We were, in fact, meant to be His house in the richest sense—a place of dwelling for Him as our God.
 - But we are stubborn and resistant and refused to be His house. Instead of entering His rest, we entered into sinful rebellion.
 - We became guilty and sinful and therefore unable to enter His rest, unfit to be His house, a dwelling place for our God.
 - This is positively awful—to be a man or a woman, made in the image of God, and to be cut off from our God!
 - To be made to be a dwelling for Him and to be cut off by our sin.
 - As Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”
 3. We need a priest.
 - That is what the word of God shows us.
 - The job of a priest is reconcile sinners to God—sinners who are incapable of reconciling themselves.
 - That’s us. We need a priest to reconcile us to God.
 - A priest who offers sacrifices in our behalf so that God will accept us.
 - In the Old Testament scriptures, God testified that we need a priest to offer sacrifices for our sins.
 - He was showing us our need for Jesus to be our priest.

TRANS> So we have been shown in God's Word that we need a priest.

B. And now in the New Testament we have been shown that we have a priest!

1. We are told that we have a great high priest!
 - a. This is a superlative description!
 - In the Old Testament, the high priest stood out as the only one in the world who was allowed to enter into God's holy place to offer atonement at the mercy seat.
 - But our priest in the New Covenant is not only the high priest, He is the *great* high priest.
 - He is the highest of the high priests, the chief of the chief priests.
 - The true pontifex maximus.
 - b. At the beginning of chapter 3, He was referred to as "*the* Apostle and High Priest of our confession."
 - He is the one that we confess to believe in, trust in, and rely upon to offer the sacrifice that takes away our sin so we can come to God.
 - He is described at the opening of chapter 3 as superior to Moses because although Moses was faithful in all of God's house, Jesus is the one who owns the house and who builds the house.
 - Heb 3:3 says:
 - **"For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house."**
 - He builds a house for God out of people who were ruined by sin, dead in their sins, condemned to eternal misery in hell.
 - He is a great one because He takes people like us and forms them into a dwelling place for God! Only God can do that.
 - Hebrews 3:6 tells us that we are God's house if we continue to trust in Jesus until the end... If we come to Him and continue to come to Him as our priest with joyful hope, He will make us a dwelling place for God.
 - The actual words are (Heb 3:5-6), **"And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."**
2. Hebrews 4:14 reminds us of two ways that He is a great high priest
 - a. First, because He has "passed through the heavens."
 - The priests in the Old Testament were privileged to go into the holy of holies—but Jesus has gone into heaven itself to offer sacrifice for us.
 - We were told about this all the way back in chapter 1 where it said in 1:3 that **"when He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels."**
 - He is the only priest who has the sacrifice that takes away our sin!

- He is our priest!—if only we trust in Him.
- b. Secondly, He is *great* because He is “Jesus, the Son of God.”
- This also was presented to us in Hebrews chapter 1.
 - There we are reminded how God addressed Him as His Son (Heb 1:5), something He never said to any of the angels;
 - And we are reminded how He commanded all the angels of God to worship Him (1:6) —
 - And how the Father also said to Him, (Heb 1:8): “**Your throne O God is forever and ever.**”
 - We are told in chapter 2 how the Son, who is God, became flesh that He might a suitable priest for us and be made perfect through suffering.
 - As God and man, He alone is able to take sinners like us and made us into God’s house.
- C. Seeing we have such a priest, verse 14 says, “Let us hold fast our confession.”
1. It would be foolish to have a priest like Him and to say, “I have no need of you,” and to deny Him or even to ignore Him.
 - Who would ever do such a thing?
 2. Yet, that is exactly what we have been warned about in these chapters.
 - That there might not be found in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.
 - In these chapters, we have seen how the example of Israel departing from God in the wilderness has been pressed upon us as a real example of such wicked folly today in resisting Christ as our Saviour!
 - There is much that tries to take our profession away—to get us to turn from a full confession of Christ.
 - The Hebrew believers who were the recipients of this letter were facing the temptation to depart, and we constantly face it as well.
 - There is opposition from family or friends, there is the loss of the world’s respect, there are duties that God has given us that we do not like, there are the lusts of our flesh that teem within, there are Satan’s deceptions, there are objections of the sceptics and their arguments that they throw at us, there are the hardships and sorrows that the LORD brings upon us that can make us bitter, there are the times of confusion that we must bear, there are the difficulties that we have with other professing believers.
 - All this, but let us hold on to our confession in thought, word, and deed—let us profess Christ with our heart, our mouth, and our conduct,
 - for we desperately need a priest and He is the priest that we need.
 - There is no other that can save us. We cannot enter into rest without Him.

