

Main Idea: God not only offers us His rest, but He graciously has provided two resources for entering His rest. We learn about these resources in Hebrews 4:12-16.

- I. We have His Word (12-13).
  - A. God’s Word is alive.
    1. The Scriptures are not merely old words written on paper.
    2. In the Scriptures God speaks to us today.
  - B. God’s Word is powerful.
    1. It can do what nothing else can do.
    2. It will accomplish exactly what God intends.
  - C. God’s Word is precise.
    1. It’s like a sword, only sharper.
    2. It can cut right through any barrier.
  - D. God’s Word is penetrating.
    1. It distinguishes things that seem united.
    2. It reveals the truth about the part of us that nobody sees.
  - E. God’s Word exposes the truth about our hearts.
    1. It gives us categories for making sense of the inner man.
    2. It deals with both fruit-sins and root-sins.
      - a. It’s not enough to address merely sinful behavior.
      - b. It’s vital that we also address the issues of the heart.
  - F. God’s Word prepares us for the day of judgment.
    1. The One who gave us His Word misses nothing.
    2. The One who gave us His Word will expose everything.
    3. The One who gave us His Word will one day have the final word with us.
- II. We have a High Priest (14-16).
  - A. Make sure you are putting your faith in Him (14-15).
  - B. Be sure that He will give you exactly what you need (16).

The Bottom Line: In His grace God has given us everything we need to enter His rest.

Let’s read together today’s text.

*Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4:12-16 (ESV)* “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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.”

For the past several weeks we have been pondering the amazing subject of *God’s rest* in the book of Hebrews. God worked, then rested, and now offers to people like us the fruit of His rest. That was true of His *creation work*, says Hebrews 4:4-5. God worked six days, then rested on the seventh, and then offered to mankind the fruit of His rest which was life in relationship with Him in the paradise He created. Of course, man violated God’s creation rest by transgressing His command, so consequently man forfeited the experience of God’s rest.

The solution? God accomplished another work, the *work of redemption*, and the same pattern holds in God’s redemption work. In the person of His Son, Jesus Christ,

---

\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

God worked to redeem sinners by means of what He accomplished on the cross. Christ came to do the work His Father had given Him to do, and having completed that work *He rested*, and now offers to mankind *the fruit of His rest*. God offers His rest, says Hebrews 4:10, to the person who will “rest from his own work” and “enter into God’s rest.”

As we finished last time we saw what at first looks like a contradiction, but isn’t. Verse 10 says that to enter God’s rest we must *rest*, specifically we must *rest from our own work*. But verse 11 says, “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.” That indicates we must extend *effort* to enter God’s rest. Can both be true, that to enter God’s rest we must both rest *and* work? Yes. We must rest from *our work*, and enter into the fruit of *His work*.

So entering into God’s rest is not entering into a life of passive inactivity. Rather it’s entering into the fruit of Christ’s rest, Christ’s *accomplishment*, which produces in us a radically new approach to life. We work, yes, but as Galatians 2:20 says, it’s His power at work in us. We produce good works, but Ephesians 2:8-10 reveals that it’s His grace that enables us to produce those good works. To use the language of Philippians 2:12-13, we *work out our salvation*, but we do so because God is *working in us*.

You say, “Hold on. I have to be honest. Verse 11 says we’re to *make every effort to enter His rest* so that we don’t *fall by following their example*. This is where I struggle. Yes, I believe in Christ, and I believe I’ve entered into the satisfaction of His accomplishment. I am trusting in Him and not in my own goodness to get me to heaven. But there are days when, quite frankly, I feel like I’m not going to make it. I need more than the *promise* of God’s rest. I need more than motivation. I need help *now*.”

Let me encourage you with two thoughts. The first, you’re not alone. Remember, the first readers of this epistle were so overwhelmed they were considering throwing in the towel and going back to their old ways. So, if you feel weak and needy, know that there are other needy Christ-followers in this building, including the person speaking to you.

