

## “God’s Living Word”

### Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus, Our High Priest

Hebrews 4:12-16

Rev. Jeff Stivason

May 11, 2018

**Jeff:** Don, do you want to lead us into worship?

**Sig:** And before you do that, I want to say one thing. *(Laughter)* I wanted to let you know that I got an email today. Apparently part of the audio picks me up saying, “Use the microphone when you have questions.” And one of the men wrote back and said, “Thank you that you use the microphone, because I listen every week.” And he lives down in Florida. So wait for the mike from Bill McCoy.

**Jeff:** That’s a powerful microphone.

**Sig:** That’s what I say. *(Laughter) (Music)*

**Jeff:** Our merciful God, we thank You that we can gather in this place this morning. And we’re thankful that as we gather here, we gather around one thing which is Your word. And it is indeed Your word. And we’re thankful for Your having spoken it, for Your having inscripturated it, and Your Spirit who still takes it up moment by moment, and applies it not only to the life of the unbeliever, but also to our own. And Father, we’re thankful that this is Your instrument by which You mold and shape us, by which You take off the rough edges and smooth us, conforming us to the image of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Father, we’re thankful that we can be here this morning and open Your word. And we pray that You will bless us as we study it. Father, we pray that You’ll do with us what You will. We’re thankful to be here, and ask for Your blessing upon us. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Let’s turn to Hebrews chapter 4. But I thought that maybe before we get to that point, I thought that maybe I’d just ask that we have a moment of silence. *(Laughter)*

**Transcriber’s Note:** The Penguins were eliminated from the playoffs.

**Jeff:** Having said that, let’s cheer for Fleury. *(Laughter)* And I might add that the pseudo-Penguins team, which is Neal, Peron, Fleury, England, and whoever else is on there. *(Laughter)* All right.

**Participant:** Now we can enjoy the Pirates because their season has already started.

**Jeff:** Who’s that now? *(Laughter)* All right, let’s turn to Hebrews chapter 4. Don, do you have that with you?

**Don:** Yes, I do.

**Jeff:** Would you read 4:12-16?

**Don:** Okay.

**Jeff:** Thank you.

**Don:** “*For the word of God is living and active.*”

**Jeff:** Oh, wait a minute. Wait for the microphone. Sorry.

**Don:** *Mia culpa. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

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**Transcriber’s Note:** Don receives an audible text.

**Phone:** To listen, say yes or no.

**Don:** No! *“And no creature is—“*

**Phone:** Command not recognized. Please try again. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** Technology.

**Don:** They call it progress. *(Laughter)*

*“And no creature is hidden from His sight. And all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

*“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. 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. 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 the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** All right. Well I want to walk through what it is that we’re going to be doing this morning. There are three points that I want us to think about. But I want us to think about some introductory things. I want us to remember God’s word, and then to remember the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. Then we’ll see how those things fit together in just a minute. But let me take some time to work through some introductory matters with you.

There’s a temptation that’s involved in a text like this. And it’s specifically involved with the preacher and how he thinks about the text that he’s about ready to think about or teach or preach. And if you look at the text, if you look at Hebrews chapter 4 and look at verses 12, 13 and 14, you’ll notice the temptation almost immediately. And if you don’t, I’ll point it out to you.

Those verses are almost specifically about God’s word. It’s the living and active word of God. It does something because of God’s Spirit. It is a wonderful passage about the word of God. And the tendency of the preacher is to want to take a passage like this and soar with it. This is a passage about God’s word. And I can talk to the men about the inerrancy of Scripture, the fact that it doesn’t wander from the truth. I can talk to them about why that is. I can tell them about its infallibility and its truthfulness. And it is infallible, it is true because God Himself is infallible. And because God is true and He doesn’t wander from the truth, He doesn’t err in what He says. It is an authoritative Word and we can extrapolate on those kinds of things and wax eloquent about the word of God, and it’s just all true. However, when you look at a text in light of its rootedness in a context, it doesn’t always permit that kind of waxing.

