

Hebrews 4:11-16 "In His Rest May We Actively Seek Him"

Our text this morning continues the thought we ended with last week concerning God's Rest. And one of the things we saw last week is that God's Rest is not some inactivity. It's an abiding by faith in who God is and what He's given us in the way of life in Christ.

This Rest is not so much a place as it is a person. It's true that Abraham understood that the Rest, or the Promised Land, was not real estate in this world, but a future Rest in a place where God is not only on the Throne but the designer of all that He has in store for us in Christ.

HEB 11:9-10 "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

The spiritual reality of a heavenly city, or Rest, must be understood in our relationship to Christ and where we stand in His Kingdom through His shed blood our behalf.

EPH 2:19-20 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

Now we know that Jesus Christ is not literally a stone which makes up part of a building. Rather it speaks of Himself as being our foundation. He is the One who is our abiding place, our fortress, our Rock of salvation. All of these terms speak of the person of Christ as being our Rest.

To enter into His Rest is to enter into His life which He freely gives to all who would come unto Him by faith. This is where the writer of Hebrews is going with his thought.

HEB 4:9-10 "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."

Our Sabbath Rest may be found on the first day of the week which we celebrate because of Christ's resurrection, but this is only a shadow of the ultimate rest we have in Christ. There remains then

a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. This is future oriented which is confirmed in 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."

This rest can only be entered into by faith. This rest is our salvation. This rest is Christ Himself.

1JO 3:19-20 "This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."

Our rest in Christ is entered into by faith the moment we believe. But its fuller realization comes the moment we leave this world to go home to Him. And what that should do for us is what it did for Abraham. His focus was always on what lay ahead. He never got caught up in this world, but rejoiced in the promise and with gratitude sought to know God and to please Him in this world until He went home to his ultimate rest in Christ.

Abraham was diligent to please the Lord, but his diligence was the result of his faith in the God who promises. He trusted the Lord and therefore he didn't look back. And this is what our text brings out.

HEB 4:11 "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."

The NAS puts it this way. "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest...." This is not to suggest that our diligent works will get us to heaven. It simply means that our diligence is faith with feet. Be diligent to enter that rest, be diligent to trust God, be diligent to follow Christ, be diligent to persevere to the end as we rely on the grace and strength of God.

In other words, don't let your guard down. Don't become complacent and disobedient as the unbeliever is toward God. We certainly don't want to follow the same example of disobedience of those who reject God as we read here in verse 11.

This is a warning to the church not to take their new life in Christ for granted and in the process dishonor their new Lord, Master and King Jesus. If we are alive in Christ, we have a life which will be sensitive to the leading of our Lord, because His Holy Spirit dwells in us.

And this is why we read in HEB 4:12-13 "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Here the writer of Hebrews demonstrates how God's word works in the life of one who has life and also how this word can bring life as the Spirit takes the truth and opens the heart to receive it.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. God's word is effectual in the life of the believer because he has been given spiritual eyes and ears to not only hear the Lord but to follow the Lord. This is what Jesus meant when He said in JOH 10:27-28 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

God speaks to us in His word. And His word is living because Christ is living. It's not a coincidence that the living word we see here in our text is also the same expression we see of Jesus in JOH 1:1,3-4 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men."

It's interesting that in our text the living word is seen as active and sharp and is referred to as a sword. This is exactly what Paul makes mention of when describing the armor of God given to us.

EPH 6:16-17 "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

We wield a sword that is not a carnal weapon. It has been given to us by God Himself so that we might do battle for Him. The apostle John also speaks of this sword in REV 1:16 "In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Jesus is the one addressed in this passage. It is out of His mouth where this sharp double-edged sword comes. He has spoken the word and given it to us. But the idea of a double edged-sword

carries with it the truth that it cuts two ways. It is a righteous sword or word and it will not only bless as it cuts away at the old man in our lives, but it will also cut in a way as to judge the unbeliever.

REV 19:15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. (Psalm 2:9)

The same word which gives life and blessing is the same word which condemns those who reject its life giving message found in the living resurrected Christ. And no one can escape its cut.

But for you and me in Christ the cutting of the word in our lives is like a Masterful loving surgeon meticulously cutting out the cancerous parts which only do us harm. This living word in our lives is only meant for our good. And as God works in our lives and conforms us into the image of His Son He goes deep and cuts out the stubborn parts which will not conform without Divine intervention.

