

Mid Week • Hebrews 4

INTRO

As we saw last week, in chapter 3, the writer of Hebrews shows the superiority of Jesus Christ to Moses.

The power and effectiveness of his argument was based on fact that the Jews of his time considered Moses to be the greatest man of history.

And they were shocked and outraged by the behavior of their ancestors who had resisted Moses and at times conspired to murder him.

The height of their forefathers folly was demonstrated at Kadesh Barnea on the border of the Promised land.

It was from there that they sent the 12 spies who returned with a report that while Canaan was indeed a rich land, the people who lived there were too fierce to overcome.

Their lack of faith in believing God would go with them and give them the land had resulted in their wandering around the wilderness for nearly 40 years, until the entire generation that had come out of Egypt in the Exodus died off.

It was their children who entered in and took possession of the land.

The writer of Hebrews rehearses all this as a way to raise the ire and sense of outrage of his readers.

Then he holds forth Jesus as being *even greater* than Moses.

The point was – if they honored and respected Moses and criticized their ancestors for their lack of faith in entering in to all that the Lord had promised through him, then *how much more outrageous* would it be if they rejected Jesus, who was even greater than Moses, and who had opened a new realm of the Spirit for them to enter in to?

In Chapter 4, the author speaks about this *new realm*, this *new age of the Spirit* and what Jesus has opened for the people of God.

Chapter 4 flows out of chapter 3; so in order for us to understand what the beginning of chapter 4 is about, we need to recap the last

few verses of chapter 3.

16 For who, having heard, rebelled?

→ **Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses?**

17 Now with whom was [God] angry forty years?

→ ***Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?**

18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest,

→ **but to those who did not obey?**

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

It wasn't *disobedience* that hindered them. It was *unbelief*!

A lack of faith stalled their progress and resulted in their demise because they *never overcame* their unbelief.

God said, "Go in and I will go with you and give you the land."

They said, "No! We don't believe You."

Now the writer applies this to his readers . . .

HEBREWS 4

Vs. 1-9

Because of the way he works his argument in this passage, it's extremely difficult to deal with this in a verse-by-verse manner.

So the way we're going to approach this section is to read the entire thing, take a look at his main point and then go back and break it down.

¹Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

²For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. ³For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

“So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’”
although the works were finished from the foundation of
the world. ⁴For He has spoken in a certain place of the
seventh day in this way: **“And God rested on the
seventh day from all His works”**; ⁵and again in this
place: **“They shall not enter My rest.”**

⁶Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and
those to whom it was first preached did not enter
because of disobedience, ⁷again He designates a
certain day, saying in David, **“Today,”** after such a long
time, as it has been said:

**“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your
hearts.”**

Psalm 95, which he quotes in ch. 3 and here in ch. 4, was written by
King David some 500 years after the Exodus.

But David applied it to the people of his own day.

He said. “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your
hearts.” Even though “Today” was 500 years *later*.

And notice the vow God made against the unbelieving people of
Israel who balked at his promise to take them in to Canaan.

V. 5 - God said, “They shall not enter My” **WHAT** – “My REST.”

What we expect to read is God saying that because of their
unbelief, “They shall not enter the” **WHAT** – the PROMISED
LAND.”

But God said the penalty was they shall not enter His Rest.

It is this *Rest of God* that becomes the focus of chapter 4.

In order for us to understand the rest of chapter 4, we have to ask –
Just what *is* the *Rest of God*?

First let’s determine what it is *not*.

It’s not the *Promised Land*.

Verses 8 & 9 prove that . . .

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not
afterward have spoken of another day.

The rest of God is not the *Sabbath* observance of the Jews.

That's what v. 4 says . . .

4For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”

The Sabbath law was a part of the national covenant God made with Israel.

They were to rest and cease from all their labor on the 7th day as a commemoration of God's rest when the work of creation was complete.

But the rest God is referring to here is neither Canaan nor the Sabbath.

The rest of God is linked here to *faith*.

Just as the Jews celebrated the Sabbath day by faith and eventually entered in to the Promised Land by faith, these were merely *symbols* or *figures* of a place God wants to bring all of His people in every age.

And that place, that position, is a settled confidence in Him as God.

This is what Jesus Christ came finally and fully to accomplish. You see, even though the Jews eventually entered and took possession of the Promised Land, they continued to struggle with unbelief. They never really conquered their adversaries but became content to settle down *among* them.

And the presence of their enemies among them eventually led to their falling away from God.

As it says in v. 8, Joshua never gave them rest.

If he had, then King David never would have spoken of another day that was yet future.

If we're not careful we'll miss the subtlety of what the writer is saying here.

You see, the name “Joshua” is the same as the name “Jesus.”

In Hebrew, they are both written and pronounced “Yeshua.”

