

That You Might Cherish God's Rest

Hebrews 4:1-16

Halifax: 2 October 2022

Introduction:

Today in our sermon series from Hebrews we have come to chapter 4.

- This chapter is closely tied to the previous chapter where we are warned about hardening our hearts the way Israel did in the days of Moses...
 - The result for Israel was that they were not allowed to go into God's promised rest in the land of Canaan. Instead, they were sentenced to die in the wilderness.
- We were admonished that if we harden our hearts, we will not continue in Christ our Saviour and we will be excluded from the rest that God has promised us.
 - If you have true saving faith, you will go on with Christ to the end, but there are many who profess Him who have an evil heart of unbelief that departs from God.

In chapter 4, the Lord graciously encourages us to pursue His promised rest (heaven).

- Our sinful tendency is to disregard God's promised rest, to see it as irrelevant or unimportant, or just simply to ignore it.
- We set our affection on the things of the earth when we ought to set our affection on the things above.
- We look at the things that are seen when we ought to look at the things that are not seen, where Christ is.
- We concern ourselves with gaining the world and we end up losing our own soul.
- Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we concern ourselves with what we will eat and what we will wear.

How kind our Lord is to give us this help in Heb. 4 to help us keep our eyes on heaven!

- He would have been perfectly just to leave us (who are such wretches that we quickly turn away from His promised blessing to seek other things) to go to our own destruction.
- But instead, He graciously points us back in the right direction and reminds us of the value of what we have wickedly disregarded.

Please listen now as I read this chapter to you... beginning in Hebrews 4:1.

- This is the word of God. Be careful to receive it as such.

Hebrews 4:1-16: Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ² 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. 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. ⁴ 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"; ⁵ and again in this *place*: "They shall not enter My rest." ⁶ Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷ 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." ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the

people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all

things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account. ¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Thanks be to God for His holy word.

- I want to show you nine encouragements that the Lord gives us in this passage to help us continue to pursue the rest He has promised us.
 - You understand that this promised rest is ultimately heaven.
 - It includes the promises that we receive from God in this life as well—such as communion with Him now, the new birth, the forgiveness of sin, gifts of service that we mutually benefit from, fellowship with each other, justification, peace of conscience and many other things...
 - But ultimately the promised rest is heaven: to be in God's house as His sons, with Jesus as our husband, with resurrected immortal bodies, with all our sins eradicated, with renewed minds that are clear and no longer confused, in a world that is in perfect harmony with us, with brothers and sisters that truly and beautifully love one another, with service that truly blesses each other, with beautiful sincere worship of our God and true, pure, ever richer knowledge of Him...
 - We do not know the half of it.
- How we ought to cherish this rest that God has promised us...
 - But because God knows that we are so inclined to dismiss this glorious hope, He has given us these nine helps to keep us cherishing the rest that He has promised to us.

I. First, our Lord tells us that we ought to be afraid of coming short of His rest.

- **Heb 4:1: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it."**
- A. No tragedy could be as great as coming short of heaven.
1. What a dreadful, sinking thing it would be to hear our Lord Jesus declare in the last day, "Depart from me, for I never knew you."
 - To be numbered with the hypocrites who have their part in the Lake of Fire with the Devil and his angels and sent to their place where their worm does die and where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever.
 - To know that we have missed out on eternity with God and His angels and all the blessings of heaven.

2. No tragedy in this world could be compared with that.
 - To be wracked with pain your whole life, to have no friends, to be deprived of all comforts in this world does not begin to compare with missing heaven.
3. To be one who relied on your good works and then to find out that these were not good enough,
 - or to be one who complained that God did not make Himself clear and to find refuge in your excuses that He seemed unjust—to have all such notions that you took comfort in exploded and to see for the first time how wicked they really were...
 - even to be one who remained in the church all your life, who even heard the gospel, but never bothered to embrace the Saviour...
 - or one who took comfort in rituals without ever facing your sin and your need of Him.

TRANS> What a tragedy to miss heaven! Be terrified of it!

B. Surely you can see how helpful this is when trials and temptations come.

1. Jesus told us that we must endure much tribulation to enter His kingdom.
 - The Apostle Paul went to all the churches that he planted and warned them of the same thing.
2. If we don't fear what it would be like to miss heaven, we will become like Israel was in the wilderness...
 - We will complain that service to God is too difficult, and we will say that we want to go back to bondage in Egypt—to live in the world.
 - We will question God's goodness and begin to say that He is not fair in the way that He does things.
 - We will forget that our Saviour even bore the pains of hell on the cross in order that we might be brought to glory...
 - Forgiveness, adoption, holiness, faithfulness, and such things will all become unimportant to us and we will turn away from the Lord.
3. But if your treasure is in heaven, if you are busy preparing for glory, then your afflictions in this world will seem a very little thing in comparison to the glory that is to come.
 - You will recognise that you are not worthy of the least of God's mercies.
 - And you will go on with your eyes on Jesus your Saviour looking for the rest that He has promised you with thanksgiving and joy.