Now you can be tangential. If you’re like Martyn Lloyd-Jones and every Friday night you’re preaching on Romans, and if you’ve ever read, what is it, the 52 volumes? *(Laughter)* No? I don’t know what it is. It’s got to be 20. I don’t know what it is. But in the multiple volumes of Lloyd-Jones’ Romans series, one of the things that I find absolutely fascinating is that if you want to know what the passage says that he’s dealing with,—let’s say he’s dealing with Romans 8:1-4—if you want to know what he has to say about the passage, what you do is that you read the first chapter or two on that particular

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text. And then the other 15 or 100 chapters that he has on that particular text are usually extrapolations. In other words, he’s going off and he’s talking about all the implications of this particular passage for other doctrines, and other thoughts that he has on church history, like the revivals which he brings up so well in his many books.

But the temptation for the preacher is to extrapolate, wax eloquent, take it out of context, saying true things about it. But what does it say in its context? In other words, exegetically, as we read it out of Scripture, what does it say here?

I mean oftentimes, you know this to be true. Oftentimes, one of the things that we run into constantly is that the Biblical authors take certain things for granted about Scripture or certain things about God, or certain things about any particular doctrine. They just state it, as if we ought to understand it. And it’s up to systematic theology, for instance, to ask the question of what the Bible says about x. And it’s at that point that you begin to pull together what the Bible says, for instance, about the word of God. And it’s then that you realize that it’s infallible and inerrant and it’s authoritative, and so on.

But when you look at a particular passage in its context, one of the things that you realize is that there’s an assumption that’s made on the part of the Biblical author that you already know these things about the word of God. And so having assumed these things, he just states them and places what he’s going to say in the midst of its context.

And I think that’s what we have to realize about this particular text. He’s assuming all of those things about the Bible that we ought to already know.

So if I don’t wax eloquent on some of those things, now you know why. I’m assuming, and I’m dealing with this passage in its context. And I want you to see its rootedness in that way.

You already know the context of this passage. You know the context of the book itself. This is a group of people who are under persecution, under fire. And if they’re not now, they will be, because they have been in the past. And one of the things that we’ve noticed is that they’ve lost their property. They’ve faced time in prison. Their faith came at quite a cost. And the temptation for them, because of that, is to defect. The temptation for them is to forsake the assembling together.

Now oftentimes the pastor uses that text, right? Don’t forsake the assembling together! In other words, get to church!, that sort of thing, right? But in its context, you remember, in its context what was happening was this. These people were tempted to flee the Christian faith and return to Judaism. They were tempted to flee Christ who is the substance of the covenant, and return to the shadows and the types of the past. And that was the temptation, and it was a real one. And these folks in this particular congregation were facing it.

Now under the surface, that’s what we see. And that’s why the author of Hebrews says to them in the chapter that we just looked at, “You have to hear not as the Exodus generation, but you have to hear what is being said in God’s word with a believing ear and a believing heart.” And you remember what he said. He said that when you hear believingly,--and remember, he’s making the assumption that the only way that anyone can hear believingly is if they’ve been enabled to hear believingly. But if you hear believingly, then your life will manifest that hearing in works, in what it does.

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And remember, there are a lot of things that we’re taking for granted by saying this. For instance, we’re taking for granted the fact that you hear believingly because the Holy Spirit resurrects you and enables you, washes your affections and makes them disposed to God and His call. We’re taking for granted what we’ve said about the *duplex gratia Dei*, the twofold grace of God. Remember, we said in the past that we can’t have justification without being sanctified. There is a reciprocity in those two things. If you are justified you will be sanctified, and we have talked about what all that meant, and so on.

But these people were dealing with a weak faith. And remember the principle that the Pastor has embedded into this text. And I’ve really tried to embed it into your thinking. In other words, you think the best about your congregation. He says, “I’m going to say some really hard things to you. But the really hard things that I say to you are coming from the standpoint that I believe the best about you. And even if your faith is weak, I believe that you still lay hold of the whole Christ. I believe that you still have something of which to boast, and that is all of Jesus, even if you are lagging in your faith.”

And they were. Remember when he says—and I talked to you about this, and I’ll mention it when we get there. It’s that inclusio, that bookending of the text. And an inclusio is just that. It’s a bookending of a text, using a word or a phrase or an idea on either side. And though the translation in English is different, we find the same word appearing in 5:11 and 6:12. These people are lethargic, they’re dull and they’re disheartened. They are weak in their faith. If we were reading *Pilgrim’s Progress*, we would think that these people are Weak Faith.

