

“Make Sure You Enter God’s Rest!”

Heb. 4:1-11

- INTRO. - Every once in a while (in our English Bibles) we come across what appears to be an unfortunate chapter division – and this may be one of those instances. Usually a chapter division indicates a new idea or a new subject. But in *this* case, chapter 4 is a continuation of what was introduced in chapter 3.

- In chapter 3 the author of Hebrews quoted from Psalm 95 to urge his hearers to enter into God’s rest – and here (in chapter 4) he is going to urge that even further. In fact, the word “rest” occurs 9 times in the passage we will be focusing on this morning.

- *Here* we see the theme of “God’s rest” worked out in detail, and we find an urgent plea to make sure we have entered into it. This passage continues the warning he began in 3:7, and it is likely addressed to those Jews of his day that were on the verge of salvation but had fallen short of receiving it.

- They had heard the gospel (and may have even been intellectually convinced of its truth) but they had *not* yet committed themselves (in saving faith) to Christ. Perhaps the pressure and tradition of Judaism was keeping them from making this commitment, but the warning is that failing to commit to Christ will lead to eternal damnation.

- And (of course) this applies to anyone (Jew or Gentile) who would fall short of saving faith in Christ. The warning applies to anyone who might be hesitating to repent of sin and embrace Christ as Savior and Lord.

- It would apply to anyone who may be putting it off for a more convenient time, or anyone who might be looking for more proof, or anyone who might be unwilling to let go of a sinful lifestyle.

- And the message is, you don’t know how long you have – you don’t know if you will have another opportunity – so today, if you hear the “voice” of God calling you to salvation, don’t harden your heart, but respond in saving faith.

- Or another way to say this is, “Don’t forfeit God’s eternal rest because of unbelief. Don’t do like the Israelites in the wilderness and harden your heart in unbelief and rebellion.”

- Now, Heb. 4:1-11 is a difficult passage. George Guthrie calls this “one of the most fascinating, enigmatic, and tightly argued sections of Hebrews...” It is *not* easy to outline and *not* easy to interpret. We have to walk through it carefully.

- And one critical issue that *must* be dealt with *first*, is the identification of what the author is referring to when he talks about “rest.” Bible scholars have spilled a lot of ink on this one, and there is *not* always agreement.

- Now, I'm going to do the best I can with this, and let me start with some things I think we should rule out. First of all, I think we have to acknowledge that what the author of Hebrews is speaking of is *more* than just *physical* rest.

- It is true that he will use two different words for "rest" in this passage, and that one of them is connected with the word for Sabbath – however, the passage as a whole implies more than just some kind of resting on the Sabbath.

- In fact, I would say, that anyone who takes this passage and makes it an admonition to keep a literal Sabbath observance is abusing this text. Any preacher (for example) who would preach from this passage that we should refrain from any work on Sunday is totally missing the point. (Of course, Sunday is *not* the Sabbath, but that is the way it usually gets applied.) This passage is *not* about resting on Sunday (or on Saturday).

- Secondly, I believe it is equally problematic to see this "rest" as something solely eschatological. In other words, there are those who see this "rest" as being equivalent to heaven. *Certainly* the eternal aspect of God's rest *includes* heaven, but what we see from this passage is that it is something that is *attained* in the present.

- If this rest is only attained in heaven, how could the author of Hebrews speak of it as something *some* of them had already fallen short of, and *others* had already

entered into? In fact, if this rest is only a reference to heaven, then he would have to say that they *all* had fallen short of it (because none of them were in heaven yet).

- Guthrie says, "Although elements in Hebrews point to the attainment of God's promises in the future, the present appropriation of God's 'rest' must be considered as aspect of our author's concern."

- This is part of that "already / *not* yet" element of biblical doctrine. Christian realities have been *inaugurated* but have *not* yet been fully consummated. So the "rest" (spoken of here) is something a believer enters into (and experiences) now, but it will *not* reach its fullness until that final destination in the future.

- And even though it is true that the author uses a different Greek word for "rest" in v. 9, the way it is used in context seems to imply that these two terms are being used synonymously.

- Although the primary word (katapausis) has a range of meanings, it is used in this passage to refer to the concept of ceasing from one's labor. In v. 10 this is clearly applied to the doctrine of saving grace. As John MacArthur puts it, "God's rest is the end of legalistic works and the experience of peace in the total forgiveness of God."

- In fact, there are several things we can say for *certain* about what this "rest" entails – (that come directly from

this passage): (1.) It is a rest that we should be fearful *not* to miss. We see *that* in v. 1. (2.) It is a rest that some are in danger of missing as a result of a lack of faith. We see *that* in v. 2. (3.) It is a rest that consists of ceasing from one's own work. We will see *that* in v. 10. (4.) It is a rest that a person must enter *now*. We see *that* throughout this passage, (but especially in v. 7).