II. Second, our Lord shows us in 4:2 that the rest He has promised to us is just as real as the rest that He promised to Israel when they came out of Egypt.

- **Heb 4:2: "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. For we who have believed do enter that rest."**

A. We might have expected it to be turned the other way and for it to say that that gospel was preached to them as it was to us, but he says it the other way. Why?

- It is because the point He is making is that the promise to us can be lost by unbelief just as the promise to them was lost by unbelief.
 - With us, it is not so evident when someone misses the promise.
 - They die, but we do not know and will not know until the last day whether they gained heaven or lost it.
 - With Israel, we see plainly that they did not get to go into the promised land, they did not obtain the rest that God had promised them in the land of Canaan.
 - Some of them may have repented and gone to heaven, but what we see is that they had a promise that they did not obtain because of their unbelief.
 - And here the Lord is warning us in His word that if we do not believe, our loss of heaven will be just as real as their loss of the land.
- B. As we go on in this world, heaven can seem like a cloudy dream rather than a reality.
- Our sinful hearts can easily begin to ignore the rest that God has promised us—to look at it as something intangible and something we need not concern ourselves about—something to put on the back burner.
 - Like Israel, we can become focused on our present situation and become indifferent to God’s promise.
 - If we do, the outcome will be the same—
 - “So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.”
 - There will be no turning back—suddenly heaven and hell will be a reality—a reality that will never be able to be ignored—but it will be too late.
- C. So keep heaven ever before you like Jesus did!
- It is a reality to cheer you on in your service to God.
 - You are going to glory, you are going to your heavenly Father, you are going to live with Jesus.
 - This is reality for all who trust in Him.
 - For we who believed do enter that rest!

III. Third, in verses 3-4, our Lord points out that the rest that is promised to us is the very same rest that He prepared for us when He created us

- Hebrews 4:3-4 says: **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. ⁴ 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...”**
- A. It is important to understand that when God rested after making the world, He did not enter into a seven-day cycle of work and rest.
1. No, His rest on the seventh day was a permanent cessation of work—He was finished with the work of creation.
 - It was all done.
 - He had no intention of creating anything else.

2. In that original creation, God gave man to have dominion over the whole creation.
 - Entering into His rest was then and is now taking our God-appointed place as His regents over all that He created.
 - Adam and Eve, after a time of testing, would have been appointed to that place where they would reign forever over the creation.
 - However, because Adam sinned, he did not enter God's rest—the place over creation—that God promised upon condition of perfect obedience.
 - Instead, Adam and his posterity (the whole human race) were cast out of the Garden and sentenced to death. Instead of taking dominion of the earth, the earth would take dominion of them—they would return to dust.
- B. Here in Hebrews, we are shown that “entering into God's rest” means that we are restored to the place of dominion that God originally prepared for us when He made the world.
1. We were told in Hebrews 2:7-9 that Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, has now been “crowned with glory and honour” and has been “set over the works of God's hands.”
 - In other words, He has entered into God's rest and has taken that place over all creation that God originally appointed for man to have.
 - Verse 8 continues: **“You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is not* put under him. ⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.**
 - The restoration is still not complete—not until everything has actually been brought under Him at the last day—but still, He is given the position of honour and glory until all is restored.

➤ To reiterate, the point here is that entering God's rest means being restored to that position that God originally created us occupy!
 2. Once again, this helps to make the promise of God's rest more tangible to us.
 - The rest that was promised to Israel was tied to the promise of Canaan just as the rest promised to us is tied to the church militant taking dominion in this present world,
 - but the ultimate rest for them and for us is that which we read of in our Old Testament Scripture reading—that we shall inherit the earth.
 3. Heaven is not a mysterious ethereal place where we float around on clouds.
 - It is instead the place where we serve God the way we were originally created to serve Him.
 - God's rest, as typified by Canaan, is a place where we live in harmony with the earth, with each other under God's law, and in the enjoyment of Him as our God whom we worship and serve without sin.
 - We become the beautiful creatures that we were made to be.
 - This is the rest that He has promised to His people.

