

Hebrews 4B (2014)

- We've reached the end of the second warning in our study of Hebrews
 - Let's summary the second warning briefly if we can
 - The writer began with a simple definition of being a Christian
 - We are a part of Christ's house (i.e., we are the Church) if we hold fast our confession of Christ firm until the end
 - Those who do not hold fast are those who have not yet entered into the Lord's rest
 - That is resting from works and entering into salvation by faith
 - And the writer reminded us that many in Israel's history were barred from entering a physical form of rest for unbelief
 - And they suffered this fate even in the face of amazing signs and wonders that demonstrated God's power
 - They knew He existed, obviously
 - But they failed to trust in His word
 - Like the writer will say later:

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- Faith isn't merely an acknowledgement that God exists; it requires we trust in God's promises
 - The Israelites were promised reward in Canaan
 - But they did not believe those promises
 - So the writer asks us, the Church, to be diligent in encouraging one another to know and follow the Lord as long as it is called "Today"
 - So that no one among us will fall though the cracks

- As he ends his second warning, the writer adds a final word of exhortation to heed his warning

[Heb. 4:12](#) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[Heb. 4:13](#) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

- The writer makes a statement many in the church has learned by heart or at least heard quoted many times I'm sure
 - It's a statement about the power of God's word in the hearts of mankind
 - This truth lies at the heart of the Gospel and of our experience following Christ
 - And it reveals the nature of our judgment and that of all Creation before Christ in a coming day
 - First, notice how v.12 begins: the word of God
 - This is statement about the power of the scriptures, the Bible
 - Ultimately, of course, it's a statement about the power of God Himself, for all power extends from Him
 - But specifically, the Lord's word has a power derived from God
 - As Isaiah says so powerfully

[Is. 55:11](#) So will My **word** be which **goes forth** from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- In Isaiah, we're told that one the Lord issues His word, it moves out into Creation with a certain and unchanging power
 - It's described as if it were an agent with a will of it's own
 - The word of God isn't merely a description of reality
 - It is the agent of cause

- All of Creation will act in unison to accomplish what the word of God proclaims
- You may remember the moment when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before He was crucified, Palm Sunday
 - As he rides in on a donkey, the crowds begin to sing Psalm 118, saying:

[Luke 19:37](#) As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen,

[Luke 19:38](#) shouting:

“ BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

- The crowd was singing from Psalm 118, which is a Messianic psalm
- Here’s a quote from that part of the psalm

[Psa. 118:22](#) The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.

[Psa. 118:23](#) This is the LORD’S doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.

[Psa. 118:24](#) This is the day which the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

[Psa. 118:25](#) O LORD, do save, we beseech You;
O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!

[Psa. 118:26](#) Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

- As you can see, this is a psalm describes the Messiah
- The psalm announces the arrival of the Messiah to establish His kingdom
- The people along the road believed Jesus to be that Messiah, so they complied with scripture’s demands and announced His arrival by singing Psalm 118
- The Pharisees were visibly upset to hear this psalm being sung for Jesus, since they did not accept Jesus as Messiah for themselves

- Here is the scene as recorded in Luke:

[Luke 19:39](#) Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.”

[Luke 19:40](#) But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!”

- Notice Jesus’ response to the Pharisees
 - Jesus simply says that if this crowd didn’t sing this song, the rocks would sing it for them
- Jesus isn’t speaking in hyperbole; I believe He meant what He said literally
 - If the people had remained silent, in disobedience to God’s word, then the very rocks themselves would have made a joyful noise to comply with God’s word
 - The word of God declared that upon the Messiah’s arrival, this psalm would be sung
 - And whatever the word of God says must come to pass
 - The Creation itself operates according to that word
 - As Isaiah says, the word WILL accomplish what the Lord desires
- And in this context, the writer wants us to understand that the word of God will expose those who live in unbelief
 - Unbelief will not go undetected
 - The Lord will one day call all to account
- How does the word of God expose the hearts of men? In five ways, the writer says
 - First, the writer says the word of God is living
 - It is living in the sense that it has the power to grant men spiritual life
 - In fact, the word of God is the only thing that brings spiritual life
 - And so only those who have truly heard the word of God will be made alive by it

- Secondly, the word of God is active
 - The Greek word is *energes*, from which we get energy
 - The word means is accomplishes work within us
 - It's active in the way God's word speaks to us on unique issues in our spiritual lives
 - A group may study the same passage of scripture together, and yet each is convicted in a different way
 - One person comes to repentance and is brought to faith
 - Another is convicted of a persistent sin and the need to walk in holiness
 - A third senses the Spirit confirming it's time to move out in a new ministry
 - A fourth may experience encouragement and hope in seeing God's patience and wisdom reflected in the text
- And it's not just active in the sense of how it informs us
 - The word of God has power to compel the Creation to respond and comply with the will of God
 - So is it in each of us
 - Learning and submitting to the word of God has a supernatural power to transform us to the will of Christ
 - As Paul said in Romans 12