Here’s the second thought. What you need (and what I need), God has graciously provided. He had given us *two wonderful resources* for entering His rest. We discover what these resources are in the very next passage, Hebrews 4:12-16. We’re going to spend the majority of our time today marveling at the first resource, and then mention the second resource at the end which we’ll ponder more fully next time.

### I. We have His Word (12-13).

Listen again to verse 12 (NIV), “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

These are familiar verses to many of us and for good reason. They give us tremendous insight into the unique nature of God’s Word. But please notice the first word. “*For* the Word of God...” The “for” indicates there’s a connection between verse 12 and what has preceded it. What is that connection? What do these insights into God’s Word have to do with the preceding context? The writer has been talking about *God’s rest*, and he just exhorted his readers to make every effort to enter that rest. Why now, all of a sudden, does he launch into a brief discourse on the nature of God’s Word?

The connection seems to be the final word of verse 11. *Don’t follow their example of disobedience*. He’s been talking about the Israelites who missed the Promised Land. Don’t follow *their* example. And what was their example? In a word, *disobedience*.

Ponder that word for a moment. In order to be guilty of disobedience, what's necessary? Think of your childhood. To disobey implies there was some instruction you were supposed to obey, right? There were some *words* that your parents spoke to you that called for your obedience. You learned early on that your parents' words possessed a different level of authority from the words of your best friend, Billy. If Billy said to stop hitting him, you took it as a suggestion. If Dad said to stop the hitting, you knew it was no suggestion.

To borrow the illustration, the Israelites treated God's Words like they were Billy's words and consequently disobeyed them. Don't follow their example, says the writer of Hebrews to us.

Why not? Why is it foolish to disobey God's Word? Verse 12 answers the question, "*For the word of God is living and active...*" There's something intrinsic to God's Word that makes disobedience to it an act of insanity. God's Word possess six characteristics which on the negative side explain why we ought *not* disobey His Word, and on the positive side explain why we can trust it.

**A. God's Word is alive.** "For the word of God is living." What exactly is the author thinking about when he refers to the "word of God"? Note it's not plural ("words of God") but singular ("word of God"). God's *word* is anything God has spoken.

Hebrews 1:1 says God "spoke to our forefathers through the prophets." That revelation which eventually became what we call the Old Testament was His *word*. What's more, Hebrews 1:2 says "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." That revelation of the person of Jesus Christ was likewise His *word*. In fact, that's what the apostle John called the incarnate Son of God in John 1:1 & 14, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

Hebrews 1:3 takes it a step further, indicating that the Son is presently "sustaining all things by his powerful word." So, the *Living Word* sustains all things by His *word*. And that *word* is what the writer of Hebrews has in mind in 4:12.

That word is *living*. It's alive. Allow me to remind you of something we've seen in nearly every passage we've studied in Hebrews. The writer is constantly quoting the Scriptures (at least fourteen direct quotes of what we call the Old Testament in chapters 1-4), and when he cites a text he attributes its source as being *God*. For instance, in 1:5 he writes, "For to which of the angels did *God ever say*," and then he quotes from Psalm 2:7. In 1:6 the writer uses the phrase, "he says" to introduce the quote from Deuteronomy 32:43. We see it again in 1:7, "he says," introducing the quote from Psalm 104:4. Over and over again we see the same: "he says" (1:8), "he says" (1:10), "did God ever say" (1:13), "he says" (2:12), "the Holy Spirit says" (3:7), "God has said" (4:3), and so on. Over and over again the writer equates the Old Testament Scriptures with God's Word. When we hear from this book, says the writer, we are hearing from God.

What about the New Testament books? Are they also God's Word? Take a look at Hebrews 2:1, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have *heard*, so that we do not drift away." What have we heard? In the specific terms of 2:3, the writer says we've heard the message of salvation that was "first announced by the Lord" and was then "confirmed to us by those who heard him [i.e. the apostles]." That verbal message has since been written down in what we call the *New Testament*.

