

## Be Diligent to Enter God's Rest

### Hebrews 4:1–13

You have heard me joke before about how I love a Sunday nap. But it really isn't a joke. In the rhythm of my week, there is nothing I love more than getting home from church on Sunday, having dinner, getting the dishes done, maybe looking at the paper a bit, but then eventually laying down for a short nap. I love that time and I'm pretty diligent to make sure it happens almost every week.

The writer of Hebrews says that there is another kind of rest that we must be diligent to enter. This is an eternal rest that will far surpass a Sunday nap or anything we can experience in this life. Today, we are looking at Hebrews chapter 4, which is a continuation of what we looked at last week. The whole section of 3:7-4:13 is essentially one continuing argument. Last week we looked at the truth that we need to encourage one another to persevere and not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Today, we are going to see that we are to be diligent to enter God's rest.

The author begins by urging us to be sobered by the example of Israel's failure to enter a promised rest.

#### I. Be Sobered by the Example of Israel (v. 1-2)

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup> For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.*

In the verses right before this, the author talked about how in Moses' day Israel was not able to enter the promise of rest in Canaan due to their unbelief. And so in light of that example, the author says, *Therefore, let us fear*. Be sobered by the fact that though there is a promise of entering God's rest it is possible that some may *come short of it*. He doesn't want anyone to miss out on entering God's rest. And so he is warning them.

But, there is more than warning here. He is also offering encouragement. The author wants them to know that *a promise remains of entering* God's rest. God has not withdrawn the promise. That is good news to his hearers and it is encouragement to persevere. But for the good news to be of profit, it must be *united by faith*.

In Moses' day the good news that was preached to Israel was that God would deliver them from slavery in Egypt and bring them into the land of Canaan. But that good news *did not profit them*, because it was not *united by faith*. Israel did not believe and because of that they were unable to enter the land of Canaan (3:19).

The writer of Hebrews' listeners have also had *good news preached* to them. For them the *good news* was the Gospel message – salvation through Christ. But if that *good news* was to be of value for them it must be *united by faith*. It is not just hearing the

good news that matters. The people in Moses' day heard the good news. It is hearing and then responding to the good news by faith that matters. Let me say that again. It is not just hearing the good news that matters, we must respond by faith.

I want to say a word to those of you who have grown up in the church or been in the church a long time. If this is true of you, you have probably heard the good news over and over again. Sometimes it is easy to be convinced that hearing is enough. "Yeah, yeah, I know the message of the gospel." And we give intellectual assent. But the point of this passage is that hearing isn't enough. There must be a response of faith. We must hear AND believe. Be sure of your response of faith because without faith the good news will do you no good.

The example of Israel's lack of faith and the consequences of that should sober us to this reality. Now, what the author has just said in a negative way — a lack of faith prohibits one from entering a promised rest — he now states in the affirmative and he says that it is those who believe who enter God's rest.

## **II. We Experience God's Rest Through Faith (v. 3-5)**

*<sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,  
"AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,  
THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,"  
although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.  
<sup>4</sup> For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD  
RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; <sup>5</sup> and again in this pas-  
sage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST."*

It is those who believe who enter God's rest. We must hear AND believe.

Now, the main point of emphasis in the second part of verse 3 is not on God's condemnation of those who did not believe in the wilderness, rather it is used to support the view that there really is a rest. The end of verse 3, together with verse 4, makes it clear that rest was never ultimately fulfilled in the land of Canaan. In verse 4, he cites Genesis 2:2 and then again from Psalm 95. His point is that a Sabbath rest was initiated when God completed creation and it was reaffirmed in the time of David. Rest was never to be identified just with the promise of rest in the land of Canaan. And so for those who believe, there is a greater rest than what Israel was promised in the land of Canaan.

But what is this rest? Some believe it is a state of being at rest that he is talking about — a state of ceasing from work and activity. Others believe it is a location that one enters. Both are possible, but I think the author intends for us to understand *rest* as a place. Elsewhere in the book of Hebrews the verb, "enter," is repeatedly used in reference entering into a place — for instance entry into the inner sanctuary in Hebrews 6:19-20. As well, Canaan, which serves as a symbol or a type of what was to come, was a place

into which the children of Israel were to enter to find rest. And so I believe that when the author is talking about rest, he means a place of rest.

When do we experience this rest? Some believe that the rest that the author is talking about is something that is a present experience of those who believe. Most who hold this view still see a greater fulfillment at the end time, in other words, it is an “all ready-not yet” kind of thing. Others believe that the rest that is promised here is something that is in the future. It’s a very complex issue and either position is possible, but I think the author is speaking of something that lies in the future. It is what we will experience at the time when either we die or Jesus returns and we step into God’s presence in His heavenly kingdom. That’s the promised rest.

But having said that, there are future realities that can have a bearing on our present. This is one of them. The knowledge of that future rest in God’s heavenly kingdom is something that bleeds back into the present and in a very real way we begin to experience it in some senses in this life. But the writer of Hebrews is clear, it is only those who believe who experience the promise of God’s rest.

Do you believe? Jesus died on the cross for your sin. He rose again to give you new life. It is those who believe this good news who will experience God’s promised rest. The promise of rest still remains. It is possible to enter it if we respond to the good news of the Gospel by faith.

The writer goes on to express that we must not think we will get around to responding some day in the future, because today is the day to enter God’s rest. Today is the day of opportunity.

### **III. Today is the Day of Opportunity (v. 6-8)**

*<sup>6</sup> Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,  
<sup>7</sup> He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,*

*“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”*

*<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.*

In verse 6, the author is essentially saying that the promise of rest is still in effect. There is still room for more to enter. And the day of opportunity is *Today*.

