

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 4, Verses 12-16
Notes From Class on September 15, 2009
Last Revised on (September 25, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin I would like to make sure that you have everything you will need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

And if you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then it may help you to have the handout which I have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews, Chapters 1 through 6.

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started.

Review

Last week we read up to Chapter 4, Verse 11.

Detailed notes for all classes, up to and including last week, have been posted to the Google group site.

Nevertheless tonight as usual I will begin with a brief review.....

We remember that Hebrews is a document written in Greek around the end of the First Century A.D

It is probably best thought of as the text of **sermon**, which the author intended to be heard by a particular church, one with which he was **familiar**.

The church apparently consisted of people who had confessed their faith in Christ **long before** they would hear this sermon.

One of the author's main purposes in addressing them seems to have been to encourage them to **hold fast** to their original confession of faith.

This sermon begins with the observation that, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God **spoke** to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son," (1:1-2a).

The speech to the fathers by the prophets, is **consistent**, with the speech by his Son and, indeed, it is the same speech.

But the speech by the Son is God's **ultimate** message: the highest and fullest and the most complete revelation of God's nature and character and purpose,

so **all** of the Bible, including the Old Testament, can best be understood in the light of Christ.

Chapters 1 and 2 of Hebrews intend to make certain that we fully understand the **greatness** of Christ.

He is greater than everything in all creation, even the **angels**.

We should not let ourselves be confused by the fact that the Son of God came **down** and seemed for a while to be a little lower than the angels, as Man is.

He did this so that he could lift Man **up** to where He is, making us his brothers and, therefore, children of the Living God.

This, his coming down to suffer and to serve, is his crown and glory, and our best evidence of God's **grace**.

Because he came down and experienced suffering and temptation, God's Son is able to **help** us when we are tempted, if only we will turn to Him, and hold fast.

So ends Chapter 2.

At the beginning of Chapter 3, the preacher addresses his listeners collectively as **holy brothers** who share in a heavenly calling,

and he invites them really to **consider** Jesus,

whom he describes as the **apostle** and **high priest** of their confession

He reminds his listeners that Jesus, who is greater than everything in all creation, including even the angels, is of course also greater than **Moses**,

who **in** all of God's house was said, by God Himself, to have been faithful.

But Jesus is faithful **over** God's house, as a son,

and we **are** that house if we hold fast to our confession.

To fall away from our confession of **Christ**, would be the most tragic and fatal error imaginable.

In the remainder of Chapter 3 our author shows us a frightening **picture** of what unbelief and disobedience can look like:

the story of those whom Moses led out of Egypt but who failed to enter the Promised Land.

In Psalm 95 David had used this same story to warn Israel in his generation.

Indeed it is from Psalm 95 that the author of Hebrews quotes (Hebrews 3:7-11)

Both David and the author of Hebrews used the example of the Exodus generation to admonish their listeners to **hear** and to **obey** God,

and to **warn** them that when God's people hear his voice and **disobey** it, bad things can happen.

In the last part of the last verse of Psalm 95 (Hebrews 3:11), referring to the Exodus generation, God swears "**They shall not enter my rest.**"

The term here translated "**rest**" was loaded with symbolic weight at that time.

In the remainder of Chapter 3 and continuing on into Chapter 4, the author of Hebrews **meditates** on this idea of entering or failing to enter God's rest.

Last week we read the first **11** verses of Chapter 4 and I, at least, found them difficult.

Let's go ahead and reread that text again, now, and see if we have finally understood it.

And tonight, let's be sure to hear these words as if they were spoken to **us**.

Chapter 4, Verses 1-11

Will somebody please read Hebrews, Chapter 4, verses 1-11, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Now will someone please read that same 11 verses in English (ESV)

- 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 not 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: "And 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 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.

Thank you. So as we have just read, what follows from **remembering** the story of the Exodus generation in Chapter 3, is an **invitation** to the Church, at the beginning of Chapter 4.

And it is an invitation to the church to be **afraid**: lest any of its members should seem to have failed to enter God's rest. (v.1)

Failing to enter God's rest is equated (v. 2) with failing to benefit from the **Gospel** (of Jesus Christ).

Conversely (v. 3) we are told that those of us who **have** believed (the Gospel) **do** enter God's rest.

Thus belief of the Gospel and entering God's rest belong **together**.

It is grammatically possible for God's rest to mean, only, a rest which is conferred **on** man by God.

It may also mean a rest in which God **Himself** participates

Our author means to **include** the latter, I think.

He alludes (vv. 3, 4) to the Creation story, where God Himself is said to have "rested."

