

Title: Lettuce – pt.3  
Text: Hebrews 4.14-16  
Theme: The seriousness of entering his rest  
Series: Hebrews pt.11  
Prop Stmt. The basis of assurance is Christ. Perseverance is the corroborating evidence.

Read Text:

Four times in this chapter the AH says, “let us.” Two of those admonitions are in these 3 verses. The first one speaks to an issue that is throughout the book of Hebrews and is not only in our text, but is part of the big idea of the book, reflected in the theme; Press on Pilgrim. The most debated text in the Bible that relates to this issue is only two chapters away and probably two sermons away. So, let’s first of all, look at this “let us” statement in v.14 as it relates to some other statements in this book, and then we will work through the text.

Read v.14

The command to us to “hold fast our confession” certainly implies that it is possible to let it go – don’t you think? Why would you command someone to hold on to something, unless it was possible for them to lose it – right? We say, “Hey don’t lose your keys.” But we don’t say, “Hey, don’t lose your nose (unless of course, you’re Mr. Potato Head). You can lose your keys, but you can’t lose your nose. So, if we are told to hold fast to our confession, then what does that mean to lose it? Let me put it to you this way. Can a genuine follower of Christ fall away from the faith? Or, can a person really be saved, without a doubt? This is not the first time that this book raises this issue.

2.1 – “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”

3.6b – “And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”

3.12 – “Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”

3.14 – “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

4.1 – “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”

In v. 11 we read, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”

Some of these are clearly warnings and some of these are calls for endurance that are like the encouraging words of friends and teammates to you as you run in a track meet. Looking specifically at our text it appears to be saying that we can have confidence to “draw near to the throne of grace” if we “hold fast to our confession.” Is this saying that we can only experience the benefits of the gospel, if we are successful in holding on to the gospel? If so, it makes it sound like we are saved by our faith in Christ, but we are kept in Christ by our efforts (or we are kept in Christ by our ongoing faith – either way, our staying in Christ is based on our obeying and believing, rather than Christ keeping us). Now, we have seen from the Scriptures that our salvation has three aspects to it. A) Justification – the act of God whereby he declares a sinner to be righteous based on the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith alone in Christ alone. B) Progressive Sanctification – the process whereby a believer grows and matures to become more and more like Christ. C) Glorification – the point at which the believer actually becomes like Christ – in glory.

If we believe that a person is saved (justified) by faith alone, but (between justification and glorification) this person is kept (progressive sanctification) by works, then if that person stops working, and stops holding on, do they lose what they used to have? Is it true that we are saved by faith and kept by works? Is it therefore possible that a person can become a believer and then lose their salvation? Those two questions appear to go together, so let’s answer them one at a time.

## **2 Questions**

1<sup>st</sup> question: Are we saved by faith and kept by works?

Galatians 3.2-3 Answer – NO!!

2nd question: Is it possible that a person can become a believer and lose their salvation?

There are a number of passages that seem very convincing that a genuine believer is kept by God all the way to the end.

John 6.39-40

John 10.28

Romans 8.29-30

2 Cor. 1.21-22

2 Cor. 5.5 (Eph 1.13-14)

Phil. 1.6

1 Thess. 5.9

2 Thess 2.13-14

Heb. 13.5

Is that not a rather convincing case, that once you are saved, you are kept by God? When you have such a strong emphasis in the Scriptures on the security of the believer, I think that you had better be very careful in attempting to undermine that, unless there is an

equally compelling emphasis to the contrary. So what do you do with those passages that appear to say that if you snooze, you lose?

2 Cor. 13.5

Galatians 5.4

Selected Hebrews passages

I have heard people attempt to reconcile these apparent contradictions by saying that we should believe like it all depends on God, but live (work) like it all depends on us. Seriously, does that make any sense? Is that even rational? Does the Bible ever call you to disconnect your belief from your actions? But that is what that statement is saying – isn't it? There are no actions that are disconnected from belief. What we do is a reflection of what we believe. So, if we attempt to do things because our salvation depends on us, then we believe that it in actuality does.