His point is – what the old Yeshua was unable to do because of the unbelief of the people, the new Yeshua has done for us who believe.

In the same way – though the Jews observe one day in seven as their Sabbath, they still have not entered the place of rest God wants for

His own.

Through Christ, we enjoy not a one day a week relationship with God, but a continual relationship.

Our entire lives are a Sabbath of rest because through Christ, we have ceased from our own efforts at earning salvation and rest in His completed, perfect work.

This is what he means by the God's rest.

It is not the rest God *is taking* but the rest God *offers* to all those who look to Him instead of themselves for salvation.

It's critical we understand this or this entire chapter remains a mystery.

God's rest speaks of the place a person finds when they come to a settled, abiding confidence in the power and goodness of God.

Bottom line – it means a once for all decision to believe God's revelation of Himself through Christ and then to daily renew that decision.

You see, when it comes down to it, we're faced with one of two options:

1) We can trust Christ and depend on His love and strength

--or--

2) We can trust ourselves and depend on our own ability.

Now think about it – the only place to know true rest, is to cast ourselves totally on God.

To the degree we fail to do that, is the degree to which we fail to rest.

Armed with this understanding of what the rest of God is, let's go back now to v. 1 and see how the author develops his argument . . .

1Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest,

As Psalm 95 says -

let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Fear is not the legacy of the believer in Christ.

As John says, God's perfect love casts out fear!

And that's the point here – the writer is addressing this to those who through unbelief are in the process of falling away from

their faith in Christ.

They have every reason to fear, for they have lost their grip on Christ and are drifting away.

2For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them;

The good news, meaning the Word of God, was preached both to the first readers of Hebrews and to the people of the Exodus.

The specific message may have been different, but it was all the Word of God.

And being the Word of God, what it needed if it was to be of benefit was an open and receptive heart that was willing and ready to believe – but alas, for the ancient Israelites, it was not to be.

but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.

We know how the Jews of the Exodus responded to the word and revelation of God – with unbelief.

Notice the way the writer *describes* their unbelief here.

He says, “the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.”

Though the revelation of God was so mind-blowingly obvious and clear to the people of the Exodus – because their hearts were bent on evil, what they heard with their ears was never mixed with faith in their hearts.

It is one thing to *hear* the word of God and something completely different to *receive* it.

God’s Word, in and of itself is powerful – but it does not profit someone unless it’s received and appropriated.

I could stand up here and tell you that a local Mercedes car lot has an over run on inventory and needs to give away 200 cars *tonight*.

They came just before service and gave us the keys to 200 vehicles and they’re absolutely free to the first 200 people who come forward right after study.

Unless those words mix with faith in you, they profit you nothing. But the faith he’s referring to here isn’t merely intellectual assent or

agreement with the facts.

It's a belief that results in trust – a trust that leads to action.

Let me use another example – it's a well worn one we often use when describing biblical faith to those who are new.

This is a chair.

I can stand here for the next 10 minutes and explain to you the physics of gravity and the tensile strength of steel and pressboard.

I can explain how this chair has been designed by an engineering team and subjected to numerous test to ensure it will hold the weight of a person weighting up to 600 lbs.

You can look around and see numerous other persons sitting in chairs just like this one.

In your head, we can build a mental construct for why this chair is dependable as a piece of furniture to sit in.

But unless all that mixes with a willingness on your part to

TRUST that information, this chair will not PROFIT you.

For the children of Israel, they had abundant evidence that God was dependable and that He would give them the Promised Land, but they refused to trust Him.

There was no reason for this lack of trust – it was merely a choice not to believe.

As a result, God's word and promise, though powerful, did not profit them.

How sad it is that God's Word is so abundant and powerful today, but it remains profitless because to so many, simply because they refuse to trust God.

3For we who have believed do enter that rest,

What's the key for entering the rest of God? Believe!

Believe what? Believe God!

The word "enter" is in the present tense and could rightly be translated this way – "In contrast to those in v. 2 who heard but didn't believe, we who have believed the good news, are entering the promised rest of God."

The moment we came to faith in Jesus Christ, we entered in to a

totally new relationship with God based on faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ.

So in that sense – we *were* saved.

But as we go on, we realize that the Christian life is one of continual growth.

And what was *begun* in faith must *go on* in faith as well.

We don't begin in the Spirit and then become perfect by the flesh.

That was the great mistake the Jews made.

They were delivered from Egypt by the power of God.

But they thought their entrance into Canaan would come by their own strength.

This was also the blunder made by the Galatian Christians.

Paul asked them, "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"

So we are also *being* saved.

Finally, the day will come when we *will be* saved – when Christ comes and our days on earth are complete.

That is our final rest – fully realized.

as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'"

The writer here shows how King David made an application of the story of the failure of the Jews of the Exodus to the people of his own day 500 years later.