This word of God is living, life-giving, and it's active as only that which is alive can be. Don't think for a moment that the word of God which you have in your possession is some text book which only contains principles for us to live by. No, this word is from God Himself and will work in our lives as we come to it, meditate on it, be doers of it as we live by faith in the One who gave it.

We are new creatures in Christ. Therefore the old things of our lives cannot make this new life grow. Only life can come from life. This word is living and to neglect is to neglect the very means by which we can grow in this new life. Remember what Peter said?

1Pet.2:2-3 ..... "like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

The kindness of the Lord is the rest we enter into by His grace. And the kindness of the Lord is what cuts deep into our stony hearts and is replaced with the heart of Christ which allows our hearts to beat with His life.

This sword, this living word of Jesus, pierces 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."

This is a heart-word from God which is living. Many times we wonder why our growth seems so slow. And sometimes when God is in the process of cutting out the fleshy parts of our lives we get off the table and demand to know what in the world this master surgeon is doing instead of trusting He knows what He's doing.

The Master surgeon says, 'this trial is for your good and My word will encourage and heal you.' Or, 'this choice you have to obey or disobey is to test your willingness to follow and let me cut out that part which wants to wander from Me.'

All of life is an opportunity for God to work in and through us for His good pleasure. His living word is meant to nourish us, to protect us and to strengthen us. And in the process of abiding in His word we find that our true abiding is in the One who is the Word become flesh. And we can hear Him speak to us and encourage us as we have ears to hear and eyes to see as the Spirit of God enables us. And we find His rest and are lifted up in the promise of His ultimate rest for our lives with Him in eternity on the new earth with our resurrected bodies.

He knows us through and through. This is why we read in HEB 4:13 "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

We're tempted at times to think that maybe God won't notice if we move in a direction that is not where He wants us to go or that it won't make any difference to Him if we do. Adam and Eve come to mind when they sinned and they hid in the garden. I'm sure the thought went through their minds, maybe if we stay behind these bushes God won't see us.

You ever see little children who try to hide from you? It's a riot to watch them especially when they've found a spot that only hides their head. As long as their head is under cover everything is okay, despite the fact that their rear ends are hanging out from under the couch. But you can't see them, or so they think.

And as you walk into the room you try to keep from laughing and you say, I wonder where Billy is? And yet that's what we do at times and in fact that's exactly what our first parents did.

GEN 3:8-9 "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day,

and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9  
But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

God wasn't looking to be informed of Adam and Eve's whereabouts. He knew. The question was asked for their sakes. And so it is with you and me who think that we've pulled one over on God. And as that little child, God comes to His children in Christ at times and asks us, "where are you"?

And we hear our Father's voice and we come to grips with the fact that we can't hide from Him and He doesn't want us to hide because He's seeking us out for restoration and forgiveness.

He knows what we're made of and how much we need Him because of the weakness of our flesh. But He certainly doesn't want us hiding our heads in the sand thinking that there-in is our solution. He wants us to come to the light of our salvation and find the peace and rest which passes understanding and fills us with His joy, His rest.

His love for us surpasses anything we could begin to imagine. His love is shown in the very act of redeeming us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus Christ, representing us before the Father in His perfect righteousness, speaks of His priesthood on our behalf. And our writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that this is an integral part of our rest in God.

HEB 4:14-15 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin."

First notice that our High Priest has the total victory. He's gone through the heavens which is another way of saying He has resurrected from the dead and has ascended to the Father and has been received with joy and gladness in completing His mission to redeem us from the penalty of our sin.

And it's with this knowledge that our writer says, "let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." Why hold firmly? Because we have a firm and sure salvation. There is substance to our new life

in Christ. It's not like water which slips out of our hands. Christ has gripped us and He tells us to grip Him and walk with Him.

Many, many times the word of God tell us to stand firm in the Lord. He's worth standing on because He's faithful.

1CO 15:58 "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

1CO 16:13-14 "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 14 Do everything in love."

But we say, "Oh, God how can I stand firm in my circumstance?" We can stand firm in any circumstance if we stand on the Rock of our salvation. But we can only stand by faith.

2CO 1:24 "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm."

Peter says the same thing in his epistle.

1PE 5:8-9 "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

But we say, "Oh, God I don't have enough faith to take another step." He knows that too. And He knows how we need Him. But don't ever forget where your faith comes from. It comes from God Himself which is why you can stand firm.

