



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Growing in Grace

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Hebrews 4:11-16

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*<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.*

*(Pastor prays)*

By God's grace, we stand here ready to start a new year. And on this first Sunday of 2021, I want to center our hearts and focus and minds on the good grace of God found in Jesus.

No matter what you've been through, who you have lost or what wrongs you have suffered, our good God has brought you through and here you are, a real product and picture of His provision and grace. The refiner's fire burns, but it also purifies that you might be closer, calmer and more dependent on your Heavenly Father. And today before we jump into our regular exposition of the Bible, I want to use this passage as an encouragement and challenge for you to take up the mantle of Christianity, the mantle of what it means to live this year as an adopted son or daughter of God, purchased by the blood of Jesus at the cross. I want to grow in grace and I want to sin less, trust more, quit worrying and take joy in the love of God and the

finished work of Christ on the cross. I don't want self-help books and trite sayings and shallow, lightweight devotions. I want to know God like I haven't before and I want you to experience the same.

In an effort to help with that endeavor, I've dropped right into the middle of Hebrews Chapter 4, in which the preacher has written a letter to a struggling church in the middle of a terrible year and presses them to get their eyes on Jesus. I want to do this with you. So for the next few minutes, I want to put before you a challenge for the new year. And not just a challenge, the tools and resources and ways that you and your family or you and your friends can accept the challenge to grow in grace.

### **Let's Commit to Grow in Grace in 2021**

I have three challenges based on three commands.

#### **Let's commit to work hard at rest**

Look with me at verse 11. <sup>11</sup> *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest.* The first question is, "What rest?" Verses 1 through 10 speak about the disobedience of Israel in the Old Testament. The disobedience was their lack of faith and trust in the finished work and clear pattern God gave from creation. Verse 3 speaks of the finished work of God from the foundation of the world and verse 4 speaks of the pattern. In six days God created and on the seventh day He rested. Verse 8 speaks of Joshua not being able to give the people rest. Verse 9 speaks of a Sabbath rest that remains. So verse 11 says, let us, as God's people in Christ, enter that rest.

Joshua points to Jesus, but what the first Joshua couldn't provide, the true and better Joshua— Jesus— does provide: genuine rest for our souls, a ceasing of a frenzy, striving, clawing, worrying, fretting for the peace of God. Jesus Himself said, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." And the amazing thing is that in verse 11 the command is to strive. The word strife is "*spoudazo*." It means fierce determination and considerable effort. It is a focused intention, a disciplined dogged attitude of doing this no matter what. This is soul work. More than your body needs rest, your soul needs peace and healing, repairing and restoration. You need to claim this rest, this finished work of God found in Christ. Rest. It is to be absolutely satisfied in Christ, His love, His life, His righteousness, His compassion, His empathy and His death on the cross for you, for your forgiveness. Rest.

OK, I see the command, let us strive to enter that rest. My next question then is “How?” How do I enter that rest? I think verses 12-13 hold the key to striving for this rest. Let’s read it.

*<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

**Living and active.** Those words are “Zao” and “Energie’.” They mean “life, effect and power.” Jeremiah 23:29 says, *Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?* The rest for God's people is found in God's word. God's word is conviction, comfort, strength, calming, confidence, courage, knowledge, growth, nourishment, change, maturity and depth. Paul told Timothy: it's the scripture that will make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ.

**Piercing.** The word of God is piercing, penetrating, sharper than any two-edged sword. And the writer gives a poetic statement about the power of God's word to get through the hardest heart and the most calloused soul. God's word can cut through anything. When God wills it, His word will accomplish it.

**Discerning.** *Kritikos.* It's where we get the word “critic,” critic of thoughts and intentions of the heart and the author elaborates in verse 13 , shifting from the word of God to God Himself to show the intrinsic link between God and scripture. Verse 13 says, “naked and exposed before God with no place to hide.” The word is *trachea*. It means neck. It is complete vulnerability and dependence on God. The word shows us the supreme majesty of God, the utter sinfulness of our lives, and the amazing grace that is ours at the cross, and we run there and rest there. I'm going to ask you to commit to work hard for the rest. That means giving priority to the Lord's Day for worship, singing, praying, preaching and fellowship. It is daily washing in God's word, doing a Bible reading plan, there is a New Testament plan and a new free app called Dwell set up on our plan. We have resources to help you with memorization and meditation on monthly passages. it would be good to find a partner for daily accountability. Let's commit to work hard at rest.

**Let's commit to holding fast to the faith**

You can see where I get this in verses 14 - 15. <sup>14</sup> *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.* <sup>15</sup> *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.*

This is all about Jesus Christ. This is devotion and doctrine. One of the fundamental flaws in the church in the last 30 years has been to overemphasize on devotion and the lack of doctrine. The writer here takes two verses and slams them full of doctrine about Christ. And in the middle of that doctrine, he says hold fast to the confession. Take both hands and get a hold of meaty, weighty truths about Jesus.

Let me just point out a few. Verse 14 says He is not just a high priest, He is a great, mega- high priest. You can search the whole Bible and you will not find another one even close. Every high priest, every sacrifice, every altar was nothing but a dim foreshadowing of the Great High Priest. Verse 14 also says He passed through the heavens. He not only was raised from the dead, He ascended into the very presence of a holy God and did so as a man *for* man. It is how we are reconciled. He is Jesus. He is fully man on behalf of men. He is the second Adam. Only a man could stand in for men and women. He is also God, the son of God, the very essence of God, the second person of the Trinity, and has the power to save. He is compassionate and sympathizes with us. The Greek word is *sympatheo*. It means to suffer along with. It means He sympathizes with our weaknesses, ailments, failing health, addictions and struggles. He doesn't shoot His wounded, He heals His wounded with patience, walking with and carrying them. Verse 15 says He is hope-giving. He was tempted yet without sin. He's there when you are tempted, providing strength, endurance and the ability to resist. He's there when you fall to temptation, covering you in His righteousness. Our savior is perfect. Verse 15 says He is tempted and yet without sin. He is spotless, sinless, the perfect Lamb of God who gives us His righteousness and takes our sin at the cross.

Now look, I just pointed out six quick things about Christ that give substance to our faith. And that only scratches the surface. I'm asking you this year to commit to holding fast to the faith. That means slowly reading the Bible, Sunday school or small-group Bible studies, reading good books, watching the pastors' class on Wednesday nights to deepen our knowledge of the One we claim to love. Let's commit to work hard at rest. Let's commit to hold fast to the faith.

## Let's commit to seeking God

Do you see the third command in verse 16? <sup>16</sup> *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.* It says that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So let's see here that the command is to draw near. It's to approach, to come to the present tense with ongoing effort.

Let's draw nearer again and again and again. I would call this praying. And look at the descriptions that give us some idea of how to pray. Pray with confidence, the freedom to come to God with your whole hearts, problems, the freedom to speak and to pour out the entirety of your soul in trust that you are covered in the righteousness of Christ. It is to pray openly, freely and often without worry. You are to pray with joy. Draw near to the throne of grace. Charles Spurgeon said, "When God gives the law, He sits on the throne of legislation. When God administers the law, He sits on the throne of government. When He tries His subjects, that is the throne of judgement. But when His people pray, He sits on a throne of grace." Pray with hope. The verse says to receive mercy, that is kindness, forgiveness, *not* getting the punishment you deserve. Mercy is loving, gentle restoration. Pray with expectation. You are finding grace. You are knowing that He purchased you with the blood of Jesus. He didn't just take you out of prison, He brought you home and gave you His name. He will hear and answer and heal. Pray with endurance. Find grace to help in time of need.

God has brought you through many dangers, snares and toils and He will do it again. He will help you. You are His.

There is no telling what this year holds, but let's commit to grow in grace in 2021. Work hard at rest. That is the finished work. Hold fast to the faith. That is doctrine and truth. Seek God with our hearts, that is learning to pray.

*(Pastor prays)*