TRANS> Where can we go for help when we find that temptations are pressing upon us to turn our hearts from Him?

II. Here is an astonishing and wonderful truth: Jesus our great high priest is able to sympathise with us and help us under the pressures of temptation!

- That's right.
 - He is not only a priest who is able to take away our sin—He is also a priest who is able to help us when we are tempted to harden our hearts against Him!
 - Verse 15 says: **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.**

A. He had more temptations to depart than any of us will ever face.

1. First of all, even to *be* our priest, He had to come to this world of sin and misery—
 - a world that was made that way because of the rebellion of the very people He came save.
 - Here is the one who is of purer eyes than to behold evil—who is holy and is a consuming fire to whatever is not holy—here He is, sent to dwell among us as our priest—He who knew no sin—He who has a holy hatred of sin because He knows the honour that is due to Himself and to His Father.
 - He had to become a man that He might represent us as our priest.

➤ That was a huge temptation.

2. Having come here a man, He then had to put up with us in our sinful ways.
 - And most disagreeable of all, He had to actually bear our penalty—the very pains of hell—that He might atone for our sin.
 - This He rightly loathed.
 - He would not have been holy if He had not despised the very idea of bearing our shame and guilt before the Father, if it had not been repugnant to Him to become sin for us, to become the very object of His Father's holy wrath and indignation—the Father that He truly loved with a burning, holy, ardent, passionate love.
 - Of course He had a reason to do that that superseded His reason not to do it, but the thing itself was more despicable to Him than anything you have ever been asked to do or ever will be asked to do—and He had to do it anyway.

3. He was assaulted with every possible temptation to depart from this calling.
 - He had the common infirmities of life that so often turn us from God—not to full apostasy necessarily, but they cool our love and our devotion and take us off an obedient course...
 - Things like the rejection of friends and family—whose love meant more to Him as a holy soul than it ever means to us...
 - He suffered poverty and deprivation, false accusations, misunderstanding, foul treatment from those in authority over him, efforts to take His life before the time, disappointing His mother, being rejected by the people He grew up

with, hunger, thirst, weariness to the point of exhaustion, disappointments in ministry, apostate disciples—the list goes on.

- The devil employed every tactic that his diabolical mind could conjure.
 - He assaulted Him at every level, calling into question His ministry, calling into question His Father's love and reasonableness in asking Him to bear the sins of others (was this the way of a loving Father?).
 - He offered Him shortcuts to achieve results that he claimed were similar without the cross that he knew Christ rightly despised.
 - He tried his best to use that as leverage to get Him to turn from the Father's calling.
- B. Jesus was tempted more than any of us will ever be tempted, yet He was wholly without sin.
1. Not once did He turn against the Father.
 - Not once did He think God unjust or ungracious or unholy—not in all His sorrows and afflictions which He felt with a depth that we do not know.
 - Not once did sorrow break into sinful complaining, covetousness, or anger.
 - Not once did He sinfully neglect a single duty or miscarry in an act of love.
 - Our text is clear—He was tempted as we are, yet without sin.
 - No trace of sin could be found in our LORD.
 2. What was His secret? How did He handle all that temptation?
 - It was that, no matter what came to Him in our flesh, He did not forget that the Father is pure and holy and wise and just and righteous and good.
 - Not once did He allow His heart to be hardened so as not to love the Father, for He knew that here was beauty, truth, and love.
 - He loved God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength, and He made it His very purpose always to please Him and to do His will.
 - He never forgot that as a man, He had no other reason to live but for the Father's glory and pleasure, and that in doing that, He would obtain glory.
 - And so He was obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross and because He was, He was exalted and given the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that He is LORD to the glory of God the Father.
- C. He fully understands and sympathises with the pressure you are under to depart from God because He has experienced it.
1. His whole purpose in doing what He did and bearing what He bore was to restore those who failed and who continue to fail.
 - He knew better than any of us what it was to be asked to do something that He did not want to do, and yet to do the will of God.
 - He has known the struggle, and being the Lord of all comfort and compassion, He deeply cares and He fully understands...
 - He has experienced the same passion to depart, yet without departing.