2CO 1:21-22 "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

He has no intention of leaving us out there in the cold to fend for ourselves.

1PE 5:10-11 "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

We have a God who cares for us in every area of our lives, no matter how big or small. Sometimes we forget that Jesus the Son

of God, became man. He knows what we suffer and the trials we encounter.

HEB 4:15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin."

Did you ever wonder if God can personally relate to your trial? I remember when we had to live with Cheryle's parents when we moved over to this coast. And they were very gracious in allowing us to do that. But the four of us lived in a 10'x8' bedroom for six months. Try it sometime and see if you don't agree that that can become a trial.

And yet I recently thought, even there Jesus can relate. He spent most of His three year ministry living in the homes of other people. Remember what our Lord said in MAT 8:20 "Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Could He relate to our situation at that time? You bet. There isn't an area of life that Christ can't relate to that we find to be a struggle. In fact our text tells us that our High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses.

The Greek word for sympathy here is *sumpatheo* and it means to feel sympathy with, but it also implies to commiserate with. In other words Jesus commiserates with us in our weakness. The idea of commiserating is to personally console in their time of need.

You see, you and I might feel sympathy for someone. But Jesus doesn't simply feel our pain, He gets next to us and puts His arm around us and personally consoles us because He personally went through what we're experiencing.

He was tempted in all ways, and went through every sort of trial, but He never sinned in the process. That's why He can be called our High Priest. He is eligible, because of His perfection, to enter into the Father's presence on our behalf with the sacrifice of His own life as the final payment for our sin.

He knows what it is to suffer. He knows what it is to be rejected. He knows what it is to be alone and lonely. He knows everything about our trials because He suffered the ultimate trial in giving His life for ours. Can He relate to your particular situation? Yes, but infinitely more than that He wants to commiserate with you and comfort you and encourage you.

Because of who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf the writer of Hebrews ends this section in HEB 4:16 "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

I like the way the NAS begins this verse. "Let us therefore draw near." God wants us to draw near to Him. In fact that's exactly the way James puts it in his epistle.

JAM 4:8 "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you....."

God wants us to come near to Him. And the way we draw near is through the One who came near to us, so much so, that He took on our humanity and exchanged places with us, taking our sin and giving us His righteousness. He loves our nearness so much that He died to secure that nearness for us with Him forever.

Other translations, including the KJV and the NKJV, speak of drawing near and coming boldly to the throne of grace. The word boldly in our world today is usually meant in a way which includes a brashness. This is not what the word of God means here.

It doesn't suggest that we come to God and demand something or hold God hostage by quoting a verse and telling God to deliver on such a promise that we bring. No, the word used in the KJV, boldly, suggests what the NAS and the NIV say and that is we can approach His throne with confidence.

Our confidence, our boldness, comes as a result of God already inviting us to come. It's a confidence in His love which says, come and find rest for your souls. But it's a confidence that allows us to speak frankly and honestly with our Lord. That is not to be confused with speaking rudely with our heavenly Father or coming into His presence with the attitude that He doesn't know what He's doing.

But we can come asking questions and wanting to know how we may walk with Him and what we need to do to accomplish His will. It means we can come with our confusions and anxiousness and our fears and weaknesses. It's a confidence without being afraid of what we'll find when we come to His Throne. He wants us to draw near.

I might add that the word come near or draw near in the Greek is in the present tense which means it's encouraging a continual and constant coming that God wants of us. Don't ever stay away, is what He says to you and me.

But what we find when we draw near is what I get excited about. "... so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." When we draw near to God He's not waiting to abuse us, He's there to give mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

Mercy is His compassion and love for us. Grace is giving us what we don't deserve. And yet He wants to shower us with what we need to help us in our time of need. The literal translation regarding our time of need is, "*timely need.*" Our need will be met on a timely basis. It may not always be on our timely basis, but it will be on God's perfect timely basis.

The point is, God knows how timely it must be to meet our need and allow Him to receive all glory and honor as we draw near to Him and rely on Him and trust Him for all things.

Stay close to God. It's a good and safe place to be. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Be diligent in your faith in Christ and abide in His living word which is active in your life to conform you into His image.

His grace and mercy is real and He's there to help us in our time of need. I leave you with an encouragement from Peter's first epistle.

1PE 1:3-5 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."