

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Resting in the Intercession of Christ" – Hebrews 4:9-16 (Complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Weeks of 10/10 and 10/17/2010

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This month on The Scripture-Driven Church broadcast we're remembering the Protestant Reformation. One of the key truths that the Reformers recovered from Roman Catholic darkness is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, through the intercession of the one Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus.

Every believer has the priceless privilege of access to the very throne room of the Father through the mediation of the Son. This is God's precious gift of rest for every believer. We are to rest in the intercession of Christ. He does for us what no earthly priest, Levite or Catholic, could possibly do.

Last week we presented part one of a two-part message focusing on this glorious truth. This transcript includes the entire message.

This morning I want to call your attention to a familiar passage of Scripture. It's found in the last part of Hebrews chapter 4. Turn with me there, if you would, please. I'm going to read Hebrews chapter 4, verses 9 through 16, and I want to focus our attention on verse 16 in particular this morning. Hebrews chapter 4, beginning at verse 9:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his [this is speaking of God's rest on the seventh day of the creation week].

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief [and here the writer is speaking of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness].

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For the word of God is quick [that is, it is alive], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Introduction

The portion of Scripture we have before us this morning speaks to us about three things. It speaks to us about the power of the Word of God. It speaks to us about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it speaks to us about His intercessory work on our behalf.

It also tells us how we are to approach our Lord when we come before Him in prayer. The key word in this passage is the word "rest." Resting in Him. Resting in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be our focus this morning.

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These verses form one of the climax points in the book of Hebrews. The writer has been building up to this point. And so before we consider verses 9 through 16 together, and especially verse 16, I want to set the stage for us. We need to step back and briefly review what the writer has covered in the first 3-1/2 chapters, leading up to this point.

The Theme of Hebrews

First of all, we need to think about the overall theme of the book of Hebrews. The theme is "the superiority and the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit through the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus *Himself* is superior. He is superior to the prophets. He is superior to the angels. He is superior to Moses. He is superior to the priests of the old covenant system. He is superior to Abraham, our father in the faith. And He is superior to all the saints who are mentioned later on in the great roll call of faith in chapter 11.

Hebrews also tells us that Jesus' *atonement* is superior. It is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. And that is because Jesus' *priesthood* is superior. He is a High Priest not in the Levitical line, but after the order of Melchizedek. And Hebrews tells us that by being both our Great High Priest and the perfect sacrifice for our sins, that Jesus is our all-sufficient Savior. He is the author and finisher, the perfecter, of our faith. So that's the theme of the book – the superiority and the all-sufficiency of Christ.

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Why Hebrews Was Written

Secondly, we need to remind ourselves *why* the book of Hebrews was written. It's clear from the later chapters of Hebrews that the author is writing this book to people who might be tempted to fall back away from Christ into Judaism, into legalism. They might be tempted to try to add legalistic Judaism to the Gospel. So the writer is exhorting them to recognize the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, and he's encouraging them to stand firm in the New Covenant. He's reminding them that the reality of the New Covenant in Christ is far superior to the shadows and the types of the Old Covenant.

What Leads Up To This Passage

And thirdly, we also need to remind ourselves of what the writer of Hebrews has been saying, in building up to the climactic passage that we just read.

In chapter 1, the writer tells us that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament prophets. God spoke in times past by prophets, he reminds us, but today He speaks to us by His own Son. He also reminds us that Jesus participated in the creation of the universe itself as the second person of the Godhead.

Then the writer reminds us that Jesus is superior to the angels. Now if we didn't read on into chapter 2, that comparison might seem strange. We say, of course Jesus is superior to the angels. He's God himself. Why even draw such a comparison? And

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why should the writer spend most of the first chapter of Hebrews talking about it, when it would seem so obvious?

Well, in chapter 2 the writer explains the reason for that comparison. He tells us that Jesus was made lower than the angels – He was made lower than beings that He created – by coming to earth to live in a body like ours. The reason for this, we're told in chapter 2 verses 10 and 11, is so that He might be made perfect or complete as the author of our salvation, through sufferings.