Rom. 12:2 And do not be **conformed** to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Thirdly, the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword
 - The word for sword used in the Greek means a small, sharp paring knife commonly used to debone fish
 - In ancient Rome, this type of knife was the symbol used for Roman judges and magistrates

- Like we have a blind Lady Justice holding scales to symbolize unprejudiced judgment
 - The two-edged knife represented the judges responsibility to “cut both ways” in getting to the bottom of a matter
 - Here, the writer is using that symbol to reflect how the word of God carves us up in judging the thoughts and intentions of our heart
- The Lord’s word will be the instrument by which the Lord will perform a postmortem examination of every persons life, whether at the Judgment Seat or the Great White Throne Judgment
 - We will be judged by the word of God, according to what it demands
 - For the unbeliever, the Great White Throne judgment will reveal their deeds to be sinful and not in keeping with the word of God
 - But even for believers, the Judgment Seat of Christ will be a moment when our lives are laid bare for judgment
 - The result of our judgment is for the determination of eternal reward
 - Nevertheless, the outcome of that judgment will be based on our conformance to the word of God
 - Our obedience to the word in our walk with Christ
- Fourthly, the word of God is piercing, such that it separates spirit from flesh
 - The writer actually uses four descriptions of soul and body, but each pair are synonyms
 - He says soul and spirit vs. joints and marrow
 - Soul and spirit describe the immaterial nature of our being
 - While joint and marrow describe the flesh of our existence
 - So there aren’t four parts to our existence or even three
 - We are only two: spirit and flesh

- The writer's speaking of the word's power to discern between the motives of our flesh and the motives of our spirit
 - The same action we take can at sometimes be sinful and other at other times be a result of walking in faith
 - We could make a donation to our church with the intent to support the work of the Lord
 - Or we could make a donation hoping to gain the favor of leaders in the church
 - You and I are not perceptive enough to know the difference sometimes
 - But the word of God is perceptive enough to discern when an action was driven by the flesh or when it was a response of faith in our spirit
 - Once again, the word of God will judge us, and we will only gain God's pleasure for acts of faith
- Finally, the writer says the word is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of hearts
 - The word is powerful at revealing truth that it will bring to light those good and sinful thoughts we harbored in our hearts
 - Even those thoughts we never took action on will still be subject to judgment
 - Remember, Jesus Himself explained the potential for our thoughts to convict us before God

[Matt. 5:27](#) " You have heard that it was said, ' YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';
[Matt. 5:28](#) but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Notice it judges both our thoughts and our intentions
 - God's word is such a perfect judge, it will reveal not only what we thought, but also our intentions in having that thought
 - Think about that the next time a sinful thought moves through your head

- While we've been forgiven from the penalty of those sinful thoughts (and all sin), they're not going to remain hidden forever
- And to finish his comments on the second warning, the writer says there is no creature – no demon nor angel, no unbeliever nor believer – who will hide from His judgment
 - Everything about our lives will be open and laid bare to the judgment of Christ
 - Naturally, the writer expects his readers to respond to this truth in the appropriate way
 - If everything we think, want, do and don't do is going to be subject to judgment on a day to come, then we should strive to live now in keeping with that prospect
 - And we should want to encourage all those around us to do the same
- And with that, the writer moves forward, with an introduction to his next section of teaching, on Christ as our High Priest

[Heb. 4:14](#) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

[Heb. 4:15](#) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

[Heb. 4:16](#) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- These verses serve as an introduction to his next section, which really gets going in chapter 5
 - This next section addresses a major pillar of Judaism, the priesthood of the Levites
 - Like the earlier issue of angels, this issue centers on a comparison of the value and purpose of older things with the new and better things available in Christ
- The writer introduces this section with v.14 with a statement that sounds very much like way he detoured into his second warning
 - That detour began in chapter 3:7

- In fact, take a moment with me to look at the verse immediately preceding 3:7

[Heb. 3:6](#) but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

- This was the statement that launched the writer into the second warning
 - Notice he used the preposition “if” to pique his readers’ interest in where he was going next
 - By using “if”, he was suggesting that not all of his readers were apart of God’s house
 - Not all were truly believers in Christ
- But now look again at v.14, where the writer ends his warning to this group

