

Hebrews Message 16

Exposing our need for a high priest

Hebrews 4:6-16

⁶ Since therefore it remains for 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.”

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

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.

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.

The fear of being exposed

So let’s say you get a phone call from a friend, someone that sometimes tests your patience. You were right in the middle of something else, and they call, and they go on and on about something, but you just are very self-focused at that moment, and you brush them off, barely even listening to them, and you hang up the phone. Then you turn to whoever is with you and you start to really just let your feelings flow, “man, I can’t believe them. They just always call, want to know what I can do for them, they go on and on complaining, sometimes I really just can’t take them...” on and on you go, and about two minutes into your miserable and sinful dialogue you suddenly hear their voice again- “hello? Hello?”- on the phone. Which you never actually hung up. And they have been there listening the entire time. And you are caught. Exposed. No hiding what you just did. **How do you feel?**

You know what, hold on, let’s make this worse. Let’s say it’s not just some friend, let’s say it’s a friend from church who has called you to share something with you, and they are **at a church meeting** that has just ended, most of the church standing around them, **and they have you on speakerphone**. And everyone can overhear your conversation, and it was the end of THAT conversation that you complained about them without having hung up, and everyone knew it, they all heard you. Now how do you feel?

Probably pretty bad, but maybe we need to make it even worse, because with that scenario we can still kind of smile in our embarrassment thinking about it. What about a scenario that takes away our smiles, that leaves us shaken?

Same scenario, someone called from a church event, speakerphone, and you end a phone call, but don't hang up, and then you are talking to yourself somewhat out loud, and everyone is listening, **and you happen to say something that exposes some of your deepest, darkest sins and struggles.** Something you would never share in any context. A sin or thought so bad that, even if you have shared your struggle in this "area" of sin with others, never have you shared any details of your thoughts, the details of your anger, greed, lust, envy, whatever the case may be. But you SAY it, out loud, and you realize it has been overheard. Can you imagine?

You see where I am going with this, right? What I am trying to get us to consider? We have talked about this kind of thing before. What if your deepest most shameful secrets were overheard? **What if right now someone could stand up and repeat to all of us the details of the depth of the wickedness that has gone through your mind?** If everyone here knew, really knew, the truth of what you had been or have done or still do, if all your hiding and pretending fell away and everyone could see and know the depth of your depravity, **how would that go for you? Does the thought of it cause your stomach to flutter, cause your heart to skip a beat? Does it cause you to break out in a bit of a sweat?**

Can you imagine, then: if this is what it happens to us when we think about being exposed before **other sinful people**, what would it be like to be exposed before **Holiness Himself**? It's one thing, brothers and sisters to have the eyes of **other sinners** fall upon us and see **part** of our sin- but really, in the end, what's the big deal of that? For guilty eyes to fall upon me, for the eyes of other criminals to see my crimes, that's one thing- but to have **pure eyes** see what we have hidden, to have pure eyes uncover **every bit** of what we are and what we have done, this is something else. Understand, true judgment, real heart wrenching revelation of who and what we are **can only happen before God**, before the One who speaks judgment and announces who and what we are, **and what He says is right and true and binding and echoes into the very ends of the universe.**

Stand before Holiness Himself and have ALL your sin, every detail, be seen and replayed, - what does THAT thought do to your stomach?

If that thought does not shake you as it should, then consider, friends; there's one thing you should realize this morning: I can't say if you will ever face any those scenarios I painted earlier with the phone call, chances are you won't. **But there is one scenario that I know for a fact that you will face.**

You, with all your sins and shame and all that you try and hide, will be seen. Listen to me- there is one thing that is for sure- the hiding doesn't last forever, you will be exposed. Verse 13:

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.

How many creatures are hidden from His sight? **How many** are naked and exposed to Him? **And, friends, how many will have to give an account to Him?**

Can you even begin to imagine what that would be like? If the thought of being exposed **before other people** is so frightening, what would it be like to be exposed before this Perfect Judge? Yet, **it will happen, you will stand before Him.**

And the reason that we shrink back, the reason why we try our best to hide from this exposure and why we fear it so much, is because we know that what verse 13 says is true- **He, our God, is One to whom we must “give account.”** There is One to whom we must give explanation of what we have done.

