

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Coming to Rest (Part 3)

Hebrews 4:1-11

Hebrews 4:1-3a

1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 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. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest...

There was a young man who took a short cut home late one night through a cemetery. While working his way past the gravestone, he came across and fell into an open grave. He called out for help and tried the best he could to climb out, but to no avail. There was no one around to lend him a hand. Being a rather level headed young man, he simply settled down for the night in a corner of the darkened grave to await the morning and went to sleep.

A little while later another person was cutting through the cemetery as well and, like the first young man, fell into the same open grave. He the second man started clawing and shouting and trying to get out just as the first had done. Suddenly, the second fellow heard a voice out of the dark corner of the grave saying, "You can't get out of here." But he did!

Isn't it interesting how certain things can motivate us to do that which we might otherwise think ourselves incapable of doing? And to be sure, things like fear can be a huge motivational factor causing us to do things we might otherwise give up on. In our Hebrews text this morning we come to the second of our main points, namely, "The Response to Rest." We have already looked at the "Reality of Rest," noting three important things. First, that God's rest is ultimately a consideration, a contemplation and a celebration of the work of God. It is living or dwelling in such a state as to daily enjoy the work of God in providing and preserving life both physically and spiritually. Second, we noted that God's rest has been and continues to be available to all who will enter. And third, we noted that the only means by which a person forfeits the availability and joys of God's rest is through disobedience and disbelief.

II. The Response to God's Rest (4:1-3a)

Now, we need to see what the author of Hebrews presents to us as being the proper responses to this knowledge of the availability of God's rest along with the knowledge of what it is that keeps a person from entering that rest, again, disobedience and disbelief. So, I present to you two responses to the reality of God's rest as found in Hebrews 4:1-3a and they are FEAR and FAITH.

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A. FEAR

Our text begins in Hebrews 4:1 with a somewhat startling and perhaps even confusing term. We read, “*Therefore, let us fear...*” To many professing Christians the idea of fearing seems out of place and even unbiblical. Many will quickly point out 2 Timothy 1:7 which says,

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (NKJV)

Even in the Old Testament we read of passages where God tells His people not to fear. In Isaiah 41:10 we read,

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (NASU)

And even our Lord Jesus Christ Himself has given the command not to fear as we read in John 14:27,

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

But with all that said, we also have passages that actually tell us to fear. In Proverbs 1:7 we read,

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

And again, let us consider the words of Jesus Himself, who said in Matthew 10:28,

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.

In 1 Peter 2:17 God’s people are expressly commanded to “fear God.” In other words, we have a seeming paradox with the Bible telling us both to fear and not to fear. So, when someone asks the question, “Should the believer fear?” the answer must be in accordance to what the Scriptures teach. *There are things about God that the believer should fear, and there are things about God, which he does not need to fear any longer* – that is an important distinction. As

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believers, as those who know and trust in the sacrifice of Christ not only as sufficient payment for our sins, but also as the only means or merit by which we might enter into and enjoy the presence of our holy, creator God, we need not fear God then in reference to His wrath upon our sin – for again, it has been paid for and appeased by Jesus Christ. There is to be no fear in reference to our sin not being taken care of. There is to be no fear with reference to where we will spend eternity due to the merits of Christ being imputed or charged to our accounts before God. We must, however, we must fear those things, which God hates. And we have examined two of the things that God hates in Hebrews 3 and 4, namely, disobedience, *which are acts that violate God's purpose and will for your life*; and disbelief, *which is an attitude of not trusting and following the purpose and will of God*.

How much do we really “fear” such things? Do we not often find ourselves fearful of so many other things? We tend to be fearful of disease and death; of personal failure; of poverty (that is being without means for life); and of being alone. We quickly forget that all such fears have been answered in Christ, that while disease and death may be the rule at this time for humanity, they will not reign forever and Jesus will heal all disease and will raise all the dead who have exhibited a real and working faith in Him, a faith which we will talk more about in a moment. Each one, however must first recognize that he has already failed in the most important thing in a person's life that is in his relationship with the living God. “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” says Romans 3:23 and for such sin all deserve death, that is eternal separation from the joy and bliss of being in the presence of our Creator God (Romans 6:23). But, such failure has been met by the success of Jesus Christ, who paid for all such sins of each and every person who comes to Him by and in faith, believing that Jesus indeed paid it all for you and now you owe Him all your life. In Christ we are never alone, even though we may feel like it from time to time, for Christ has become for the believer, Savior, Lord, Brother and Friend.