Because of the unbelief of the people, God took a vow that they would not enter – not the Promised Land, but His rest.

This mention of *rest* moves the writer to clarify for his readers that by *rest* he doesn't want them to think of *Canaan* or even the *Sabbath*.

The rest he is referring to is something *Canaan* and the *Sabbath* are only figures of.

So he writes . . .

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; ⁵and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

6Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it,

Why does it remain that some must enter it at some future point?

Because King David wrote of it and exhorted his readers to look for it.

and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

8For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.

Now he gets right down to it and spells it out in v. 9 . . .

9There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

But that rest isn't still future for the readers of Hebrews.

It may have been future for the people of David's time – but it's now been accessed and made possible through the later Joshua as he goes on to say in v. 10 . . .

Vs. 10-11

10For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

11Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Since vs. 9-11 are my text for Sunday, so I'll leave further comment till then.

I would just ask that you pray and ask the Lord to prepare the hearts of all who come this Sunday as we will be looking at the very core or the gospel and the precious gift Jesus Christ came to give us.

Christ came to give us rest, to give us peace – yet many Christians miss out.

This is nothing new – it's the very concern the writer is expressing here.

There's a relationship between *faith* and *rest* we must grasp if we're to know the peace that's the real legacy of the Christian life and the central power of its message.

Vs. 12-13

12For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. **13**And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give account*.

The author's emphasis throughout this whole section has been the abiding principle of the freshness, relevance and vitality of God's Word.

It was as real and potent to his readers as when first spoken to the generation of the Exodus or the people of David's day.

For God's Word is a living thing – a powerful thing.

An individual will not profit from it unless it's mixed with faith – but that does not nullify or weaken the Word one whit!

The person who is not profited by the Word because of a lack of faith will find that in the end the Word will stand as a powerful testimony against him!

Here the writer reveals the power of the Word of God to lay bare the core issue of faith or a lack of it.

He says the Word is like the sharpest knife that is able to slip in between things the human spirit is unable to discern the difference between.

In the most graphic terms, he describes a dividing process that lays bare the very heart and soul of a man or woman.

What he describes here is something intensely personal that every person has known or will know.

It's a confrontation with the Word of God in which a person's very heart is laid bare and they come face to face with God.

They realize they are being challenged with the Truth, and they

have a decision to make to either yield to that truth, or resist it. It's the place we all come to when we experience the work of the Spirit opening us like a fisherman guts a fish.

Our motives, or desires, our innermost fears, dreams, values and aspirations are all laid out under the light of the Holy Spirit and we come face to face with the choice of hanging on to all of that or agreeing with God's view of it that it's all sin and death.

It's my firm conviction that everyone faces this moment of decision – maybe many times in their life but for sure, at least once.

It's their Kadesh Barnea, if you will – their moment like ancient Israel where God has revealed Himself time and again and proven Himself trustworthy but then He brings them to a critical, crucial point of decision.

It was pretty clear for them that day – believe God and go in, or reject Him and fall back.

God's eyes looked out over the camp of Israel and saw that of all the hundreds of thousands, only 2 believed Him and wanted to enter in.

Their faith was rewarded and they eventually did get to enter the Promise.

The rest of the people, all the adults, died there in the wilderness. The writer is saying that just as in that day, God's eyes still surveyed those who were called His people and He knew what the posture of each heart was.

No one can fool God with appearances for God looks at the heart. And in his grace and mercy, He sends His Word to us so that we too can know what's really in our hearts.

This is why there's no substitute for the Word of God in the Life of the Christian.

Living in this world, fallen as it is and in such carefully orchestrated opposition to God, it's easy for our hearts to become seduced and led astray.

It's the Word of God, applied by the Spirit of God, that lays us open to the truth and helps us discern whether we're still at rest in Christ or if we've strayed and are trusting in something else.

In v. 13, the author writes about the penetrating gaze of God that makes us downright uncomfortable –

. . . all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give account*.

There is nothing to hide behind – not fig leaves of self-righteousness to cover ourselves.

We stand naked before God!

The word “open” means literally to “twist the neck” or to “take by the throat.”

It’s the posture the priest would use as he took the bound sacrifice and held the head to expose the neck just before drawing the blade across the throat!

The point was that all of us are in the grip of God, totally vulnerable and subject to all-seeing gaze.

Let no one think that in the Day of Judgment, they will pull anything over on God or escape His righteous verdict.

Indeed, we are in the grip of God.

And that means we are in the *grip of grace*.

But that grace will not profit us unless it is mixed with faith.

CONCLUSION

Vs. 14-16 belong with the next chapter as they introduce Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest.

That subject will then run all the way through the end of chapter 7.

So we’ll leave the last 3 verses of chapter 4 for our study next week.