And so that’s the context, the situation that’s being considered here. And that’s what we saw in chapters 3 and 4. And this is his admonition to them. He says, “Do not be unbelieving.” Even the way in which he talks to them is hard. But it takes for granted that he thinks the best of them. And so he says, “Do not be like the Exodus generation.”

Now what is he saying? He says, “Strive to enter, lest anyone fall short.” We’ve talked about this. Some of this is just review. But now we’re going to go on to that first point. We need to remember the word of God. Now that sets up the context. But do you have any questions or thoughts before we go on to that next point? None? Okay.

All right. Let’s think about *the word of God*. I want you to know something. This is important. *The word of God is not abstracted*. And this gets back to a little bit about what I was saying earlier when I said that you have to take into account that what’s being said here is not just something about the word of God that we can sort of rip from its context. In other words, this is the word of God. But it’s not an abstracted word of God.

What do I mean by that? I mean an idea about the word of God that we can talk about apart from this text. Now I want you to catch this. Look at this. “*The word of God*”—verse 12. But notice what else it says. Look at verse 12. “*For the word of God is living and active.*”

But notice what it says in verse 13. “And no creature is hidden from its sight.” That’s not what it says. “*No creature is hidden from His sight.*” Now that strengthens the idea that this is not an abstracted idea about God’s word. God’s word in this passage and God Himself are to be thought of coterminously, synonymously. We can’t abstract one from the other.

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And that’s what people try to do with us, isn’t it? I mean, people who find out that we’re fundamental in our faith, that we believe in the basic truths of Christianity and we hold to them tightly, do you know what they say to us? They say, “You’re Bibliolaters. That’s all you are, you’re Bibliolaters. You worship the Bible.”

And we want to say to them from a passage like this, no. We believe that this is God’s word. But you can’t abstract this Word from God Himself, because the Bible never does. That’s the idea. So this Word is His word.

Now keep that in context. Psalm 95, the chapter we dealt with not last time but the time before that, because last time we took the detour and had a little hiatus there,—Psalm 95 is His word. It is spoken by His Spirit. You remember this. And so Psalm 95, whether it was spoken to the Exodus generation or whether it was spoken by the Psalmist, or whether it’s written again by the writer to the Hebrews, it is God’s word, speaking then, speaking to them in Rome and speaking to us now. It is His word. Psalm 95 is His word.

And there are a couple of things that this Preacher says about it. He says that it is a *living Word*. Now when you look at 3:12 in the light of our passage, here again this reinforces the idea that this is not an abstract Word. It’s not an idea about the Word. One of the things is that if you look at verse 12 of Chapter 3, you notice that God is called a “*living God*”, right? He is a living God. And if He is the living God, then His word is a living Word. You see again how the Preacher does not want to abstract the word of God from the text. He’s rooting it in the fact that it is God’s word.

And this God has spoken to this people in the past—this Exodus generation, and Psalm 95 records it. And the Preacher is saying, “*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.*” And I said to you that just as He spoke to the Exodus generation, just as He spoke to Rome, He speaks to us today. Because it’s His word, it’s an eternal Word, and it transcends the generations. And it’s His word. You read it and it is His word to you. So you can open up this Word. And when it says, “*Today, do not harden your hearts*”, it is speaking to you.

I don’t know if I gave you this illustration; I probably did. But years ago I went to see a Muppet movie. And I’m sitting in the theater, and it was a 3d movie. You know, it was really entertaining because the 3d imagery was really good. And this character comes out and hovers over the audience, the crowd in the movie theater. And he says, “*Everybody thinks that I’m talking to them. But I’m not. I’m talking to you!*” And, you know, his finger is right there, right under your nose. (*Laughter*) Yeah, that was pretty cool!

And I think to myself, you know what? That’s exactly the way it is in preaching. Somebody will come up to you and they’ll do the king of Syria thing. He’ll say, “Man, you must have been in my bedroom listening to me talk to my wife, because you said exactly what I was talking to my wife about last night.”

And you say to yourself, No, no, no, no, no. That’s not what I was doing. I wasn’t there at all. But somebody was there, and that was God. And He took His word and He brought it right into your life. And He said, “*Today, if you hear My voice, do not harden your heart.*” You see, it’s that kind of thing. And it’s just an absolutely wonderful thing. It’s a living Word.