Now the term "made perfect" or "made complete" doesn't imply any sinfulness or propensity toward sin on Jesus' part. It means perfect in the sense of completeness. It means the proving of the fact that Jesus was fully qualified as our substitute. And because Jesus was made lower than the angels and suffered in human flesh He is, we are told, not ashamed to call us – the ones He is saving and sanctifying – He's not ashamed to call us His brethren. The writer concludes chapter 2 by saying that because Jesus suffered in being tempted, He is able to aid those who are being tempted. And that's going to be especially important as we move on.

In chapter 3, the writer goes on to tell us that Jesus is superior to Moses. Moses was considered the greatest of the prophets by the Jews. But in John 1:17 we're told, that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. And in Hebrews 3, Moses is spoken of as a servant over God's house, but Jesus is the Son ruling over His own house. And the writer tells us that we, along with Moses and all of our fellow-believers through all of time, we are all members of that same household of faith.

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Then later in chapter 3 the writer tells us what happened to Israel in the wilderness under Moses. And he sets it before us as an object lesson – a warning for believers in the present day. He reminds us that the generation of Israelites that was brought up out of Egypt was not permitted to enter the promised land of Canaan. Why was that? It was because of their unbelief. God said of that generation, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' "

So they died in the wilderness in unbelief. Unbelief in what? Well, the writer makes it plain in chapter 4 verse 2. Their unbelief was unbelief in the Gospel. He tells us that the same Gospel is preached to us today that was preached to Israel in the wilderness – the Gospel of redemption through the Messiah. There has been, is now, and always will be only one way to God – through faith in Jesus Christ. In those days, it was the Gospel looking forward to the cross. For us today, it is the same Gospel looking back upon the cross. But we're told that in the case of that generation of Israelites in the wilderness, the preaching of the Gospel did not profit them. In the original, it says that it was of no advantage to them. And the reason was that the hearing of the Gospel was not mixed with faith to produce salvation.

The preaching of the Gospel was not united with faith, and we know from Ephesians and elsewhere that faith is the gift of God. The Holy Spirit, in the work of bringing an individual to salvation, unites the message of the Gospel with faith in the heart. The writer of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 4, verse 10 that those who have entered into God's rest have ceased from their own works, just as God ceased His

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work on the seventh day of creation week. God ceased from His work on the seventh day because creation was complete. We cease from reliance on our works because Christ's work of salvation on our behalf is complete.

And in chapter 4, the writer also reminds us that even though that generation of Israelites failed to keep the faith, God's promise of eternal rest for believers remains unchanged.

Be Diligent to Enter Into Rest – For Three Reasons

So that brings us to the passage we're focusing upon this morning. What is the writer saying to us? First of all, in verse 11, he exhorts us to be diligent to enter into that rest, to rest in Christ, to not fall away through disobedience.

Why does he do that? We have the answer in verse 12: "For the Word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The little conjunction "For" at the beginning of verse 12 leads us to the answer. The word could also be translated, "The reason is that" or simply, "because." The writer is saying, be diligent to enter into the rest that is in Christ, and don't fall away, because you cannot fool God. Verses 12 through 15 make it plain why this is true. There are 3 reasons.

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First, the Word of God reveals who you are. As verse 12 tells us, God's Word is a discerner – in the original this is the Greek word from which we get our English word "critic" – the Word is a critic of your thoughts and your intentions. You need the Word of God to speak to you and tell you if we are truly resting in Christ. You're not fit to judge this on our own, apart from the Word of God. Our feelings rise and fall. Circumstances can confuse us. We need to rely upon the Word of God as our discerner, our critic. And the Scriptures have the life and the power to do this.

Second, you cannot hide anything from God. In verse 13 the writer reminds us that all things are naked and open before Him to whom we must give account. Who you are, what you are, what you do, and what you think – these things are all laid bare before God.

You don't get any more plain-spoken than that. The two-edged sword of God's Word has once and for all laid open everything about you. You can't hide anything from God.

Thirdly, the writer also reminds us that Jesus understands your situation from first-hand experience. In verses 14 and 15 we are told that the One to whom we must give an account is also our High Priest. He understands what we're going through in this life from firsthand experience in human flesh. He was tested in all points as we are – in all the points where you and I fail – but He did not sin.