I think that the author means to say that, since the creation of the world, God has been "**at** rest" in this particular sense, that all of his works of **creation** have been completed,

and similarly those who have believed enter into God's rest, in the sense that the works of **belief** have been completed by God in them.

God's **rest** can happen (by definition) only after God's **work** has been completed.

Unbelief is the only thing we need to fear, because it is the only thing that can keep us from entering, with other believers, into God's rest, which is, for us, heaven and the world to come.

This appears to have been the teaching of the author of Hebrews and, also, of King David in Psalm 95.

It cannot simply have been that David was speaking of God's rest in a sense that might have been exhausted when Joshua took the subsequent generation of Israel into the Promised Land. (vv. 5-10)

Indeed all subsequent generations of Israel, including the one that entered the land under Joshua, made the same mistake as the generation that failed to enter the land --- i.e. many of them did not believe God,

which is the one work which must be completed in a man before he can enter into God's rest.

We must come to believe God!

The implications of last week's reading are sort of summarized in Verse 11 which, again, reads:

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (Emphasis added)

The **rest** we have been discussing, God's rest, is something that we enter by **striving**.

This must be a striving to **obey** God,

because that which might prevent us from entering God's rest, is the kind of **disobedience** that was seen in the Exodus generation in Israel, and in later generations also.

The sort of striving that is required in order to enter God's rest is certainly **not** any sort of "works righteousness," as several of you appropriately pointed out last week.

Israel had **zero** possibility of freeing itself from Egypt, much less of entering and occupying Canaan in its **own** power.

God had promised to do **all** of that **for** them, and had proved himself faithful and capable in their sight many times.

All that they had to do was to **accept** the grace of God and **enter** and **occupy** the Promised Land.

Which is to say, all they had to do was to **believe** God and **obey** him, however difficult it seemed to them.

In the same way, **we** do not and can not work to save ourselves from Satan, sin, and death.

We simply have no **means**, by which to undo even past sins.

And we have no **power** (of our own) to resist present and future temptations.

Indeed our very **nature** is sinful and we must therefore surely die.

We agree, in our better moments, that we deserve to die! And would not wish to live forever as we are.

Certainly we are **no** match for Satan, and have **no** power to raise ourselves from the dead.

In all human history, there has been only **one** man who deserved to enter God's rest, and he had the power to get there on his own.

He is Jesus Christ, who displayed his **eternal** perfection and divinity by becoming a man, living a **perfect** life and, then, overcoming death, and ascending to the right hand of God, entering **his** rest.

The Gospel in which we believe, and which saves us, is that it pleases God to count the death of this perfect man, God's only begotten son, as payment in full for all of our sins (past, present, and future) so that we could be free....

...free to **strive** ... **hopefully**

...free to **follow** Jesus into **his** glory and ultimately to become as he is.

Because of our faith in Jesus, God allows and enables us to do what we could never have done without his help.

That is to pick up **our** crosses and follow him...to have the Holy Spirit in **us**...to be able to **believe** and able to **obey**...to be able to **work** and to **suffer** and to **struggle** and **still** not to fall!! To share in his work as he lets us share also in his reward. It is our joy to do his work so that we can enter God's rest with him!

And a big part of the work we will be seen to do, will be helping **others** within the church to walk that narrow and difficult path after Jesus,

and helping others who may still stand **outside** the church to enter in.

We cannot save **ourselves**: that his His work.

But he condescends to allowing us to help him to save **others**.

That is what our preacher is doing in this sermon

With these words which are hearing spoken to us.

Chapter 4, Verses 11-13

Will somebody now please read Hebrews, Chapter 4, verses 11 -13 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku).

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same three verses in English (ESV)

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.

Verse 11

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Thank you. Now we have already spent much time, last week, and today by way of review, with Verse 11 of , Chapter 4

We understand that **belief** is the ticket to God's eternal rest and that **unbelief** is the terrible danger to be avoided.

We understand that belief and unbelief manifest themselves, at least to human eyes, as **obedience** and **disobedience**.

We understand also, from verses 1 through 11 of Chapter 4 that the fear of falling away is the fear that no **one** within the church may fall away, and that this is a fear that **all** of us within the church are supposed to feel on behalf of **each** of us and strive to avoid.

This is a **family** matter: God is our **Father**, Christ is our **Brother**, the same Holy Spirit is **in** each of us and among all of us, we are surrounded by each other --- holy brothers and sisters with a heavenly calling --- **all** of us are bound for glory...if only we all hold fast to the end.

But we rightly **fear** (4:1) that some of us may fail to reach it,

because it sometimes **seems** that way, judging from the disobedient actions and feelings that we see in others, and in ourselves,

and we don't have any way to see into the hearts of our brothers and sisters, or even into our own hearts, which are in any case terribly, terribly corrupt.

So we are urged, as a group, to strive, so that no one may fail to enter God's rest.

What does this striving look like?

That depends on the word of God

Verse 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.

This verse begins with the frequently used connector, "for"

What is the logical connection between verse 12 and what went before?

I wrestle with this. I think that it indicates that verses 12 and 13 explain and support the admonition of verse 11.

Verse 11 urges us to **strive** and, also, warns us to **obey**, and holds out the ultimate threat of falling, as exemplified by the Exodus generation in Israel, God's people, to whom God spoke by Moses, and for whom God also worked mighty signs and wonders, and who, then, perversely rebelled against God, until finally God swore, they shall not enter my rest, but Caleb, Joshua, and some others were, God said, of a different spirit, and did believe, and did enter into God's rest. Etc.

All of this was brought about by God's **word**,

and we are urged not to **neglect** or **disparage** God's word in any respect.

Similar disasters can be avoided if only the Church will **hear** God's word and **obey** it!

The word of God is, first of all, "**of God**."

It is the speech of the One who is almighty. It simply must be obeyed and cannot be resisted.

If anyone ever **seems** to disobey or disparage God's word with impunity, it is only a false seeming.

The word of God is **never** overcome, because there is no one who **can** overcome it.

The word of God is, second of all, **alive** and **active**.

It does not draw its power from the men who **speak** it,

it does not **lose** its power once it has been spoken,

its power cannot be **destroyed** by anyone.

Sooner or later, whether to condemn or to save or to sanctify, or to accomplish some other purpose of the Almighty, his words **accomplish** their purposes among men, no matter what.

Yet the word of God is a word **spoken** by the mouth of man, **heard** by the ear of man, and **received** through the understanding (sometimes called the spirit) of man, and ultimately

accepted, rejected, or otherwise responded to by the heart and soul of man. It is a speech of God in which man **inevitably** participates somehow, if only through rejection.

The word of God is said here, in verse 12, to be sharper than a sword, sharper even a double edged sword, which adds to the image of its **sharpness** and, also perhaps, of its ability to **pierce** deeply.

A hammer can **smash** things, a dull sword can **tear** things, a sharp single edged sword can **chop** things into fine pieces, but a very sharp, double edged, sword can cleanly **pierce** and **divide** things which are normally difficult to pierce or divide.

And **what** can the sword of God's word pierce and divide?

Well we are here speaking of its operation on the human man or woman to whom it is spoken.

And there is a rhetorical piling up of images here that mean collectively to say that the sword of God's word can pierce deeply into and divide **everything** that there is in man: body, soul, spirit, and every component of these.

It would be a mistake to attempt to divine the preachers "psychology."

His point is that the word of God in a **discerning** word, which can discern, that is distinguish and separately consider the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Thus the word of God can discern how men are truly disposed toward God.

And thus the word of God is only salvific --- i.e. it only saves.

And never destructive.

Or so it seems to me.

Please consider the following Verse 13.

Verse 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.

Verse 13 begins with the word "and"

It is the continuation of the thought which began in verse 12.

I do not understand this to mean that God somehow needs to speak to man and measure his response in order to determine what is truly hidden in man's heart and soul.

God does not need to do experiments.

Rather I read verse 13 to mean that **nothing** is ever hidden from the eye of God.

We are **transparent** to him.

But we are **not** transparent to ourselves or to each other.

He speaks to us using human speech, in order that **we can** "see" (perceive, understand) what he sees in us.

And remember these are the **living** and **active** words of God, which cannot simply be ignored.

God's words **exposes** and **convicts** each man of sin, whether or not they will admit it.

God's word also provides what is needed for the **salvation** of the unsaved person.

And what is needed for the **sanctification** of the saved person.

And what is needed for us to **minister** to one another in every way that we need to minister to one other.

The only human person who possibly does not benefit from hearing the Word of God is one who is irredeemably lost, if such a person exists, and even he is not harmed by the Word. It merely confirms his status.

The word, then, is what we need. It is what everyone needs, without exception. It is what the preacher has been preaching and will continue to preach in this sermon.

Chapter 4, Verses 14-16

Will someone please read Chapter 4, Verses 14-16 in English (ESV)

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.

Thank you. Will somebody now please read Hebrews, Chapter 4, verses 14 -16 in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku).

God's word, spoken long ago to the fathers by the prophets and now at the end of time by a Son, is spoken to the Church.