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I want you to know that the word of God, if we can compare it, is like classical music. You know, classical music never loses its voice, does it? Classical music has a way of transcending the generations. You know, there are other genres that come along. But classical music has just been with us. I’m seeing faces. Maybe this is not a good illustration, but that’s okay. You get the idea. Classical music never loses its voice.

**Participant:** Amen, brother! Preach it! (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** Yeah, there’s my Don! (*Laughter*) But I want to tell you something. That is the way of it with God’s word. The Scripture never loses its voice.

But I want to tell you something. Let’s be honest. We are not Barthians, and by that you know what I mean. This is what a Barthian says. A Barthian says this. Brothers, this becomes the word of God when the Spirit takes it up. And there’s a Latin term for that. It’s called *hogwash*. (*Laughter*)

All right now, listen to me. It doesn’t become the word of God. It is the word of God.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** And so it never loses its voice. But the fact of the matter is that existentially, in our experience, it can. In other words, when we begin to listen to other things in our lives, experientially the Word can lose its voice. We stop reading it. We stop really thinking about it. And pretty soon our lives aren’t governed by it and we’re in disobedience. We’re living like the Exodus generation.

**Participant:** And yet I want you to know something. It may have lost its voice with you. But it has not lost its voice.

You know, I’ll never forget. I was listening to a couple ministers when I was in a church elsewhere. And I was at a gathering. And this one minister walked up to this other minister. And I happened to be talking with the minister. And the one minister came up really excitedly and said to the other, “Brother, guess what?”

And the minister said, “What?”

And the other one said, “My council just let me cancel the evening service!”

And the other minister says, “Oh, wonderful! Now you can do some really profitable things.”

And about that time, I was taking a class from Sinclair Ferguson. And Sinclair Ferguson had said something that rings in my ears to this day. He said, “You may say that the word of God doesn’t work anymore. But about all you can do is say that about your own preaching, and not about the word of God itself.”

**Participant:** Wow!

**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Boy, is that powerful or what? And so Scripture never loses its voice. And we must listen to it and take it to heart and believe it.

But he also says this. He says that it is “*active*.” He says His word is active. In other words, it penetrates, it dissects. This is what he says. It’s kind of a parallelism here. You know, a parallelism is lifted out from the way of the Hebrews, where they say something in a similar way or even in an antithetical way in order to get the point across, that hey, we’re saying something here twice in a different way to be powerful and to be imposing upon you. And he says that none are hidden.

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And then he goes on. And he says, “No one He does not see.” This word penetrates and it dissects. But remember, we’re not talking about the omniscience of God. We are talking about His word reaching into our lives, because God and His word are coterminous. God in His word reaches into our lives. It reaches into our hearts.

And this is what the New King James says about our text. Listen. *“All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.”*

Now if you just stop there for a minute and think about this, that is a frightening thing, just to think about opening God’s word and being laid bare before it, or going into a preaching service and hearing the word of God. You know, I always find it funny when somebody comes into the service who is an atheist. And they act as if they’re coming into that service in order to critique what’s going on there. I’ve had that happen to me in the not too distant past. And one of the things that I’ve always thought to myself when I hear this kind of thing is, *You don’t know the dangerous position in which you’ve placed yourself.* (Laughter) There’s a Word that is swimming around this place that the skin is no barrier against. And this Word reaches into the depth of the human heart. It searches you out and lays you bare before it.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Jeff:** That’s the kind of thing that we have to think about when we think about God’s word. Yes, Don?

**Don:** Okay. So then, are you saying that this is not referring to Judgment Day, but that this is referring to here and now? Because I’ve often had questions. Well, what is that going to look like on Judgment Day. We’re justified and forgiven. Are we still going to have to give an account for our old sins, or am I misinterpreting the passage?

**Jeff:** I think this passage is talking about today. So I think what he’s saying is that *“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as they did in the rebellion.”* I think that when Colossians talks about Christ forgiving all our sins, there’s a sense in which all our sins are forgiven. And, you know, the question always comes up after that. Then why does the Lord’s Prayer tell me that I need to confess my sins? And why is there a confession of sin that needs to be made? *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Why are those things true if we have been forgiven all of our sins?

