



First Baptist Church Selmer

JESUS IS BETTER • JESUS, THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST • HEBREWS 4:1-7, 11-16 •

5/28/2023

MAIN POINT

We can experience a life of peace knowing that Jesus took on human flesh and dwelt among us, becoming both our advocate and Savior through His sacrificial death on the cross.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share about a time when someone spoke up on your behalf.

Share about a time when you hoped that someone would speak up for you but they didn't.

How has Jesus spoken up for us? How has he stood up for us?

Jesus, who is fully God, took on human flesh and dwelt among us to glorify God by identifying with us. He became our advocate before God, our Savior, and our means of overcoming temptation.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 4:1-7

1 "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3

For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, they shall enter my rest,' although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' 5 And again in this passage he said, 'They shall not enter my rest.' 6 Since therefore it remains from some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'"
(ESV)

Though the Lord had promised to give the Israelites a rich land, they did not believe in His promises. Because of their lack of faith, they failed to rest in the land but instead wandered around and around for 40 years. Today, still, a failure to trust in the promises of God will lead us to a sense of wandering restlessness and an inability to discern what's most important.

This passage also addresses the fact that God Himself rested on the seventh day of creation. Why did He rest? What does His example teach us?

When we don't rest, life can feel like an endless cycle—constantly running, but never really getting anywhere. To truly rest we must understand that rest isn't always about sleep; it's more about completion. That's why God rested in creation. It wasn't because He was tired; it was because His work was finished and He could enjoy it. If we want to truly rest, then, we must examine at a deeper level what our inability to do so says about our hearts.

What might an inability to rest because you over-commit yourself to activities show you about yourself?

How might an inability to rest influence the way you interact with other people?

In each of the examples above, the true enemy of rest isn't a busy calendar; it's a failure to believe in the finished work of God at the cross. Because of the cross, we know that we are highly valued by God. Because of the cross, we know that God is out for our ultimate good and we need not worry about the future. Because of the cross, we no longer have to prove ourselves to others because God has justified us in Christ. Keeping the cross at the forefront of our minds helps us simplify our lives and practice restful time alone with God.

One of the benefits of regularly practicing Sabbath rest is that it helps us prioritize our service to God, rather than just surviving each day. Have you ever experienced the Sabbath aiding you in this way? If so, share.

Notice in this passage that rest isn't a specific period of time, but an ongoing state of Sabbath. Does that mean we can even rest while we are working? How so?

When we are in Christ, we can live in a state of rest even when we are physically tired. The finished work of God enables this state because it transforms the way we work. We don't do so to prove ourselves or to secure some kind of future; we do so as a celebration of what God has already done for us in Christ.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 4:11-13

11 "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (ESV)

In what ways has God's Word spoken into your life? How has it changed you?

Have you ever read a passage that meant something different to you today than it did years ago?

What type of authority does God's Word hold over all creation?

According to the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), "The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation."

God's Word is infallible, errant, and authoritative. It means that what is spoken of in Scripture cannot and will not fail. No one in heaven or earth can escape the power of the Word of God. As believers, we are capable of living with great peace fully trusting in the truth of the Word of God.

But His Word is also active, discerning of our thoughts and heart, and will one day serve as the standard of either our acquittal or conviction based solely on our standing before our Lord

Jesus.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 4:14-16

14 "Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (ESV)

The Book of Hebrews was likely written to Christians who were experiencing severe persecution. In this passage, the writer sought to encourage these Christians to persevere in their faith by considering how Jesus came from heaven to earth to be our representative.

What is the significance of Jesus being our "great high priest" (v. 14)?

Why did Jesus have to be fully human in order to fulfill his role as our "great high priest?"

How might considering that Jesus "passed through the heavens" encourage us to persevere in our confession that Jesus is Lord?

Hebrews 2:17 tells us that Jesus "had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." The high priest would enter the most holy place once a year to make a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Jesus had to be completely human and completely pure in order to make propitiation for our sins.

The writer of Hebrews mentioned that Jesus passed through the heavens in order to emphasize Jesus' transcendence. Though He is God, Jesus chose to become our great high priest by sacrificing Himself for our sins. Emphasizing that Jesus is the Son of God demonstrates the depth of God's mercy in determining to identify with us and serve us as our great high priest. When we are mindful of the depths of God's mercy, we can remain faithful to Christ in the midst of any circumstance.

