

JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

HEBREWS READING GUIDE

WEEK 8



JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

WEEK 8
MARCH 6, 2023



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A PASSAGE TO READ,

... SOME COMMENTS TO CONSIDER,

... THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK,

... A PRAYER TO PRAY.



WEEK 8

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DAY 1 EAGER FOR REST

First read Hebrews 4:11.

After an extended reflection on Israel's failure, Hebrews invites us to, **"strive to enter that rest"** (v.11). That may seem a bit odd. Striving sounds a lot like work. And as we've learned, rest is not the reward for our work. Rest is God's reward. Rest is a grace. So, *what then does this mean?*

Well, perhaps it's best to understand the word "strive" as an eagerness or zeal. Our deepest longing should be for rest. That is, to be in God's presence; with him there's **"fullness of joy"** and **"pleasures forevermore"** (Psalm 16:11). Of course, this passion will lead to action. Professor James K.A. Smith explains, "Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow." (*You Are What You Love*). We don't work for love. But love leads us to work.

If the desire for divine rest is not central to our lives, we will **"fall by the same sort of disobedience"** as our spiritual forbearers (v.11b). The gospel does not first change what we do, but rather who we are and what we love. Jesus gives us a new heart. That means the Christian life is about learning to embrace, cultivate, and demonstrate redeemed desires. Paul told the Ephesians to **"put off your old self"** and **"put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"** (Ephesians 4:22,24). In Christ, rest in him is our greatest desire. Therefore we should strive daily to enter that rest.

DAY 1 EAGER FOR REST

1. What joy and pleasure have you found in God's presence or rest?
2. What desires are you currently learning to "put off"? What new loves are you learning to "put on"?
3. Why is rest in Christ our greatest desire and need?

Heavenly Father ...

I'm eager for rest. Yet daily old urges haunt my attention and seek my striving. Settle my soul. Comfort my pain. Empower my spirit. I want to be in your presence, basking in your joy and pleasure.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 2 EXPOSED BY TRUTH

First read Hebrews 4:12-13.

God's Word makes rest possible. After all, it was his word, "which fell on deaf ears in the wilderness" (*O'Brien*, 175). While in the immediate context **"the word of God"** is likely connected to his voice in Psalm 95, in the wider context it's about the fact that God has **"spoken to us by his Son"** (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus is the Word of God—alive and well (John 1:14). And he himself is our rest (Matthew 11:28).

The Incarnate Word makes rest possible because he tells us the truth. It's **"sharper than any two-edged sword"** and separates reality from deception (v.12). And it cuts both ways. Sometimes we're tired because life is hard; simply being a human in a broken world is wearisome. Other times we're tired because we're sinning; we keep trying to be gods unto ourselves. That's exhausting!

In either case we're prone to believe lies. We might think our weariness is proof God has forgotten us. We might think our exhaustion is just another problem for us to solve on our own. The Word speaks life to both lies. T

he truth of God's Word exposes who we are (humans) and gives us what we need (Jesus). None of us is hidden, we are fully seen by the one who loves us.

DAY 2 EXPOSED BY TRUTH

1. What stand out to you about God's Word in this passage?
2. Which lie do you believe most often? That God has forgotten you? Or that you are God?
3. What truth do you need to remember this week?

Heavenly Father ...

Thank you for speaking the truth. Thank you for never leaving me and always loving me. Help me to rest assured in the truth of your Word this week.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3 HELD FAST FIRST

First read Hebrews 4:14.

Rest is possible because Jesus tells us the truth. But it's also possible because Jesus draws near. Hebrews now tells us that he's our **"great high priest"** (v.14a). In the same way that priests in the old covenant made intercession and sacrifices for God's people, so now Jesus does in the new. To do so he **"passed through the heavens"** (v.14). This is an astonishing reality.