I think the answer to that is best understood in terms of the relationship of a father to a child, right? If the child does something wrong, the father doesn’t say, “You’re out,” you know?

**Don:** Sure.

**Jeff:**

But if there is to be a healthy relationship between father and child, the child needs to go to the father and say, “Dad, I’m sorry,” right?

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Because here’s the thing. The father stands willing to forgive his child. But in order to have a healthy relationship, there needs to be that seeking of forgiveness and repentance, and then the restoration of the relationship.

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So I think that’s the same with us. If we really belong to Christ, then there’s an activity of repentance on our part that happens daily. Now the question is, what if someone is a member of the church but not a genuine believer? Well then, their departing will demonstrate that. And either they will depart and show themselves never to have been part of that fellowship, or on the last day that will be revealed. Does that make sense?

**Don:** Yes. That’s something that’s kind of revolutionary to me, because I’ve always thought of this in terms of the future. And you’re bringing into today.

**Jeff:** Well, there’s a future aspect of it that we’ll get to. But I think this passage is really talking about today. Yes?

**Participant:** Can I say something? All analogies break down.

**Jeff:** You bet they do.

**Participant:** There are people who have been raised by fathers who are not the type of fathers you presented.

**Jeff:** Absolutely.

**Participant:** And I think it creates things like I never was good enough.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Participant:** I’m always trying to please the father. And I’ll never know if I ever do.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** We translate that to God.

**Jeff:** Right. And I totally agree with you, Bob, back here.

**Participant:** Bill.

**Jeff:** Yes, Bill. Sorry. I will say this, Bill. The problem, though, is that just because sin creeps in and infects and destroys those relationships, the Bible doesn’t cease to use those kinds of analogies when it talks about our relationship with God. In Hebrews it talks about the father disciplining his child. I realize that somebody who has had a bad childhood with a father beating him will read that text and probably have internal angst. But the fact of the matter is that the Bible uses that as a healthy thing.

So it is true. But we always have to pull people back and say that your experience is not normative for our reading the Scriptures. There’s a normativity that the Scriptures bring to any conversation to which you must conform.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Jeff:** That’s kind of how I feel. I am sensitive to that, and I try to be sensitive to that with people. But I think the position needs to be that the Scriptures norm our relationships, and they norm our conversation about what a healthy relationship is. Yes?

**Participant:** I was going to say that verse 16 kind of answers both of those questions. It says, *“Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* So *the time of need* kind of gets to Don’s question. It is something that’s ongoing. When we sense that we have that need of grace and mercy we come to Him. But also, it does define the response that we’re going to get from our heavenly Father. We’re going to get mercy and grace.

**Jeff:** Yes.



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**Participant:** Our earthly fathers may have given us judgment and punishment. But that’s not who our heavenly Father is. So it helps, as you say, to reorient our thinking based on what the Word says, rather than on what our experience says.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely. All right. So the warning is *don’t have an unbelieving heart when the Word reaches in*. And you can feel the crushing force of this, can’t you, if you look at this in its context. In other words, what I’m saying is that if you look at verse 12 in light of what has gone before. So verse 11 says, “*Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active.*”

You see the connection, then. The connection is that they didn’t believe the Word. And not believing the Word their lives did not produce this sort of obedience. “*For the Word.*” In other words, the idea then is that here is the word of God which is living and active, and demands something from us, right? And its demand calls us to offer that which it demands, and we don’t do it.

And we need to ask ourselves. Are we like the Exodus generation? And I have a tendency to think that if we really think about our lives, we think to ourselves that we are like the Exodus generation. I think somebody even said it two weeks ago when we were talking about this. I mean, how can you avoid thinking that you’re like the Exodus generation? We sin in word, thought and deed daily! How can we avoid thinking that? And we feel like that.

And then there are others who say, “No, no, no. We’re not like the Exodus generation.” But I have a tendency to think that what the Preacher is driving at here is to help us to feel the weight of this. How so? I think it’s this. If we say, “I’m nothing like them,” then we have to ask the question. What about the Sabbath? Because, remember, he says that you demonstrate your view that there is a *catapausan*, an eternal rest, by the weekly participation in the *sabbatismos*. And he says, look. The Exodus generation never kept the day of rest, and that’s why they went into exile for all those seventy years, right? How about you? In other words, do you anticipate the eternal rest weekly?