APPLICATION

Discuss how to apply what you have studied.

How might you find peace this week even amongst the busiest of your schedule?

In what areas of your walk with Christ are you most tempted to give up? How might remembering that Christ is our great high priest help you find peace?

In what area of your life are you most tempted to listen to the lies of Satan? How might we as a group support each other as we seek to root our identity in Christ?

PRAYER

God, thank you for making Jesus our great high priest at great cost to Himself. Help us to draw strength to overcome temptation from Jesus' victory over it. Thank you for making Jesus our representative, our savior, and our source of strength in the battle against sin.

COMMENTARY

| HEBREWS 4

4:1. Wherever rest appears in 3:1 to 4:11, it refers to an experience of salvation we enter by faith in Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews makes this interpretation clear when he insists on the necessity of faith in the gospel the readers had received (v. 2). This faith demands a dependence on God's work instead of on our own works (v. 10). Those who have begun the Christian walk by an experience of faith in Jesus Christ demonstrate the reality of their commitment when they continue to enjoy the rest God has promised. Those who cease to share in that rest show by their spiritual failure that their profession of faith was false.

Most of the wilderness generation died before reaching the Promised Land. Their death did not nullify the promise of God's rest. The children of this generation later entered the land. This entrance did not completely fulfill the promise of rest. The writer of Hebrews feared that his readers might stumble and falter just as those who left Egypt. They needed to be aware of the previous failure so that they might not make the same mistake.

4:2. Gospel refers to a message of good news from God. For the refugees from Egypt, the gospel consisted of the promised rescue from Egypt and entrance into Canaan. It included also God's promises to Israel in Exodus 19:5–6. For the readers of Hebrews, it consisted of the message of Christ's atoning death and resurrection. God had spoken clearly to both groups.

The refugees from Egypt heard the message of deliverance, refused to believe it, and received no value from it. These believers must not imitate their Israelite forefathers. They needed to make a

faith response so they might receive value, promise, and blessing from the declaration of the gospel.

Here is a practical truth: We get no benefit from merely hearing the gospel. We must believe it and act on it to receive its benefit. Faith involves a wholehearted trust in God's message. We must make a right response to the message about Jesus. Faith is a big word in Hebrews, and we will discuss it more fully in chapter 11. We already know that without faith it is impossible to please him (Heb. 11:6).

4:3. The rest the psalmist mentioned in Psalm 95:7–11 is still available. Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ enjoy that rest.

Those who have believed enter that rest. They enter that rest initially at the moment of conversion (see also 4:10) and will get a fuller experience of rest in the future. Those who truly experience God's rest share in his experience of salvation.

This claim for rest is supported by the divine oath of Psalm 95:11. The logic is something like this:

(1) The fact that God warned the readers to fear lest unbelief prevent entering his rest implied that the possibility of rest was still available (see Heb. 3:16–19).

(2) The Israelites did not experience the rest.

(3) God had someone else in mind who would experience it.

(4) The readers of Hebrews were among those people who could experience the rest.

Furthermore, this rest resembled God's sabbath rest. The final words of verse 3 refer to God's rest since the creation of the world. This was the rest that the Creator enjoyed when he had completed his work of creation. This means rest cannot be defined as inactivity; rather, it involves the sense of completion. The rest Christians can enjoy today comes when we willingly take on Jesus' yoke (Matt. 11:28–30). This sense of completion experienced in taking on Jesus' yoke is a benefit which comes to those who have experienced salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

4:4–5. Two quotes affirmed that God's rest was real and that Israel failed to enjoy that rest. First, verse 4 quotes Genesis 2:2–3 to show that God's rest was a real event. God's rest occurred after the completion of creation and lasted indefinitely. God never returned to the work of creation, and we may understand that his rest still continues. Believers can share in that rest, in the sense of completion, today. Anyone who responds to God's message with faith and obedience assumes

Christ's yoke and enters into a "rest" relationship with God. The idea of "rest" does not mean that we sit around sipping spiritual lemonades. It conveys the idea of our total acceptance by God and the blessing of his presence, leadership, and power in our lives.

When God rested on the seventh day, he celebrated the completion of his work of creation, but he did not just take a day off eternally. When we enter into rest with Jesus, we will find God's presence, blessing, and peace but not a cessation from labor. Our rest with God gives us new strength, but it does not introduce us into inactivity. God's salvation produces people who receive divine energy to serve, obey, and work for him.

A second quotation appearing in verse 5 shows that unbelievers fail to enter God's rest. This often-repeated quote (3:11; 4:3) comes from Psalm 95:11, and it reminds readers of Israel's failure to enter the rest. The fact the psalmist offered "rest" again shows that the idea of "rest" was not exhausted with the Israelites' occupation of Canaan. God still has a purpose of bringing believers into that rest, but hearers can forfeit this blessing by disobedience. These words become a fervent appeal not to disobey as the Jews of the Exodus had disobeyed. We have hope of experiencing rest if we follow in an obedience that shows itself by faith in God's gospel message.

These verses reinforce truths of the previous verses. First, they emphasize that God intended for someone to enter his rest. No one could frustrate his purposes. Second, since the Jews of the Exodus did not enter this rest, the offer for experiencing rest is still available. Third, this rest far exceeds the physical promise of entrance into the Promised Land. It includes the rest of entering God's presence through Christ and experiencing peace with him.

4:6–7. First, God intends for some people to enter the promised rest. If the Jews did not enter the rest, someone else must enter it, or God's promise of experiencing rest would be void and empty. Notice that the writer of Hebrews did not consider the fact that Joshua led the second generation of Israelites into Canaan. He was concerned only to contrast Moses, as the leader of the old covenant, and Christ, as the inaugurator of the new covenant.

Second, the first generation stumbled because of their disobedience or unbelief. They could blame only themselves for their failure. The gospel which this first generation received was a message of deliverance from Egypt and deliverance from sin. Although its message dealt with deliverance just as the message given to Christians, the first generation did not receive clear teaching about the work of Christ. We who live under the new covenant receive a clear statement about Christ.

Third, God's offer of rest is still open as shown by a repeated quotation of Psalm 95:7b–8a. Today emphasizes that God's invitation to enjoy rest with him finds fulfillment in the present. Many years had passed between Israel's fall in the wilderness and David's writing of Psalm 95. The fact that David expressed the truth as one available in his lifetime showed that the opportunity for enjoying rest was still present. The author of Hebrews warned his readers that both the blessing of rest and the fear of failure were as available to them as they were to the wilderness generation. They could harden their hearts and miss completely the opportunity for experiencing rest. The readers are encouraged to choose rest.[1]

4:11. This verse introduces an encouragement to seek God's rest because of the penetrating power of God's Word. Does it seem unusual to you that these believers are told to make every effort to enter that rest? This rest is a reality which believers must claim. The effort they must make involves obedience. The Jews of the Exodus generation had disobeyed. There was a clear possibility that these believers could also disobey and miss God's promised rest. Practicing obedience involves a determination on our part. Experiencing rest requires effort, but the blessing of rest makes the effort worth the cost.

4:12. This vivid expression of the power of God's message provides the explanation for the strong warning of verse 11. Because God's message is alive, active, sharp, and discerning, those who listen to God's message can enter his rest. Two questions are important in this verse. First, what is the word of God? Second, what does this passage say about it?

Although the Bible sometimes refers to Christ as God's Word (John 1:14), the reference here is not speaking of Jesus Christ. Here we have a general reference to God's message to human beings. In the past God had spoken to human beings through dreams, angelic appearances, and miracles. He still can use those methods today, but our primary contact with God is through his written Word, the Bible. God's Word will include any method God uses to communicate with human beings.

This verse contains four statements about God's Word. First, it is living. God is a living God (Heb. 3:12). His message is dynamic and productive. It causes things to happen. It drives home warnings to the disobedient and promises to the believer. Second, God's Word is active, an emphasis virtually identical in meaning with the term living. God's Word is not something you passively hear and then ignore. It actively works in our lives, changes us, and sends us into action for God.

Third, God's Word penetrates the soul and spirit. To the Hebrew people, the body was a unity. We should not think of dividing the soul from the spirit. God's message is capable of penetrating the impenetrable. It can divide what is indivisible. Fourth, God's message is discerning. It judges the

thoughts and attitudes of the heart. It passes judgment on our feelings and our thoughts. What we regard as secret and hidden, God brought out for inspection by the discerning power of his Word.

4:13. This verse contains a general statement about the relationship between the Creator and the creation. The Greek text does not mention the name God, but it is clear that the writer of Hebrews was referring to God as the mighty Judge of the universe.

He stated the same truth both negatively and positively. Negatively, he said, Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Positively, he stated, Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

4:14. This passage introduces the theme of Jesus' high priesthood. The epilogue for this section appears in 10:19–23. In between the superiority of Jesus to the priests of Aaron is explained. Three statements about Christ as our high priest appear in this verse.

First, Jesus is a great high priest. Perhaps some Jews were claiming that Christianity had no priesthood like that of Aaron. But Jesus was superior to the priests of Aaron. Both his character and his work are important.

Second, Jesus has gone through the heavens. This means that he had entered God's very presence. The priests of Aaron served in an earthly sanctuary. Jesus went far beyond all limits of time and space and reached into God's presence, where his work really mattered.

Third, Jesus is called the Son of God. This statement identifies the historical Jesus as our high priest. It also presents Jesus as one who perfectly combined humanity and divinity in his ministry for lost sinners. His human name was Jesus, but in reality he was the Son of God.

Because Jesus is our high priest, we can hold firmly to the faith we profess. Holding to the faith requires some determination on our part. The greatness of Jesus as our High Priest provides us an incentive to make the commitment to draw near to him.

4:15. How can we hold fast to our faith? Has God done anything to make this possible? This verse answers these questions. The writer of Hebrews had already declared the ability of Jesus to help the tempted (2:18). He now states negatively what he had earlier stated positively. Why would he change from a positive statement to a negative statement?

He may have tried to deal with some people who felt that Jesus Christ was too remote from human need. He stated three facts about Christ which would help readers know that Christ was no stranger in helping struggling human beings.

First, Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Weaknesses are broad enough to include any form of human stumbling, bumbling, or failure. Christ has sympathy for the needy.

Second, Christ has been tempted in every way, just as we are. This statement may mean that he faced the full range of temptations we face. It need not mean that he met each specific type of temptation which we face. A sample of the entire range of options for sinning fell on Jesus. Because Jesus never yielded to sin, we know that he faced more intense temptation. Most of us say “yes” to sin before Satan has thrown all his weapons of temptation at us. Jesus said “no” as Satan hurled every arrow in his quiver. He resisted until he broke the power of Satan (Heb. 2:14).

Third, Christ was without sin. Jesus was completely a human being (Heb. 2:17), for he became like his brothers in every way. Must a person experience sin in order to be human? No! Jesus had no sin or deceit in his life (1 Pet. 2:22).

Jesus could have chosen to sin by giving in to hunger, desire for acclaim, or lust for power (Matt. 4:1–11). The fact that he chose not to do this shows that he lived out the condition of sinlessness. He battled constantly with Satan’s temptations and claimed victory in the struggle with temptation.

If Jesus had sinned by surrendering to temptation, he would have needed an atonement. He would have been no better than the old priests who first had to offer sacrifice for their own sins (Heb. 7:27). He would have lacked the qualifications to secure redemption for us. Any sin in Jesus’ life would have made his sacrifice unacceptable (1 Pet. 1:19).

Our sinless Savior provided for us a perfect redemption. His victorious experience with temptation provides sympathy, encouragement, and victory for us in our temptation.

4:16. Given the fact that we have a sinless Savior, what can we do? What should be our response?

First, we must approach. Worshipers used this verb (Heb. 7:25) in describing their movement into God’s presence. We are to come to God with all the reverence and awe which his worship demands.

Second, we come to the throne of grace. This is a reverent reference to God’s presence. It is the place where God gives out his free favor. The term describes an attitude more than a place. The seeking sinner will find this throne of grace (Luke 18:9–14).

Third, we come in an attitude of confidence. Although we must approach God with reverence, we can enter his presence with freedom and without fear. The term describes a boldness based on

an awareness that God has all the grace we need. It is the attitude of customers coming to a store seeking an important item which they know is plentifully stocked.

Fourth, we come for the purpose of obtaining mercy and grace. God's mercy prescribes pardon for our many failures. God's grace provides strength for the demands of God's service.[2]

[1] Thomas D. Lea, Hebrews, James, vol. 10, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 66–69.