There is a better way of resolving this and it has to do with the fact, that we, like many of the people in the NT have a very shallow and simplistic view of conversion. We think like this: You are saved or lost. There is no middle ground. Now, is that true? Yes, however, (listen carefully) we do not know with certainty all who are saved and all who are lost. God does, but we don't. There are people in our church, and some in our families of whom we wonder, if they ever really got it. Fact is, we wonder that about ourselves at times – don't we? So, from God's perspective, there are only two categories and those who are in are kept. But, since every major NT book provides numerous warnings about those who claim to be believers, but in actuality are not, we have to conclude that there is in affect, a middle category, called "false faith". The people in this middle category are those who love the benefits of Jesus, but do not really love Jesus. They "love" Jesus as long as he gives them what they want, but if they don't get what they think they deserve, then they fall away. Christ warned of this false faith over and over in his ministry. He spoke in Matt 7.21-23 about those who called him Lord and prophesied in his name and cast out demons in his name and performed miracles in his name, and yet, Christ says, "I will tell you plainly, 'I never knew you.'" In John 8, there were a group of people who claimed to believe in Jesus and he said to them, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." It is the same point that Christ made in Matthew 13 when spoke of the four different types of soil (chart). So, while God knows who is in and who isn't, to us (even as we look at our own lives) it is not always immediately clear who is real and who is a fake.

But here is what is so crucial to understand. Those who are in the middle category, are those who either claim to believe or claimed to believe at one time, but there is no evidence that corroborates their claim. This person has been exposed to the gospel. This person has even claimed to believe it. This person may even think that he is a believer. If this person walks away from the gospel, they are walking away from their false faith to no faith, instead of going on to real faith. This is what we call apostasy. The person is exposed, has an initial spurt of enthusiasm, a profession of sorts that lasts for a time, but over time, the evidence of their life makes it clear they never really believed. Every church and every generation has people with a false faith mixed up with it. This is more

than an obscure theological argument. This is about us, and our children and others whose lives show no genuine desire for God. We want a gospel that will get us into heaven, but not a Lord who rules our life. But any gospel that does not include the Lord Jesus Christ is no gospel at all.

Now, I know that it is Mother's Day. Therefore, I decided to preach this sermon for Mother's Day. Now, you think I'm joking, but I am deadly serious because I know that some of you are here for only one reason; - your momma asked you to come. If it wasn't for your momma asking you to come to church, you wouldn't be in a gospel preaching church on Sunday. You would be doing what you normally do on Sunday. Now, I say this in love, but you need to hear this. You are here today because you love your momma, not because you love Jesus. The rest of the year and your life makes that obvious. Some of you claim to have no faith at all. Ok, in a minute, I am going lay out for you the greatest news you could ever hear. Others of you were raised hearing this, but there is no evidence in your life that you really believe. You have a false faith, and your momma knows it. So, I told her that if she invited you, I would preach this. (not really, it simply happened to be the next text in the series, besides, I've been here too long and ran out of Mother's day sermons about 13 years ago).

So, while good works and strong affections for Christ cannot save you and cannot keep you, and therefore are not the ground of your assurance, they do serve as markers that indicate the presence of authentic faith. Now, with that in view, this text becomes a great source of encouragement and admonition. In fact, this text is an incredibly strong encouragement for those who have authentic faith ("we"). It is a needed assurance because those who are truly regenerate are the ones who are most sensitive to sin and in light of vs. 12-13, this assurance and admonition is needed. Notice, there are 2 reasons and 2 commands.

## **2 Reasons**

### **1. We have a great high priest (14a)**

The AH described Christ as a high priest (2.17), but now starts to unpack the implications of this glorious truth. The word "since" indicates that there is reason why this truth is being set forth. A priest is someone who stands before God and represents his people. A bad priest is the occasion for much fear because of how he would be representing the people. But even a good high priest had his limits. We have a great high priest. But, what makes him great?

#### **A. He is great because of what he has done – "passed through" (6.19-20)**

Christ is described as having passed through the heavens. Later, when we get to 6.19-20, we will see that Christ passed through the inner veil in heaven to the throne room of God, which is OT Day of Atonement language that speaks of Christ offering himself as the sacrifice that brings us access to God. We have a great high priest, because this high priest was not only the one who made the offering for our sin, but he is the offering for

our sin. And now, through him, we have access to God. No one else could do that for you.

**B. He is great because of where he is – “the heavens”**

All other priests are on earth. Our high priest is great because he is in heaven. Look, if you are going to get a priest – get the greatest. Don’t get a priest here on earth who is subject to sin, sickness and death like you. Get a priest in heaven, meaning, get the most exalted one there is.

**C. He is great because of who he is – “the Son of God”**

You cannot find one who is greater than the Son of God. But, hold on, just because this high priest is right now in heaven and is the Divine Son of God does not mean that like many a politician who gets drunk on power in D.C., that he forgets all about the people that he is supposed to be representing. Oh no!