I think that’s an interesting connection when you bring together the verses in the context that we’re looking at. So what are we to do if, for instance, we say to ourselves, well, if this is the one point that the Preacher is bringing up to us, that there is an anticipation of the eternal through the weekly, and I don’t obey the weekly,—and I would say this to you. If, no matter how you construe the weekly rest, if you ask yourself how well do I keep it?, not a one of us can ever say, “Oh yes, I do well. Everything else in my life has gone to the wayside. But the Sabbath or the Lord’s Day, oh yes, I keep that. I’m really good at that.” Yeah. Don groans. Make sure that’s audible, Don.

So what are we to do? And that leads to the next set of verses. *We remember our High Priest.*

**Participant:** May I ask you a question?

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** What do you mean that the Israelites were exiled into Egypt because they didn’t keep the Sabbath?

**Jeff:** Sorry, not in Egypt. They were exiled into—

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**Participant:** Babylon.

**Jeff:** Remember how many years they were exiled?

**Participant:** Seventy.

**Jeff:** Seventy. But why were they exiled those seventy years? They didn’t give the land what?

**Participant:** Rest, time to recover.

**Jeff:** To give the land rest. Why? Because they never gave the land rest, right?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Second Participant:** As the Sabbath.

**Jeff:** As the Sabbath year. Okay? So if that’s the kind of thing that he’s driving at,-- and you can put any sin in there. I mean, put any sin in there and ask yourself. How well have I managed this in my life? How well have I managed lust in my life? How well have I managed anger in my life? How well have I managed gossiping in my life? You name it. Put it in there and ask yourself. How well have you done according to, or in light of the word of God? And you’ll find that you’ve not done well.

So what do you do when the word of God lays you bare? What do you do? Well, you remember your High Priest. You see?

Martin Luther said this about this passage. He said, “*After terrifying us the apostle now comforts us.*” And you see how well the Word, when we look at what it says about itself in light of its context, lays us bare, right? It terrifies us. And now he’s going to comfort us. How is he going to comfort us? By helping us to focus on the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Now think about this. There are three points that I want us to gather, three points of comfort. First of all, *He passes through the heavens.*”

Now there are similar expressions here. In 6:19 you can find “*he passed through the heavenlies in order to enter into the Holy Place.*” In 7:26 “*He passed through the heavenlies, exalted above the heavens.* In 9:24, again, *He entered the Holy Place.*” All of these expressions speak about Christ’s ascension.

But notice this. In its context, He passed through the heavens in order to do what? To secure our rest.

So you ask why did you bring up the whole thing about *catapausan* and *sabbatismos*? Because in its context what he’s saying is that He passed through the heavens in order to secure our rest, which is what he talked about in the previous passage.

Now if there is an eternal rest then, that’s why I said to you that we ought to be thinking about what that weekly *sabbatismos* is, that weekly Lord’s Day. So there is present weekly help.

I’m running out of time, but let me say this. I don’t want to rush this. Let me say it like this. Think about it like this. I don’t remember if I’ve said this to you before. I think I did two weeks ago, but it bears saying again. When is the first day of the week?

**Participant:** Sunday.

**Jeff:** Sunday. When is the last day of the week?

**Participant:** Saturday.

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**Jeff:** Saturday. Now you’re Adam in the garden. And you’ve been told that according to the covenant of works that you must what? Do this and live. In other words, obey and live. And your week reminds you of the covenant of works. Your week starts with work, and you work six days, and then you rest on Saturday. You do this and then rest to live.

Isn’t it interesting with the coming of Christ and the covenant of grace that the Lord’s Day is changed. Now the week begins with what day? Sunday, which is a day of rest. We rest, and out of the eternal rest provided for us in Christ we live. That’s just a wonderful way, I think, of thinking about our benefits in Jesus Christ. It’s because I’m justified. It’s because I’ve come to an eternal rest in Him that I live out a life of sanctification.

**Participant:** So was John the apostle being profound when he says in chapter 20, verse 1 of his gospel, “*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early?*” What’s he referring to?

