

Hebrews 4:1-10 "Cease From Your Rest And Enter His"

Hebrews 4:1-10 ^{NAU} 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. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; ⁵ and again in this *passage*, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." ⁶ 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, ⁷ 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." ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. ⁹ So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

This morning we begin a new chapter in our letter to the Hebrews which of course is God's letter to us as well. We never want to forget that all of Scripture is Holy Spirit inspired. And though it may be easy to relegate the Bible to another text book to study, this is God's personal word to you and me.

Our text this morning is still within the context of believers considering their salvation in a way where they don't take it for granted and they approach this new life in Christ in a way where they rejoice in God's amazing grace and rejoice that they have complete assurance in persevering to the end, while realizing that up to the end they must faithfully represent their God and Savior.

Last week we saw how many in Israel during the wilderness journey in the desert for 40 years, did not believe despite the fact that they were part of the called out people of God. Simply being associated with those who believe God doesn't save anyone. Each person must make his or her own decision to trust Christ for eternal life.

Either one believes or they don't. Being undecided is a choice not to believe God. This is what is meant in HEB 3:19 "So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." Christ put it as succinctly as one could. MAT 12:30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

The writer of Hebrews is addressing the church and wants each person to realize that we must be sold out to Christ who has purchased us with His blood. And only those who believe with their heart, soul and mind will understand what it is to have a personal relationship with their God.

Many Jews in the desert walked alongside with the people of God, but many of those Jews did not know God. And "So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." Our writer wants us to consider *Whom* we believe as we consider *how* we believe Him which will affect the *way* we believe with lives of dependence on God as we walk in obedience.

And so we come to our text.

HEB 4:1 "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."

On the surface it sounds like there is a danger of someone believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and yet ultimately falling short of His grace and not entering the "rest" of God.

I just read from the NIV which falls a little short of the original Greek text. The more literal reading would be "Therefore, let us fear lest perhaps a promise being left to enter into His rest, any of you might seem to come short." (ALT)

In the NIV it sounds like a true believer could actually be found to come short of salvation, whereas the original Greek alludes to one seeming to have come short. The difference is that we as believers should not even seem to come short, or give the impression that we come short through our behavior.

Arthur W. Pink sums it up this way. "The opening words of this chapter bid us seriously to take to heart the solemn warning given at the close of chapter three. God's judgment upon the wicked should make us more watchful that we do not follow their steps. The "us" shows that (the writer) was preaching to himself as well as to the Hebrews."

Now some might have a problem with the idea of believers fearing as the beginning of the chapter clearly speaks of. In fact we're told on several occasions not to fear. ISA 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

JOH 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

2TI 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (or fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

But the fear our writer speaks of here is a fear of God as one whom we should honor and revere as the awesome loving God He is. Time and again the Scriptures speak to this issue. In Proverbs we're told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

PRO 14:27 "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death."

Jesus Himself speaks of this in MAT 10:28 "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Here He refers to fearing God. The apostle John recorded these words in REV 19:5 "Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!"

Once again, A.W. Pink. "Concerning God Himself, we are to fear Him with such a reverent awe of His holy majesty as will make us careful to please Him in all things, and fearful of offending Him. This is accompanied by a fearsome distrust of ourselves."

In other words, our love for Christ should be so paramount that the thought of grieving our loving and holy God, because of sin, should make us ashamed of pursuing such a path. It's a check in our lives to not go off on our own way. That's what Pink meant by having a fearsome distrust of ourselves.

However, there is something else we should realize about fearing God which is not healthy. Continuing Pink's thought: "The fear of God which is evil in a Christian is that servile bondage which produces a distrustful attitude, kills affection for Him, regards Him as a hateful tyrant. This is the fear of demons..." which James

speaks of in JAM 2:19 "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."

This same unhealthy attitude of fear toward God is brought out in the parable of the talents.

MAT 25:24-28 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' 26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 28 "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

This kind of fear assumes that God is an ogre and is without love and compassion and that to trust Him is to be put in danger of being hurt. This kind of fear as we see in Matthew cripples our ability to love and serve our God as He desires to use us.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And this kind of healthy fear, which reveres our Lord and wants to please Him and trust Him for all things, is what our writer in Hebrews wants us to consider so that we won't displease our God and even seem to come short of entering into God's rest.

We don't even want to give the appearance that we are children of the enemy instead of being children of the living God. On Thursday evenings we're going through the book of Nehemiah in the O.T. On one occasion Nehemiah rebuked the Israelites in Jerusalem because of their ungodly behavior. He said in NEH 5:9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?"

