

“God’s Word and Our High Priest”

Hebrews 4: 12-16

12 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. 13 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 an account.

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 25 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (NIV)

During the construction of Emerson Hall at Harvard University, president Charles Eliot invited psychologist and philosopher William James to suggest a suitable inscription for the stone lintel over the doors of the new home of the philosophy department.

After some reflection, James sent Eliot a line from the Greek philosopher Protagoras: “Man is the measure of all things.” James never heard back from Eliot so his curiosity was piqued when he spotted artisans working on a scaffold hidden by a canvas. One morning, the scaffold and canvas were gone. The inscription? “What is a man that Thou art mindful of him?” from Psalms 8:4. Between those two ideas lies a great distance between God-centered and the human-centered points of view. Our text for today tells us that no matter who you are, what you think, what you’ve been through, you will have to answer to God. Man must give an account of himself before God, the great auditor. In the final judgment, everyone must give an account of himself. Only those who are in Christ Jesus, will hear the liberating word, “Acquitted” “Forgiven”.

[NOTE 1] Ray Boltz sings a song entitled “One Drop of Blood.” Several years after he made this video he became a controversial figure in the Christian music world but that doesn’t mean that God didn’t use him or that God doesn’t continue to use Ray Boltz to change people’s lives through his music. I have mentioned the video in at least two sermons in the last 5 years and finally I figured out how to get it into Pro-Presenter the software that handles what you see on the screen. So let’s watch the video. [Watch Video] The balance scale was the scale of justice and each persons sins and failings were falling like dirty rags on the one side tipping the scale the way the accuser/satan wanted. But those who cried out to Jesus were forgiven as one drop of blood falls on the other side of the scale and tips it to forgiveness, freedom, and heaven! The debt is paid. [NOTE 2] You can not take the Word of God lightly! The Bible demands a response. Jesus, by His life and words, did not allow people to say with any integrity, “I believe that Jesus was a good man, a wise teacher, or a prophet. Jesus claimed to be God and died for it. That makes Him at best a liar if He knew He wasn’t God and certainly not

very smart if He didn't know that His claim was false. If Jesus knew that his claim was false and still suffered and died for it that makes him a lunatic. So Jesus is either Lord, a liar, or a lunatic. The only option is that He knew that His claim was true and He was God's Son, fully God and fully man. The gospel of John chapter 10 and verses 31-33 read, "Again His Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone Jesus, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

[NOTE 3] The Word of God, the Logos is living and active, He is alive! The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word is not dead like some law that is no longer followed but alive and effective. Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 11 reads, "So is my word that goes out 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." (NIV). It is a fact of history that wherever a community has taken God's word seriously things begin to happen. When we take the Word of God seriously we come to realize that it is not only something to be read, something to be studied, or written about, but something to be done! In Bible-times, the double edged sword was the sharpest and most advanced weapon available, "state of the art" if you will. It could be compared to our super tanks, stealth bombers, or F-16s. It was the superweapon of its time. But the idea is not to focus on the sword but on the Bible, the Word of God. The point the author is trying to make is that the Word of God is sharp like a scalpel, discerning every twist and turn of the human mind. Nothing, no nothing, and I mean nothing, cuts deeper, nothing gets through the trash and gets to the heart of the matter, the essence of things, like the Word of God. All the recesses of body and soul – including thoughts and attitudes – face the sharp edge of God's dividing sword. It cuts keenly, it discovers says the Contemporary English version, it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts. "God sees though everything and we will have to tell Him the truth." The NCV reads, "It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and spirit are joined to the center of our joints and bones. It judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. The Word of God scrutinizes the desires and intentions of the heart. The Word of God is living and active and it is sitting on a shelf collecting dust. **[NOTE 4]**

At a significant turning point in my Dad's life a farmer asked him, "Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" My Dad sat in silence. He couldn't answer him. Finally he told the Farmer that he would like to answer yes, but there I guess I am not sure. About a week later my Dad, as part of his job, went on a ride along with another salesman. Next to the salesman on the front seat of his car was a Bible all used and worn and tattered from continual use. As my Dad rode along that day he kept thinking about the Bible that had been given to him as a gift many years earlier sitting on a shelf in the bookcase in our living room, still in the plastic. Let me ask you this morning. Where is your Bible? Is there just some in your head but you don't have a Bible? Is it on a shelf, in your car, anywhere that you can put your hands on it easily? Do you do what it says? I am guessing that there are at least a couple of you that had to answer that first question

about where your Bible is with “I don’t know.” We haven’t looked for the Bible in so long that we don’t even remember where it is. This passage of Scripture in Hebrews chapter four is telling each of us this morning, Find your Bible. Use it, read it, study it, think about it. Love it and do what it says! Just do it! The book of James clearly tells us how important it is for us to be doers of the word, not just read it. Yet some of us barely ever read it. [NOTE 5]

In the presence of God all is laid bare. The Greek word means naked, without any covering. There will be nothing about your life, your thoughts, your attitudes, your desires, even your innermost fleeting thoughts will be known on judgement day. God sees your heart, He knows your motivations. The Word tests a person’s earthly life and sifts his/her spiritual life to see all. The New Century Version reads, “It judges the thoughts and feelings of our hearts.” This is backed up by the Old Testament in the Psalms and in the New Testament in many places including John chapter 12 and verse 47 and 48, “as for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” (NIV). Then we have verses 14-16 in Hebrews chapter 4, which basically emphasizes the reason that Jesus is the perfect High Priest. The author of Hebrews is absolutely, positively sure of Jesus’ identity with men. He went through everything that a human has to go through and is like us in all things EXCEPT He emerged from it all still sinless! The fact that Jesus was without sin means that He knew the depths and tensions, and assaults of temptation that we will never know because we give in way before Satan ever even gets to the bad stuff. You and I fall long before the stage is ever reached where the tempter pulls out all the stops and expends the full extent of his power. Jesus knew the fullest extent of temptation far beyond anything we have experienced. He was truly tempted in all things as we are and farther. This gives Him the ultimate gift of understanding, sympathy, and empathy.

You see to the Jew of Jesus’ day, God was Holy and righteous but very separated from us. In no way did He share our human experience. The Greeks said that the primary attribute of God was an essential inability to feel anything at all. So the Christian message was really radical stuff. For centuries upon centuries people had believed the idea of an untouchable God. Now he comes this guy Jesus doing miracles and telling them that the One Almighty and Everlasting God has sent Him, to experience life as we know it. Now God fully understands in a way that is incontrovertible! God came to be with us on earth and lived in human flesh.

Not too long ago I watched the last part of Mr. Holland’s Opus for like the fifth time. I still cried, because I can really relate with how Mr. Holland feels. I know some people who aren’t even remotely moved one iota when they watch that movie. One of my friends called it boring. They can’t relate! When you have been in choir and band or you have a friend whose child can’t relate to them you understand. When you have experienced something similar you can relate. When you’ve been there before it makes a big difference. There is no part of the human experience about which God cannot say,

“I have been there,” because He has! So when we go through trials, when we go through tough times we go before a God whose been there. “There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it,” reads Today’s English Version. The Revised English Bible reads, “Let us hold fast to the faith we profess. Ours is not a High Priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested in every way we are, only without sinning...” The Contemporary English version has it, “Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because He was tempted in every way as we are. But He did not sin. So whenever we are in need we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God.” There, we will be treated with undeserved kindness and we will find help. That’s how you and I can live a victorious life. [NOTE 7]

Realize that we have a great High Priest who intercedes now and in the future and has already interceded for us through his death on the cross. There is power in the Word and all we need to do is, listen, read, study, think and DO what the Bible says!! God has been there done that. He understands our needs better than we do. We serve a God that understands. That’s great news! The Word of God is powerful and we have a great High Priest who represents for us before God. That’s great news!

What are you going to do about this great news? Please don’t just sit back and nod your head and say, “Yes, Rick you are right! That is great news and then go home and live your life exactly the way you lived it last week. What is one thing that you will do different next week because of this reminder of how wonderful and powerful the Word of God is, how we will all be judged, but in Christ we have eternal life and the news that Jesus is our great High Priest. What difference does it make? Please write down an “I will ... statement.” Write down a sentence of commitment on your bulletin or on your phone. This week I will I am not going to tell you how to fill in the blank. You know where you are at Spiritually. Maybe it is as simple as finding your Bible and getting it out and putting it at arm’s reach so you can start reading it more. Maybe it’s downloading a Bible reading app on your phone. Maybe it’s praying for 3 people five minutes every day and praying a verse of Scripture over them. Please write something. If you can’t think of anything, pray until something comes to you. Let’s pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “God’s Word and Our High Priest” based on Hebrews 4: 12-16
Given at Doster Community Church January 15, 2023

- I. Only those who are found in Christ Jesus will hear the liberating word at judgement, “Acquittal!” (Forgiven and Free)
- II. You may not take the Word of God lightly. The Bible demands a response. Jesus was either the Lord God, a liar, or a lunatic.
- III. The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word is not dead like some law that is no longer followed but alive and effective.
- IV. A double-edged sword was the latest technology breakthrough in war in Jesus’ day. Like the great weapon it is to be used, it is of no use if you don’t pick it up.
- V. In the book of James chapter one and verse 22 we read, “But don’t just listen to Gods’ Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are fooling yourselves.” Jesus was tempted way beyond what we have experienced.
- VI. When you have lived through something similar you can relate with a story or movie. Jesus has lived through it. He knows what we are going through. He is the perfect representative to God. Go to God boldly.
- VII. What are you going to do about it? Please write an “I will ...” statement giving yourself some measure of accountability for doing something with what you have learned.