Listen to me, make sure you are understanding what we are saying: because we sin, and have done horrible, shameful things, and because we know that there is a judge to whom we must answer, we fear, and we hide. We do not want to be exposed. Every human being knows the good that they ought to do, and they all know the wickedness that flows from their heart, and they also know that there is a Holy God that exists that will judge them. And so we fear, **and we hide.**

Think about why we hide: think with me, consider it: a great white throne. Reaching as high as you can see. Burning with a brightness your eyes cannot comprehend, it is not even brightness to you anymore, it is alight with a flame of glory that is something beyond what “brightness” means. And you instinctively know that on this throne sits One who is **Holy**. That before you is a kind of purity that burns away anything impure. One who has never done anything other than love perfectly. Speak truth. Know all things. Think and speak and move out of utter pure motives. **Pure-** that words just keeps going through your mind as you stand there- pure, pure, pure... pure light, pure power, pure knowledge, pure existence. No faults. Perfection. And the sanctity and the cleanness of where you are makes you feel like **you are going to die**, and you bury your face in your arms. The ground burns your feet to stand there. You stand there with the entire mass of humanity around you, and you try and shrink back and hide amongst them as best as you can, to not be noticed, to not have those Eyes, those perfect all seeing Eyes, fall upon your filth. And then you hear a booming voice from the throne shout “you!”, and the ground almost turns to water under your feet when He speaks, and the crowds of people are blown a thousand miles away, and you are left there standing on the clear crystal sea around His throne by yourself. You all the more, as much as you can, bury your face away, but He leans forward, and it feels like a billion burning suns an inch from your face, and He says “give an account! Many were given to you to love and care for. Give an account! Many gifts were given to you, to use for my glory and your good- give an account! You knew of My holiness, you knew of My glory, and instead of honoring Me and valuing Me, instead **what have you done?**” and in an instant all of the horrors of your life, all the sins you desperately want to forget, are all exposed before His **Holiness and all of heaven.**

Does your heart stop and stomach flutter to consider THAT scenario? At this we no longer smile over a mere embarrassment, we are shaken to the core.

Friends, think about it- men who encountered mere ANGELS fell like they were dead. What happens when you stand before **God Himself- as a sinner?** What would it be like to, like Isaiah, see the very glory of God fill the temple, to see His very throne of power and judgment **whose foundations are righteousness and justice**, knowing you are a sinner? What would it be like to see the powerful seraphim around his throne, and the crown upon His head? We understand why Isaiah fell on his face and cried out “woe is me!” What was it like for Peter, kneeling in that fishing boat, realizing he was filthy in sin, and in the very boat with Him was Holiness? “Depart from me!” What was it like for the woman caught in adultery, thrown before the feet of purity Himself, having moments before been caught in the very act? What kind of shame did she know, what kind of fear as her sins were totally exposed to the pure and perfect judge?

You see, we want to hide, friends, we want to avoid that moment. And that is exactly what many will do, try and hide, and avoid that moment:

Revelation 6:12-17

¹² When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

We so fear this exposure of what we are before His pure eyes, that we would dig a hole and beg the mountains to fall on us, to hide us from the face of the One to whom we must all give account.

And so, we become very good at hiding, or so we think. And for now, sometimes, the pretending seems to work. People are fooled. Sometimes we are so good at it we fool ourselves! That is, we convince ourselves that we aren't really all that bad, we are not as needy, or wicked, or depraved, as others. We try and convince ourselves that we are not so bad that we should be *ashamed*. We cover ourselves in the leaves of good works.

But there is no hiding, friends, there is no hiding what we really are! There is no way to pretend before the eyes of the One who sees all! No! Listen to me-

¹² ...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.

Do you think you can hide??! Everything is exposed before Him, friends, the very thoughts and intentions of the heart- everything is revealed, there is no hiding, no rock big enough, no mountain tall enough, to hide you from His gaze!

You will be seen.

The "word" that reveals our unbelief

And it's about right here in the message that I bet some of you are thinking "ok, I see what this is about. He is telling us how the law exposes our sin, the law is this sharp word that exposes us, and levels us before God, I get that. Well, I can just tune out, because I am under the gospel, not the law. I'm ok, I know the gospel!" and if that is what you are thinking, you are wrong, you are SO wrong!

Listen, friend- what if I told you this morning that your PROBLEM, that which you must FEAR, is that *you have heard the gospel?*

You see, we have to understand what our author is saying in this text in Hebrews today. We can't just take this little section here in verses 12 and 13 speaking about this sharp word of God **and divorce it from the context of what our author has been saying.** Our author here is **not** trying to say "the law is sharp and exposes your sin, so make sure you trust in the gospel." That's not it at all.

No, something very surprising is being laid before us here. The question we have to ask is, "what is this word he speaks of that exposes us?" -- Friends, think with me what this section of Hebrews is about. It is a great exhortation **to those who have heard the gospel, and are thinking of leaving Christ, right?** And so they are being warned about the unbelief of the Jews in the wilderness. Now, consider: the point that our author is making is NOT that the Jews heard **the law** in the wilderness and disbelieved **the law**, and so they were doomed to not enter God's rest. Do you realize this? That's not the point, right? The point isn't even simply that **they heard the law and broke it.**

So what's the point? The point is that they heard the GOSPEL, they heard the promises of God, and disbelieved THEM. That's the word that they heard. Remember what we saw last week was the problem with the Jews, Psalm 78 told us that **they did not trust in the saving power of God.**

Brothers and sisters, our author's point is this: the Israelites heard the word of God, they heard **the gospel**, they heard the gospel promises of God to save them. But what did that do? **It didn't save them!** This **hearing** did not save them friends! It was not mixed with belief.