IV. Fourth (and related to what we just saw), He shows us that whatever rest we may receive from Him in this present time is NOT the final rest that He has promised.

- This is what we are taught in **Heb 4:6-8**: **Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,** ⁷ **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.”** ⁸ **For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.**

A. The rest that God has promised us is much greater than Canaan.

1. Under Moses, Israel did not enter the promised land, but under Joshua they did.
 - They were given dominion over their enemies and drove most of them out, and they came to be governed by David, a godly king, and were given a great deal of prosperity and blessing.
 - But this was only a picture, a type, of the rest that God has prepared for His people. Israel knew this—or at least *should* have known this.
- How did they know it?
2. They knew it because even while occupying the land under the glorious reign of David, the LORD was still promising them that they would enter into His rest.
 - Psalm 95 was written in the time of David.
 - This showed them (and us) that the rest that they had in Canaan was NOT the extent of the promise.
 - If it had been, God would have been ashamed to be called their God!
 - They still had enemies, Satan was still active, they still got sick and they died, they still had a lot of sin in their lives, their worship was not nearly so pure and holy as it ought to have been, they still only had access to God through types and shadows.
 - His rest is much greater than the greatest blessing that His people have enjoyed and may yet enjoy in this world.
 - Yes, even if God is to give us a worldwide revival so that all of the world turns to Him, until the last day when Satan is cast into the pit with all who are his, hypocrites are rooted out, sin is completely eradicated, our bodies are resurrected, and we all become like Jesus our Master, we have not yet entered into God’s promised rest.

B. This is very helpful for us to keep in mind in times when we are richly blessed in this present world.

1. In such times, we can get so excited about the prosperity and blessing that we are enjoying from God that we forget that there is much more to be received.
 - Instead of being humble and seeking to grow into the fullness of His blessing, we can become smug and complacent as if we have arrived.
 - More times than we might like to admit, prosperity under God’s blessing has been our ruin when it ought to have propelled us on to greater service and thanksgiving.

- We are too easily satisfied.
2. Let us rather be like Paul, who, even when we have laboured more abundantly than they all, still continue to yearn for glory.
 - As he said in Philippians 3:12-14: **Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.** ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
 - Indeed, be thankful for what God has done, but never stop seeking Him until you are in glory!
 3. We will be disappointed in this world.
 - In the early part of the twentieth century, the gospel had advanced so far that many began to believe that they could now bring in the kingdom of glory.
 - Many of them ended up in unbelief because they had set their hope only in this present world and lost sight of the eternal rest that God has promised to His people in Christ.
 - It was out of them that liberalism arose and then when all their utopian dreams began to collapse under God's chastening hand, neo-orthodoxy arose, retaining the rationalistic scepticism without the confidence in man.
- V. Fifth, In Hebrews 4:9, our LORD tells us that weekly Sabbath Day observance continues which shows us that the promise of entering God's rest remains.**
- **Heb 4:9: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God."**
- A. Verse 9 is not well translated in the New King James Version.
 1. In the NKJV, the word 'rest' appears 10 times in chapters 3 & 4.
 - The word in the original is the same in all the other places, but in verse 9, it is an entirely different word—the word *sabbatismos*.
 2. The English Standard Version is much better. It says, **"So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."**
 - *Sabbatismos* is a word that appears to have been coined by the author of Hebrews. It refers to an observed day of rest.
 3. The idea is that after Israel entered the promised land, the observance of the Sabbath continued because the promise of entering into God's rest was still not fulfilled.
 - It showed that the promise was still to be sought by God's people.
 - And here in Hebrews, the LORD is showing that we still have a Sabbath observance because even though Jesus has come, we have not yet entered into glory—we have not yet entered into God's rest—we are not yet in heaven.
 - B. The point is, by retaining a Sabbath observance for the people of God under the New Covenant, the Lord keeps before us the promise of entering into His rest.

- As long as there is a Sabbath observance, there is a promise waiting to be fulfilled.
- The Lord's Day reminds us that God finished His work and rested and that He has promised that we will one day enter into His rest, as Jesus has already done.

TRANS> And that, in fact brings us to the next point.

VI. Sixth, in verse 10, the Lord gives us hope in His promised rest by reminding us that Jesus has already entered His rest.