- Now, we'll look at all that in more detail as we walk through this, but with all this in mind, let's move (now) into this text. I have broken it into 5 divisions, and the first one is:

I. THE PROMISE (v. 1-3a)

- Look with me at v. 1, "Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it." The word "therefore" refers back to the previous chapter, and the application of Psalm 95.

- It refers (historically) to Israel's unbelief and failure to enter into God's Canaan rest. But *here* he is applying it (spiritually) to his own audience. He is saying that a promise of rest still "remains" for them – and that they should "fear" coming short of entering it.

- In the same way the Israelites that came out of Egypt lost their opportunity to enter the Promised Land because of unbelief, in the same way there is danger in the

spiritual realm of coming short of entering God's eternal salvation.

- This was applicable for those in the first century, and it is still applicable today. The verb that is translated "come short" is a word that means "to fail to reach, or to miss a goal." This is similar to the idea of missing the safe harbor that was alluded to in 2:1.

- This verb also includes that aspect of being *excluded* from something as a result of missing it. And (by the way) this is the one thing Jesus said we should fear. In Matt. 10:28 He said, "do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

- For most people today, the greatest fear is the fear of death – but Jesus said there is something we should fear *more* than that. In fact, He said we should *not* fear those who might have the power to take our life (physically) but we should fear God, because He alone has the power to send us to hell eternally.

- In other words, spiritual death is a much greater issue. Our eternal destiny should be our highest priority. Our greatest fear should be that we don't miss out on God's eternal salvation.

- But on the *positive* side, the author of Hebrews declares that "a promise remains of entering His rest." As long as

we are in this age of grace, a person can enter into the salvation rest of God through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

- In fact, it does *not* matter what you have done or how evil you have been, there remains (for you) a promise of entering God's salvation rest.

- In his commentary, John MacArthur tells the story of a man named Jerry McCauley. This man was about as wicked as a man could be. He was an alcoholic and his children were starving because he would spend all their money on booze. His little girl died of malnutrition when she was about four. The neighbors gave enough money to buy the little girl some new clothes and a casket – but he broke into the mortuary at night and took the clothes off his dead child to sell them to buy another drink. Soon after that, he was gripped with such conviction, and he received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He went on to become one of the greatest preachers America has ever known.

- Listen, my friend, as long as God gives you an opportunity to choose Christ, you still have hope. You can still repent and believe the gospel and receive eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one sin (according to Scripture) that cannot be forgiven, and that is the sin of rejecting Christ.

- But as long as it is still “today” and as long as you can hear “His voice” (the voice of the Spirit of God calling

you to repentance and salvation) you can still be saved. You can still enter into God's salvation rest.

- By the way, notice that v. 1 implies that some will enter God's rest while others may fall short of that. You need to make sure you don't fall short of entering God's rest.

- By the way, notice the word “seem” (there in v. 1). Why does he say that it *seems* as if some may be falling short? Because they were giving no evidence of true spiritual regeneration. Some were going back to Judaism and forsaking Christianity.

- Some were *not* holding fast the beginning of the assurance of the faith firm to the end (3:14). Their “falling away” was giving evidence that they had fallen short of responding to the gospel with genuine saving faith.

- Look at v. 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.”

- The word used for “good news” (in the NASB) is often translated “gospel.” For the original audience this referred to the message of salvation, which was a spiritual application of what occurred in the OT.

- Those being addressed by the author of Hebrews had heard the good news of the gospel. They knew about Christ and all He had done to save them eternally. In the OT context the “good news” had to do with the promise of entering into Canaan, but *here* it is being applied to the Christian message of salvation.

- And (from a human perspective) saving faith is required to attain this salvation. Just hearing the gospel is *not* enough – you have to respond to that with saving faith. In the same way the ancient Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land because of a lack of faith, so people today can fail to enter into God’s salvation rest through a lack of faith.

- Hearing the good news of the gospel does you no good at all unless that hearing is united with saving faith in Christ. That phrase “united by faith” can be translated “mixed with faith” and Jay Adams uses the illustration of a chemical reaction.

- He says that you can place certain chemical compounds side by side, but nothing will happen until you mix the two together – but when you do that, in certain cases it can have a very strong reaction.

- And in the same way, if the hearing of the gospel is not mixed with saving faith, nothing will happen – but when it *is* mixed with saving faith, it makes an eternal difference.

- Look at v. 3, “For we who have believed enter that rest...” (Stop right there for a moment.) This is the positive side. The ones who have believed *do* (indeed) enter that salvation rest. This rest is for those who have saving faith.

- A. T. Robertson says that the word “enter” is an emphatic futuristic present middle active verb. That basically means that there is no question about whether they enter or *not*. This is absolutely certain. If you have put your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you have already (in the present tense and with certainty) entered the salvation rest of God!