So get this: what is our text saying? What did this hearing of the gospel do? **Don't you see what this hearing did, what this Word that came to them did? It revealed, it revealed unbelief. Hearing the promises of God alone does not have, it just reveals our unbelief, friends.**

That is why this warning is here about the cutting, revealing, exposing "word." The word is the same word he has been speaking of all along- "today if you hear His voice, do not harden our hearts", just quoted in verse 7, and having been repeated all along. If you hear **this** word, don't harden your hearts!- If I hear **what** word? The law? no. He means the gospel promises, God's promises to save you! **This** word, when it comes, it reveals! **It will reveal your unbelief JUST like it revealed the unbelief of the Jews!**

Oh, what a wretched people we are, brothers and sisters! Even the very PROMISES of God **reveal our weakness and cut into us, revealing what we are.** Not just the law. God makes promises- **and the result is our unbelief is revealed, friends.** It is not the gospel **heard** that saves, remember? Bring the law to the unbeliever, it shows that they are wicked. Bring the greater message of the gospel to the unbeliever, **and it more shows even more how wicked we are.**

Here's what I mean- friends, get this, because you can't hide from this today-

TODAY is the day that you hear, and so today is the day that your heart is exposed and revealed. Our text you may have noticed did not simply say in verse 13 that one day in the future you will be exposed- it said that we **ARE** naked and exposed to Him. And the word of promise is what cuts and divides and reveals and exposes. Meaning: as you hear God's **promise** to you today to save you by the blood of Christ alone, to do good to you, His enemy by nature, what happens is **doubt rises up in you, doubt as to the truthfulness and ability of this great savior to save you.**

And so even the gospel reveals your weakness. You see, what could be the case for you today is this: you hear the gospel, and your weakness and sin and doubt and need are revealed. The gospel heard does not save you, it could in fact end up condemning you. Be careful to understand what I mean, please- the gospel is *not* a message of condemnation, it is the power of God unto salvation, that we must hear again and again, you know this! But consider- Jesus came and preached the good news. He Himself said He came not to condemn the world, but to save it- but, He also said that whoever does not believe Him and His message *is condemned already*. That is, as they heard Him preach, it divided the crowd, it revealed unbelief, and many were condemned.

So you see, the announcement of God's goodness alone does not save you, in fact it might simply reveal your unbelief this morning.

This is what we have talked about for weeks now, and this is why the warnings here are so strong in these chapters.

And this is not just a warning for unbelievers, this same effect takes place in our lives as Christians. The gospel promises heard, even for those not condemned but saved, reveal our need, our weakness, our doubt- they show us where we must be careful, where we are in need of exhortations to flee the unbelief that would destroy us. Just consider, a few weeks ago when I asked you to leave asking each other "Is Christ a great savior, is Christ YOUR savior?" what happened in many was that as you considered that second question **your unbelief in the gospel promises was revealed**. Wasn't it?

This same theme will be picked up again by the author of Hebrews in chapter six, but right now get this: he is explaining that hearing the gospel puts you in a particular place before God- **you are exposed**. **Now nothing is hidden, you have heard- and your unbelief is exposed.**

Christ saves!

Oh how we need to remember, brothers and sisters, it is not the gospel that saves, it is **Christ** that saves. The gospel is surely what He uses to awaken us, we know this, it is the power of God to save. We know that the gospel is the good news that Christ will save those who come to Him! **But get this straight- you are being called to run *not to the gospel* today, but to Christ as your high priest- because even the gospel promises reveal your need and your weakness, don't they?** The unbeliever who encounters *only the gospel* is left a greater sinner, with greater sin revealed. But the unbeliever **who encounters the risen Christ who is bent on saving them, this is the one who is saved!**

You see, our text this morning is meant to drive us toward our high priest, Christ. Friends, we have before us in this text the strongest rebuke and exhortation so far in the book, a frightening passage about our being cast before the all-seeing eyes of our Judge. The point the author makes is this: you are no better than your fathers. Hearing the word, hearing the promises alone, it didn't save them. Nor will it save you. You need One thing, the One thing that Christ is! You need a high priest who can make proper purification, proper atonement, for your sins! You need not just to hear the promises of God, you need a great savior!

