

# Striving to Enter God's Rest

## Hebrews 3:5-4:11

### Holding fast our confidence

3:5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

- Contrast: Superiority of Christ over Moses – Christ is faithful over God's house as son, Moses was faithful as a servant.
- Moses faithfully served Israel as God rescued/saved God's household from slavery and led them through the desert towards the promised land.
- The promised land was to be a place of resting from trouble and oppression, freed from slavery, free to dwell with and worship God.
- Moses' faithful service was to bear witness to the rest in the promised land that was to come through the Son i.e. to "testify to the things that were to be spoken later", (Heb 3:5, Heb 1:1f).
- Household – God's family, a Nation belonging to God, a Chosen People.
  - We are His house "*if indeed we hold fast our confidence*". This enduring confidence is our defining characteristic. The Church is a household of faith, confident in the work of Christ and "*boasting in our hope*".
  - Covenants are about God's family- *bringing many sons to Glory* (2:10); we are His flock of sheep. The Shepherd (and under-shepherds) seeks out and finds the lost for the purpose of bringing back to the fold.
- Given by grace (2:9), not our effort, yet persevering and enduring in faith – it is imperative that we hold fast to Christ - it isn't a one-time event.

### Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

3:7 "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says ...".

- *Therefore*, is there because of the imperative to *hold fast our confidence*.
- *As the Holy Spirit says*. Scripture is God speaking. The Holy Spirit says and goes on sounding the warning contained in Psalm 95; Heb 3:7-11 quotes Psalm 95:7-11. What was said in the desert, and then to Israel in the promised land was also said to the Hebrew readers, and now to us – *today, if you hear his voice*.
- Psalm 95 begins, with invitation to worship, remembering that *he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand* Ps 95:7.  
Echoes of David's experience of shepherding and *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* Ps 23:1-3  
Psalm 23 a picture of David confidently holding fast and at rest in God – present tense.
- The sin of unbelief:  
*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. (3:7b & 15). Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God (3:12)*
  - **Hardened** through disobedience. Hardened by unbelief in the Word of God. Hardened and in danger of not hearing again if not believed.
  - Unbelief is **evil** and sinful: *evil, unbelieving heart (3:12)*.
  - So we see that they were unable to enter because of **unbelief**. (3:19)

- Those saved from Egypt were led by pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Neh 9:19), and led to camp at Rephidim (Ex 17:1) where there was no water. Rather than asking by faith they **complained**.
- Meribah and Massah in the wilderness (Psalm 95) - LXX translates these places named by Moses as **rebellion** and **testing**.
- The main focus is at Kadesh Barnea, on the brink of entering their rest. Instead of faith they disobeyed, choosing fear and **unbelief** rather than going forward, striving to enter the promised rest.
- **Unbelief. 3:19** *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*
  - Unbelief: Disobedience, evil, fear, rebellion, and testing God are all descriptions of unbelief. There is no rest in this place.
  - Faith hears and is obedient, confidently holds fast, trusts, remains loyal. This is the place the household of God rests.

**Qus:** Is it easy to trust God in the place of oppressive heat and no water? What about places of sickness, fear of death, loss of status, culturally unacceptability, opposition for who we believe, fear of loss of property and possessions? Where do we find rest in these places?

### Exhort one another every day.

*3:12-14 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

- Temptation to unbelief is a constant danger. *Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor 10:12)
- *But exhort one another every day* The household of God must help each other fight it off. "Persevering in faith to the end is a community project." John Piper
- It is imperative that we must care for each other, and each other's faith. Relationships must be strong enough to know and exhort each other – reminding of the salvation we receive through faith in Christ, pointing out drift, inattention, fear, false worship ...
- How often?
- *Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.* 13:1-3

### The promise of entering His rest still stands.

God's creational promise of rest is 4:3 *from the foundation of the world*

- *Gen 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. **And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.** So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*
- Not a rest because of any tiredness on God's part but commencement of creation's purpose, a rest that lasts forever.
- Psalm 95 is predicated on the understanding that (a) God's creational purpose/promise of rest remains valid despite man's faithlessness i.e. "*a rest remains*", and (b) God's word will be fulfilled e.g. "*we are the people of his pasture*".
- Nature of this Rest: Eden, Psalm 23, communing with God, blessing, fullness of life & vocation, Paradise (Luke 23:43), the Heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), Holiness, Shalom/Peace ...
- The Law doesn't bring us into this rest. The fourth commandment's purpose points to God's promised rest, resting from work, remembering that we receive our rest in God & in Holiness.

## A rest entered through Jesus Christ.

*For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 4:8-10*

- Joshua led them out of wandering in the desert however he did not give them this ultimate promised rest (4:8) – this rest is the creational rest entered through Jesus Christ and opened up when He had completed the work of salvation.
- This is our rest; we don't need to wander in the desert if we are those who have confidence and pride in our hope (3:6).
- God's creational purpose is still standing, despite our unbelief, rebellion, and death: unbelief in the garden of Eden, unbelief exemplified in the desert of a whole generation who were rescued from Egypt.
- *How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? (2:3)*

## Qu A rest now or at our labours end?

**Now:** ... *that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* (Heb 2:14-15)

- We are released from lifelong slavery.
- Through Christ's death we are released from our aimless dry searching for rest and our enemies e.g. our slavery to Egypt and sin, our fear of death – guilt, attempts to self-justify ...
- To Thy house, O God my Father, Thy lost child is come;  
Led by wandering lights no longer, I have found my home.  
Gerhard Tersteegen, 1697–1769

**Then:** *What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Cor 2:9. If our hope in Christ is only for this life here on earth, then people should feel more sorry for us than for anyone else. (1 Cor 15:19).*

- Those of faith will ultimately enter into rest when our earthly life ceases, when we cease from our labours. Until then, we hold fast our confession, and live by faith.
- Jesus Christ's salvation work was to be obedient to death on the Cross, and this work of true Joshua opened up the way for us to enter God's rest.

“Whilst it is true that the redeemed person is at rest from the penalty and effects of sin, yet his rest is not complete until he has laboured to the finish. To rest from one's labours does not mean to rest from one's own self-efforts. Certainly we should have none of those, but there are legitimate labours in which we must participate, and cessation from those can only be at the end of this mortal experience of life.”

Sabbath Rest or Human Turmoil – Geoffrey Bingham pg 61.

## Therefore let us fear and strive.

4:1b *let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*

4:11 *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

- Imperatives: Let us *fear* and let us *strive* (ESV and RSV). Alternative translations: We must fear and make every effort (NASB), let us be careful and make every effort (NIV)
- Recall: Disobedience and unbelief are synonymous and are deadly.
- Instructions to “fear” are also written to Christians elsewhere e.g. Paul instructs us to fear; “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Philippians 2:12, and “You stand fast only through faith; so do not become conceited but fear.” Romans 11:20.
- We are to be fearless with regards to man’s threats, fearless in “holding fast to our confession”, fearless in ministry e.g. *For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.* (Heb 10:34)
- Fear unbelief. Fear disobedience. Fear faithlessness.

### Qu. Do we live in constant fear?

3:13 *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

“Normal Christian life is aware of the fearful danger of unbelief, but does not live paralysed or terrorized by it. It lives in faith. Fear only rises where faith starts to weaken. And it only rises long enough to get us back into the peaceful fearlessness of faith.” John Piper

- By faith we can live fearless of everything dealt with by God’s promises e.g. guilty conscience, fear of death (2:15).
- Psalm 23 is not a picture of fear but of faith – often hidden from sight.
- We are instructed to approach God with confidence: *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (4:16)

What gives us this confidence? *We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* (4:14)