**Jeff:** The first day of the week?

**Participant:** Yes, the first day of the week. It’s Sunday.

**Jeff:** Hey!

**Participant:** But he’s saying as a Jew that this is—well, I think that what he’s doing is that he is making your point.

**Jeff:** He’s providing for us the rationale for the change in the day. Think about it this way. When we think about the eternal law of God we think about the Ten commandments. The Ten Commandments are what? They’re representative of God’s character. Does God’s character change?

**Participant:** No.

**Jeff:** No! And therefore, when we find those commandments, we don’t find a change in them. We may find a change in the ancillary details of them, right? In other words, for instance, all of the sacrificial aspects are applications of how to approach God, the God who we find in the very first commandment that we shall have no other god. Commandment #2 tells us how to approach this God, right? And commandment 2 then extrapolates the sacrificial system.

Now we know that if the Old Testament Israelite was going to approach this God, he had to do it according to the way in which God said, right? But we also know that with the coming of Christ that all of that has passed away. It was fulfilled. But now we still have to come to Christ in the way He dictates. In other words, commandment 2 still holds. We now have to come to Him through Christ who is the substance of the covenant.

So there are unchangeables. But then there are ancillary changeables. For instance, the day of the Sabbath—and Sabbath means *rest*—the day of the Sabbath is ancillary. It changes. It moved from Saturday to

Sunday, right? Does that make sense? I realize that we’re going off on a little bit of a tangent. But I wanted you to see, for instance, how in the construct of the week itself, under the Adamic covenant, that it was do this and live. And that was the way the week was set up. But in Christ it’s now that you live, and so your work flows from that.

The second point of comfort is this. *He is able to sympathize with us in our weakness.* And what does that mean, to sympathize? We oftentimes think, well, it’s a feeling of caring. I feel for you, right? But that’s not what it means. Webster’s third definition of

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this word, “*entering into the interests of others*” captures it to some extent. I enter into your problem, right? I bring my means to bear upon your problem, or I bring my time to bear upon your problem. Christ enters into our problem by taking upon Himself human flesh. And He’s tempted in every respect, and yet without sin. He’s the sinless Savior. So He enters into our situation, and yet He’s without sin, able to retrieve us and redeem us.

The third comfort is *an encouragement*. And the encouragement is what? “*Let us draw near.*” Now I want you to think about that. That’s priestly language. The High Priest has now enabled us to enter into the presence of God Himself.

Now I want you to think about that. When you think about the Exodus generation and the crushing feeling of that, this relieves us. We understand that in Christ Jesus our Lord we have the ability to enter into the presence of our God. And what a blessing that is, right?

**Participant:** The curtain is torn.

**Jeff:** The curtain is torn, right? And that comes in chapter ten in a magnificent way. Now look, he says this. The present tense of the matter is that you draw near, and this is the substance of it. You draw near again and again and again and again.

But I want to apply this in a way. And here’s what I was talking about when I was talking about this earlier. I talked to you about interpreting a passage in its context, staying close to the text, residing in the text as you interpret it. And how in the world can you apply this, especially after we’ve looked at the whole issue of chapter 3 and 4? Well I’m going to say this. I’m going to say that again and again and again we draw near to Him on the weekly *sabbatismos*, that we might anticipate the eternal *catapausan*, *I the eternal rest*. *In other words, there’s an application to this ready-built into the text. How is it that you draw near to him? Well, you draw near to Him on the weekly celebration of rest that He has given, that we might indeed anticipate what is to come, because when we draw near, we discover that Christ is already there. When you draw near to the Father, you discover that Christ is already there.*

*Now if I can just take us back for a minute, that’s why, if you look in chapter 2, do you remember what he said? He said that Christ is in our midst, in our assembly, leading us in our singing.*

*Now think about that. You’re in the midst of worship week to week, and you’re singing. We oftentimes think about it like this. We think that Christ is in the Word preached, and He is. But here He is in another element of worship. He’s in the singing.*

*Now think about that! When I draw near He’s already there, okay? So I think that what we find then is that we find that the word of God lays us bear. And yet God provides us with comfort in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might again and again and again find Him to be faithful, having given us rest. And isn’t it interesting that when we draw near to Him on the first day of the week, we find that rest to be there waiting for us. Yes, Don?*

**Don:** *I have a two-pronged question. First of all, you’re not saying that it’s just the first day of the week. You know, I’ve always read this as we can draw near to Christ at any time when we’re tempted or in time of need. The context is the rest on the Lord’s Day; I realize that. But obviously we can do this at any time, right?*

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**Jeff:** Will you remember your second question?