When someone says, "If God would just speak to me, then I'd trust Him!", take that person to the book of Hebrews and say, "My friend, I have good news for you. God *is*

*speaking to us.* You have a Bible, don't you? Then you have the opportunity to hear His voice every day."

Think about friends. *The Scriptures are not merely old words written on paper. In the Scriptures God speaks to us today.* Present tense. His written words that we find in the Scriptures are *living*. Not *were alive* a long time ago. But *living*.

In Acts 7:38 Stephen said that Moses received "living words" on Mount Sinai. Not past tense, but present tense. Living words.

Peter likewise emphasizes this aspect of God's Word in 1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the *living* and enduring word of God." Interesting, isn't it? Peter says that it's the living word of God that the Holy Spirit uses to produce life in a sinner's heart and thereby birth that sinner into God's family.

Paul says something similar in Romans 10:17 when he asserts, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

Brothers and sisters, are you burdened for lost people and do you desire to see them come to faith in Christ? That's all of us, isn't it? Then let's share God's Word with them because though they are presently spiritually dead, the Spirit of God can work through the Word of God to generate faith in a dead sinner's heart.

Do you remember when He did that in your life? Perhaps you were listening to someone preaching from this Book. Or perhaps you were reading it. And you knew that God was speaking to you. One moment you were dead in your sins. The next moment you were alive. What a change! And it was God's Word that the Spirit of God used to accomplish that miracle.<sup>1</sup> His Word, indeed, is alive.

"But sometimes living things become dormant", you say, "like a bear in winter hibernation. Can that happen to the Bible?" No, not to the living Word of God, for it's not only *living*, but it's also "active." The Greek adjective is *energes* (energetic) and literally means "in working" or "work within." Hence, a second characteristic.

**B. God's Word is powerful.** Many years ago, we noticed a big gap developing between our concrete-slab garage floor and the back wall of our house. Water from underground springs was flowing beneath the surface and causing our house to shift. It took a French drain to redirect the water and two concrete pillars to stabilize the back wall. I learned an important lesson from that. There's power in things you can't see.

Please realize that God's Word possesses inherent power. How powerful is it?

1. *It can do what nothing else can do.* Robert Gromacki explains, "There is a moral, spiritual dynamic in the divine Word which can produce a transformation of character within a person."<sup>2</sup> Think about that. It can totally change a person into something new. And not only *can* God's Word produce that change, it *will*.

2. *It will accomplish exactly what God intends.* God Himself offers this assessment of His Word in Isaiah 55:10-11. "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 4:5, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." And why would he preach this message? Verse 6 tells us, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

<sup>2</sup> Observation by R. Gromacki, p. 77.

from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

A person never leaves an exposure to the Word of God in the same condition. *Never*. God’s Word always accomplishes His purpose for the hearer.

You say, “How can that be? What if I’m not paying attention right now? The Word won’t accomplish anything in my life, will it?” The tragic answer is *yes*. I say tragic because rather than leaving with a heart that’s a little softer and more pliable, you’ll leave with a heart that’s a little harder. The same sun that melts the butter hardens the clay.

That’s why it’s vital to realize that in this Book, God doesn’t merely talk to us. He calls for a response. *Every time*. As we’ve heard again and again in Hebrews, the writer keeps citing Psalm 95:7, “*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*”

Now a third characteristic. God’s Word is alive, powerful, and *precise*.

**C. God’s Word is precise.** “Sharper than any double-edged sword.” The word “sword” in verse 12 is the Greek *machairan* which referred to the small sword used in hand to hand combat. It’s the same word used to depict the sword the soldiers carried when they arrested Jesus in Gethsemane, and that Peter used to cut off Malchus’s ear. In the Greek text we’re told that this sword has not “two edges” but “two mouths” (*di-stomos*). This reminds us of Ephesians 6:17 where we’re exhorted to take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” God’s Word is the God-given, offensive weapon in our spiritual armor.

