

Bible Study – Hebrews chapter 4:1-13 A Rest for the people of God

In our last study, we looked at the consequences of unbelief, focusing on the followers of Jesus Christ. We saw how the nation of Israel, in their unbelief that God could deliver them safely into the Promised Land, were not allowed to enter the 'rest' that was promised them. The writer gives a heartfelt plea to believers that they do not face the same consequences as Israel.

In today's study, we will examine the concept of rest in more detail and understand why the goal of rest should be the impetus for us to persevere in our faith.

Read Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:1-13

The writer expounds on what it means to have rest and his plea to the readers/audience to pursue it with haste. In his letter, he assumes that the audience understands what rest means, the concept coming from the Old Testament. The word of God, as it concludes, will be used to judge and test believers, to show our thoughts and actions in the light of judgement.

Q. (v.1) The writer talks about the rest that is still available for us to enter. What is the definition of rest (in its broadest sense)? What do you think this rest looks like in the context of this passage (cf. Hebrews 1:14)? What is the Sabbath rest (v. 9)? Is the Sabbath rest different from the rest spoken of in verse 1? How do we attain this rest (cf. Romans 4:13-16; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)?

- **Leader's Note** – This set of questions may take some time (30 minutes) to answer, but I feel it is important to get a good basis of what rest is and what it looks like. I feel that if people don't know what it exactly looks like, then they may not see the value in pursuing it, which is opposite of what the writer wants. Therefore, take your time to explore the question and the concept of rest.
- Rest, in the most direct definition, means the "ceasing from action or stoppage of work"
- Other definitions can include the following:
 - An instance or period of relaxing or ceasing to engage in strenuous or stressful activity
 - Peace of mind or spirit
 - A state of motionlessness or inactivity
- Rest can look like the following (as per Puritan Commentator John Owen):
 - Peace with God
 - Freedom from a servile, bondage-like spirit in the worship and service of God
 - Deliverance from the burden of Mosaic observance
 - The freedom of worship according to the Gospel
 - The rest that God himself enjoys (Sabbath Rest)
- The writer used the term 'rest' as Moses did, as an equivalent to ceasing from the work of fulfilling God's will and entering into all the inheritance that God promised His people
- **Hebrews 1:14 – change to Deuteronomy 3:18-20**
- **Deuteronomy 3:18-20** – Talks about future rest once the Israelites fulfill their mandate as given to them by God.
 - How this relates to this passage is that the rest will be given once we finish our work here on earth.
 - The full inheritance is everything that God desires to bestow on us when we see Him
 - The work that we do on earth is also finished and we can now enjoy God and Jesus to the fullest
 - It is also a stoppage of all that is sinful, all the anxieties and worries, and everything else that prevents us from having 'rest'
- ***Another alternative definition of this rest is as follows, which is in the present day:
 - Rest from the self-righteous acts that we perform to please God (this is justification)

- It is a cessation from legalistic self-activity
- To have confidence in God's care and charge of your life
- To lean on God for your strength, wisdom, and guidance
- Sabbath rest, if we look at Genesis 2:2 as a basis, seems to indicate that as God stopped his work of creation, that man, when entering the Sabbath rest, also finishes his or her work on earth.
 - The Christian's work involves continual trusting and obeying of God (e.g. walking by faith daily as opposed to apostatizing).
 - The Christian will enter their rest, if they have persevered in faith, when we receive our inheritance from Jesus Christ at His judgement seat (1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:9-12)
 - **1 Corinthians 4:1-5** – How the apostles (and by extension, Christians) are to be faithful in their work and it is the Lord who will judge them
 - **2 Corinthians 5:9-12** – We aim to please God and Christ will judge us, giving us what we are due having done what we should have in the body
- **Is the rest in v.1 the same as Sabbath rest? It depends on how you look at it. Some say yes, others say no.**
 - The rest contemplated in vs.1 is written to indicate a time in the future
 - If you take our definition, then the answer is yes.
 - However, if you take the alternative definition, then the answer is no.
- It is by faith and obedience
 - **Romans 4:13-16** – It is by faith that we attain righteousness. What is it that we are putting our faith in? The work of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, that was sufficient to pay the penalty of our sin in order that we be made righteous.
 - **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** – We are to run this race (e.g. maintain our faith) so that we would win the prize and not disqualify ourselves from losing it.
- Is faith that God will do what he says
- Obedience, listening and obeying the word of God and following Him
- Without it, we cannot enter that rest
- The opposite of faith and obedience is unbelief and rebellion
- Those who have listened, accepted by faith, are the ones who can enter into his rest
- All others are excluded because they did not trust and obey

Q. What was the good news in the Old Testament (cf. Exodus 34:6-7)? What is the good news of the New Testament (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-6)? What is the warning to those hear the good news (cf. John 8:24)?

- **Exodus 34:6-7** – A God that is
 - Merciful and gracious
 - Slow to anger
 - Abounding in steadfast love
 - Faithfulness
 - Keeping steadfast love for thousands
 - Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin
- **1 Corinthians 15:3-6** – the message is:
 - Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures
 - He was buried
 - He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures
 - He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then the twelve, then to more than 500 brothers
- When hearing the good news, they are to accept it by faith and to trust and obey
- Failure to do so would disqualify those from entering the rest that was promised by God
- Faith, is needed, to know that the promises of God are true
- **John 8:24** – When speaking to the Jews, they had to believe in Jesus and that he was God or else they would die in their sins
 - By extension, as explained in verse 2, those who do not accept Jesus and his work by faith, they are doomed in their sins.

- Trusting and obeying God is necessary because we need to follow his commands in order to complete the work he has given us, to how he wants it done (cf. Matthew 25:14-30 – Parable of the talents)
- Failure to accept the word by faith, to trust and obey, shows that God is not Lord of your life and therefore, of no need in your life. This is the act of rebellion and unbelief by a person on what God has said.
- This is also not a one-time act (of faith or trusting and obeying), but something that is continuous (v.6)

Q. The writer gives three (3) warnings to the reader regarding the potential forfeiture of rest:

1. v.1b – “...let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” – What does it mean “to fear”? How does one live in light of this warning (cf. Philippians 3:13-14; Hebrews 10:23)?
 - “Fear” is defined as being aware or cautious
 - It is important to have your guard up so that you don’t fall into unbelief
 - **Philippians 3:13-14** – *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* – To run the race faithfully with the goal in sight.
 - **Hebrews 10:23** – *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful* – To be faithful in our hope that we have in Jesus Christ
 - We are not to live in fear, but only when the situation or circumstances arise, that we are to ‘fear’ to fall into that. When that happens, we should do everything to get out of it.
2. v. 6c – “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” What is the consequence to those who do harden their hearts (cf. Romans 1:18-24; 1 Timothy 4:1-2)?
 - **Romans 1:18-24** – If we continue in disobedience, our heart will be come hardened. Then God would give us over to our passions, abandoning us so that we can follow our own way
 - **1 Timothy 4:1-2** – Some will depart the faith and their consciences will be seared, meaning they will no longer be able to tell what is right and wrong according to the bible and its teachings
 - This is a dire warning to Christians and needs to be confronted early, similar to the disciples (cf. Mark 16:14)
3. v. 11 – “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” What does striving look like (cf. James 1:12)? Why are we to do this (cf. Revelation 2:10)?
 - James 1:12 – It means persevering, especially during trials and temptations, as God would reward him.
 - Revelation 2:10 – We are to do this for a reward at the end of our suffering. God calls us to be faithful, even unto death.
 - Striving and ‘struggling’ to enter the rest means to use all your might to pursue this goal, which will take a lot of your energy to do

All three warnings are meant for our good and to prevent us from living like the Israelites in the Old Testament. Why can it hard for us to follow these warnings? What are some practical ways to pay heed to these warnings in our lives?

- **Leader's Note** – point of this question is for people to reflect in their own lives the need to be faithful to their calling, to persevere in the faith, especially when times are tough.
 - It is also meant as a time to share and encourage each other as we all face difficulties and may be helped by hearing how others have struggled through this
- If there are no answers forthcoming, just remind them that we do fall at times, but that we should always remind ourselves that God is here to help us, to give us the strength to move forward in our sanctification and to face whatever life gives us.

Q. In verses 12-13, the writer talks about the Word of God being powerful enough to dissect our entire being and to lay bare before God who we really are. In reading this passage, does it give you comfort or worry? Does the Word of God play a powerful role in your day-to-day life? What are some practical ways that the Word of God can help you in your perseverance of the faith and to combat unbelief?

- **Leader's Note** – purpose of this question is to remind people that all our actions and thoughts will be held to account at the day of judgement.
- This can be a comfort, in the way that no matter how much we sin, we know that the death and resurrection of Christ was sufficient to pay for the penalty.
- The worry can be lost rewards or not receiving the full rewards due to us because of our constant sins.
- Again, the questions are meant for people to reflect on their own lives and to also give encouragement to others as well, who may be in this situation.

The writer expounds on the concept of rest, which is to be given to the Christian who perseveres in their faith. Though the nation of Israel had not be able to enjoy the full rest that was promised to them, it pointed to a rest in the future that would be accessible by all who believe in Jesus. The writer also warns about the danger of unbelief and to be on guard as he doesn't want them to fall short of achieving it. And should a Christian fall into faithless disobedience, the word of God would expose the thoughts and actions of the Christian at the day of judgement.

It is hard to be obedient and faithful all the time. However, Jesus calls us to trust in him, especially when we are weak, and it is then that we see God's power in action (2 Corinthians 12:10). He calls on us to depend on him daily for all our needs. It is only through him that we can strive and live the faithful life so we can enter the promised rest.