

Hebrews 4:1-16: Would You Like to Stop Feeling *Less Than*?

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I. Introduction

Do you ever feel less than, like there's something wrong with you, like you don't measure up? We often feel this way. It happens when we're kids in the playground and grade school, no one picks us on the team or we're picked last, they make fun of us. And this carries over into our teenage years and adulthood. It happens in every area of life; we constantly measure ourselves against others. Wouldn't it be nice to feel completely at rest with who you are?

II. Hebrews 4:1-16: God Offers You the Ultimate Rest from All Your Inadequacies

4:1-10, since God killed everyone who disobeyed Moses and refused to enter the Promise Land and the readers of Hebrews are in danger of committing the same sin of unbelief but against someone who deserves abundantly more glory and honor than Moses—Jesus Christ our Apostle, High Priest, and the One who built all things—the author wants his audience to fear lest any of them fall short of entering God's promised rest. The Exodus Generation failed to enter God's rest because they failed to believe the Goodnews God told them about the land of Canaan, that they would conquer it no matter the odds, no matter the giants, and make a home for themselves that flowed with milk and honey. Therefore, God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest. The rest here is the Promise Land rest. But how can this be rest when they have to take on various armies, including giants? It's rest from their slavery in Egypt, but more importantly, it's rest because they're going to stop trying to work it out themselves and rest in, rely on God no matter the odds. God will fight the giants for them (Deuteronomy 1:30; 20:4).

This is the other rest the author mentions, a rest that's been around since the 7th day of creation: Creation Sabbath-Rest. It's the kind of rest that God enjoyed right after He created the heavens and the earth and declared them to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). He was completely satisfied with His work and could therefore rest from all of it. This rest eludes those who refuse to believe which is why God swore that the Exodus Generation would not enter it. But it's available to all who believe, which is why God said through David in Psalm 95:7-8, "Today, if you will hear His voice do not harden your hearts." David wrote this hundreds of years after Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promise Land. This means that this rest that God's offering the audience of Hebrews (and you and me) is still available; it's been around since the 7th day of creation. Joshua gave Israel rest from their enemies (Joshua 21:44) and from being slaves in Egypt, but Joshua didn't give Israel Creation Sabbath-Rest (though he himself had it, Joshua 24:15). This rest is available to all of God's people who believe in Him, who trust Him to end their striving. Those who enter God's Creation Sabbath-Rest, can put an end to their work as God put an end to His (this is Adam and Eve [and you and me] in Genesis 2 instead of Genesis 3; it's the rest David mentioned in the first half of the psalm, 95:1-6, i.e., when we're in God's presence, all is right with the world).

4:11-13, we need God's rest because outside of God's presence, it's Genesis 3 all over again. That is, when we decide to go it alone, to live our lives by our own strength, we will end up laid out naked and bare, covered with guilt and shame. God's Word will reveal every flaw we have, every shortcoming in us. God's Word sees everything and He's the one to whom we must give an account. So if we refuse to follow His Word, there will be consequences. We must therefore "be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

4:14-16, now the author of Hebrews begins to show in detail what he's already alluded to (1:3; 2:17), that Jesus is superior to Aaron and the entire Levitical priesthood. Why should they hold fast to their confession of faith in Jesus? Because this high priest is not like any other. This one is not merely human; He's God in the flesh, the Son of God. And this one doesn't serve in an earthly temple; He serves in the actual temple that is beyond the heavens. This High Priest is not detached from our experience. He knows exactly what it is to struggle in this life, to be tempted in all areas of life. Therefore, He's able to sympathize with our pain and agony. Additionally, even though He was tested in all areas of life and suffered beyond belief, He never failed! This means He's able to help us overcome every struggle!

And knowing that God's Word will lay us bare, that there's nowhere to run from our failures and inadequacies, Jesus, our High Priest, beckons us to come boldly, unashamed, to His throne of "grace" knowing that we will find forgiveness and mercy and the grace to help us in our time of need. Any time (24/7) we need help, He's a moment's notice away.

When you feel like the biggest loser, Jesus brings you into His presence where you see everything crystal clearly. Jesus came to free you completely (Luke 4:18). He promises that you will no longer have to prove yourself to anyone, especially God, because the moment you believed in Him, He declared you righteous (Romans 5; 8:31-39). From now on, it will be Jesus who will do the work for you; it is His power, His wisdom, and His guidance that you will use to live your life (Galatians 4:6; 2:20). He calls you to take His yoke upon yourself, but His yoke, His labor, His work is so easy that you will find rest in the midst of life's labor (Matthew 11:28-30).

In the beginning we (Adam and Eve) were completely under the Lord's rest, rule, protection, and guidance. And life was awesome (Genesis 2). How did we lose it? We took that rule away from God and gave it to ourselves; we decided to rest in ourselves but there's no rest there. There's only guilt and shame and falling short (Genesis 3). Jesus is offering you true rest from your constant labor.

III. Conclusion

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.