Yet Hebrews 4:12 doesn’t say God’s Word *is* a sword, but *like a sword*, only sharper. The writer makes reference to a *sword*, says Philip Hughes, to show that God’s Word “is more powerful and penetrating than the keenest instrument devised by man.”<sup>3</sup> What makes God’s Word like a sword is the reality that it *can cut right through any barrier*.

You say, “I’m a Christian but I still have doubts.” Okay, you’re in good company. Most of us struggle with doubts from time to time. So, face your doubts before an open Bible and you’ll find that your doubts are no match for God’s Word. Nor is fear, or anxiety, or discouragement, or any other threat to God’s rest. God’s Word has the power to cut right through any would-be barrier. Related to this, a fourth characteristic.

**D. God’s Word is penetrating.** “Sharper than any double-edged sword, it *penetrates* even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.” God’s Word has the ability to pierce and go deep in a person. And what does it do once inside? It “penetrates,” says the author in the NIV, to the point of “dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.” The ESV says, “piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow.”

Let me put it this way. *God’s Word distinguishes things that seem united*. Like the terms “soul” (*psyche*) and “spirit” (*pneumatos*).

Several years ago, a person entered a college classroom on an Illinois campus and killed several people, injured others, and then took his own life. When a tragedy like that happens we often hear this explanation, “Something must have snapped inside that man.” We say that because we know the problem wasn’t the man’s *finger* that pulled the trigger. We know the problem goes far deeper and has to do with the part of man we can’t see.

The technical term is anthropology (the study of man). Why do people do what they do? Everyone has an anthropology, an explanation as to why people do what they do.

The Bible too presents an anthropology and it comes from the Creator Himself. According to these God-inspired words, there’s the part of man that you *can* see (the

---

<sup>3</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 164.

material, the physical), and there's the part of man you *can't* see (the immaterial). And to describe the immaterial aspect of man the Bible uses terms like "soul" and "spirit" (and in other places words like "mind" and "conscience" and "will"). Some people actually argue about whether man is a dichotomous being (made up of two parts) or a trichotomous being (made up of three parts). The reason they argue has to do with the complexities involved in the human makeup.

Now answer this question. What's the difference between *psyche* (the word for "soul" in verse 12) and *pneumatōs* (the word for "spirit" in verse 12)? I checked a lexicon and saw that *psyche* refers to a person's "inner self," and *pneumatōs* refers to a person's "inner being." Those two definitions sound pretty similar to me, and that's the point. We don't have the capacity to fully understand how the "parts" of our anatomy relate and differ. But our Maker does! And in His Word, He actually makes distinctions between facets of our makeup that seem united.<sup>4</sup>

But there's more. God's Word actually *reveals the truth about the part of us that nobody sees*. The fact is, God knows things about the inner man that we could never know apart from His Word, for we lack instrumentation with sufficient precision.

Five centuries ago John Calvin said, "There is nothing so hard or firm in a man, nothing so deeply hidden that the efficacy of the word does not penetrate through to it."<sup>5</sup>

Warren Wiersbe puts it this way, "In the Word we see God, and we also see how God sees us. We see ourselves as we really are."<sup>6</sup>

Listen to this ancient prayer. The person (I believe it's Augustine) takes to heart what we're seeing in Hebrews 4:1. He's quite transparent. "O thou elect blade and sharpest sword, who art able powerfully to penetrate the hard shell of the human heart, transfix [grip, hold, rivet] my heart with the shaft of thy love.... Pierce, O Lord, pierce, I beseech thee, this most obdurate [obstinate, stubborn, unyielding] mind of mine with the holy and powerful rapier [blade] of thy grace."<sup>7</sup>

These are characteristics of God's Word. Alive. Powerful. Precise. Penetrating.