So God possesses complete and intimate knowledge of us – everything. But how does that tie back to the idea of entering into God's rest in the previous verses? What

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the inspired writer is telling us is that a vital, practical, day-to-day part of entering into that rest from works, is to rest in the intercessory work of Christ on your behalf. If you are truly resting in Christ for your salvation, then one of the out-workings, one of the evidences of your faith in Christ, should be that you are resting day by day in the intercession of Christ before the Father on your behalf. You should be coming before Him day by day, entering into that rest.

And that brings us to verse 16. Verse 16 tells us how you should come before God, and what your expectation should be as you come: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Let Us Therefore Come

"Let us therefore come" the writer says. In the original this speaks of approaching or drawing near. It's a term that was used in many ancient writings to describe what took place when someone came into the court of a monarch or ruler. We need to remember that we are drawing near and approaching the Holy God and Sovereign of the universe.

And verse 16 says, let us *therefore* come. In other words, "because these things are so." What things is the writer referring to? He's saying, let us therefore come, because there remains a rest for the people of God, in Christ (verse 9). Because we need to cease from reliance on works (verse 10). Because you need to be diligent to enter into your rest in Christ (verse 11). Because God's Word reveals who you are and what you are (verse 12). Because God knows you intimately, and you can hide nothing from

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Him (verse 13). Because Jesus is a High Priest who can sympathize with your weaknesses (verse 14). Because Jesus was tempted in all points as you are, yet without sin (verse 15). Because of all these things -- "let us come." Let us come!

Let Us Come Boldly

And not only that, "let us come *boldly*." "Boldly" Now the word that's used here does not mean let us come brashly, or presumptuously, or without proper respect or reverence. But it does tell us about two aspects of our coming – first, how we may speak to our Lord; and second, the attitude with which we may come before Him.

The word "boldly" in the original language encompasses several things. It says that you may have freedom in speaking as you approach the Lord. It says that, within the bounds of reverence, you may be unreserved in your speech. You may, and indeed you should, speak to your God openly, frankly, without concealment.

The word "boldly" also speaks of our attitude in coming to the throne of grace. It tells us that you may come with free and fearless confidence; with cheerful courage; with assurance that as a believer in Christ you have the right to come, and God wants you to come.

We Come Before the Throne of the Universe

Also, we're reminded here that we come before a "throne." Now in the original language, and in the cultural context in which Hebrews was written, this denoted something very specific. This throne is not just a chair, but a chair of state. And it was

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a chair with a footstool. The chair was the seat of authority, and the footstool was a figure of the fact that territories and peoples were under the authority of the one who sat on the chair.

Jesus is the One who now sits at the Father's right hand, and He rules from there. When we approach the throne of grace, we have the confidence that the One who is seated there has all authority in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). All things are under the control of our God. You come before One who lacks no ability to move anything or anyone in His creation to help you in your time of need. All things are subject to His will. You are coming before the very throne of the universe – the control center of all things.

The Throne of *The* Grace

And we're also reminded that it is the throne "of grace" – In the original, the phrase is literally, "the throne of *the* grace." It's a very specific way of speaking. The sense here is that the "throne of grace" is the throne from which grace proceeds or emanates – it is the source. It reminds us that the grace that we so desperately need – first for salvation, and then for day-to-day living – that grace originates in and proceeds from the authority and sovereignty of God.

There are two aspects of the term "grace" here, from the original language and from the context: First, it's speaking of saving grace – grace in the sense of God's merciful kindness in exerting His influence on men's souls to turn them to Christ and to

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preserve them in the faith. If you are trusting in Christ for your salvation, you can approach God because you are the beneficiary of saving grace.

Secondly, grace here speaks of that which is due to, or on account of, saving grace. In the original language, this speaks of the spiritual condition of one person is governed by the power of divine grace. It also speaks about the tokens or the proofs of grace, in other words, the benefits we receive as the objects of God's grace. In other words, when you approach God's throne as a believer, you can be confident of His benefits toward you, because of grace.