To often we tend to fear then things for which Christ came to take care of for us. As we read in our text “*let us fear...*” (Hebrews 4:1), we must come to know that the greatest and truest fear of the believer is that somehow or someday his life could reveal even an inkling of a deceitful, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12). What are the things I should fear as a professing believer of Jesus Christ? I ought to fear –

- A lack or want of passion and desire to live for God (Colossians 3:23)

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23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Is this your passion? Do you fear when you do not do “whatever you do” heartily, as for the Lord?

- Every act of disobedience and every thought of disbelief (2 Corinthians 10:5-6).

5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Does the fear of losing a loved one to death cause your heart to race and your mind worry? How much more ought acts of disobedience and thoughts of disbelief do so, causing us to plead with God for their elimination from our lives?

- Alienation from fellowship with God and with His people (Psalm 133:1)
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

Do you fear not being in fellowship with God? While we must seek to worship God privately and daily, the truth of the matter is that eternity will be one continual, blissful and corporate worship service. If you have any fear of not being part of that worship service, you ought also to fear the idea of not being among God’s people now to grow in your love and appreciate of not only what God has done for you, but also what God has done for other believers.

When the author commands, “*let us fear if...any one of you may seem to have come short of it,*” our hearts are being pricked, seeking to motivate us to not allow ourselves to toy with or become too comfortable with any sin.

So I ask you, what is it that tempts you to toy with or be comfortable with sin? Many may say, “Preacher, I do not know!” So I ask you, what fleshly pleasures do you indulge? What earthly delights do you often refuse to withhold from your experience? What attitudes and thoughts do you entertain that are at war with God? Let us remember the truth, the reality of every believer as found in Galatians 5:24,

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Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We must fear if we are not walking by the Spirit of God, according to the Word of God with a passion for the glory God. The lack of fear for sin then is to be warning sign, a flag that indicates that you may be coming short of God's rest. Now, I would like you to look at something else here in Hebrews 4:1. The fear we are to have is not simply a concern of coming short of God's rest, but includes even the fear that one may "seem" to have come short of God's rest. The word for "seem" here has carries the idea of "*thinking a certain way about someone or something.*" It speaks of carrying or having a reputation. How does one usually gain a reputation? By the way they act or live their life. The fear to be had here is not simply that they might come short of the rest of God as if somehow by surprise, but rather that one's life might also actually reveal or somehow "seem" to be lived like one who has "**come short**" of God's rest.

To "**come short of it**" is a most vivid term describing someone that is falling behind. It pictures a company of soldiers marching along with one person that cannot keep step and continually falls farther and farther behind. He appeared to be with the rest of the pack but in time he falls short. The tense of the verb implies that this is not a momentary lapse or a brief struggle with sin but rather that it is a settled condition, an abiding failure to enter into God's rest. It is a contentment with sin and its subsequent actions. While the rest of the people of God go marching forth; this one ever slips back into the world. It is someone who has gone along with the people of God, apparently "marching to Zion," but never making it. It is described by our Lord as those who cry, "Lord, Lord," declaring all that they have done, but hearing the declaration, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). *They have a start on the Christian life, but they do not finish.* What could be more devastating and more tragic? These are those who are around believers, sometimes talking like believers, and maybe even engage in service like believers; but their something in their life, maybe visible to other, maybe only know to that person, reveals that they are coming short and they will eventually "**come short**" of God's rest: showing they have never known the saving grace of God. That my beloved, is something to fear. And I submit to you that we must fear anything that causes our faith to stall, anything that causes our lives to move away from God, and causes sin to appear more and more attractive. "*Let us fear...if any one of you may seem to have fallen short of*" God's rest. This is the first of the two proper responses we are to have to knowing God's rest.

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B. Faith

The second response we are to have in knowing God's rest is that of faith. This is revealed to us in Hebrews 4:2-3a. Beginning in verse 2 we read,

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 author brings our attention back to that first generation, of those who heard the promise of God, the promise of entering in the Promised Land, which was a picture of God's rest. Who preached this message to that generation of Israelite who came out of Egypt? It was Moses who preached the good news of deliverance and blessing and it was God who promised it all. At Kadesh-Barnea, according to Numbers 13 and 14, it was Joshua and Caleb who preached and God that promised. Repeatedly this generation that came up out of Egypt heard the good news of what God promised to do and repeatedly they would not believe and only disobeyed God. This phrase **"had good news preached"** is in a tense in the Greek that describes then the adequacy or completeness of the message preached. It was not that they did not understand what God had promised, rather it was that they just would not believe God. Notice that the author stresses this point because he says the same thing again in verse 6.

What was it that caused this disbelief and disobedience? According to the text, we learn exactly why this good news was not profitable to these Israelite. Look at the end of verse 2 where we read of this reason;

"Because it was not united by faith in those who heard."

The word **"united,"** means to mix, combine or commingle together. The idea here is that the promise or Word of God is to be mixed, combined or united with faith. This is a person's proper response when hearing the good news of the gospel, namely that in Jesus Christ there is deliverance, there is salvation from self, from sin and from Satan. The idea of the promise of God being "united by faith" describes a sure, certain and active faith in the good news of Christ.

The point to be made is this – hearing the word is not enough! No one should be content with going to church and simply hearing the word. It is not enough to read the word. Rather, the Word of God is given to be mixed or united with faith, with a firm belief that what God has said is true, that what God commands is necessary and that what God promises will come to pass.

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Now then, what is faith? Let me give you a simple and familiar definition of faith. Faith is belief in action. Faith is not passive, but active. Faith seeks to reveal itself, to make itself known. So, while it is true that faith come by hearing, according to Romans 10:17, and hearing is passive, a true hearing, a real listening, and godly understanding always results in a God-honoring result or action. If you believe it, you will do it. If you believe it, you will want it? If you believe it, you will be consumed with seeking for it.

Let me ask you something. Paul makes reference to the fact, the truth, the reality that laid up for him was the crown of righteousness. How did Paul know this? Did he exhibit a passive faith, a faith mixed more with the things of this world than the things of God? No, turn with me to 2 Timothy 4:7-8 where we see how Paul could have the confidence that he would receive the crown of righteousness as he anticipates fully entering into God's rest. We read in 2 Timothy 4:7-8;

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Paul knew because he had a faith that worked. It is not that it worked in order to gain God's rest, but rather it worked because God gives faith first and causes it to work as an evidence of salvation, of deliverance, of entering into God's rest. The word preached to that generation in Israel was not profitable, because they did not hear or act with faith. But how do we know if our hearing of the word is profitable, if we are any different from that disbelieving generation? We know that our hearing of the word is profitable when faith is working, that is when our life is changing; when sin becomes more detestable (because remember by nature sin is attractive); and when holiness becomes our greatest desire.

And this is the idea behind what we read in Hebrews 4:3a, *"For we who have believed enter that rest..."* We noted last week that God's rest began on the seventh day, at the completion of creation. Adam, as we also noted, dwelled in this rest for a time, yet forfeited his place and his descendents place in this rest by his act of sin. Now, the pursuit of entering that rest daily, that place of depending upon the provision and plenty of God, exists for those who by faith, by the very action of their lives, reveal that God is bringing them back to their original and intended place of fellowship with God, in His rest.

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But note that our text does not say, “*For we who have believed have entered* (past tense)...” but rather, “*For we who have believed enter* (present tense – meaning something that is happening now). It is by this present pursuit of entering in that rest, of daily contemplating, considering and celebrating the works of God that I know I have believed. So, the proper response to God’s rest is to exhibit true faith, belief in action, to be dependent upon the provisions of God, not only for salvation, but also for my daily needs (Matthew 6). By this I can be certain that I have believed aright in God. If, however, I do not have a daily, a regular mindset to pursue entering God’s rest, to consider the things of God, I lose assurance of ever making God’s rest my final destination, and for this I ought to fear. In this sense, fear is not so much about trembling due to the nearness of God, but rather it is a terror at the thought of being far from God.

May we have such a response to the good news of God. May we fear that something in our lives may indicate that we have not truly known God. And may we exercise and exhibit to others and ourselves a working faith, a faith that fights the good fight and a faith that longs for holiness and hates the things that God hates.

Soli Deo Gloria

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