What Nehemiah was saying is, that if we behave like the Gentiles how does that show that we belong to God? Cannot the Gentiles look at us and ask why they should turn from their evil ways when God's people can claim a relationship with God and yet walk as the rest of the world?

We as believers in Christ are not only to love and obey our Lord in things we do or don't do, we are to be above reproach to the degree

that nothing of our behavior could even be questioned by the world as being ungodly.

This is why Paul wrote to Timothy and instructed him to choose men for leadership whose lives were exemplary so as to be the example for the flock that they may follow such example.

1TI 3:2 "Now *the overseer must be above reproach*, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,...."

But so as not to only single out leaders Paul also addresses others in the Body of Christ who are not in leadership.

1TI 5:14 "So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander." ("No occasion for reproach" - NAS)

All of us are to be above reproach as we faithfully represent our Lord in this world to His honor and glory as we depend on His grace and strength to accomplish His will. The writer of Hebrews is simply encouraging the Hebrew believers to consider how they represent Christ before the world and to turn from any ungodliness which would bring shame to our Lord's name.

Now before we move on to verse two let me just point out that here in verse one a theme is being introduced which will continue on for most of chapter four. That theme is God's rest.

HEB 4:1 "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you (seem to) have fallen short of it."

This rest is entered into only through faith in Christ as we receive the gospel or good news of the promise of God's deliverance. What's interesting about this is that our writer points out that this gospel or good news was not only preached to you and me but also to those in the wilderness in the days of Moses.

HEB 4:2 "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

You mean to say that the Jews in the wilderness had the gospel preached to them? You bet. In fact, the word used here in our text is the word gospel as it applied to them. In the original Greek the word is *Euangelizo* and it's where we get our English word evangelize.

The Jews in the desert were evangelized. They were the recipients of good news that God would deliver them and bring them into His rest. Later we'll look at what this rest entails, but it included a spiritual rest which can only be received by faith.

That's why we read in HEB 4:2"but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." All the good news God has for the world is useless to them unless they receive it by faith.

Trusting that God has given us this good news and we receive it by faith will secure for us the rest He has for us.

HEB 4:3-6 "Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world." 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." 5 And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." 6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience."

Now what does all of this mean? The point that our writer is making is that our hope is found in God's rest. The question is what kind of rest? Keep in mind that those first receiving this letter were primarily Jews. They had heard about God's rest all of their lives.

This is why we read in verses 3-5 that this rest was spoken of but as we'll see it was spoken of as future. This is what threw a lot of Jews. They had always been taught of God's rest but many of them equated it with the rest they received when entering the land or the rest they experienced on the Sabbath and thought, we've got it all.

No, they didn't have it all. In fact they didn't get it at all. The writer of Hebrews is setting up his argument from the Scriptures by showing that there is much more to look forward to when referring to God's true rest.

HEB 4:3-4 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work."

The Jews felt that the rest they had in God had to do with the Sabbath they observed. On the one hand God says they shall never enter My rest and yet on the other hand the rest was established from the foundation of the world, which is to say that the true rest of God has always been available, but only through faith.

God labored six days and rested on the seventh. This is not to suggest that God was active in this world for six days and then went into some inactivity. That's not what rest intimates here. It speaks of completing a particular work where there is no longer required that same type of work to continue. Once God created all things by the word of His power everything was created. From that point on there was nothing to add. It would continue as was designed by God in those six days.

By the way for those who have a problem with God creating everything in six days, as do the evolutionists who contend that this world evolved over billions of years, I would just add that there is another way to look at this. God spoke everything into existence out of nothing. My question would be why did He take so long? He could have created everything in a millisecond. But that's another study.

But because the Jews understood the concept of Sabbath rest to mean stopping any labor, they thought they experienced God's rest since on the seventh day they observed what God commanded and since they entered the Promised land their ultimate rest was there. In their minds they were already in God's rest and yet we see here that the writer of Hebrews is quoting from Psalm 95 which was written hundreds of years after Joshua led them into the Promised Land.

What this means is that there was a rest which was always intended to be entered into which was not realized by many Jews, because this rest could only be entered into by faith. This is why verse one starts with "while a promise remains of entering His rest." It's a promise yet to be realized. And that's the only reason verse 5, which is quoting Psalm 95, could speak in a way which says, "They shall not enter My rest."

How can this be? Because it's a rest which God gives to those who accept His good news by faith. This good news was given to Israel and they rejected it. Instead they substituted their own good works as they used the law as a means of obtaining this rest.

And yet God could say of these people they will not enter My rest. Why?

HEB 4:6 "It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience."

