

The Rest to Come Hebrews 4

Genesis 1-2:3
1 Kings 8:54-61
Responsive Psalm 116:1-7

Today we start in our chapter 4, where the author here dives deeper into the idea of entering God's rest that he had introduced in chapter 3. As we saw last week in chapter 3 he is warning his readers to wary that they have not strayed into unbelief and to be careful that they are not in danger of losing the promised rest, as Israel did in which everyone from that first generation that was lead out of Egypt died wandering the wilderness. The last 2 weeks we talked about the implications of this example of Israel in what it means for the life of those who claim Christ, that this is a stark warning to be sure of your salvation and faith and that you are in this rest. Which is why the Author implores his readers to be reminded, and to remind each other to remain faithful to the truth of God's word, and to the grace and faith that they have been given lest they fall away in rebellion as Israel did proving that salvation which is claimed to be false. For, as he said in verse 14 of chapter 3, "We have become partakers of Christ, IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

This does not imply that it is necessarily an act of man's will alone, and while man's will is included it is subject to God, and his will in the new birth. This verse here in chapter 3 is not a promise that if you live a good life, attend church and basically act like a Christian that you will be saved from the wrath that is to come.. it is more than that, it is deeper. As we know all those who are the adopted Children of God will persevere for they have God working in them to will and to do, we saw that in the book of James, and in the book of Galatians. So this author is basically saying the same thing, All of those who are partakers of Christ will be steadfast to the end, all of those who are not, all of those who rebel, or are unbelieving will fail, they will not remain steadfast. This is one of the lessons in the parable of the sower is it not? The seeds who fell upon the stony ground and sprang up immediately. But when the sun came, when things got difficult they withered and died. They did not persevere to the end proving to not be rooted in the faith.

The the passage we are looking at today is a continuation and building upon this argument, now that he has warned them to make sure that they are in the rest of God, he goes on to explain exactly what it means to be found in the rest of God. So starting this morning I want to go back to chapter 3, verse 7 and read through to 4:10 since today is really a continuation building upon what was said in chapter 3. So as we can see the author's intention here as with the earlier chapter is to apply to those he is writing to this lesson from their forefathers. And in doing so here he is showing that the fulfillment of the promises did not end with the physical nation of Israel, but instead extends to something far greater, and far superior then just the inheritance of physical land, but rather to salvation itself.

As we will see as we continue through this book of Hebrews that this is the common practice of this author, that is to point out the ultimate fulfillment of the promises that were first given to others in the old testament. And that those promises often times were two fold, one to the physical, and one to the spiritual, such as the case here equating entering God's rest both with the land of Canaan which was promised, and also salvation and an inheritance with Christ in the spiritual promised land which is heaven. An important thing to point out, is the timing of entering God's rest. It is implied here that it has yet to be fulfilled, that there is a time coming when we who remain faithful to the end shall enter into his rest.

There is a sense that we can say that we experience a small piece of what it is to be in the rest of God as believers is there not? Each believer at some time or another has personally experienced a time of resting in God when everything else around them seems to be nothing but chaos. Resting in God's sovereignty, know that he is ultimately in control brings a rest in trials and hardships. Know that your salvation and faith is secure in Christ, it can not be lost is another thing that we can rest in. These things are just a small taste of the rest that is to come, when we finally are no longer wandering the wilderness here in this world, but have arrived in the promised land. So what the Psalmist writes, saying Today if you will hear his voice, is just as applicable now as it was then, for in the large picture, we are still living in this time called Today. The door of salvation is still open to all those who would repent and believe upon Christ. As far as God's promises are concerned it is still Today which indicates both an opportunity, and also a responsibility. We have an opportunity to live in his time of God's grace, and we have a responsibility to not be like the Israelite and continue to live in unbelief and rebellion.

The wording here in verse 1 of chapter 4, while it is a continuation of the same thought process as the last half of chapter 3 there is even more of an urgency when he says, "let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it." There is nothing more dangerous to a body of believers, or to the individual than to become complacent in their faith, or fostering an attitude of not being concerned whether or not one may not enter into God's rest. Paul put forth a warning in 1 Corinthians which we read this morning using the Israelite in the wilderness as his example as well. HE says in verse 11 after listing the failures of Israel, their rebellion and unbelief, he says, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." But he goes on in verse 13, with the promise, that "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

There is a warning of this constant push, or temptation to fall into rebellion or unbelief, there is the constant struggle with sinfulness that we deal with on a daily basis, and we must be careful that we do not become complacent in our faith, but that we continue to strive to endure lest we fall as Paul writes. And while the author of Hebrews writes, you will be a partaker of the promises if you endure to the end. Paul here encourages us that those who are Christs will endure for they are not given any temptation, trial, or hardship that God has not provided as escape, so the effect of such things in our lives work as both a testing of faith to prove out whether or not it is genuine, and also so that through such things we grow in grace and in faith toward our God who provides the escape. So we can see the fear of the author as he writes to these Hebrews, that he is afraid of the possibility that there maybe those among them who are through unbelief in danger of not entering that rest, there is the fear that there maybe those who believe that they have been born again, or brought to faith but the reality is that have been deceived and while may act, or seem like a child of God in all appearance, they lack the true faith that is needed.

