

Rest by Faith

Hebrews 4:1-3

October 4, 2026

Well, I want to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 4, and we're going to continue in this study of Hebrews and contemplate this concept tonight of entering God's rest, entering God's rest.

We are only kind of dipping our toe into the text tonight, even though we'll read this, this fuller portion. But we're only going to kind of get into the initial part of it because there's just so much here, as I've discovered, kind of in the middle of an argument that the pastor is making. And we're reconnecting with the point that the author started back in Hebrews 3 in verse 6. He started there, and then he uses the rest of chapter 3 and then most of chapter 4 to make his point.

And so what is this pastor's point? What point is he making from Hebrews 3:6 all the way through Hebrews 4:13? His point in Hebrews 3:6 is to see that those who belong to the household of

God, that they continue to hold fast their confidence and the boast of their hope.

He wants to make sure, and especially as he's writing as a pastor to his congregation to his church, he wants to see that they who belong to the household of God, that they continue to hold fast the confidence and the boast of their hope.

So, fully confident in their hope and even boastful that their heart is filled with rejoicings to such a degree that they boast in this hope that they have, which kind of leads them to be expressive about it, to teach about it, to evangelize.

So why is the author of Hebrews, who, as I said, is a pastor, why is he making this point? As one who deeply loves these people, he's their pastor after all, as one who is deeply convicted in the truth, one who loves and fears God, and also who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, loves his gospel, he has a concern.

And his concern is he thinks that he is seeing history repeat itself yet again in his own church, among some of the people at his own church. After all, this is written to the Hebrews. So these are Hebrew Christians, Jewish. And he's seeing that the Jewish people once again, at least some of them, are



turning away from the hope of the gospel, and they're trusting in something other than God.

In the terms of the text in Hebrews 4, they're seeking their own rest. They're trying to rescue themselves from social trouble, that is all around them in Rome. So for this pastor, these Jewish people, they're not remote figures to him who are in the text in Scripture, someone from history, someone he doesn't know. He knows these people personally, he knows them by name. He knows their families, he knows their kids, their grandkids, and he loves them. So he's got a deep concern for what he's seeing in front of them.

So as he's thinking about them, as he's thinking through the Old Testament, as he's thinking through the gospel, the times he lives in, the trouble that's facing his church, a key text comes to mind.

And this key text that comes to mind is perfect, he sees, to encourage his believing congregation, but also to warn or even evangelize the unbelieving people who are among his congregation, who are in attendance there, or maybe members there, but seem now to be adrift.

And that key text that comes to mind, as we've seen in chapter 3 and coming into chapter 4, is Psalm 95. And we actually learn from this text that it's a psalm of David. He cites, as we've seen, several verses of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:7-11, they happen to be Psalm 95:7-11, and cites those verses there in Hebrews 3:7-11, and then Hebrews 3:12-4:10.

He's kind of giving a selected, not a full exposition, but a selected exposition, a targeted exposition of that text to drive home its key message. Maybe if I were just to kind of summarize the gist of it, he's trying to tell his people, we need to take heed to this as well, here's the message: God is not a God to be trifled with. God is not a God to be trifled with.

When he offers to you, to us, gospel hope, you need to snatch that promise up right away. Trust him. Obey him. Why would you not do that? Not to take him up on his promise, not to cling fast to that promise of the gospel, is really an affront to his grace.

That's really what the message is of this big section from Hebrews 3, starting at after verse 6 into verse 7 all the way through chapter 4 verse 10, that's the main message.

So again, go back to Hebrews chapter 3 verses 7 through 11. The pastor sets forth this text from Psalm 95, and then in verses 12 to 19, he warns any in his church who don't believe of the dire consequences and the company they keep in their unbelief.

I'll read that again. I'll back up to verse 6. He says, "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope. Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw My works for 40 years.

"Therefore I was angry with this generation and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways, as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.""

Here's where he drives home the implications to them. "See to it, brothers, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

"For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.'

"For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

Now we spent several weeks in that section. I'm not going to rehash the warning to the unbelieving. There were also believers in his church, true Christians, who were succumbing to the pressure to leave their fellowship, to return to the synagogue.

And so this warning to the unbelieving has a dual purpose, kind of warning the believing, too, to kind of wake them up, to bring them to their senses so they can see what they're doing and see that they don't want to keep that kind of company. They want to stick with the faithful and the believing.

So having emphasized the warning of Psalm 95, the pastor shifts his focus now to the promise of Psalm 95. And as you're going to hear in verses 1 to 13 of chapter 4, he really traces this promise through the history of Israel, even returning back to its original form in Genesis 2. And he's doing this as an encouragement to his church, to the believing in his church. And I hope it's an encouragement to you as well.