The point of verse 8 is that Joshua did eventually lead Israel into the land. And they did experience rest there, but it was not the fulfillment of the ultimate rest that God promises. That is why David spoke of another day in Psalm 95. The author uses Psalm 95 again; this time to emphasize the use of the term, *Today*. *Today* is the day to hear

God's voice and respond with faith. It was "today" in David's day. It was "today" the day that the writer of Hebrews wrote these words. And it continues to be "today" for us.

Have you ever told yourself, "Some day I'm going to give my life to God. Some day I'm going to trust Jesus and become a follower of Christ, but not yet. I'm not ready. I want to have some fun first or I need to get my life cleaned up first"? The author of Hebrews is saying to you, today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart and say, "Some-day I will respond." Today is the day of opportunity.

Now, as we come to 9-11, we come to the main exhortation of the writer. He urges us to be diligent to enter God's rest.

#### **IV. Be diligent to enter God's rest (v. 9-11)**

*<sup>9</sup> So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. <sup>11</sup> Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.*

Once again the author states that there is a rest for God's people that remains. This time he calls it *a Sabbath rest*. This is a different term for *rest* than he has used in every other instance in this chapter. The normal word he has been using for *rest* indicates a place, but this term emphasizes the character of this rest that we can have. *Sabbath rest* doesn't mean, "Sabbath day", but rather a Sabbath celebration. It stresses "festivity and joy, expressed in worship and praise of God" (O'Brien). There is a place of rest to which believers are going and it is going to be an amazing place in God's presence where we experience celebration and joy and festivity in the worship and praise of God.

And since this promised rest is going to be an experience of celebration and joy greater than anything we can imagine, the author urges us, "*Be diligent to enter that rest.*" Make every effort to enter that rest. He has made it clear that it is believers who will enter that rest. He has also made it clear that it is disbelief that prohibits someone from entering that rest. And so he is urging to have a kind of diligence that lives with a persevering faith that believes to the end.

Notice his concern for each person. He says to exhibit this diligence *so that no one will fall*. He wants no one to fall and turn away from God in disbelief. There is a sense where our diligence is a community effort. We make every effort to enter God's Sabbath rest together. This is what Steve talked about last week when he talked about how we need to encourage one another day after today (3:13).

Now, just as the author started chapter 4 with a sober warning, he concludes this section with a truth that should also sober us and that is that we will give an account to God.

## V. We give account to God (v. 12-13)

*<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

This familiar passage is such a rich passage about the word of God. I wish we had more time to talk about it. But the point of these two verses is that we cannot hide from God. He knows us completely. The living and active word is able to penetrate into the deepest recesses of a person's being and it is *able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart*. We are completely exposed to God through the power of his penetrating word. God knows your heart.

Verse 13 adds the thought that no one can hide from God. *All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of God*. We are accountable to God. You cannot fake Him out. He knows you completely. He knows your heart. There is no place to hide. We will all give account to God.

If you are here today and have not yet come to the place of responding to the good news of the Gospel in faith, my encouragement to you is to take this warning seriously. If you do not come to God in faith, like the children of Israel in the wilderness, you will not enter God's Sabbath rest. You might be raising a nice family. You might be doing stuff in the church. But God knows your heart. He knows if you truly believe.

The good news of this passage is that the opportunity to enter God's rest still remains. There is still room. And the writer of Hebrews is saying to you that today is the day of opportunity.

Jesus' death on the cross as payment for your sin is a free gift. You don't have to earn it by living a good life. You CAN'T earn it by living a good life because no one is good enough, for all have sinned. It is simply a gift that you can receive by faith – a faith that says, "I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin and that through His death I can be forgiven and be given new spiritual life and experience God's Sabbath rest.

This morning if you sense that today is the day for you to not only hear, but to also respond in faith, I want to give you an opportunity to do so. I'm going lead in a prayer that you can pray right there quietly in your heart to God. Let's pray:

Dear Jesus, thank you that because of your love for me, you became a man and you lived a perfect, sinless life so that you could die to pay for my sin. I am sinful and I need your forgiveness. Jesus please forgive me. Wash me clean. I yield my life to you now and choose to follow you. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal spiritual life . . . Sabbath rest. Amen.

For those of you who made this decision of faith, Jesus has answered your prayer. You may feel something; you may not. What matters is an act of faith. When we respond to the good news by faith God honors His word. Your sins are forgiven. You are given new spiritual life. You become a child of God with the hope of rest because things are right with God.

Now, many of us this morning hear this passage and we already have expressed belief. We have not only heard the good news, it has been united by faith in our hearts. For us, I believe that the writer of Hebrews wants this promise of a Sabbath rest to be a truth in our lives that helps sustain us in the midst of trials and hardships. He is using this truth to help his listeners not give up and turn away from God in their struggles. There is a promised rest. It is certain.

When we enter that rest upon our death or upon the return of Jesus, we will experience a Sabbath rest so full of joy and celebration and festivity that will stretch for eternity that it will be beyond unbelievable. We need to see our struggles in the light of that promised rest. Let the hope of that future rest bleed into our lives now and be encouraged by it and keep walking with God.

Today, we are celebrating the Lord's Supper. In this celebration we are invited to look back. We do this to remember Christ's sacrifice for us. But as well, Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 11:26 that we are to do this until Jesus returns. This celebration is to help us look forward to our heavenly destination, our place of Sabbath rest, where we will gather with Jesus around a table and enjoy a great feast in His presence (Rev. 19). And so, today, be reminded that you have a certain destination of promised rest. Let that truth strengthen you to remain diligent in your pursuit of God.