There is a real danger that through a failure of faith that the end up depriving themselves of the joy of experiencing the fulfillment of entering God's eternal rest. It is the same for us today as is for them, We as Christians are like the nation of Israel, traveling through the wilderness toward the promised land. And as we make this journey, the one thing that should strike dread and fear in our hearts is that in the end we are judged to have failed to enter into God's rest. Over the course of that last few years I have quoted this passage of scripture many times, and I describe it as being likely one of the most fear inducing sections of the bible. Matthew 7:22 "Not everyone who says to me Lord Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me you who practice lawlessness.” The reality of this possibility which is stated here, and experienced so vividly in the fate of the generation that perished in the wilderness warns us to place our trust in God completely and not to be deceived into believing anything that we have done, or can do would justify us before a holy and sovereign Lord. Thankfully we can experience some of the rest to come through the ministry of the Holy Spirit which testifies in us God's love, grace and mercy toward us.

Looking now at verse 2, here in chapter 4, “For 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.” This is quite the profound statement in a couple of ways. First off the mention that the author says that gospel was preached to us, meaning us in this new testament era just as it was to those in the old testament era. This is actually quite an important distinction to make and the implication here is huge in understanding the bible. There is not, and never has been multiple ways of salvation. There is an idea that salvation came through the following of the Law in the old Testament, and now it is through faith in Christ, but as we see the author here says that the gospel was given to them, just as it is given to us, unifying the bible as a complete work pointing to Christ on the cross instead of being split between old and new, or Hebrew and gentile. So there is no excuse, and there should not be any who teach, or believe that the message of gospel has ever been inadequate or deficient. There is no real difference in message between the old testament and the new testament for essentially the content is the same.

The Old Testament, looking ahead to the arrival of the messiah and the fulfillment of all of God's promises in his Son, and the New Testament looking back to Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises are proclaimed through his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. There is only one gospel, there only ever has been, and there only ever will be. We know this to be true not only because of this passage but because of what Paul wrote in Galatians, saying that the giving of the covenant promises to Abraham preceded the gospel to Abraham before the law was given to Moses. Same gospel, same message just expressed and taught differently. But as the author here in Hebrews writes, the message that was given to these Israelites was not effective as it was when given to Abraham for the simple fact that they did not have faith to hear it. Sort of sounds like the book of Mark does it not? The message given, the ability to hear, and the faith to believe. Just like in the book of Mark, simply hearing the message avails nothing without the faith to accompany it. None of these things are mutually exclusive, as Paul wrote in Romans 10, “How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?” The Gospel must be proclaimed to be heard, must be heard to be believed but as the verse says here in Hebrews it must also be mixed with faith.

The effect of the gospel not only saves those who believe, it also has the effect of condemning those who reject it such as we see with the case of Israel in the wilderness. The generation that rejected God, the ones who rebelled and sinned against him despite all of his provision and instruction died never reaching the promised land. In many ways Israel's time of wandering in the wilderness is very much a picture of life today. There is no middle ground, you either have faith and believe upon Christ as the only salvation from sin, or you die in your sin and rebellion. But for us, there is even less of an excuse, for Israel was given the promise of the future salvation through the coming messiah, where we now see the fulfillment in the messiah who has come, and who has already provided the atoning work needed for redemption. As John 12 says, He who rejects me, and does not receive my sayings has a judge, he who hears that I have spoken will be the judge on the last day. “

The word of God, is both the savior, and the judge of all mankind. The difference is if the word is accepted by faith through hearing, or rejected through rebellion. In verse 2 the author sort of makes a shift, as he addresses those who he is writing to and once again equates them to being his brothers, of being those who believe unlike Israel in the wilderness who heard but did not believe. Verse 3. “ For 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. For 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 and again in this place, they shall not enter my rest.” Again we see he quotes this passage from Psalm 95 to drive his readers and remind them that in Christ there remains a rest.

An interesting note, is the authors mention of the seventh day of creation in which Moses wrote that God rested. The seventh day, is the only day recorded in the creation narrative that does not have an end. In each of the other days, Moses mentions the evening and the morning but there is no such mention on the seventh day. So as it says here in the end of verse 3, God's rest is already accomplished, and it has been since the creation of the world, but it is applied in the future in relation to the consummation promised to his people who have yet to enter into it. The reality here is that even though those in the time of Moses because of rebellion did not enter into God's rest that he had prepared from the foundation of the world does not mean that God's purpose of bringing his people into his rest had been abandoned or failed, but rather as verse 6 says, “since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again 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. This indicates that the promised rest is still remaining and unentered even in the time of the writing of Psalm 95.

And just so there is no confusion here about the rest that the Author is writing about, it is not the promised land of Canaan that the Israelites were led to when taken out of captivity in Egypt. For the rest still remains in the time of David, and as it says in verse 8. “For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from his. So as we can see the land of Canaan was not really the rest that was intended, but once again just a shadow, an example of the true intended rest. Pointing to verse 95 here, is significant to the original audience that this was written for because as I had mentioned before, being Hebrews they are the descendants of the Israelites who were led out of Egypt, and in the time of David were a fully established, powerful nation in the land of Canaan that was given to them, so this form of argument would be very obvious to the readers that this promised rest did not just have an earthly application, but instead still holds a future application for the people of God in the fullness of the fulfillment of God's promises. Showing that God's people should not be tied to any earthly or material fulfillment,

We are not promised a life without strife, and trouble, we are not promised success, and wealth in this life, but we are promised that we will enter God's rest in the next life if we trust and obey him and do not harden our hearts in rebellion and disobedience but rather listen to the word of God given to us. So we too, like the author of Hebrews, and like the psalmist are looking forward to a future day, of the promised rest in its fullness. And it is this promised rest that is our hope, and our incentive as we go through our Christian walk.