He starts out in chapter 4 verse 1 with the word, Therefore. "Therefore" in verse 1 wraps up the previous point by summarizing and then urging appropriate action to take. And as you'll see as we read, there are two more uses of the word, therefore, one in verse 6, one in verse 11. They perform that same function. They kind of tie up the point and then move the argument forward.

So with that in mind, I think you'll spot them as we go. But let's read Hebrews 4:1-13. "Therefore, let us fear, lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have fallen short of it. For indeed we have had good news proclaimed to us, just as they also; but the word that was heard did not profit those who were not united with faith among those who heard.

"For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, 'As I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest,"' although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken somewhere in this way concerning the seventh day: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'; and again in this passage, 'They shall not enter My rest.'

"Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news proclaimed to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again determines 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.'

"For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

"Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall into the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing 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. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are uncovered and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we have an account to give."

So the pastor is making the point in this section that's found in verse 9, that there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. That's the main point, here, in this section. But why does he sense the need to make this point?

Because as we've just said, some church members, having professed Christ, they've lost sight of the promise. They have failed to see the importance of "the rest," and thus they've failed to see this danger that they're in.

This is the pattern that their forefathers fell into and that sealed their fate in unbelief, in disobedience, and being cast aside, and not attaining to the promise. He wants them to understand this.

A promise from God represents both opportunity and responsibility. The opportunity is to enter God's rest. The responsibility then is to believe and obey the promise. And the alternative, then, is to disbelieve. And then he goes, go find some other rest, go find their own rest.

The fundamental error in the thinking of some of these people, some of these church members, which the pastor addresses in this text, some of them do not acknowledge a certain continuity that exists between the past and the present, a certain continuity that exists between the people of the past and themselves in that day.

And we would, I would say that we do the same thing. We don't see the continuity between the figures of Scripture and ourselves. We tend to read from a kind of a safe distance.

They don't acknowledge that continuity between past and present, between the people of the past and themselves, and between the promise of God and the consequences of rejecting the promises of God then and now. They fail to see the continuity, that God continues his ways from the very beginning of time to this very moment.

So notice in this text that we read that the pastor refers to several points in Israel's history. Entering into this text, he was talking about the wilderness generation, end of the previous chapter, the wilderness generation, which sets the context for verses 1 and 2. That generation left Egypt, but they failed to enter the Promised Land under Moses because of disobedience and unbelief.

Then in verses 3 to 5 that we read, the pastor makes the connection to his own congregation. He wants them to see the continuity, and he assures them, "We who have believed enter that rest," verse 3. "We escaped the wrathful curse of judgment that came upon the unbelieving." He says that in verse 4. As believers they sought the Sabbath rest of God, and he makes that connection all the way back to Genesis 2 verse 2.

Then the pastor draws their attention to another point in Israel's history in verses 6 and 7 when he cites Psalm 95, which is David's generation. And David's generation, that's a generation that shared more in common with the generation that entered into the Promised Land under Joshua. Clearly, the warning was needed for them, too.

Note kind of the different circumstances of the Moses generation in contrast to the Joshua and David generations. Think about the circumstances of each of those people in the time that they lived in their lifetime.

What were the circumstances of the Moses generation? They grew up in Egypt as slaves. They grew up under oppression, great difficulty, under hard task-masters. They experienced, coming out of that time, God's miraculous rescue out of their oppression from the Egyptians.

But then, after they experienced that miraculous rescue, passing through the Red Sea, the entire Egyptian army drowned at the bottom of the Red Sea as the walls of water crushed them, fell down on them, they spent their final forty years, because of unbelief, wandering in the wilderness of Sinai until they all died off.

So you see this magnificent, marvelous, amazing time of miracles, but on either side of it, great hardship, right? That's the Moses generation. Now, what kind of rest would that generation long for? They kept longing for plenty, right? They kept longing for the leeks and the the onions and all that kind of stuff from Egypt. They want to go back to their hardship and their slavery because at least there they could fill their bellies.

So they're wandering through the wilderness, and so what does rest look like for them? Provision. While they're wandering, they're constantly exposed to enemy attacks, so what would they long for? Safety. Protection.

You ever tried wandering around in a desert for forty years? How about two days? I've done some of that, and I don't recommend it, let alone for forty years living in tents. You can

imagine the kind of rest the Moses generation longed for. Makes perfect sense to us.

What about the circumstances of the Joshua-David generations? Quite different, aren't they? Those generations were conquering, they were ascendant. They became settled and established under Joshua in Canaan going into the Promised Land, and then under David, the united kingdom of Israel, headquartered in Jerusalem.