Coming With Expectation

And the writer reminds us that we come before the throne of grace in order "that we may obtain." You can expect something at the throne of grace. The sense of this phrase in the original is to come in order to receive a benefit where the initiative rests with the giver, but the focus of attention in the transfer is upon the receiver. It's a phrase that shows both our inability to help ourselves, and the extent of God's care for His people. It's a phrase that indicates God's personal care for individuals and for the body of believers as a whole. You may cast all your care upon Him, as First Peter says, because He does care for you.

And what is it that you may expect to obtain when you come? First of all, "mercy." There are several words for mercy in the New Testament. This particular Greek word is one that is used several times in the New Testament to describe God's attitude toward His people when they are in distress. It is a very interesting word in that it

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speaks not simply of feeling pity for someone, but of actually doing something about it. And that's God's attitude toward us.

It is one thing to have pity on someone without being willing or able to do anything about it. We often hear about situations, in which we are not directly involved, where someone has experienced great difficulty. We may pity the person's plight, especially if we have been in similar difficulty ourselves. But we may have no real desire to do anything to help that person, and we may not have the means or the opportunity or the resources to do so.

But that is not the kind of pity this passage speaks of. The word used here assumes need on the part of the one who receives mercy. But this word for mercy also assumes that the one who takes pity has the resources that are adequate to meet the need of the one in distress, and that the person who has those resources at his disposal then takes the initiative to help. Our God not only shows us pity in our need, but He has all the resources necessary to meet our needs, and He reaches out to us in our need. He does something about your need. He takes the initiative, and He does so from a position of all wisdom, and all power, and of endless resources.

Well-Timed Grace

And the writer also reminds us *when* we shall receive mercy and grace to help us. It will be "in time of need" – Literally, this means well-timed or timely. You must remember that Christ's intercessory work on your behalf is on His timetable. You may tend to grow impatient waiting for answers, and you may fear that God has not heard

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your plea. You may think that the answer isn't coming because something is wrong with you. And you certainly need to examine yourself to make sure there is no unconfessed sin standing between you and your God.

But the writer here reminds us that we come before the throne of grace through the merits of Christ. You don't come on the basis of your own works. And He reminds us that Christ your intercessor not only knows exactly what you need, but exactly when you need it, for your good and for His glory.

Let me sum things up, this morning, by giving you a more literal translation of Hebrews chapter 4, verse 16: An it is like this: "Approach therefore in freedom of speech and fearless confidence the throne of grace, in order that receiving mercy, pity, compassion and grace you may find help that is perfectly timed and perfectly suited to your specific need." This is truly rest for our souls. This is the promise of God. We can rest – you can rest – in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An Invitation

Let me ask you these questions, if you are a believer in Christ. I believe these are questions we should continually ask ourselves as Christians.

Are you taking full advantage of your position in Christ by truly resting in Him?
Are you truly resting in and relying upon in His intercessory work on your behalf?

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Do you struggle in your own sinful flesh to try to make inadequate and ill-timed substitutes for His gracious and perfectly-timed provision, or do you look to Christ as the one perfect source of all grace, all help?

Are you honest with the Lord about yourself, about your needs, and about your temptations? Do you really desire His help? Do you seek His help and His deliverance in time of need, even at the very moment of need, instead of trusting to the inadequate resources of the flesh?

Perhaps as we bow in prayer at the close of this service, you need to do business with the Lord, about these things. Perhaps you need to confess failings in these areas. I know I certainly do. And as we allow the Word of God to search our hearts, no doubt we all need to confess failings in these areas, and we all need to resolve, by God's grace, to rest more fully in the intercession of Christ.

And let me also say a word to you this morning if you are here, and you know that you have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin, and death, and Hell. Jesus Christ is the intercessor for sinners. 1 Timothy chapter two tells us that "God our Saviour...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

If you will come to the Lord Jesus Christ today, confessing that you are a sinner, confessing that you need to turn from your sins and receive the gift of eternal life that He purchased with His own blood on the Cross – if you will come before His throne

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on that basis today, He has promised that you will find grace to help in time of need. You will find, first of all, His grace to meet your first and greatest need – eternal salvation.

If it is your desire this morning to come to Christ on that basis, I would encourage you to come forward during our closing hymn this morning, and it will be our privilege to have someone sit down with you, and show you from the Word of God what it means to have eternal rest, eternal life, in Jesus Christ.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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