

**Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist**

**Sunday, May 24, 2020**

**Hebrews 4:1-13**

**Warnings from Hebrews #2 – “Will You Choose Rest?”**

REST! – Much of our lives are spent trying to get rested when we can, yet we fight against our needs and desires by making ourselves as busy as we can. More work, more tasks, more activities...and these activities, tasks and jobs are often valuable and good, but they can sap our energy and strength. In trying to be more productive, we burn the candle at both ends, and burn ourselves out! For some it is so extreme that they never recover.

Have you ever wished for NO work? NO commitments? BECAREFUL what you wish for!

The lack of purpose can be just as detrimental. Those who find themselves out of work, laid off, or physically unable to pursue activity will lack rest due to boredom and monotony. You soon realize that true rest is not found in LACK OF ACTIVITY!

Today we primarily look at Hebrews chapter 4. God has promised the Christian “REST” – holistic and fulfilling. IF this is the case...why are so many lacking it?

We lack true rest because we find ourselves “out of place” in God’s order! The author of Hebrews will dive into his vast knowledge of scripture (the Old Testament) and will teach us about the decision that we must face – the proverbially “fork” in the road that will either grant us rest or send us away from it.

Let’s read Hebrews 4:1-13

**4 Therefore, God’s promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. <sup>2</sup> For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good**

because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said,

"In my anger I took an oath:

'They will never enter my place of rest,'"<sup>[b]</sup>

even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. <sup>4</sup> We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: "On the seventh day God rested from all his work."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>5</sup> But in the other passage God said, "They will never enter my place of rest."<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>6</sup> So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. <sup>7</sup> So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted:

"Today when you hear his voice,  
don't harden your hearts."<sup>[e]</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. <sup>9</sup> So there is a special rest<sup>[f]</sup> still waiting for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. <sup>11</sup> So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

<sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

Chapter 4 begins with a word that, when you read it, is a giant red flag. That term is **therefore**.

There is an old saying that goes:

***“When you see a ‘therefore,’ ask what is it there for?”***

“Therefore” is one of those clue words that tell us that some important information/teaching has been given to us and NOW there is an action that we must take!

To understand this practical application we must know the **context**, and the context in this case is Chapter 3. If you haven’t completed the homework I gave you last week – to read through Hebrews – then I encourage you to take the time to stop and read chapter 3 before you continue.

The Jewish audience prided themselves on their history, and the knowledge of that history. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The stories of Moses. One of the most important historical events was the freeing of the Hebrews from the bondage in Egypt known as the Exodus. Moses leads the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea with the Promised Land (the land of milk and honey) in their sights.

In chapter 3, the teaching that Christ is superior to all other continues. This time the lesson is showing how Christ is superior to Moses. Moses was a faithful servant in the House of God (3:5) but Jesus is the overseer of God’s house because He is the Son of God. Have you ever quoted “our bodies are the temple of God”? (1 Cor. 6:19). If we truly believe that, then we are God’s house and Jesus has authority over us.

Chapter 3 goes on to encourage us to LISTEN when we hear God’s voice. This is a theme that runs through scripture “Let those who have ears...hear!” of “If you hear God’s voice TODAY...” We are faced with this same question. If you hear God’s voice today, you have a choice to make! Listen or ignore! Obey or disobey! The choice is that simple!

As Moses was obediently leading the people to the Promised Land, the land of rest, the people have this annoying habit of complaining – often referred to as murmuring (still a common past-time in our lives and churches today!).

The people would often repeat this patten: complain, rebel against Moses/God, be chastised/punished, repent. They tried God’s patience over and over – but God was longsuffering and patient.

Finally they reached the shores of the Jordan, at a place called Kadesh. All they needed to do was cross over and God promised to give them the land.

12 spies were sent out. When they returned, 10 of them gave a “doom & gloom” report. There were giants in the land along with great walled cities with mighty armies. What were the people thinking? They genuinely feared being wiped off the map. There was NO WAY they were crossing the river.

Two spies (Caleb and Joshua) confirmed what was said by the ten and then proceeded to encourage the people to go forward and trust God. After all, God promised the land to them.