God forged Israel into a nation and then handed it to Joshua, and so it had its own law code, its civil, ceremonial, moral law, and gave this basically society, culture-in-a-box and said, Here, be a people, be a nation, no longer slaves. Now you're God's people, God's nation.

God protected them, provided abundantly for them, under Joshua sent them into Canaan, conquered Canaanite enemies, powerful enemies, giants. Then he settled them in the land, established them in the land, elevated the kingdom under Saul, then the Davidic kingdom, Jerusalem. All Israel was a land of health, wealth, and prosperity.

Did the generations of Joshua and David, did they need rest? They did need rest. And what kind of a rest did they need?

They needed a spiritual rest. They needed a rest for their souls, a repose in God, because their sins are forgiven, because they're in a right relationship with God, because whatever God has done has satisfied his demand for their perfect righteousness. Only then, only when they are justified by God, will their hearts be at rest. And that is the first and initial and needful thing, the primary thing.

So the pastor says, Yes, they needed rest, and David put his finger directly on that need in Psalm 95, as we see in Hebrews 4:7-8. "He again determines a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David after so long a time, as just as been said before, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua," which is a parallel kind of a circumstance to David, "for if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not have spoken of another day after that."

Joshua, the rest in Canaan, the Promised Land did not satisfy their need for rest. And that's why God spoke through David of another day, another day of rest.

So there is a continuity that I want you to see between then and the contemporary time of the Hebrews and now, our own time. There's a continuity between those people and us people. There's also a continuity all the way through to today, and

regardless of circumstance, a continuity of the promise itself, a continuity of the promise itself to enter God's rest.

In verses 1 and 2, there are three points here in verses 1 and 2: the implication of a promise, the proclamation of a promise, and the participation of a believer. So implication, proclamation, participation.

First, the implication of a promise; that is to ask the question, what is implied by the offer of a promise? The pastor writes in verse 1, "Therefore, let us fear." Another translation kind of puts it this way: Let us be wary, let us be mindful.

But the word is *phobeomai*. It's *phobos*, the word fear, and he's not talking about reverential or respect or anything like that. It's not talking about fear of God. It's talking about fear of our own condition, a wariness, a cautiousness about the temptations, the things that kind of elicit our own heart's affections and draw us away.

"Let us fear, therefore, lest while a promise remains of entering His rest, anyone of you may seem to have fallen short of it." So the word promise, here, if God promises rest, verse 1, "a promise remains of entering his rest," what does a promise imply? What is required for us to attain that promise?

Believe. Faith. That is the demand made by a promise. You either believe that promise, or you don't believe that promise. Faith is the critical issue. The implication of a promise is that it demands faith. You've got to believe it.

Biblically speaking, if we're going to use the Bible to define our terms, not our own intuition, not a cultural definition, to believe is a radical thing. When I say radical, I don't mean, Whoa, radical! I mean deep. I mean fundamental, radical. It is a radical thing. Going down to the depths of the heart sets the direction of the heart. It captures and captivates the life, sets the direction for one who believes.

Who were the standout believers in Moses' generation? Joshua and Caleb. Wow! Two of the spies came back with a good report, and they didn't die in the wilderness, and they entered into the Promised Land, right? Did Joshua and Caleb then enter God's rest? Yes.

And I'm just going to say, if they entered God's rest, why do they keep fighting battles? Is that restful? Joshua 21:44, I believe, where basically God says he gave them the rest. He gave them rest.

There's a very true sense in which they did enter into rest by entering into the Promised Land. But really more fundamentally, we know Joshua and Caleb entered into that rest because they believed.

And yet they fought. They had to fight. They had to war, they had to cast out Canaanites. They had to do the, the dirty business of doing battle. So we're going to come back to this. It's important.

So what is this rest? Consider the terms, here, very quickly. In our English versions, there are ten references to rest in these eleven verses, these first eleven verses; and all but one of them are related to the verb *katapauo*. The noun is *katapausis*. It's built on the root verb of *pauo*, which basically means just to stop, cease, leave off, halt. That's *pauo*.

But with the preposition that's added, *kata*, it's an intensifying of the root verb, and it means to stop, cease, restrain, but then with a positive sense, to make to rest or to give rest. So it's the idea of making an activity end, making something cease in order to bring to a place, a state, or a condition of rest. That's the chief term, here, refers to a cessation of some work or some activity which leads to a state of rest or a condition of restfulness.

And I'll just throw in here, this cessation of work or activity is tied directly to the gospel, verse 2. It's a result of the gospel which was on offer since Genesis 2:2, when God rested on the seventh day from all of his work.

Next, notice in verse 2, and again, we'll come back to this, we'll unpack more of it, but the proclamation of the gospel, number two, the proclamation of the gospel. "Indeed, we have had good news proclaimed to us, just as they also."

You want to take a guess as to what that proclaimed good news verb is? To evangelize. Evangelize. Yeah, *euangelizo euangelizo, euangelizomai*. We get the word evangelize from it. We're familiar with this term *euangelizo*, mostly preaching the good news because that was the preaching of Jesus. Mark 1:15 says, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is in hand. Repent and believe in the gospel." So he's preaching the gospel. It's the *euangelizomai* verb, there.

But what about the, they? "Just as they also." So we've had the good news preached to us. We, obviously, we're living on this side of the cross, this side of the resurrection. We understand that Jesus came preaching the gospel.

What about the, they, in that sentence? "We have had good news proclaimed to us," the pastor says to his believing Christian congregation, "just as they also." Who's the they? How did they have the gospel proclaimed to them? Were they not recipients merely of the law, the law of Moses? What gospel

The very first proclamation of the gospel comes where? What's the proto-euangeleon? Genesis 3:15, right? "Yahweh said to the serpent, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed, her seed. He shall bruise you on the head. You shall bruise him on the heel.'" That is the gospel, the very first proclamation of the gospel that they must believe. There's a promise, there. There's a promise implied.

It goes on through the Old Testament. If those Old Testament saints treated the Law as something that they could obey and gain a good standing before God and maintain their good standing before God, then that was a law of works.

If, on the other hand, they believed the God who revealed himself to them in the Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and you shall love the Lord your God," and if they gravitated to him, they have a new nature, they put their faith in him, they trust him, they see this law as a blessed provision

of living a blessed life, that in this law you follow, you'll have life.

If it's no longer a law of righteousness to earn a good standing before God, but rather is just a way for them to walk in his ways, all of a sudden that's a whole different scenario, isn't it? That's a believing heart in his treatment of the law.

Basically, what you see in the exodus from Egypt and the entrance into the Promised Land, what you see there is a geopolitical demonstration of the gospel: rescue from slavery in Egypt, entering into the Promised Land.

And who did they enter into under? His name was Joshua. You know the word for Joshua in Greek, here? *Iesous*, Jesus, same name. It means Yahweh saves, Yahweh saves, and he brings you into a blessed promised land. It's the land of promise. The land of what promise? The promise of the gospel, the promise of forgiven sin, the promise of his righteousness granted to you, and you just embrace it by faith.

There is gospel all through the Old Testament. There's figures and types, ceremonies; there's the geopolitical example of the exodus from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land. There's also their entire sacramental, sacrificial system that

points to the need for a savior, the need for forgiven sin, a need for perfect righteousness, one that they'd forfeited with their very first sin.

So, what gospel? Gospel was illustrated everywhere, and through the law and the time of the prophets all the way up to Christ, there was increasing clarity in glory about clarity of the gospel and fulfilled finally in Christ.

So remember this term, then, from verse 1, *katapausis*, which is about the cessation of work or activity, leads to a, a place, state, condition of rest. This rest is tied directly to the gospel in verse 2. It's a result of believing the gospel, and it's been on offer since Genesis 2:2.

He calls it throughout this text: his rest, that rest, my rest, God rested from his work. So it's tied directly to a rest of God, and we'll have to talk about what that is and get clarity on that.

So this promise of rest has to do with the cessation of some kind of work or activity which is tied directly to the gospel. And so this is the rest that God has provided in Christ. And he refers to this rest as his rest, and yet in Genesis 2:2,

he speaks of this rest as having been available to mankind since the end of creation week.

Okay, we'll come back to this, too. I'm just trying to raise issues for you that we need to answer as we go through Hebrews 4.

So we've got the implication of a promise. To receive what's promised, you must believe it. We've got the proclamation of a gospel. There were preachers that preached the gospel then and now.

And then, third, the participation of a people. How do people participate or partake of a promised rest? It says, end of verse 2, "But the word that was heard did not profit those who were not united with faith among those who heard."

That statement, if it sounds clunky in English, it's because it's clunky in Greek, and I'll actually unpack it next time. But that's not actually the best way to translate that. But it's a little technical, and I'll have more time next time to unpack that.

But "the word that wasn't heard didn't profit those" who heard that gospel. Whatever generation they were in, when they heard the proclamation of the gospel, when they read it on the

pages of Scripture, when they heard it preached to them, taught to them by the priests, it didn't profit them.

Why? Because they didn't believe it. Verse 3: "We who have believed enter that rest," are entering that rest. "We who have believed," perfect tense, so it's past completed action with results continuing, "we enter in," present tense "are entering in," we are entering into that rest. Same gospel of promise offered by divine grace, received through faith, proclaimed to a people then, proclaimed to a people now; heard by people then, heard by people now.

Only those who believe what has been preached to them, what they have heard, only those who believe gain what's promised and enter into that rest.

So the concept of rest and the nature of that rest is kind of what's on offer in the gospel. And that's what generations in the times of Moses and David forfeited through their unbelief. It's what the pastor's own generation, some of them were in danger of losing this, too.

Many modern people today risk forfeiting this promise of rest as well. And I wonder, do they sense any need for rest? Do

people today sense their need for rest? You think they think that, or you think, hey, I'm good?

I talked to somebody recently who's going through very great difficulty in life, great, great difficulty, an unbeliever. And for a while wanted my counsel, but then, knowing that I was going to draw a bead to the gospel, said, "Hey, no, thank you."

Going through great travail, some of the hardest things, and doesn't want, doesn't sense his need for rest. He wants out of that situation. He wants that to be fixed. Temporal problems, relational problems, whatever. Doesn't sense his deepest need for rest. He doesn't believe.

And I just want to ask, do you sense the need for rest? Do you think people today sense the need for rest? But do you sense the need for rest? And when I ask that, I'm not trying to say, are you a believer or unbeliever? I'm assuming as I speak to you, I'm speaking to believers.

Do you sense the need for rest? And so, yes, you could say, Hey, I rest. I'm not trying to work for my salvation. I'm not trying to gain favor with God. I totally believe in the promise of Christ. I believe I've entered into that rest."

But can a weariness creep up in your soul? Do you feel like maybe Joshua, Caleb, maybe David, as was mentioned earlier? Do you feel like in the times of Joshua, Caleb, David, that, always enemies, always things, always trouble? Well, I think that this text answers that. It answers the both-and. There's an already-rest. There's a not-yet rest that is still on offer for us.

So as we wrap up, I just want to draw some lessons. First, I just want to encourage you to do this as you think through this text, number one, find the connections that exist between yourself and the characters and the situations in Scripture.

Because there is a clear continuity in the fallen human condition then and now. Those sinners and these sinners and we sinners, we're all the same. We're all dealing with the same stuff, have the same maladies, have the same deepest needs. So see the continuity.

Be sure to read and see yourself in Scripture, in both the bad and the good, in both the unbelieving tendencies, but also the believing as well. Let your heart be both encouraged but also provoked, challenged, convicted. Do not just side with the good guys in the text all the time. You'll get a false sense of yourself if you don't take your continuity with all the characters in Scripture seriously.

Second, take note of the ways that people sought rest on their own. Whether they were in plenty or in want, whether they were experiencing poverty and hardship or health, wealth and prosperity, take note of the ways that they sought rest on their own, apart from God. Consider yourself and think about how you tend to seek your own forms of rest. Call yourself out, call yourself to repentance and return to his rest.

Number three, one more thing to consider, here. Consider the excellence of the rest that God provides in Christ, which is grounded in promise, which means that the benefit of that promise is procured by faith alone. Believe and you will find rest, but as you believe, be sure your faith looks like that of Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, too, this pastor of the Hebrew Christians in Rome.

Take note of these examples of true, saving faith. Look for that in your own life. Look for it to be developed and strengthened in your own life. And consider how God's rest led to changes in the thinking of the characters in Scripture, deepened their conviction, sometimes led to greater trouble, temporal trouble on earth, but at the same time they always gained the victory.

We're going to see a whole litany, a hall of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 whenever we get there. So we got a lot more to learn about this rest, its nature, its already-not-yet character, so a present enjoyment of rest, a future attainment of a final rest, which is our abiding hope. But for now, let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for this time in Hebrews 4 and just kind of really an introduction into this concept of rest. I think for every believing person, they would give testimony to some deep, deep level of abiding rest that they have in Christ, in the gospel, in your grace. At the same time, I think every believing heart could also profess just a need for a full and final rest. And we've experienced both.

We want to give you thanks that you have caused us to enter into this rest. We pray that you would help us in our pilgrimage as we travel, traverse through this life, to walk faithfully, not turning to the right or to the left to chase after lesser forms of rest, that we keep our eyes fixed on Christ, that you'd help us in our pilgrimage to walk faithfully to you, that we would enter into that final rest that the people of God have always sought after. We love you and thank you for how you teach



us and how you encourage our hearts. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.