Friends, you are exposed before the law, no doubt, but you are also this very morning exposed before the gospel, and I pray today that the hiding ends. I pray that you come to this high priest, and present your disease to Him. The disease is not mostly your lust and greed and envy- those things are a disease, wretched sins that must die- but the heart of it all, your worst sin, is your **unbelief**. The horror of this day, the sin that you should most be ashamed of, but that you can't hide, is this: He bleeds for you, He dies for you, He offers you grace upon grace, **and you still cast Him a look of doubt, you still refuse to trust your soul to Him, and want to secure your souls salvation by your own hand. You doubt the effectiveness of Christ's blood, and the willingness of this savior to save you. Your hearing of the promises of God reveals that.**

That is the situation that this letter is addressing, and that is what you need to hear today.

Directed to our High Priest!

And you need to see where we are directed to go by the author of Hebrews. Because if this is all we heard today, how hopeless! Even the promises of God can't save us, so wicked are we! We need to know, what saving is there then? HOW then can we be saved? **And so, perfectly our author takes us exactly where we need to go, right to Christ, the helper of the weak and needy:**

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.

By presenting to us Christ as this merciful and sympathetic high priest, he is drawing us toward the help we need. He is saying to us "yes, you doubt, yes, you are like your fathers in that even if God promises you good, you doubt it. You are doing it again, even with Christ, doubting His saving power, doubting again God's work to redeem you! So come, come to the high priest who God has graciously given you, who is able to save you even from this unbelief! Come, **WITH** your weakness, **WITH** your doubt!"

You see, friends, we must understand, we have to go to the high priest WITH our diseases and sins and faults! We must not think we have to get things right THEN go!

Oh, friends, that you would see today what a great savior He is!

Please see the greatness of this high priest! You see, the high priest under the old covenant, you could go to him with your disease or uncleanness, and for some things he could make atonement, but for others, **there was nothing he could do**. All he could do is announce your uncleanness. You present to him the leprous hand, he sees it, and he declares you unclean. But now, today, brothers and sisters, we have a high priest **who does not simply announce us unclean when we are revealed and exposed before Him, we have a high priest, praise God, who can CLEANSE us of all unrighteousness!**

Yes, I know, we want to hide, we want to hide from what the law says about us, and we want to hide from the unbelief we find in ourselves, but I caution you this morning- that hiding is deadly! It is what Hebrews is calling us away from! That hiding will kill you, friends. Hide no more! You must come and present yourselves to this high priest! You see, this is what is so hard to believe! This is what is so against our nature! We want to run and hide and have the rocks cover us- **but what if this high priest is not like the rest? What if this high priest bids us come *as we are, in our sicknesses, with what we are ashamed of- what if He calls us to come so that He can cleanse us and make atonement for us?***

Guys, what if you can come to Him today, and not HIDE your faults, *but let them be seen?* I am not talking about confessing your sins to another person or priest or pastor or some much thing, I am talking about **you going to Christ for redemption!**

How wonderful the news is, today, friends, that we do not have to hide our leprous hands, we do not have to shrink away in fear from the announcement of the high priest! No, friends, run, **run to Him!** Reveal to him your sickness, show him the leprous skin, present to him the uncleanness of it all, do not hide it! Show him! Ask not for the mountains to cover you, but for the Priest to cover you! And watch what He does! Do you know what He does? He applies his own blood, covers you with his own goodness. He is the faithful high priest who has fulfilled the law's demands on our behalf, and has shed His blood as our sin bearer- dying our death. He is the high priest who rose from the dead, conquering our enemies, securing for us an eternal rest! The crazy thing is, the thing that is so hard to realize today is, **you can stand before Him like you are- you can come to Him with weakness and sin.** You don't need to hide, you can come and show Him all that you are, all that you lack, all that you still fail in. And you do this **not** because you boast in your sin or because you like it! **No, but because He came to heal you of it, to wash it from you. The one who goes to a doctor does not love his disease, but he does not hide it either, he shows it to the doctor! And this morning we have high priest who has come for the sick, for the sinful and the broken.**

So come, friends, come to Him! Weak though you are! Come!

Our text tells us in verse 16 **when** we should draw near- when? In time of need.

Our text tells us HOW we should draw near. **How?** With confidence.

Our text tells us **to what we draw near-** to what? A throne of *judgment?* A throne of *condemnation?* No, a throne of grace!

Our text tells us what kind of high priest we have. A sinless, **sympathetic** high priest, one who sympathizes ***with our weaknesses.*** So why would we hide them from him?

So hide no more- come to Him, to this High priest, today. Now. That woman caught in adultery, thrown at Jesus feet- what did SHE learn of the requirements needed to earn Christ's mercy and forgiveness?

But even now, doubt rises up. Could it be He would save us, ***could it be this free?*** So take your doubt to Him, and throw it at His feet, confess it, admit it, and pray to Him, "Oh, Merciful savior, great high priest, heal me of even this! Examine me, see my sickness! And heal me of it! Forgive me, oh compassionate Savior, cover me with your blood! My faith is weak, but your faith is strong, so even be faithful for me! **Be everything for me, and carry me home to be with you!"**