Disobedience here is not simply that they didn't accomplish some act that was required of them, rather disobedience is intrinsically tied to unbelief. In other words they disobeyed God's promise of hope and rest through unbelief. Because the commandment was, trust Me and I will deliver you. They disobeyed God's command and said I won't believe.

Does this mean that the promise of God's rest is not still offered to people? Of course not. Notice the beginning of verse 6 "It still remains that some will enter that rest." This is where you and I come in. In fact this is where the original readers of this letter come in.

The point that the writer is making is that if we think that we can enter into this rest in any other way than through a saving faith in Christ then we've missed God's rest. Once again, the Jews receiving this letter were being tempted to go back to the old ways of the Old covenant.

The message to them was, Judaism is dead as the means to entering into God's rest. Faith in Christ is what makes alive and gives the sure hope of entering into God's rest. The message is the same for you and me. You and I are to consider this rest and the way in which we enter into it.

If we have embraced Christ then we have His rest promised to us. But as has been one of the main themes of chapter three and four, our lives should demonstrate that we have entered in this rest by faith. And the way we can know we have entered into His rest by faith is if we're persevering in this promise by faith with lives of obedience as we trust our God.

We've seen this contrast all through this portion of Hebrews. Unbelief and disobedience produces a false hope in the works of man's hands. Belief in God as shown through obeying His promises by faith is shown to produce a true hope in the works of Christ.

One trusts in our own works and self-righteousness, the other trusts entirely in Christ's work and righteousness which is the only true acceptable sacrifice which the Father will receive.

HEB 4:7-10 "Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."
8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."

Today, in other words, whatever day this is, is the day of salvation. The good news goes out to say, don't harden your hearts toward the promises of God. Receive them by faith today and live in that new life in Christ. And then as to remind these Jews, who had first received this letter, our writer uses his logical progression of thought to further drive home his point of how this rest was not obtained even after the Jews entered the Promised Land.

HEB 4:8 "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day." So, what does this mean for you and me? We look forward to this rest. And as I mentioned before it does not mean inactivity. This rest is the very rest God enjoys in Himself which is life eternal.

F.F. Bruce raises the question.... "In what sense does God speak of My rest? Does it simply mean "the rest which (God) bestows" or does it also mean "the rest which God Himself enjoys"? It means the latter. The rest which God promises to His people is a share in that rest which He Himself enjoys."

Bruce continues: "What then is this Sabbath rest which awaits (us)? It is evidently an experience which (we) do not enjoy in our present mortal life, although it belongs to us as a heritage, and by faith we may live in the good of it here and now. How we may do so is illustrated with a wealth of biographical detail in ch.11. And in that chapter we have further references to the eternal homeland which is the heritage of believers, the saints' everlasting rest -----

----- the better country, that is, a heavenly one which we desire, the city which God has prepared for us, the well founded city of which He is architect and builder. Of this city of God men and women of faith are citizens already, although the full exercise of their civic privileges in it is reserved for the future.."

This is the ultimate Sabbath rest which God has reserved for you and me in Christ. And what the writer of Hebrews wants us to do is take our eyes off of the earthly and begin to see that which is eternal from God's perspective. Because as we do this by faith we will begin to grow in our appreciation in a way which shows our gratitude by living in this faith without wavering.

What used to toss us like the sea now begins to level out as our hope of rest in God takes on a new view from a heavenly perspective. And we begin to understand the spiritual aspect of our rest in God and how that is the most important thing in our lives.

As we dwell on Him and trust Him more and more we will find ourselves understanding that our citizenship in heaven is much more important and real than any citizenship we have in this world, and our priorities begin to line up with God's as we live in this rest by faith and trust in the One who offers this rest which is our future hope.

And what we begin to discover more and more is that our citizenship in heaven is God's priority for us, so much so that He will give us everything we need to finally arrive there. And of course everything we need is His Son.

That's why Paul could say in GAL 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We're told in HEB 4:10 "for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."

In Christ we have ceased from trying to work our way to heaven. Instead we rely on His work. God ceased from His work of creation and it was found to be complete and very good. He also ceased from His work as it relates to securing our salvation. His work at the cross is done and we are the fruit of it although He continues to work as He draws many to Himself. In one sense our work for Christ will one day be done in this world. And then we will know first-hand of the promise of His rest.

REV 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

If we've rested in Christ by faith, our rest in Him will be secure. Now in that security God tells us to go out in His power and alert the world that there is rest in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we will be saved.

Praise be to our God and Savior Jesus Christ who gives us His life for eternity. May we be eternally grateful and show Him our gratitude with lives of love for Him, because He first loved us.