**Don:** Yes, I will. And you might want to hit me for it.

**Jeff:** Okay. That’s all right. Let me answer this one first.

**Don:** All right.

**Jeff:** First of all, that’s absolutely correct. We’re staying with this text. And so when we stay with this text, you look for what’s around it to help explain what’s being spoken of there. So the context is the Lord’s Day. So that’s here.

But if you go to James 4:8, that’s not the context. James 4:8: *“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”* But the application is different. So there’s a drawing near to Him apart from and outside of the Lord’s Day. Does that make sense?

**Don:** Yes, absolutely. You may choose not to answer this one.

**Jeff:** Go ahead.

**Don:** Do you believe that in light of Hebrews 4:14 and 15—Jesus being tempted as we are, yet without sin,—do you believe that Jesus was capable of sinning in His human nature?

**Jeff:** Oh, look, we’re out of time! *(Laughter)* Oh, I’m sorry! *(Laughter)* I believe in the impeccability of Christ.

However, however,—

**Participant:** Say that again, Jeff. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** I not only believe in the sinlessness of Christ, but I don’t believe that He could have sinned.

**Participant:** Right.

**Jeff:** And here’s why. So people would say that’s not a real temptation. And I’ve heard Sinclair Ferguson say that’s not the right question. He would say that the right question is this. Was Jesus really tempted? And I think He really was tempted. And I think that we would all say that He really was tempted.

But the question is how did He overcome the temptation? And I think that this is oftentimes where we as Reformed or evangelical people get mixed up. And we answer this question like the Lutheran or the Roman Catholic might answer it.

Here’s what we do. We understand that the Council of Chalcedon in 451 said that the two natures of Christ—His divine and His human nature—are together not mixed and inseparable in the one Person, Jesus Christ.

But when we talk about Christ’s sinlessness, how He withstood temptation, oftentimes we talk about it as if a little hole got poked between the two natures. And the divine nature flowed into the human nature and divinized the human, thereby creating a sinless Christ.

And that’s the error of Lutheranism. And if you said to the Lutherans, “Well, wait a minute. How does that happen, whereby Jesus can say at one moment, ‘I don’t know the day or the hour?’”

They would say, “Oh, that’s easy—kinosis.” Kinosis happens. There’s an emptying of the divine from the human. And so they say that’s easy. The Son of Man could at will infiltrate the human or detract from it.

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And so if you’re a Calvinist, you’re going to say that that’s the error of the Lutherans, though we love them so. But it’s also the error of the Roman Catholics. It’s the error of the Roman Catholics because they believe that the bread and the wine become the body and the blood of Christ. In other words, the human nature is ubiquitous. The only way that the human nature can be ubiquitous is if the divine nature infiltrates the human. And that cannot be.

So how is it that in the Person of Christ, how is it that Christ withstood temptation? The answer is given in Scripture. The Holy Spirit took the gifts and the graces from the divine nature and bestowed them upon the human nature in the Person of Jesus Christ. How did He withstand temptation? The Holy Spirit was, shall we say, the conduit between the divine and the human nature that enabled the Son of Man to withstand against temptation.

And the comforting aspect, the pastoral aspect of that is this. We possess not the divine nature, but the same Spirit who draws from Jesus Christ and His gifts and graces, and bestows them on us in our time of need. That’s the pastoral payoff, right? So that’s my answer.

**Participant:** Very good.

**Jeff:** Any other questions or thoughts?

**Participant:** Don’t spoil the moment. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** All right. Have a good day, then.

Oh, let’s pray. Father in heaven, we are thankful for the day that You’ve provided, and thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the riches that are found in Him. Father, thank You for opening our eyes to the greatness of Your Son. And thank You for the blessedness of being in Him. Thank You for the eternal rest that He affords. And thank You that You’ve enabled us to believe that truth by faith.

Father, we ask now that You would continue to bless us throughout the day and give us a good weekend. And bless Your Lord’s Day, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*