It is alive and active and sharp and --- therefore apparently --- also quite dangerous,

because it reveals, through our willful disobedience, that some of us may not truly be children of God.

We are instead hypocrites, just pretending to be among God's people, but we are actually headed toward destruction.

But it is not the **word** that kills us, it is our **sin** that kills us.

The word simply **reveals** our sin, and our doom, to us.

Therefore the Holy Spirit uses the word **first** to convict of sin and **next** to lead us to Christ and salvation.

Jesus stands before us, not to condemn us, but to save us.

to save us not "**from**" God but from **Satan**, and **sin**, and **death**.

It is through Jesus that **God** eternally **reconciles** himself with us.

This is what the author to Hebrews means in Chapter 3, Verse 1, when he refers to Jesus as the High Priest of our Confession.

It is to Jesus that we bring our troubled consciences as we are brought under the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and the Word which has been spoken to us.

And Jesus can help us.

Verses 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.

First of all, Jesus is very **great**, as the author of Hebrews has been helping us to see for four chapters now. He is higher than everything in the heavens and on earth; he is the Son of God; he is God. He **cannot** fail to help us for lack of **power**!

We should certainly not think we could find a more **effective** intermediary, such as the descendants of Aaron, or even Aaron, or even Moses himself.

All of these, especially Moses, were faithful intercessors for the people before God, and so somehow help us to begin to **understand** in the most provisional way the greatness of the Son of God.

But they are not in the same category with the Son of God. He is infinitely more powerful but, also, infinitely more **loving** and also perfectly righteous and etc..

Verse 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.

This thought was presented before in Chapter 2, near the end, and it will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Again we are reminded that, although the Son of God is the Sovereign Lord of all Creation, with the power to make and unmake galaxies and to roll up the world like a garment and etc.

He actually set **aside** his majesty and became for a while a little **lower** than the angels.

He actually suffered our **weaknesses**.

He actually was **tempted**, as we are, but without sin.

So he is able to **sympathize** with our weaknesses.

Bottom line: we can **approach** him, and get **help**, and even get **sympathy!!**

It is this **combination** of power and **compassion** that makes Jesus such a great High Priest.

There are a couple of things to notice here.

First, I think we are to understand that Jesus suffered all of weaknesses that men suffer and which are not intrinsically sinful: hunger, thirst, fatigue, heat, cold, and death among them.

Second, and in addition, I think we are to understand that Jesus also suffered all of the weaknesses and temptations which in men are generally mingled with sin, but that Jesus experienced these without sin.

This would be things like fear, loneliness, worry, sadness, anger, and some others. In us such emotions are almost always sinful because we who experience them are sinful from birth. It is our sin that tempts us!

But in Jesus who was without sin, such weaknesses and temptations were no less real; thus unlike most of us, Jesus was tempted by Satan personally.

In fact it has been pointed out that, while his **ability** to resist temptation was commensurately great, the temptations which Christ endured must have been **difficult** beyond our imagination.

We all hold out for a little while and then, finally succumb to our weaknesses; but he had to hold out with no end; and, at the same time, it was always within his power to do as he pleased.

Finally, it seems likely that because of the great power which he had set aside but could have taken up at any moment, the things by which he could be tempted are beyond our imagination; we get a glimpse maybe in the temptation in the wilderness following his baptism.

So when, by the **Word** and the **Spirit**, our weaknesses are exposed and we are moved to repentance, but fear that we cannot endure the temptation to follow, we know that we really do have a sympathetic friend in Jesus and one who also has all power and authority. He can and he will get us through.

So it is OK to STRIVE (v. 11) to enter God's rest, because Jesus **GUARANTEES** our victory.

This is our confidence and our boasting in our hope (3:6).

Jesus is our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

So ends today's reading, in Verse 16

Verse 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.

This is a word spoken to the **church**, including all the saints who **struggle**, as **Jesus** did, to obey God despite their weaknesses and temptations.

Jesus **knows** what you are going through.

This is a word spoken to the church, including all the saints who **have** sinned, as Jesus did **not**, but sincerely wish to repent and become more obedient, but know that they do not have the power to do it.

Jesus **has** the power.

This is a word spoken to those on the **edge** of the church, who wonder if they are really **inside** or **outside** of that boundary of saving faith.

Jesus has the compassion **and** the power to help you also; but come, and come **quickly**.

This is also a word spoken to those **outside** the church and who remain in rebellion against God.

Jesus is waiting for you to come **also**.

Come quickly, lest you ultimately **fail** to enter God's rest.