**2. We have a sinless high priest (15)**

Who was not conceived like us, but who was born on this earth like us. He walked on this earth, just like us. He ate like us, and drank like us and slept like us and worked like us, and played like us, and talked and laughed and cried and suffered, and struggled and was tempted like us. In fact, he was tempted far more than we will ever be tempted. He was tempted by Satan himself. In addition to that, he never gave into his temptation, so the intensity of the temptation was never broken by his surrender to it. Yes, he is the Son of God, but that does not mean that he does not understand. Jesus knows all about our sorrow. Jesus knows all about our sin. Jesus knows all about our trials, our temptations, our struggles, and fears.

**A. He understands because he was tempted.**

Notice the phrase, “in every respect”. That means that you can never accuse God of not understanding. Brothers and sisters; that is an enormous comfort! We all have people in our lives that mean well, and seek to encourage us in our struggles. But, when you don’t have a job and they do, or you don’t have a spouse and they do, or you don’t have a child and they do, or you don’t good health and they do, or you don’t have parents who are living and they do, or you don’t have whatever, we often construct a barrier in our mind from receiving comfort and counsel from them because we are not convinced that they really know what we are facing. The truth is; they may not. However, you have One who knows you completely (3.12-13), and has been tempted with the same temptations that you face. The exact circumstances differ, but the heart issues are the same. He knows, but not because he shared in the same failure. He knows, but did not fail.

**B. He is effective because he is without sin.**

When he stands before the Father's throne on your behalf, his pleading for you, his advocacy for you, his representation of you is so effective and so successful and so complete, because of (work and relationship to the Father – explain)

The Roman church is being rocked by a pedophile scandal that seems like it will never go away. It is a sad and sinful story that affects lives of thousands. This church (CBC) is not perfect, so I do not bring this up because we have arrived. But there is a contrast between what the Roman church teaches and what this text teaches that is sadly illustrated by the current mess. The Roman church teaches its people to put their faith in the church. I.e. do what the church tells you to do, and we will handle the rest for you. But, what happens when you discover that what you have put your faith in is corrupt? For, what is the church if it isn't the people who run it and are in it?

Do you see the difference? This text calls you to put your faith in Christ, not the church. Put your faith in the great high priest. That is what these two commands are about.

## **2 Commands**

### **1. Let us hold fast our confession.**

We believe, but we don't believe perfectly. In times of struggle we are tempted to think – “What's the use?” (Like being behind by 40 points in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter – except that because of Christ's victory, you cannot lose – but we forget, so we are commanded to hold fast our confession – which means...) Look at Christ! Do you see how glorious he is?! Do you see how excellent, how perfect, how sufficient he is? Do you see where he is right now? Do you realize what he has done and what he is doing? Do you realize the power of his gospel to save you and keep you forever? Cling to him, not because you can be lost, but because he will not let you go! Trust his hold on you! Hold fast to your profession of his Lordship. Cling to your declaration that is He alone is your Savior. Never relinquish your grip on your announcement that you trust him completely, knowing that you are trusting in the One who will never let you go.

### **2. Let us draw near to the throne of grace.**

That is a bold command! This is a bold command from your Father to come to him with your needs. Come, boldly! Pray confidently because you have a righteousness that is not your own! That is a command that initially brings a “you've got to be kidding me” type of response, particularly in view of verses 12-13. What on earth would ever motivate me to even go near God, and pray to him and ask him for his help when I know that he knows all of my sin? Did you ever do something, for which you were supposed to be punished, but the punishment never came and with every passing day, you thought, that maybe it was forgotten? But now, you need the teacher's permission, or the principle's signature, or a statement from a judge, and you are terrified, because you fear that your request will trigger their memory. That is our dilemma – isn't it? The very one that we need is the one that we fear. The very God, whose strength and wisdom and direction we have to have is the one who has every reason to judge us and condemn us. What right do

we have to approach God and ask him for anything? How can we come to God who is devastatingly righteous, knowing that He knows every thing about us? We can come, and we can come boldly, and we are not merely given permission, we are commanded to come boldly, with confidence to God because we have a GREAT, high priest, in whom we stand and who stands in our place having lived in our place and died in our place. When we fail to pray, we are failing to appropriate the gospel. Pray is a logical response of the believer because he has an audience with God that has been merited for him by Christ alone!

No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in Him is mine. Alive in him, my living head, and clothed in righteousness divine. Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ, my own.