- **Heb 4:10: "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His."**

A. I agree with those who teach that this is referring to Jesus because He is the One who has entered into God's rest.

1. That gives us this understanding of the passage:
 - **"For he who has entered His rest [that is, Jesus who has entered God's rest] has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His."**
2. It is not likely that this verse speaks of *us* entering into God's rest now because entering His rest is referred to as something yet future for us as long as we are in this world.
 - Furthermore, while we cease to *rely* on our works for salvation when we come to Jesus, we certainly do not stop working, as if we have arrived.
 - As we just saw, we press on all the more.
3. Jesus, on the other hand, after He had purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high until His enemies are made His footstool.
 - He finished the work of our redemption when He fulfilled all righteousness and went to the cross, then died and was raised again.
 - He entered not into a weekly rest cycle, but into a complete cessation of His work just like God did when He finished creating the world.
 - Jesus ceased from His works *as God did from His*.
 - This can only be said of Him.

B. This provides us with a tremendous encouragement about our promised rest—that Jesus has already entered into it!

1. He is there in human flesh, now resurrected.
 - As I just mentioned, Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus, by Himself purged our sins, and then **"sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."**
 - He is now, as Hebrews 2:7 says, crowned with glory and honour and set over the works of God's hands with all things put in subjection under His feet.
 - He has, as it says in 4:14 "passed through the heavens," to sit at God's right hand.
2. He is there waiting until the day comes for Him to gather us all to Himself and so bring us into God's rest with Him.

- He is, as it says in 2:10, *the captain of our salvation, who brings many sons to glory*, being made all that we need through His sufferings for us.
 - You may remember that the word *captain* refers to one who forges the way for us to follow—He breaks open for us a pathway to the Father.
- 3. In Jesus the hope of heaven is sure!
 - Jesus is there, preparing a place for us. He will lead us there.
 - We will most certainly be there too if we continue to trust in Him for our salvation to the end and are not moved away from this hope.
 - Heaven is not a possibility in Him. It is a certainty!
 - This helps us go on when we are painfully aware of our own weakness and when trials and discouragements weigh heavily upon us.

TRANS> We will spend more time on the rest of this chapter in the future...

- But I want to briefly summarise the remaining three encouragements about the promise to us of entering into God's rest.

VII. Seventh, in verse 11, the Lord urges us to be diligent to enter God's rest.

- **Heb 4:11: "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."**
- We are encouraged to press on because, in Jesus, the hope is sure.
 - Let no power or persuasion deter you.
 - Be not discouraged. Jesus has opened the way to glory and you are to press on with gusto, knowing that if you lean on Him, you will not fail to attain the promised rest.

VIII. Eighth, in verse 12 & 13, the Lord points out how His word exposes us so that we see how much we stand in need of His promised rest.

- **Heb 4:12-13: For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account."**
- God's word cuts us deeply—it exposes what is truly within us when God's Spirit works through it.
 - This has a two-fold benefit.
- A. First, it shows us whether we really are trusting in Jesus or not.
 - Perhaps it reveals to us that we have no real desire for God's promised rest so that we might repent and turn to Him.
- B. Second, it shows us our sin so that we see our need to rely on Jesus that we may obtain what God has promised.
 - The word exposes the fact that we still have a long way to go.
 - Even when our conscience is pure in that we are not continuing in deceit and rebellion, the word exposes the fact that we come short of what we ought to be in many, many ways.

- This makes us yearn for heaven—for the rest that God has promised us. It keeps us clinging to Jesus for grace and forgiveness.

TRANS> And that brings us to the last point...

IX. Ninth, in Hebrews 4:14-16, the Lord our God assures us that if we look to Jesus, He will bring us into His rest.

- It says: “¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- I will have much more to say about this in the future...
 - But for now simply...
- A. Be encouraged that Jesus is the One who is gloriously equipped and enabled to bring us to glory.
 - He has gone from this world to glory as our high priest, all that He might bring us to God.
- B. The very reason He came from heaven to earth, became a man, and went to the cross, was in order that He might bring us to God’s promised rest,
 - the rest that God prepared for us when He created us that we have yet to attain.
 - Do not hesitate to look to Him for help—go boldly to Him and ask.
 - Again, that is the reason He came.
 - You cannot bring yourself to God’s rest; nor can anyone else.
 - He has both the atonement that you need and the grace that you need to keep you going.
 - Lean on Him.
 - If you will not, you cannot be saved. If you do, you will surely be saved.
 - You will enter God’s rest.

Conclusion:

What useful instruction our LORD has given to us in this chapter to help us cherish the promise of entering God’s rest as we ought!

- Never become indifferent about heaven.
- Set your affections on the things above where Christ is, in glory, ready to receive all who come to Him.
- Remember what Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
 - Thanks be to God.