

HEBREWS – PRESSING ON

“Lord, Please Don’t Let Me Grow Mildew!”

Week 7

To whom is the author of Hebrews speaking?

Of what is he speaking?

- Heb. 2:5 – the world to come - the Messianic Kingdom/Millennial Kingdom.
- The author was speaking to the readers of their ultimate destiny – as believers.
 - Big Picture: God created; man sinned; God is restoring
 - The grand design for restoring lost humanity – humanity’s lost dominion over God’s creation – revolves around Jesus, God’s Son, Who emptied Himself of His glory (NOT of His deity) and took on flesh and blood – to die – to pay the penalty for sin – to be the propitiation – the SATISFACTION of God the Father’s righteous demands.
 - AND – as the God/man – to receive the Kingdom from God the Father – the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13)
- The author is telling the readers that there are consequences for their drifting from the anchor Who is Jesus (Heb. 6:19), for not heeding His word, for becoming dull of hearing. The consequence: not entering God’s rest.

The author likens the readers who are on the verge of going back to the Law – to the children of Israel in the wilderness who disobeyed and wanted to return to Egypt. The children of Israel had been physically redeemed/delivered from Egypt. They came out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lambs. They told Moses at Mount Sinai that they would obey God’s word (Ex. 19:8; Ex. 24:3, 7-8). And, they told Joshua that they would obey (Josh. 24:15-18, 21-24).

Their disobedience is equated to rebellion, unbelief, hardening of the heart in Hebrews 3:8,17-18. They physically died and they were not allowed entrance into the Promised Land along with Moses! They forfeited HIS rest! Not all believers today look for rest in God. We often times look elsewhere for satisfaction and security – not in what God has promised.

Hebrews 4:1-10

Hebrews 4:1

Therefore, . . .” which connects us with what the author wrote in Hebrews 3. The author is concerned - in light of Israel’s initial failure to enter into the Promised Land, there is a danger of the readers, the Jewish believers, to fail to enter into rest (4:1). The promise of rest is still available, but it is possible that their faith will be so tested by their present experience that they may fall short of entering God’s rest.

“let us fear” – a deep reverence for God as evidenced by humility, trust, worship, and obedience. It includes the recognition that we are accountable to this all-powerful, sovereign God. As we live life and contemplate the world to come, there must be a certain seriousness attached to how we live!

I Peter 1:17 – “And if you address as Father the One Who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.”

Prov. 8:13 – “The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.”

What should we fear in this context – falling short of God’s rest.

What is this “rest”?

- Some teachers/commentators have said that “rest” is a reference to the salvation.
 - However, the “rest” being discussed in Hebrews is entered into by diligent effort and obedience and is forfeited by disobedience (Heb. 3:14, 18; 4:11).
 - In the book of Hebrews, believers are being exhorted to do some things and to avoid doing other things.
 - To work for salvation is in direct opposition to the truth that salvation is a gift that is obtained by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9).
- Some teachers/commentators have suggested that the readers are essentially being warned to get saved because they are merely “professed believers.”
 - If that were the case, one would expect the warnings and exhortations to focus on their need to be justified by faith.
 - If the author is telling them to “get saved” – he wouldn’t tell them to be more diligent and obedient in their lives. The readers are specifically told they need “endurance” which is quite different from needing justification (Heb. 10:36).
 - Furthermore, Hebrews is addressed to a group primarily comprised of believers. The author clearly knows these people (Heb. 13:22-24), addresses them as “holy brethren” (Heb. 3:1), and includes himself (“we,” “us”) with the readers (Heb. 1:2; 2:1-3; 3:12, 14; 4:1-3, 14) and views their spiritual experiences as those of real believers (Heb. 5:11-6:5; 10:26, 29, 32).

The Exodus generation had tested the Lord in the wilderness – refusing to obey His words.

- They murmured (“being discontent”) because of a lack of water (Ex. 17:2-7). There was an unwillingness on their part to exercise faith in what God had promised them. (The author of Hebrews quotes Psa. 95 where King David calls the children of Israel the sheep of His pasture and then cites the rebellion at Meribah).

- In Numbers 13 we read that the Exodus generation were disobedient regarding the task God had set before them – taking the Promised Land. While God had told them He was going to give them a land of milk and honey, they desired to investigate the land. They didn't move out on His promise. Following the 40 days reconnaissance mission (exploration/inspection), 10 of the 12 spies refused to go into the land! Because of this, God vowed they would not “enter His rest.”
- The Exodus generation had the opportunity to enter His rest but lost that opportunity. They had provoked the Lord with their unbelief and disobedience on many occasions which culminated in their massive failure at Kadesh-Barnea – at the threshold of the Promised Land.

The author is warning the readers of Hebrews not to become dull of hearing, not to drift, not to doubt/disbelieve – because of the danger of not entering God's rest – NOW. AND, NOW will impact their service for Him in the Millennial Kingdom (rewards; Bema seat of Christ [I Cor. 3: 11-13; II Cor. 5:9-10]). Believers in Christ will stand before Him at the Bema seat – completely cleansed from sin - and receive or not receive rewards. Salvation – justification - is not judged at the Bema seat. For true believers – there is no condemnation.

Rev. 22:12 - “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”

God's rest is the faith/life – full surrender of our will to God – a rest appropriated by faith and enjoyed even in the midst of the conflicts, obstacles, and opposition of life. That was the rest that the Exodus generation missed.