- The word *sympathise* is a word that means to share the same suffering, the suffering of temptation—to have what you don't want or to want what you don't have—for Him, always something that ought to be desirable, but had to be withheld for God's purposes.
 - We ought to desire peace with all men—but often it is withheld.
 - We ought to desire health, but often this is withheld for God's purposes in this fallen world.
 - We ought to desire a good marriage and godly children, but if God does not give us these, we must continue to serve Him.
 - Yes, because of sin, we also desire things that we ought not to ever desire. Jesus did not do that, but still, He understands the pressure of temptation and He sympathises.
- 2. What this means is that He does not look on us in our struggle with disdain, but with tenderness and compassion.
 - He looks upon us a priest who is eager to help us—and He is able to help us.
 - The fact that He never sinned and we so often do did not make Him haughty, but rather it makes Him all the more eager to minister to us.
 - As our gracious priest, He is eager not only to secure our pardon, but also help us overcome when we are tempted.

TRANS> So what are you advised to do as one who is tempted to turn from God or who has turned—even a little?

III. You are advised to go to Him for help!

- Verse 16 says: **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
- A. You are advised to come boldly or with confidence to Him in your time of need.
 1. Come to Him with confidence that He is one who is eager to help.
 - Does not the very fact that He came here to be your priest when it meant that He must bear your sin not make it clear that He is eager to help you go on?
 - Does it not make it certain that if you come to Him, He will never berate you but will gladly help you?
 - Is this not so whether you are tempted, have already begun to yield, or have even fallen headlong?
 - Is His passion and ministry not to help you in your time of need?
 2. Come to Him as one who is able to help.
 - a. He has an atonement to take away your sin.
 - Is that not what His suffering was all about?
 - Does He not have the sacrifice that can completely take away your sin, and will He not make use of it whenever you come to Him in your need?
 - That is the help that you need when you have sinned.
 - b. But not only that—can He not help you with the temptation?
 - He can assure you that it is completely worth it to do the will of God.
 - He can remind you that the Father is lovely and perfect and therefore to be loved and served.

- He can set your mind straight about it all because His mind was always straight about it when He was tempted and tested.
 - He uses His word to make it clear to you, as it always was to Him in the most difficult temptations, that it is always better, always worth it, always right to go on and on and on with God—even as far as the cross!
 - That is the help that you need in your time of testing.
- There is something else here that we must not miss.
- B. Look at what the place of help is called here—the throne of grace!
1. This is so helpful a title for this place of help.
 - It is the only time that it is used in the Bible.
 - Think about what a splendid thing this is...
 - A throne—of grace.
 - A throne is the seat of a sovereign.
 - And grace is help for an undeserving sinner!
 - Put that together and you have a throne of sovereign power that is set up to help undeserving sinners!
 2. That is what we have in Christ!
 - Think of it! Divine sovereign power enacted to help sinners!
 - God has set up a throne whose purpose it is to help sinners in their need.
 - It is set up through Christ—it is the throne that He established in Christ the Mediator, because it is in Christ that we have an atonement and a sympathising Saviour to help us when we are tempted.
 - Here, divine power is found for sinners.
 - It is reminiscent of the mercy seat in the holy of holies where the high priest went once a year to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people.
 - It was a throne of mercy—a mercy seat—that represented God’s footstool.
 - There was the ark of the covenant and on top of it was the mercy seat where the sacrifice was made that reconciled sinners to God.
 - Now the throne of grace is Christ, the crucified One, at God’s right hand.
 - It is only through Him, in His name, that we find grace and mercy to help us in our time of need.
 - This is the throne of grace.
 3. Do not look for help in any other place!
 - Jesus is the priest that you have.
 - Jesus is the priest that you need.
 - Come to God through Him.
 - Come to this throne when you have failed.
 - Come when you are tempted to fail.
 - Come with boldness and confidence.
 - Come again and again and again and again.

- This is the only way we can enter into God's rest.
- It is only with His help that we can endure to the end.
- Not only does He provide forgiveness for us—but also the help that we need to go on when we are tempted to turn away.
- Is this something you need to start doing? experiencing?
 - I think for too many of us, we may have come to Christ for forgiveness, and we may come from time to time,
 - but we know too little about coming to Him when we are tempted.
 - We try to fight in our own strength.
 - We come only after we have failed because we do not know this throne of grace as a place to go when we need help in our temptation.
 - We don't know our Saviour as one who sympathises with us in our weakness.
 - Perhaps there are times when we really don't want to be helped because lust has already been conceived in our hearts and we go headlong into sin.
 - Come before that to this Priest.
 - Come even when the lust has conceived and He will help you.
 - That is the ministry that He is committed to fulfil because He loves you and He wants you to go on with Him.
 - **“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**