[Heb. 4:14](#) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

- We can see the writer getting back on point now
 - He’s back to talking about that house, the one that Christ built, that is the Church
 - And he’s still comparing it to the house that Moses served in, that is the people of God who were under the covenant Law
- Both “houses” have high priests serving the needs of the people
 - But we have a High Priest far superior to the one that served in the earlier day
 - And in this introduction, the writer mentions numerous ways that Christ is superior to the men who served as high priest in Israel
- First, our High Priest has passed through the Heavens
 - The writer is speaking of the proximity or position of Christ to the Father
 - Christ isn’t merely a man bound to the earth, far from the presence of the Father

- Such was the condition of earthly priests that served under the Law
- They might have been elevated to the position of High Priest by the people
- And in their duties they got as close to God as any man could under the Law
 - They entered the Holy of Holies to administer the blood of the sacrifice on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement
- But that was nothing compared to what our High Priest has done in the new Covenant
 - Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father
 - There is no flesh closer to the Father than the Incarnate Christ
 - And Christ is in that position 24/7 on our behalf
 - The high priest of Israel only entered the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle on one day of the year
 - Only once each year did Israel send a representative before the mercy seat to seek the Lord's mercy and intercession
 - But our High Priest is continually serving His people
- And the high priest of Israel wasn't just in a lessor position to serve God's people, but he also had an infinitely poorer perspective by which to serve as an intercessor
 - The high priest of Israel was only a man, and he was relatively isolated from the people
 - He couldn't meet every member of the nation of Israel so to receive their prayer requests
 - He wasn't like Santa; he didn't make appearances at the Mall of Jerusalem so Israelites could sit on his lap and tell him their needs
 - And even if he could visit every Jew in advance of Yom Kippur, he couldn't have remembered all their needs
 - And his function in the temple didn't allow him to bring those needs before the throne

- He simply performed the duties prescribed in Leviticus
 - And he called it a day
- Not our High Priest hears every prayer we raise up in His name
 - Despite the fact that hundreds of millions of Christians can pray to Christ simultaneously, He can hear every single one
 - And he represents them to the Father with great wisdom and insight
 - And the Son's perfection and oneness with the Father ensure our prayers are received by the Father
- Moreover, in v.15 the writer says that when our High Priest hears, He does so with great sympathy and understanding
 - He isn't a dispassionate messenger relaying data
 - His humanity has equipped Him with an understanding from personal experience that informs His perspective
 - He was tempted in all things of life, the very same temptations you and I have experienced in our lives
 - He knows that moment when we are drawn away from sin, though He himself was never drawn away by temptation
 - The writer's point is we have to seek for His guidance and power and intervention while we are encountering the temptation, not afterward
 - If you and I wait until after we have sinned, we missed a great opportunity to gain the blessing of such a great High Priest
 - Certainly, we still should approach Him after we have fallen, coming in repentance and seeking forgiveness
 - And He is faithful and righteous to forgive us of our sins
 - But if we stop as we face temptation and raise that moment up in prayer, we have confidence that the Lord can intercede for us in that moment to grant us victory over the temptation
 - Because He has faced the same temptation and won
 - And because He has full access to the power of the Spirit in us, He is capable of equipping us to victory over those moments

- But we need to turn to Him as a High Priest before we fall to temptation, not just as our atoning sacrifice after we fall
- That's how the writer concludes in v.16
 - He says we should draw near to the throne of grace with a confidence that the Lord will hear and respond and equip us to receive a better judgment
 - Isn't that the point after all?
 - We know this judgment is coming? The writer just explained in it vivid detail
 - And as we contemplate it, we struggle to consider how to be ready
 - How can we face such a stern judgment, when we recognize how far we have to go in living a life that pleases the Lord
 - Now the writer gives us a boost of confidence
 - He says the Lord is prepared to grant us the mercy and grace necessary to persevere in times of need
 - Times of need refers to a moment when we're experiencing temptation to sin, and we feel the weakness in our flesh, and we know where this is headed
 - We've been here before perhaps
 - And we know we should take a different course this time
 - But we feel powerless to make a better choice
- The writer says Jesus knows how you feel
 - And He is prepared to equip you supernaturally by the Spirit to succeed where before you have failed
 - He is our intercessor with the power to change our walk of life
 - But we must draw close to Him in that moment of need
 - So the next time you face temptation to sin, take a moment and pause in your tracks
 - Close your eyes, perhaps, and lift a prayer up to the Father, in the name of Christ

- Ask Him to stop the temptation, to grant you victory over it
- Ask Christ to give you the spiritual power to win the battle the way He did when He walked the earth
- And watch the Lord respond to ensure you receive a better judgment