Hebrews 4:2

The Gospel was preached to them (those who were delivered/redeemed from Egypt. And, the Gospel was preached to the readers. The Gospel is the good news of forgiveness through the Messiah (Psalm 51; Isa. 1:18; Isa. 33:14ff; Isa. 55; Jer. 31; Eze. 36)

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- Gal. 3:8 – the gospel was preached to Abraham
 - Gen. 12:3 – the blessing part of the Abrahamic Covenant
 - Gen. 15:6
 - Gen. 22:8
 - Gen. 49:10 – Shiloh – the Messiah
 - Ex. 12 – the Passover lamb
 - Leviticus – the sacrificial system
 - Deut. 18:15-18 – God would raise up a Prophet like Moses and would put His words in His mouth and would require it of the people if they didn't heed Him
 - John 8:56 – “Your father, Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad”

- Heb. 11:13ff – the OT faith heroes – died in faith – not having received the promises but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The good news of salvation, as we know from the context of the entire Scripture, provides a life of rest that can be appropriated by faith even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Hebrews 4:3a

“We who have believed do enter that rest.”

“believed” – one time action in the Gk aorist tense. Trust in; entrust oneself in the object of belief.

“do enter” – present tense – continual action; not static but progressive. Maturing process/sanctification is noted.

The rest that God promises can only be appropriated by faith in the promises of God. II Cor. 5:7 – we walk by faith. II Cor. 10:15 – as your faith is increased – Paul told the Corinthian church that when their faith was strengthened – his ministry would expand into another area. Gal. 2:20 – the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God. Phil. 3:14 – Paul hadn’t attained – but he was pressing on. Heb. 11:1 – faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 4:3b-5

- In verses 3-5, the rest into which God entered following His work of creation is presented as the pattern of the rest into which a believer may enter.
- Genesis 2:2 – God entered into rest – cessation from work – enjoyment of His completed work.
- The “rest” in reference to God’s labor reinforces the idea that “rest” is the reward and satisfaction that comes when a task is completed – now and in the future. Each believer has been given a gift of the Holy Spirit. How are we using those gifts?

Hebrews 4:6-10

- The sinning generation in the wilderness forfeited its rest. Does that mean that the rest was permanently withdrawn? NO! The author quotes Psalm 95:11 wherein David speaks of the rest that was extended to those living in the midst of political strife and conflict at that time.
 - Some have thought that the generation which entered the PL under Joshua had fulfilled God’s promises of rest; therefore, those promises were not available to later generations.
 - Since David promised rest long after Joshua had completed the conquest, it is evident that this promise is a continuing promise that may always be realized by FAITH!

- Joshua did give them rest from their enemies, he did not provide true consecration rest, since this could only come through the Messiah. This is a Sabbath rest. It is the rest of spiritual maturity. It is a Sabbath rest because the one who has entered into it has ceased from his own works as God did from His (Heb. 4:10).
 - Conclusion: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). This rest is NOT realized by human effort – it is realized via ceasing from works (Hebrews 4:10).
 - YET – v. 11 – the author exhorts the readers to BE DILIGENT to enter that rest!

Hebrews 4:11-13

- After clearly demonstrating that a faith/life rest is available to believers today – in ceasing from our works, the author concludes by an exhortation to enter into that rest.
 - This type of life is not one into which a believer passively drifts. Rather, it is realized only by giving diligent attention to enter that rest. Faith is never passive; it is always active. If one does not give careful attention to the exercise of faith, he or she will not enter into that promised rest. Apart from diligent attention to the exercise of faith, any believer can disobey and fail to enter that rest.
- In verse 12, the word “for” explains why we should be diligent to enter the promised rest. Unbelief will be detected by the Word of God.
- Not only may we fall short of the promised blessings, but through our neglect we might also come under God’s discipline as the Exodus generation experienced (see also Heb. 12:5ff).
 - We are accountable to the Word of God!
 - The Word of God is living.
 - The Scripture is given by inspiration of God – it is God-breathed (II Tim. 3:16). Because it is God-breathed, it partakes of the character of God – ALL He is – and His very life.
 - The Word of God is powerful/active.
 - It does something to those who hear it and heed it. It not only enlightens the mind, it also alters conduct. It not only reveals what is within man, it also sits as the judge of all conduct.
 - The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword.
 - The author is speaking of a dagger that penetrates. The Word of God so accurately and precisely penetrates that it is able to distinguish between what is godly and what is ungodly, what is right and what is wrong.

- The Word of God pierces.
 - It penetrates to the very core of man – to the depths of the soul and the spirit.
- The Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
 - It penetrates not only to our thoughts but to the very intention of those thoughts.
 - NOTHING can be hidden from God. The detection by the Word of God is so complete that there is nothing that will not be manifested by the Word (Heb. 4:13).

The promise of a faith/life rest is before the recipients of this letter. They can enter into that faith/life rest, but to do that they must give careful attention to the exercise of FAITH. Their every thought and action will be judged by the Word of God.

There is a vital connection between the Word of God and the life of faith/rest God offers us. Without a careful, ongoing study of the Bible, we are completely unequipped to diligently pursue the rest He provides. Bible study is the key to spiritual growth and maturity. We cannot trust what we do not know and we cannot act upon what we do not trust.

The Word of God alone gives God's standard to which all are subject and by which all will be evaluated. All that we need for life, for godliness, and for maturity is found in the Word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Pet. 1:3). It is completely sufficient to guide us wisely and to keep us from following after the wisdom of this world which, if followed, will ultimately rob the believer of reward/rest.

NOTE: "The Word of God" in Heb. 4:12 and "His sight" in Heb. 4:13.
 "Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

OBEY His living Word!

Eph. 6:5 – be obedient. . . in sincerity of heart/singleness of heart - - not divided – laid open and bare – transparent.

Heb. 12:1-2 – lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us and run with endurance the race that is set before us – looking unto Jesus. . . .

Rom. 12:1-2 – present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God – and don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . . .

Phil. 3:13-14 – forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.