Perhaps when we think about Jesus drawing near or his sympathy (which we'll consider more in the next passage), we think about his compassion and willingness to love us, especially in our pain. However this personal intimacy is only possible through his cosmic intimacy. Only because the Eternal Son of God first **"descended from heaven"** and became Mary's son, could he also be **"the propitiation for our sins"** (John 3:13 and 1 John 2:2). His priestly role is not only about his proximity to us, but his death for us.

Jesus is the high priest who doesn't just make a sacrifice, but is the sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews says, **"let us hold fast our confession"** but it's clear that in condescending himself from heaven to the cross, Jesus held fast to us first (v.14).

DAY 3

HELD FAST FIRST

1. How have you experienced the intimacy of Christ?
2. What prevents you from fully trusting the intimacy of Christ?
3. How does the gospel empower us to “hold fast”?

Heavenly Father ...

Thank you for drawing close to me. Thank you for loving us so much that your Son stepped down from heaven, took on flesh, endured the pains of this life, and even died for the sins of the world. May his humble priesthood cause me to grow more confident, faithful, and trusting.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4

SYMPATHY IN WEAKNESS

First read Hebrews 4:15.

We are weak. The pressures of this life compromise our values, confuse our thoughts, and compel us to destructive behaviors (see Romans 12:1-2). North African theologian St. Augustine understood living a just and holy life was about having our loves in order. He said, we should “not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally” (*On Christian Doctrine*, I.27-28). In our weakness, under the pressures of this life of flesh, our loves get disordered.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that while Jesus faced those pressures, he was **“tempted as we are,”** but his loves were never disordered (v.15b). He never sinned. He wasn’t compromised, confused, or compelled to destruction. Therefore Jesus can do two things at the same time: sympathize with us and save us.

Jesus is able to **“sympathize with our weakness”** but he’s also able to say, **“my power is made perfect in weakness”** (v.15a and 2 Corinthians 12:9). As a human being, he knows the pressure. As Lord, his loves remain ordered. And so in him, our loves can too.

DAY 4 SYMPATHY IN WEAKNESS

1. What does this passage tell us about God's love?
2. How have you experienced the sympathy of Jesus?
3. How does the gospel empower us in our weakness?

Heavenly Father ...

I'm weak. Daily I feel the pressure to conform to the patterns of this world, and reorder my loves in accordance with its will and way. Thank you for meeting me in my weakness, not just with an idea or plan, but in the flesh. Empower receive and emanate your love today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5 HELP IN NEED

First read Hebrews 4:16.

Jesus is not just a priest, he's a King. In fact, he's the King of kings who is ***"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come"*** (Ephesians 1:21). As in the opening of his address, the writer draws attention to a heavenly throne (see Hebrews 1:1-2).

A throne, of course, is the seat of power and prestige in a kingdom. It's where royalty makes mandates and proclamations, exercising authority over their dominion. However, Jesus' throne is ***"the throne of grace"*** (v.16a). What's more, we're invited to ***"draw near"*** and even expect to ***"receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"*** (v.16). Because of the character of this King, his power is exercised for the good of the weak.

This is wildly unexpected. Worldly power is rarely used to benefit the weak. Universally we value the idea of using resources and position to bless others, especially those with less agency. However, we rarely see this virtue embodied by the powerful. Whether in politics or religion or business, those in power almost always use their power to protect their power.

Jesus' throne is not a place of fear and hoarding but love and blessing. At his throne we don't just have access to his resources, we have access to him. You see, "Mercy is characterized as God's tender compassion; grace, as his goodness and love" (NTC, 127). What we receive is Jesus--who is merciful. What we find is Jesus--who is gracious. Our confidence to draw near to such power comes not from what Jesus has, but who he is. And no matter what we require in our time of need, Jesus is more than enough.


DAY 5 HELP IN NEED

1. How does Jesus' character give you confidence to ask him for whatever you need?
2. What help do you need this week?
3. How ought the gospel reshape our view of power?

Heavenly Father ...

I need your mercy. I need your grace. I need mercy because _____ . And I need grace because _____ . Help me to trust that by your Spirit and in your Son, I have everything I need.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



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