

“Receiving Mercy, Finding Grace” Hebrews 4:11-16

Context: The second of five exhortations uses the calling and apostasy of Israel during the Exodus as a warning to the readers of this epistle not to do the same. Salvation is realized only by the remnant, who not only begin the journey of God’s call but live it out to completion. This section calls readers to remain faithful to Jesus and avoid the peril of drifting away. This is as necessary in the present time as it was in the past, since we, like those in the faith community of that time, are prone to drift, particularly when persecuted by the secular world or wooed by fleshly trappings. Readers are called to cast off any weight or entangling sin by fixing their eyes upon Jesus, the initiator and perfecter of their faith (cf. Hebrews 12:1-3).

Life Principle: The obedient heart that cries out to God receives His mercy and finds His grace in good season (cp. Hebrews 4:16).

1. Mercy of His Word – Hebrews 4:11-13

An exhortation is given to hasten entrance into God’s rest with all diligence. Diligence is especially important in view of the ease with which we can fall away from God’s promise by hardening our hearts through indifference to His word. A graphic description of God laying bare and exposing the trachea of an animal sacrifice is used to depict His Word’s exposure of our deepest inner emotional attachments and moral valuations. Our emotions and mental constructs will be weighed in the scales of God’s Word.

2. Grace of His salvation – Hebrews 4:14-16

The author reveals the basis upon which faith communities can hold fast to God’s mercy and grace. The writer uses the imagery of the Old Testament high priest approaching the presence of God in the holy of holies through the blood spilled upon the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement. The earthly images are transcended, however. Jesus Christ serves as the priest who makes clear the way through heaven to the throne of God. His sinless divine nature and his fully sympathetic human nature provide the path and the access to the very presence of God. In seasons of trouble, we only need to cry out to God, confessing Jesus as our propitiation. We are to come before God with bold confidence, arousing Christ’s emotion unto mercy while eagerly expecting deliverance through His unmerited, loving, saving presence. Here God’s rest is found.

For Further Study:

- Hebrews 4:12 declares that God’s Word is living and working in the deepest part of our mental life. Prayerfully read Proverbs 23:19-24:22. Did any verse jump out at you? What emotional attachment or moral valuation did it challenge? How do you apply Hebrews 4:14-16 to that which was exposed?
- The sinlessness of Jesus is proclaimed in Hebrews 4:15 and is used to support our profession that Jesus is “sinless in nature” and thus lived a sinless life (see our **doctrinal statement ‘On Jesus Christ’** under **what we believe**, footnote 11 http://www.gracepointfellowship.org/files/Doc_Stmnt.pdf; see also John 8:46). What significance does Jesus’ sinlessness have on your hope of deliverance from the power of temptation (cf. 1 Peter 1:21-22; Luke 4:1-14)?
- Adapting Philo’s concept of a plurality of heavens as God’s temple, the author uses the typology of high priest to set up a long and involved discussion of Jesus’ superiority to the Old Testament position. As a **Bible study method**, look up the term “priest, high” in the *ISBE Bible Dictionary* online <http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/> and then look at the procession of Jesus into the Holy of Holies in Hebrews 9:11-28; 6:19-20; 8:1; 10:19-22. How did Jesus fulfill and transcend all seven categories described (see also “Christ, offices of,” #7)? What do you find in these texts that brings mercy and grace through Christ as your priest in the hard seasons of life?

Transformation exercise:

Memorize Hebrews 4:15-16. Each morning skim the chapter of Proverbs according to the day’s date. Let the proverb that jumps out at you correct your emotional attachments and reality construct. Cry out to God in prayer for mercy and grace in that correction.