A vote was taken. The results was a resounding NO! The people even contemplated turning on Moses, Joshua, and Caleb and killing them.

GOD INTERVENED! The people had an opportunity to enter a paradise of rest and their lack of faith became disobedience and they chose not to enter! What happened next? GOD GOT MAD! The people were punished!

Listen to part of the punishment found in Numbers 14:32-35:

**<sup>32</sup> But as for you, you will drop dead in this wilderness. <sup>33</sup> And your children will be like shepherds, wandering in the wilderness for forty years. In this way, they will pay for your faithlessness, until the last of you lies dead in the wilderness.**

**<sup>34</sup> ““Because your men explored the land for forty days, you must wander in the wilderness for forty years—a year for each day, suffering**

**have me for an enemy.’<sup>35</sup> I, the LORD, have spoken! I will certainly do these things to every member of the community who has conspired against me. They will be destroyed here in this wilderness, and here they will die!”**

Their punishment for unbelief was to wander the Sinai desert for 40 years. In that time, everyone 20 years and up who sided against God would die. The disobedient generation would miss out on the promise of rest!

***How do we apply these teachings for ourselves and our lives in 2020 and beyond?***

As a Christian – you are on a spiritual journey everyday and God is promising you rest! This rest is multi-faceted. There are several levels.

We often think of God’s rest as being a final destination – and it is! The promise of heaven and eternal life is amazing – but WHAT ABOUT NOW?

We are asked the same question “TODAY, if you hear His voice.” “Today” indicates a current, present reality. Tie this in with Jesus’ invitation given in Mt. 11:28-29, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest...” Hebrews 4 also begins with the statement “since the promise of entering his rest ***still stands.***”

WHO is the promise of true rest for? Quite simply “those who have believed!” You will often hear Bible verses used in popular culture, but the reality of true rest is based on a relationship with Jesus!

Sadly, over the years, we have majored on the minors. We often tie in “God’s rest” with things like “no shopping on Sunday.” Some have even taken it to an extreme and decreed “do nothing – no work, no play” on Sunday (at least not until the magical time of 6 or 6:30 pm when it seems that you can start doing activities). Much of what many Christians think of as “rest” ties in with the old ways of celebrating the Jewish sabbath.

If you go back to Mt. 11 and carry on with the next phase, rest is tied in with taking up Jesus' yoke – his passing, his purpose, his ministry.

REST is grounded in relationship and attitude of the heart! When an individual "hears" and "responds" to the "Gospel" (the words of Salvation proclaimed by Jesus) – it calls for a conscious decision. Will I be obedient? The generation of Hebrews lost their promised rest and had to toil in the wilderness for 40 years because of their disobedience! The Children of Israel stopped short of God's promise because they refused His command to "enter." By distrusting God, and listening to their own advice as to what was the best course of action – they failed to enter God's rest.

**WARNING!**

Vs. 12-13 give us the warning to consider the power of God's word.

God's word is more than just a call to read the Bible – even though the written word is a huge part of what we are talking about. Hebrews tells us that God's word is "living and active." Critics of Christianity will be quick to point out that we are crazy to follow an archaic, out of touch, man-made set of writings. What they don't realize is that the Bible represents the "living" (not dead speech of a bygone era) and "active" word. The words that God spoke creation into being and governs the heavens.

We, as partakers in a relationship with God, always need to be aware that God's word is a two-edged sword and as the author reminds us – cuts like a sharp knife.

We love to remember the promises and blessings that the voice brings, but we would be prudent to remember that God's word also brings judgment!

This active, living Word is not worried about religious observances – the "sharp sword" gets right into the thoughts and attitudes of our heart.

It is easy to "play Christian" or "play church." The prayers can be taught, the worship can be mimicked. The rituals can be displayed.

We find ourselves at Kadesh and God is telling us to “enter” His perfect rest. We are confronted by a huge decision! We see the giants of our lives facing us. We know that there will be trials and hardships with the joy. What will we choose?

When we are obedient, we will find rest in the storms – but only if we are willing to listen and believe. What will your decision be?