

“Our Eternal Rest”
Hebrews 4:1-11
(Preached at Trinity, December 10, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 3** the author opened by continuing to stress the superiority of Christ, this time the superiority of Christ over Moses. Both were faithful in God's house. Moses was a servant, however, while Jesus was the Son over the house.
2. **Verse 6** turned our attention to the identity of those in God's household.
Hebrews 3:6 NAU - "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 firm until the end."
3. The remainder of the chapter emphasized the importance of faith and perseverance and stressed the danger of judgment upon those who did not press on in faith.
4. Now, as we enter **Chapter 4** he continues to show the superiority of Jesus over Moses but now, among other things, he compares the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. The New Covenant is new, but it is also a continuation of the Old Covenant. In other words, it is still a covenant of grace and still must be received by faith.
5. Israel in their wilderness wandering was a test of faith. Normally, we must be careful about our use of types and shadows in the Old Testament. Many have fallen into error in their over-use of symbolism. But Israel in the wilderness gives us shadows of the Gospel and the Bible authorizes us to interpret it in this manner.
Chapter 3 compares the wilderness wandering with our salvation by faith in Christ.
Hebrews 3:7-12 NAU - "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ Where your fathers tried *Me* by testing *Me*, And saw My works for forty years. ¹⁰ "Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart; And they did not know My ways'; ¹¹ As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" ¹² Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God."
 - A. These verses are applied to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament they speak of Israel entering their rest by entering the Promised Land. But there was a much greater promise. The author of Hebrews is applying it to saving faith.
 - B. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, those who have come to faith in Christ have been delivered from the house of bondage. Israel was delivered from their bondage in Egypt. We have been delivered from our bondage to sin. Also, like Israel, we are heading towards our rest—Israel heading to Canaan and Christians to our heavenly inheritance—both seeking the promised rest. Canaan was a foreshadow of our rest in Christ.

- C. The Apostle Paul also applied it in this manner.
1 Corinthians 10:1-11 NAU - "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. ⁷ And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." ⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."
6. **Chapter 3** is focused primarily upon unbelievers—those who perished because of their unbelief. But **Chapter 4** addresses believers – **Verse 3** – “we who have believed”
7. The promise of entering into God’s rest is still valid today.
Verse 1 - "while a promise remains of entering His rest"
- A. For both groups there was a promise of rest. For Israel the promised rest had a focus upon Canaan which was indicative of God’s promise to Abraham. But this was not their ultimate rest. Those of faith looked beyond Canaan.
Hebrews 11:16 NAU - "But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."
Hebrews 4:8 NAU - "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that."
Joshua did not lead Israel into their rest as they crossed the Jordan into Canaan. The Sabbath rest yet remained for the people of God. The believers continued to believe the promise of God by faith.
- B. The promise of entering into our rest continues. And the requirement for entering is still the same. It must be entered by faith in God’s promised Redeemer—the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. What is this rest? It is God’s rest. It is referred to as “My rest” in **Verse 3** and in **Verse 4** we are directed to the Genesis account.
Hebrews 4:4 NAU - "For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"
God rested from His work of creation. He finished His work. It is a permanent cessation. This doesn’t mean God is idle. But He continues to enjoy His rest from creation. Believers enter into God’s rest, a permanent cessation from our labors.
F.F. Bruce describes it well – “The ‘rest’ which God promises to His people is a share in that rest which he himself enjoys. When we read that God ‘rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done’ we are to understand that he began to rest then; the fact that he is never said to have completed his rest and resumed his work of creation

implies that his rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to his overtures with faith and obedience.”¹

9. Entering into our rest means entering into the presence of God. It means enjoying God’s ultimate redemptive purpose of restoring that which had been destroyed by the fall. It is a present reality and a future hope. God’s rest is an eternal cessation.
 - A. It is a rest from sin and the grip of evil upon our hearts.
 - B. It is the end of our hostility with God. It is peace in the abiding presence of God. As Augustine wrote: “My heart, Lord, does not rest Until it rests in Thee.”
 - C. It also means rest from every form of self-effort to find acceptance with God.
Matthew 11:28 NAU - "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."
 - D. And it is an eternal rest from death, sorrow and tears, pain and suffering, doubts and fears.

10. Some wrongly try to use **Verse 9** to support the abrogation of the Sabbath for the church. They claim the Sabbath rest is now reserved for eternity. There is nothing here that states the Fourth Commandment Sabbath is no longer in force. In **Verse 4** we are directed to the Genesis account and God resting on the seventh day. This rest set up the creation ordinance of the Sabbath. There are actually four distinct applications of that Sabbath ordinance.
 - (1) There is the Creation Sabbath where God established the Sabbath as a perpetual ordinance. We celebrate God’s creation and worship Him as our Creator. God’s rest began at the foundation of the world.
 - (2) There is the Sinaitic Sabbath where it was codified as the Fourth Commandment. It was clearly tied to the Creation ordinance.
Exodus 20:11 NAU - "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."
 - (3) There is the Resurrection Sabbath whereby we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. The day was changed to the first day of the week to commemorate the resurrection of Christ.
 - (4) There is the eternal Sabbath’s rest promised to those who by faith receive God’s promise of salvation through His Son and follow Him in obedience. There is no justification to use this as evidence that God has rescinded one of the Ten Commandments.