- But without skipping a beat, the author of Hebrews goes on and gives the negative side of the equation. Go on in that verse, “...just as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,’ [quoting from Psalm 95 again]...”

- Just as absolute as it is that those who believe *will* enter His rest, so those who do *not* believe will *not* enter His rest. MacArthur says, “Both the positive and negative side of this truth are categorically absolute.”

- But at the end of v. 3 we see a shift, and that takes us to the second point in our outline, which is:

II. THE PORTRAYAL (vv. 3b-5)

- The last part of v. 3 gives us the transition. Look at it, “although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.” That (of course) is speaking of the “rest” of God at the completion of the creation of the world. And what is the author of Hebrews doing here? He is using a rhetorical device that was common in that day, called “a verbal analogy.”

- He is connecting Gen. 2:2 with Psalm 95 on the basis of the fact that those two passages both contain the word “rest.” In other words, he is associating the “rest” into which the wilderness wanderers failed to enter with the rest that God demonstrated at creation. This was a common rabbinic technique.

- Go on and look at vv. 4-5, “For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’; [That’s Gen. 2] and again in this *passage*, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ [That’s Psalm 95].

- He’s tying these two *texts* together – and these two *concepts* together. And he is applying *both* of these to the gospel. The Sabbath rest was intended to be a symbol of the true rest to come in Christ.

- And it is important for us to note, that in the same way God rested at the completion of creation, so Jesus Christ declared “it is finished” from the cross. In v. 3 the word “finished” is used (I believe) to show this connection.

- In other words, the Sabbath rest was a type for which the work of Christ on the cross was the anti-type. The atoning work of Christ was the fulfillment of that symbol.

- The Sabbath rest at creation is the *portrayal* of the spiritual reality of the gospel in the NT. It is an illustration of it. And when we get to v. 10 we will read, “For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.”

- In the same way that God rested from His works at creation, so a repentant sinner must cease from doing his own good works and totally trust in the finished work of Christ.

- The word for “rested” in v. 4 is “katapausis.” It does *not* mean that God was tired. It means He was fully satisfied. It means His work of creation was completely (and perfectly) done.

- In the same way, when Christ proclaimed “It is finished” (from the cross) it meant that the work of salvation was completely (and perfectly) done. There is nothing to add to it. There is no need to supplement it in any way. We certainly don’t need to add our “good works” to it. We simply need to receive it by faith.

- But it is important for us to recognize that the concept of “ceasing from work” is a key concept in this passage. In order for a person to be saved, they must cease from

their own work and trust totally in God's work of salvation.

- Over and over again in this passage we see the rest referred to as "My rest." This is all of God. In the same way that God accomplished creation and then rested, so He accomplished our salvation in Christ. It is all of God. (Pause) But *not only* do we see the *promise* and the *portrayal*, thirdly we see:

III. THE POTENTIAL (vv. 6-8)

- Look with me at vv. 6-7, "Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 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.'

- This is a re-cap of the urgent warning he had given before. Opportunity to enter into God's rest still remains, but it will not remain forever. There is a certain day that God has "fixed" for responding. It is called "Today." It is that limited opportunity to believe. We often call it the age of grace.

- For each individual, this time of opportunity will end at death, and for history as a whole, it will end at the Second Coming of Christ. But the point is, that your opportunity will one day end, and if you have hardened your heart (like those in the OT) and you have failed to believe (and

put your faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation), your "Today" will be over. God's "Today" is always "right now." That is the only opportunity we can be sure of.

- The fact that the opportunity was spoken of as "still remaining" in the days in which Hebrews was written, makes it clear that this opportunity was *not* limited to the time of the wilderness wanderings, *nor* was it limited to the days in which David wrote Psalm 95.

- This truth was for the generation in which Hebrews was written, and is for every generation, as long as God's provision of salvation is available. It is still applicable today as I speak.

- In fact, go on to v. 8, "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that." Again, this can't be referring to the physical rest of entering the land of Canaan. That was only a picture of the spiritual rest to come.

- God's true rest did *not* come through Moses, or Joshua, or David. It came through Jesus Christ. It was available to those of the first century – and it is still available to us today.

- By the way, the KJV has "Jesus" in v. 8, but that is a bad translation. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of Yeshua, but it is the same name as Joshua. However, the context clearly refers to Joshua (here) and *not* to Jesus.

- F. F. Bruce writes, “The revisers of 1611 would have done better to follow the precedent of Tyndale, Coverdale, and Whittingham, *all* of whom had used ‘Joshua’.”

- And for my “King James only” friends out there, this is just one example of why we have to acknowledge that *no* English translation is perfect. This is why we have to go back to the original languages, and why we need textual criticism of the Bible to help us get to a proper translation.

- I generally like the KJV and think it is usually fairly accurate. But as with *any* translation, we have to be careful. In *this* case, it should clearly read “Joshua.” It clearly points back to the time when Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. To use Jesus (there) makes no sense at all. Jesus *did* (in fact) give them that *spiritual* rest, but that is *not* what the author of Hebrews is saying here. (Pause) Well, let’s move on (fourthly) to:

IV. THE PREMISE (vv. 9-10)

- Look with me at v. 9, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” (Stop right there.) The phrase “people of God” is probably a reference to Israel (which means he is directing this to his Jewish audience), but the NASB makes note of a change in terminology here. The author of Hebrews uses a different Greek word for “rest.”

- This is *not* a “katapausis” but a “sabbatismos.” This is a Sabbath-kind-of-rest. And it’s interesting – this is the only time this particular word appears in the NT. In all likelihood, this is the only time this word appears anywhere in Greek literature.

- In fact, this is a word that was most likely coined by the author of Hebrews. He made up a word just for this purpose. Of course, we would have to say that this was a word that was inspired by the HS, but it is a very unique usage.

- Some scholars have said that this word is a parallel term for “katapausis,” but if that was the case, then why use such a unique term in this verse? Why *not* just go ahead and use “katapausis”? He has used that term all through this passage, why would he *not* continue to use it if he intended the same thing?

- No, he clearly intends something unique through the use of this term, but what is his intention? It is clearly “Sabbath rest,” but what does that mean?

- Some scholars have taken this eschatologically. F. F. Bruce (for example) write, “When God completed his work of creation, he ‘rested,’ so his people, having completed their service on earth, will enter into his rest.” In other words, they will go to heaven.

- Bruce couples that with v. 10, which says, “For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.” He takes that to be a reference to heaven. He writes, “In other words, he has completed his appointed work in accordance with God’s will.”

- John MacArthur says, “I believe Hebrews 4:10 anticipates that final day when we cease from all effort and all work and enter into the presence of Jesus Christ.” He says, “That is the reality of Sabbath rest.”

- So that is certainly a possibility, but there might be another meaning here. We know that the author of Hebrews is connecting the concept of “rest” with the concept of the Sabbath in this passage.

- And as George Guthrie points out, “an important clue to the specific Sabbath the author has in mind may be found in the book of Leviticus, where the Pentateuch also joins the concepts of ‘ceasing work’ and ‘Sabbath.’”

- Turn with me for a moment to Leviticus 23, and let’s begin reading in v. 26. Here’s what it says, “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God.’”

- Drop down to v. 32, “It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath.”

- Interestingly, *here* the Sabbath is directly associated with the Day of Atonement. It is connected with the high-priestly offering to atone for sin. Is it possible this is what the author of Hebrews has in mind?

- Guthrie writes, “In this interpretation the Sabbath that remains for God’s people is a new covenant Day of Atonement Sabbath, in which they are cleansed from their sins.” That makes a whole lot of sense to me, in light of the broader message of this book.

- The author of Hebrews is going to go on and show that Jesus Christ is the perfect High Priest, who has atoned for our sins once and for all. His use of the concept of Sabbath rest could very well be connected to the ultimate atonement of Christ – and if that is the case, the ceasing from work would more likely refer to the ceasing of trying to earn one’s own salvation through good works, and the acceptance of the salvation of God by grace.

- Of course, we also know that the atonement of the believer ultimately leads to the rest of heaven, and that we will one day cease from all our labor and enter into that ultimate rest.

- It is difficult to say for certain what the author of Hebrews has in mind here exactly, but one thing appears to be clear – it is connected with the salvation of those who believe. And that leads us to:

V. THE PLEA (v. 11)

- Look with me at v. 11, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through *following* the same example of disobedience.” He has already told us (at the end of the previous chapter) that those who fail to enter this rest will do so because of unbelief.

- This is an urgent exhortation to make sure you enter the rest of God, and that you don’t miss it through unbelief and disobedience and rebellion (like the Israelites in the OT).

- The Greek word for “be diligent” is “spoudazo” and it literally means “to apply oneself fervently” or “to do one’s best.” It speaks of focused attention to the accomplishment of a given task.

- In other words, this is *not* something that should be taken lightly. This is something that should be given a very high priority. This is like saying, “Whatever else you do, make sure you enter into God’s rest, and don’t fail to enter because of unbelief.

- Those who failed to enter Canaan in the OT did so because they did *not* believe God. They rebelled against His plan and disobeyed His word. As a result, they were *not* allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

- In the same way, in this age of grace, in this day of NT revelation and eternal salvation available to us through faith in Jesus Christ, we need to make sure we attain that salvation.

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER