

Motivating Factors that Should Cause the Christian to Persevere

Hebrews 4:12-16

Hebrews 4:12-16 - *“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.”*

Background Notes

In the first half of Hebrews 4 the author urged his readers to make sure that they had entered the “rest of God” that was available to them. Hebrews 4:9-11: *“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”*

What and when is this “rest” that the author of Hebrews was talking about? In our last study we concluded that the author was thinking primarily of the **future eternal rest** in which all true believers will share. The present faith “rest” that we can experience and enjoy now is only a foretaste of that future eternal rest to come. In the future we’ll experience and enjoy that “rest” in the kingdom of Christ here on this earth, and we’ll also enjoy it in Heaven, when all of life’s heartaches and labors are over.

Although this “rest” is yet in the future, we enter it now when we become Christians - just like we enter eternal life now when we become Christians. Eternal life does not start when we die. It started when we became Christians – we **have** (present tense) eternal life. In the same way, we enter the rest of Hebrews 4 now, even though that eventual future eternal rest is in view.

The important point that the author of Hebrews was trying to press home to his readers is that they’d better make sure of their salvation now, or they will never enter that future eternal rest of God. Remember, the recipients of Hebrews were primarily Jewish, and while all of them at least were professing believers, some of them were starting to slide back towards Judaism. The people who turned back were never true believers.

The message of Hebrews, then and today, is to make sure of your eternal salvation by pressing on in the faith. ***True faith perseveres.***

The end of chapter 4 provides two motivating factors that should cause the true believer to persevere in the faith: the ***Word of God*** and the ***High Priestly ministry of Jesus Christ***.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers have the Word of God to convict them of their spiritual condition.

Verse 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.”*

The author of Hebrews told his readers to present themselves to the knife of God’s Word. This two-edged sword would expose their hearts, so they would know exactly where they stood before the living God.

This is still true today. Do you want to know whether you’re a true believer or only professing to be a Christian? Expose yourself to the sword of Scripture. The Bible is not just another religious book - it’s the living and powerful Word of the living God! Like a two-edged sword or a surgeon’s knife, the Bible will cut you open and expose your true heart.

“Full exposure” is the main idea in the phrase: *“piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow.”* Others can’t read your thoughts and the intents of your heart, and even you yourself can’t always know your true heart - but the Bible can expose the thoughts and intents of your heart. A steady diet of the Word of God is food for the soul, and it also convicts us of our spiritual condition.

You can’t hide your spiritual condition from God. *“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” (v13).* God sees our innermost being. He knows our every motive and thought and intent, and we must give an account of ourselves to Him some day. So let the Word of God expose your heart ***now!*** The primary point of these well-known verses is: ***Let the Word of God expose your heart.***

Is it possible that you are living a hypocritical faith, or that you’re just professing faith - and you don’t even know it? Let the Word of God convict you.

Believers have the Word of God to convict them of their spiritual condition.

2. Believers have a High Priest to help them in their spiritual condition.

Verses 14-15: *“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. 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.”*

We have the **Word of God to convict** us, and we have a **High Priest to help** us. As you know, the Old Testament high priest mediated between God and the people. The high priest passed through the inner veil of the Tabernacle, entered the Holy of Holies, and came into the very presence of God. In the same way our Lord passed through the heavens into the dwelling place of God.

Do you see the parallel? Look at verse 14 again: *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens.”* He did this for us. Verse 14 does not say that **there is** a great High Priest - it says that **we have** a great High Priest. He’s not just a great High Priest; He’s **our** High Priest! And He’s a **great** High Priest - a term that was never used for any of the Old Testament high priests. ***The Lord Jesus is our great High Priest.***

He’s a great High Priest because He is both God and Man at the same time. What a mediator! It doesn’t get any better than that! Could we possibly have a better High Priest than a High Priest who is both God and Man at the same time - Jesus, the Son of God? No Way! As Man He can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was *“in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* The Lord Jesus knows what it feels like to be tired and hungry, lonely, heartbroken, rejected, and forsaken, and He also knows what it’s like to be tempted.

Can the Lord Jesus really feel for us when we’re tempted? After all, He didn’t sin. In fact, as God, He couldn’t sin. Yes, He **can** understand how it feels to be tempted. He **can** sympathize with us and feel with us in times of temptation, even though He never yielded to temptation. His temptations were from without - never from within - but He did not yield to temptation in any way.

However, even though He didn’t give in to temptation, He felt the full pressure of every temptation. In fact He felt the pressure more than we do, precisely because He did **not** yield in any way. Here’s an illustration: Which tree feels the force of a hurricane wind the most – the tree that stands throughout the storm, or the tree that falls from the winds? Obviously, the tree that remains standing feels the force and pressure more than the tree that falls!

So as our great High Priest, our Lord Jesus can sympathize with us more than any human high priest. Jesus is more sympathetic because He did not sin. In fact, one who has yielded to temptation and sinned is less sympathetic, because sin has a hardening effect.

Would you want a high priest who was tempted and sinned by yielding? Even a little bit? I don’t! I want a **perfect** High Priest - a High Priest who has experienced the greatest pressure of temptation but has not yielded – not even one little bit.

That kind of High Priest can be the most helpful for us when we face temptation - and that's the kind of perfect High Priest we have in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Believers have a High Priest to help them in their spiritual condition.

Practical Application

In time of need, look in the right direction!

Our practical application comes from verse 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."*

The other day our 3 ½ year old granddaughter, Ingrid, was watching a children's program on TV, and the actors started singing a catchy little song. The gist of the lyrics was something like this: If you have a special problem or need, just be brave and look inside yourself, and there you'll find the strength you need.

Well, that's not what the Bible teaches! That's humanistic philosophy. We explained to Ingrid that the song was wrong, and that when you have a special problem or need or fear, you should look to Jesus and pray to Him for help. And she clearly saw the point that Jesus can help you more than you can help yourself! What a difference!

Do you have a special problem or special need right now? Maybe it's even a problem that began because of your own mistakes. If you're a believer, you can go boldly to God's throne of grace, and there you will obtain mercy. We can come boldly before the throne of God because our High Priest Jesus Christ is there, and He has paid for our sins with His own blood. At the throne of grace we can find whatever help we need. And we can get that help at any time, because our great High Priest does not keep office hours!

Did you ever wonder how you'll face your death, for example? Maybe even martyrdom? Will you cop out? Will you be unable to handle it? You don't have to worry. As long as you look in the right direction - ***when the need arises, the grace will be there!***

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

In time of need, look in the right direction!