11. Most of Israel under the Old Covenant failed to enter into their rest because of unbelief.
Hebrews 3:18-19 NAU - "And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."
 - A. **Verse 19** summarizes Israel’s judgment. They were not able to enter into their rest because of unbelief. This sets up the warning that begins in **Chapter 4**. Remember, the context finds some of these Hebrew Christians falling away under the stress of persecution.
 - B. **Chapter 4** opens with the word “therefore.” The author reminds these Hebrew Christians of the failure of Old Covenant Israel as a warning for them to continue in the faith lest they too fail to enter into their rest.

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 106.

12. The author wants us to see the Good News was preached to both groups – those delivered from Egypt and those in the New Covenant. There is a single Greek word translated here, “Good News Preached” - εὐαγγελίζω. It is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With those delivered from Egypt it was the message of God’s promise of rest. That promise can only ultimately be accomplished through God’s Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ. They failed to receive God’s promise and perished in their unbelief.
- I. We can see here the effectual call of the Gospel
- A. There is a universal offer of grace
1. All who left Egypt had the Good News preached to them. It was a message of salvation, a message of a promised rest that had to be received by faith. This was the basis of Abraham’s justification.
Romans 4:3 NAU - "For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
 2. Christians today have had the same Good News preached to them. Now Jesus Christ is fully revealed but the message is still the same. God promises rest for those who trust and obey Him in faith. If we reject the promise of the Gospel, we will die in the wilderness, but if we trust the promise of God we will enter into God’s rest.
 3. Just hearing the Gospel isn’t sufficient. Most, like Israel of old, continue in their stubborn unbelief.
Hebrews 4:2 NAU - "but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."
Hebrews 3:19 NAU - "So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."
Matthew 22:14 NAU - "For many are called, but few *are* chosen."
John 6:65 NAU - "no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."
- B. The Good News must be accompanied by God’s grace of faith.
1. Without God’s gift of faith the sinner simply will not receive the Gospel. He will not because he cannot.
 - a. The lost man may come. There is no physical limitation to his coming. He has permission to come. There is a genuine offer of grace. “Whosoever will may come.” All have permission to come.
 - b. Mere permission or invitation does not imply ability. It doesn’t imply that anyone “can” come.
All “may” come but God determines who “will” come.
John 6:37 - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me"
 2. The heart of the sinner must be opened.
 3. The multitude in the wilderness perished in their unbelief.
Hebrews 4:2 NAU - "but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."
 4. The work of God in the sinner enabling him to believe is called effectual calling.

- II. It also points to the urgency of the Gospel.
- A. Israel continued in their unbelief into death.
1. They were stubborn and unbelieving.
 2. God was patient and forbearing, and yet His patience will not last forever.
 3. Yes, the message must be accompanied by God's grace of faith, but all have a duty to believe and obey God.
 - a. This is the important truth of human responsibility. Our depravity and inability to receive the Gospel in no way lessens our responsibility and duty to receive it.
 - b. We must pursue God's rest with great energy.
Verse 11 - "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest"
 4. How do you know if you are one of the elect? The elect come to Christ.
John 6:37 NAU - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
- B. There remains great urgency to receive God's promise of rest.
Hebrews 4:7 NAU - "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."
Hebrews 4:11 NAU - "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest"
1. The word "Today" must ring upon the heart of every man. This may be our only opportunity to believe, today may be the only day. No man can presume upon tomorrow. Delay can be deadly.
 2. The acceptable time to receive the Gospel is now.
2 Corinthians 6:2 NAU - "for He says, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I helped you"; behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation"

Conclusion:

1. Those who repent of their sin and receive Christ by faith shall partake of God's eternal rest—eternal life. Deliverance from this present wilderness and eternal rest and peace.
2. Have you heard the Gospel?
 - A. What have you done with it? You know the Gospel's demand to repent and forsake your sin. You've been meaning to give attention to living for Christ. Hopefully tomorrow. Do you pretend to have time?
 - B. The Gospel declares your need for Christ.
 Do you think you need Him less today?
 Do you think you can stand before God and give reason for your delay?
Hebrews 4:7 NAU - "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."
3. Those who have believed and are enjoying their rest with Christ must be diligent to press on. The author issues his warning.
Hebrews 4:11 NAU - "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience."