

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

Title: "Access: The Believer's Priceless Privilege" (Hebrews 4:9-16)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Air Date: Week of 10/13/2019

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There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His [this is speaking of God's rest on the seventh day of the creation week].

Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief [and here the writer is speaking of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness].

For the Word of God is quick [that is, it is alive], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:9-16)

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The portion of Scripture we have before us speaks to us about three things. It speaks to us about the power of the Word of God. It speaks to us about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it speaks to us about His intercessory work on our behalf.

It also tells us how we are to approach our Lord when we come before Him in prayer. The key word in this passage is the word "rest." Resting in Him. The believer's priceless privilege. Not coming to God through a human intercessor, and earthly priest, but coming directly to our Savior seated at the right hand of the Father. The believer's priceless privilege. This great doctrine that was recovered at the Reformation. Resting in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These verses form one of the climax points in the book of Hebrews. The writer has been building up to this point. And so before we consider verses 9 through 16 together, and especially verse 16, I want to set the stage for us. We need to step back and briefly review what the writer has covered in the first 3-1/2 chapters, leading up to this point.

The Theme of Hebrews

First of all, we need to think about the overall theme of the book of Hebrews. The theme is "the superiority and the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit through the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus Himself is superior. He is superior to the prophets. He is superior to the angels. He is superior to Moses. He is superior to the priests of the old covenant system. He is superior to Abraham, our father in the

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faith. And He is superior to all the saints who are mentioned later on in the great roll call of faith in chapter 11.

Hebrews also tells us that Jesus' atonement is superior. It is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. And that is because Jesus' priesthood is superior. He is a High Priest not in the Levitical line, but after the order of Melchizedek. And Hebrews tells us that by being both our Great High Priest and the perfect sacrifice for our sins, that Jesus is our all-sufficient Savior. He is the Author and Finisher, the Perfecter, of our faith. So that's the theme of the book – the superiority and the all-sufficiency of Christ. And that, indeed, is an excellent summary of the great driving theme of the Protestant Reformation.

Why Hebrews Was Written

Secondly, we need to remind ourselves why the book of Hebrews was written. It's clear from the later chapters of Hebrews that the author is writing this book to people who might be tempted to fall back away from Christ into Judaism, into legalism. They might be tempted to try to add works to the Gospel, to add rituals to the Gospel. In that sense, Roman Catholicism is a religion that keeps people in bondage to a distorted form of the Old Covenant. But the writer of Hebrews is exhorting believers to recognize the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, and he's encouraging them to stand firm in the New Covenant. He's reminding them that the reality of the New Covenant in Christ is far superior to the shadows and the types of the Old Covenant.

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The Same Gospel

At the beginning of chapter four, the writer to the Hebrews makes another vital point. He recalls the fact that an entire generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt never made it to Canaan. They never made it to the place of rest that God was preparing for them in the Promised Land. He says, chapter three, verse 19, that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Unbelief in what? Well, the writer makes it plain at the beginning of chapter four. Notice Hebrews chapter four, verses one and two:

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Their unbelief was unbelief in the Gospel. He tells us that the same Gospel is preached to us today that was preached to Israel in the wilderness – the Gospel of redemption through the Messiah. There has been, is now, and always will be only one way to God – through faith in Jesus Christ. In those days, it was the Gospel looking forward to the cross. For us today, it is the same Gospel looking back upon the cross. But we're told that in the case of that generation of Israelites in the wilderness, the preaching of the Gospel did not profit them. In the original, it says that it was of no advantage to them. And the reason was that the hearing of the Gospel was not mixed with faith to produce salvation.

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The preaching of the Gospel was not united with faith, and we know from Ephesians and elsewhere that faith is the gift of God. One of the great Scriptural rallying cries of the Reformation was Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." Faith alone. The Holy Spirit, in the work of bringing an individual to salvation, unites the message of the Gospel with faith in the heart. The writer of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 4, verse 10 that those who have entered into God's rest have ceased from their own works, just as God ceased His work on the seventh day of creation week. God ceased from His work on the seventh day because creation was complete. We cease from reliance on our works because Christ's work of salvation on our behalf is complete. This is the great truth recovered at the Reformation.

And in chapter 4, the writer also reminds us that even though that generation of Israelites failed to truly receive the faith, God's promise of eternal rest for those who do believe remains unchanged. The Gospel offer still stands.

Be Diligent to Enter Into Rest – For Three Reasons

So that brings us to the passage we're focusing open this evening. What is the writer saying to us? First of all, in verse 11, he exhorts us to be diligent to enter into that rest, to rest in Christ, to not fall away through disobedience.

Why does he do that? We have the answer in verse 12: "For the Word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

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The little conjunction "For" at the beginning of verse 12 leads us to the answer. The word could also be translated, "The reason is that" or simply, "because." The writer is saying, be diligent to enter into the rest that is in Christ, and don't fall away, because you cannot fool God. Verses 12 through 15 make it plain why this is true. There are 3 reasons.

First, the Word of God reveals who you are. As verse 12 tells us, God's Word is a discerner – in the original this is the Greek word from which we get our English word "critic" – the Word is a critic of your thoughts and your intentions. You need the Word of God to speak to you and tell you if we are truly resting in Christ. You're not fit to judge this on our own, apart from the Word of God. Our feelings rise and fall. Circumstances can confuse us. We need to rely upon the Word of God as our discerner, our critic. And the Scriptures have the life and the power to do this.

Second, you cannot hide anything from God. In verse 13 the writer reminds us that all things are naked and open before Him to whom we must give account. Who you are, what you are, what you do, and what you think – these things are all laid bare before God.

You don't get any more plain-spoken than that. The two-edged sword of God's Word has once and for all laid open everything about you. You can't hide anything from God.

Thirdly, the writer also reminds us that Jesus understands your situation from first-hand experience. In verses 14 and 15 we are told that the One to whom we must give

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an account is also our High Priest. He understands what we're going through in this life from firsthand experience in human flesh. He was tested in all points as we are – in all the points where you and I fail – but He did not sin.

So God possesses complete and intimate knowledge of us – everything. But how does that tie back to the idea of entering into God's rest in the previous verses? What the inspired writer is telling us is that a vital, practical, day-to-day part of entering into that rest from works, is to rest in the intercessory work of Christ on your behalf. If you are truly resting in Christ for your salvation, then one of the out-workings, one of the evidences of your faith in Christ, should be that you are resting day by day in the intercession of Christ before the Father on your behalf. You should be coming before Him day by day, entering into that rest.

And that brings us to verse 16. Verse 16 tells us how you should come before God, and what your expectation should be as you come: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Let Us Therefore Come

"Let us therefore come" the writer says. In the original this speaks of approaching or drawing near. It's a term that was used in many ancient writings to describe what took place when someone came into the court of a monarch or ruler. We need to remember that we are drawing near and approaching the Holy God and Sovereign of the universe.

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And verse 16 says, let us therefore come. In other words, "because these things are so." What things is the writer referring to? He's saying, let us therefore come, because there remains a rest for the people of God, in Christ (verse 9). Because we need to cease from reliance on works (verse 10). Because you need to be diligent to enter into your rest in Christ (verse 11). Because God's Word reveals who you are and what you are (verse 12). Because God knows you intimately, and you can hide nothing from Him (verse 13). Because Jesus is a High Priest who can sympathize with your weaknesses (verse 14). Because Jesus was tempted in all points as you are, yet without sin (verse 15). Because of all these things -- "let us come." Let us come!

About the Broadcast

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