**E. God's Word exposes the truth about our hearts.** Notice how verse 12 concludes (NIV), "It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The ESV says, "Discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

In his book *The Enemy Within* Kris Lundgaard offers this convicting observation: "Many people live in darkness and ignorance about their own hearts. They keep careful track of how their investments are doing on Wall Street and get frequent checkups at the doctor; they watch what they eat and work out at the gym three or four times a week to keep their bodies finely tuned. But how many people give the least thought to their souls? If it is important to watch over and care for our bodies and investments, which will soon die and rot, how much more important is it to guard our immortal souls?"<sup>8</sup>

This is one of the *many* reasons we need the Bible, my friend. It helps us see the truth about our hearts. The term *kardia* here doesn't refer to the physical organ that's pumping blood in your chest. I like the definition offered by Philip Hughes: "the central seat of human personality, the deep fount of man's life in all its aspects, spiritual, intellectual,

---

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce comments, "That the word of God probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light is what is meant." (Bruce, p. 82)

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, quoted in Philip Hughes, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> Warren Wiersbe, p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> In *Augustini Opera*, IX (Lyon, 1664), taken from Philip Hughes, p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*, p. 27.

moral, and emotional.” And then Hughes explains, “It is here, in this radical center of human selfhood, that the word of God does its work.”<sup>9</sup>

Follow your heart. That’s pretty common advice these days. Should I marry this person? *Follow your heart*. Should I choose this career? *Follow your heart*. Should I stay in this relationship? *Follow your heart*.

But there’s something about our hearts that we tend to forget. As Jeremiah 17:9 explains, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” My heart is prone to deceive me. I rationalize things in my heart. I blame-shift in my heart. And you do this too.

Listen again to Kris Lundgaard: “The heart is a maze that only God can solve. Computers can’t decipher its floor plan. We modestly admit we don’t know someone else’s heart, but the truth is we can’t even know our own. Do you always know why you choose chocolate over vanilla? Why one day your passions sizzle and another you’re a dead leaf in the wind? Can you number all the events and images that impress your heart and make it lean this way or that? Haven’t you been surprised by the insincerity and even intrigue you’ve found in your heart?”<sup>10</sup>

Yes. I most certainly have. Where did that word come from? That wicked thought? That foolish desire? Those are daily internal discussions.

Thankfully, God has given us the perfect resource so we can know the truth about our hearts. His Word is a *critic* of the human heart. *Kritikos* is the Greek word for the English word “judges” (NIV)/“discerning” (ESV) in verse 12. *Kritikos* means “able to judge and discern.”

What do we discover about hearts when we look into God’s Word? *First, it gives us categories for making sense of the inner man*. We see two right here. God’s Word judges the “thoughts” and “attitudes/intentions” of the heart. Barclay says that “thoughts” (*enthumesis*) refers to the emotional aspect of man, while “attitudes” (*ennoia*) have to do with the intellectual aspect of man.<sup>11</sup>

Kris Lundgaard asks an interesting question. “Which is easier: to sit with a bucket of butter-soaked popcorn and watch Tom Cruise on the big screen for two hours, or kneel down and pray for five minutes. Tom Cruise wins hands down, because there is literally no competition.” And why is that? The Bible tells us flat out by giving us a category called ‘the flesh,’ followed by this explanation in Galatians 5:17, “The flesh wars against the Spirit.” That’s what’s happening within us, says the Bible. If we know Christ, a battle is raging.

It’s basketball tournament time. What does every good coach do before he plays a game? He studies his opponent. He scouts the opposing team, watches film, all the while looking for tendencies, and then he shares this information with his team.

A lot of sincere Christians aren’t doing so well simply because they’re failing to do their homework. Is it important for us to know what the Bible says about things like our inner man? If we want to win the game, it is!

Listen to Lundgaard again: “What the flesh hates is God, so it resists anything that smacks of God—especially communion with him. The flesh can curl up by your side and watch mindless movies all night long. But let even the barest thought of meditations flutter into your mind, and the flesh goes to Red Alert. Before you get past ‘Our Father,’

---

<sup>9</sup> Philip Hughes, p. 166.

<sup>10</sup> Kris Lundgaard, pp. 36-7.

<sup>11</sup> Barclay, p. 40. Leon Morris agrees, p. 44.

your eyes, which were glued to the screen, now sag in sleepiness, and your attention, which was so fixed on the plot, now zips around the universe faster than the Starship Enterprise.”<sup>12</sup>

If we don't understand the tactics of what the Bible calls “the flesh,” we won't understand why it's so hard to pray. But God gave us His Word so we can, not simply *understand* the flesh, but *overcome* it.

In addition to giving us categories for understanding our inner man, the Bible does something else that's vital for victory. *It deals with both fruit-sins and root-sins.*

Think of an apple tree. Why is there fruit on it? It starts in the roots.

Think of the typical counsel that's often given to struggling Christians, “You need to stop missing church, and you need to stop ignoring your Bible reading.” Is that good counsel? Sure! But it doesn't go far enough. It addresses *fruit* sins but not the *root* sins. The question is, “What's going on in a person's heart that affects why he doesn't come to church regularly and doesn't read his Bible consistently?” In his heart are certain thoughts and desires that powerfully influence his actions.

So, let's take a closer look at our friend. He's missing church. That's not good, but that's just the fruit sin. There could be a host of *root* sins that produce the same fruit. Maybe there's bitterness in his heart over not getting that Sunday School teaching position he wanted. Or maybe he's upset because someone didn't speak to him. Or maybe he's hurting due to a loss in his life. Or maybe he's avoiding problems he needs to face and coming to church reminds him of this. Or maybe he misses church because he simply loves the world more than God.

I like the way Kris Lundgaard puts it, “To slap a copy of the Ten Commandments in front of someone under the rule of sin and tell him to submit is as effective as trying to make a rhinoceros jump by whacking him on the rump with a blade of grass.”<sup>13</sup>

Think about that. If we're going to help people change, if *WE* are going to change, **it's not enough to address merely *sinful behavior*.** We must go deeper. **We must also address the *issues of the heart*.** And this is precisely what the Bible enables us to do.

Let me give you another example. A teen gets drunk at a party. A sin? Sure, a fruit-sin. What's the root sin? It could be a host of things: peer pressure (the Bible calls that the fear of man), unbelief (he really doesn't believe God is watching), the love of pleasure, and more.

A woman slanders her sister in Christ. A sin? Sure, another fruit-sin. The root sin? It could be pride in her heart (she thinks she's better than others), or her lust for power (sharing information makes her feel powerful). Maybe it's jealousy. Perhaps she's hiding something, and spreading juicy morsels about another person keeps the spotlight off of herself.

You say, “Wow! Helping people change sounds complicated.” Yes it is, especially if we try and do it based on our own wisdom. But when we use God's Word, we are shining a spotlight into the human heart and we're able to deal with both fruit-sins *and* root-sins.

This brings us to a sixth characteristic of God's Word (and perhaps most important).

**F. God's Word prepares us for the day of judgment.** Verse 13 states, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

---

<sup>12</sup> Kris Lundgaard, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Lundgaard, p. 32.

Some people are pretty good at talking their way out of things. “Oh, *sorry* officer. Was there a speed limit sign back there? I didn’t see it. I *never* go faster than the speed limit.”

But there will be no pulling the wool over God’s eyes. *The One who gave us His Word misses nothing.* “*Nothing* is hidden from God’s sight.”

What’s more, *the One who gave us His Word will expose everything.* The text says everything is “uncovered” (NIV), a word literally meaning “naked” (*gymna*; as in the KJV and ESV). And everything is “exposed” (ESV; “laid bare” in the NIV) before the eyes of God. It’s related to the Greek word for “neck” (*trachelos*). Tracheotomy comes from the term. It was a wrestler’s word and used for seizing an opponent by the throat in such a way that he could not move. It’s a sobering reminder that we can run from God for a long time, but in the end we will not escape His grip.

The same word was also used of criminals. Listen to William Barclay’s description: “Sometimes when a criminal was being led to judgment or to execution, a dagger, with point upwards, was so fixed below his chin that he could not bow his head in concealment but had to keep it up so that all could see his face and know his dishonour. When that was done, a man was said to be [laid bare].”<sup>14</sup>

Do you realize how vulnerable we are before God? If you don’t, my friend, I challenge you to read this Book carefully. In God’s Word, we see God and we see how God sees us. Indeed, *the One who gave us His Word will one day have the final word with us.* “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

It was on a Thursday several years ago that I was fighting a migraine and went home and searched for the darkest place in the house. I ended up in our windowless basement and took a seat and looked into the darkness that surrounded me. I could see absolutely nothing since it was pitch black. But as the minutes passed, something happened. I noticed that it *wasn’t* pitch black and began to see the outlines of shapes around me. The bookshelf, the fireplace mantle, a piece of furniture against the wall. What at first seemed to be a mass of darkness became clear the longer I sat there.

What made the difference? Just a little light. That’s all. A little light will dispel the most intense darkness.

Let me say it again. If you want to see yourself the way God sees you, you can wait for the judgment day and find out. I would not recommend that however. I recommend that right now you give careful attention to His Word so you’re not surprised then.

Here’s a good place to start, Psalm 139:1-12: “O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

---

<sup>14</sup> Barclay, *Hebrews*, p. 40.

I'm so thankful God has given us, not simply the *promise* of entering His rest, but *resources* to make sure that we who are His will make it. He's given us, first of all, His precious Word. Are you daily reading His Word? If not, why not? What's the root sin? Perhaps your heart is cluttered with too many other loves. Perhaps it's the fear of man that's keeping you from humbling yourself and asking someone to help you learn how to study the Bible. Maybe you don't read it simply because you don't know the Author. Jesus Christ gave His life to rescue sinners like you and me, and rose again. And today He will save you and give you a new heart, if you'll repent and trust in Him.

Then there's a second resource, one that I'll merely mention now and then explore carefully with you next time, the Lord willing.

## II. We have a High Priest (14-16).

Verse 14 says, "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."

Martin Luther observed, "After terrifying us, the Apostle now comforts us, after pouring wine into our wound, he now pours oil."<sup>15</sup> There is a high priest, dear friend.

**A. Make sure you are putting your faith in Him (14-15).** That's the exhortation in verses 14-15. And if you are, you can be sure of this.

**B. Be sure that He will give you exactly what you need (16).** That's the message of 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."

Here's today's bottom line. *In His grace God has given us everything we need to enter His rest.* We have His Word. We have a High Priest. So let's rest!

**Closing Song:** #275 "*How Firm a Foundation*" (all four verses)

### Community Group Discussion:

1. In Hebrews 4:12-16 we learn that God has given us resources that we might experience the joy of entering His rest. After reading today's passage, discuss initial thoughts that this passage/message raises for you.
2. Verse 12 begins with the connective word "for". What is the connection between what the writer has been talking about in verses 1-11 and what he talks about in verses 12-13?
3. What do we learn about God's Word in verse 12? What are some characteristics of God's Word and what can it accomplish in our lives?
4. What does it mean to say that God's Word "pierces to the division of soul and spirit" and that it "discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart"? Why do we need the Word of God to do this for us? What must we do if we're to experience this? Think of a time when you personally experienced this "piercing" ministry of the Word and share it with your neighbor.
5. What are some practical steps we can take this week to personalize what we've learned today? After sharing, spend time as a group *praying the Word* with prayers of both thanks and supplication.

---

<sup>15</sup> Taken from Philip Hughes, p. 169.