

Hebrews 4:1-14      “Today Is the New Creation”  
Joshua 1:1-18  
Psalm 107

February 7, 2021

When you first hear those words, “as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you” –  
how do you hear that?

I know that for years, I laughed at those words –  
because the wilderness generation is famous for their rebellion against Moses!

But as we heard last week from Numbers 14 – that whole generation died in the wilderness!  
They never entered the land!  
The next generation – their children – are the ones who are now speaking.

How often did they rebel against Moses?

Never.

They watched their fathers rebel –  
and they watched their fathers die.  
And they decided that they did not want to repeat their fathers’ mistakes.  
As you go through the book of Joshua, you see that this generation is faithful.  
Sure, they were sinners – just like us.  
But when they sinned, they repented!  
And when there was danger of rebellion, they dealt with it.  
They were faithful!

But their faithfulness was not the *reason* why they inherited the land.  
Faithlessness resulted in their fathers *not* inheriting the land.  
The children could not have inherited the land *without* obeying Moses and Joshua,  
but Joshua 1 clearly assigns two reasons  
for why Israel inherits the land.

Verse 6: “Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people  
to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.”

There are two reasons why Israel inherits the land:  
first, is God’s promise – the land I swore to their fathers to give them;  
the second is *Joshua’s* faithfulness.

As we saw last time, Israel had failed.  
Israel does not deserve the land.  
But *Joshua’s* faithfulness will result in Israel inheriting the land.

And so flip to the end of the book – chapter 21, verse 43:

*<sup>43</sup> Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. <sup>44</sup> And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. <sup>45</sup> Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.*

Again the focus is on the LORD's *promise* to the fathers –  
to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

(and if you read the rest of the conclusion to the book of Joshua,  
it is clear that Joshua himself is the reason for their faithfulness).

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 107.

Psalm 107 is the first song in Book Five of the Psalter.

Book Four ends with Psalm 106 – a song that asks God

to “gather us from among the nations” and restore his people from exile.

Book Five opens with a song of praise thanking God for doing just that.

Since Psalm 107 is a longer Psalm, let's break it into two parts –

we'll sing the first five stanzas now,

then I'll comment on what is going on in the song,

and then we'll finish singing it.

Sing Psalm 107 stanzas 1-5

The restoration from exile has a lot of similarities to the days of Joshua.

God brings his people out of distress – out of rebellion –  
and into the land.

You'll notice that there are four distinct stories told in this song.

Each story starts with the word “some” –

identifying four different groups who walked four different paths –  
four different “yesterdays” – four different backgrounds;

but then each story includes the line:

“then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress” –

then it gives the particulars of how God delivered them,

and then the story calls them to “thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!” –

and concludes with a particular example of what God has done.

Verses 1-3 introduces the whole song – thanking God for his steadfast love  
in redeeming his people from trouble.

Verses 4-9 (stanzas 2-3 in your TPH) tell the story of those who wandered in the desert.

There are lots of echoes of Exodus here.

God brought them out of the desert and gave them a city.

Verses 10-16 (st 4-5) then speak of those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death.

Their rebellion against the LORD resulted in their trouble.

(Yes, sometimes your sin results in misery for yourself and others!

But you can always cry out to the LORD!)

Verses 17-22 (st 6-7) then speak of those who turned to folly –

and because of their sin, they suffered affliction and disease.

Verses 23-32 (st 8-10) then speak of those who went down to the sea in ships –

telling the story of sailors who survived a terrible storm.

The Psalm then concludes with a picture of rest –

a picture of how God raises up the needy,

and pours contempt on princes who oppress them.

The wise will attend to these things and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

Sing stanzas 6-13

Read Hebrews 4:1-16

Hebrews is teaching you how to read the OT.

Do you tend to read the OT as a story of “what happened back then”?

The OT provides a truthful history – but it’s more than just that.

Do you read it as a series of moral lessons?

The OT provides lots of moral lessons – but it’s more than just that.

The OT is your story, too.

Hebrews wants you to see yourself in the story.

We saw last time that Hebrews sees you at Kadesh in Numbers 14.

Will you believe God’s promises and enter the land?

But here in Hebrews 4 we discover that Hebrews does not leave you at Kadesh.

Having suggested that you are being asked the same question–

“Will you listen to God’s voice in faith, or in unbelief?”

Now we see that the context is different.

Because at Kadesh the promised rest is still entirely future for all God’s people.

But for us it is different.

It is true that *we* have not yet entered God’s rest,

but Jesus has.

Our Joshua has entered God’s rest,

and therefore we are not so much Israel at Kadesh,

as we are Israel in the midst of the conquest.

We have entered the land, but we have not yet received the full inheritance.

The major theme of chapter four is entering God's rest.

There is a promise of entering God's rest –  
through faith.

But there is also the peril of not entering God's rest –  
through disobedience.

And so there is again the call to be diligent –

to strive to enter God's rest (v11),

with the corresponding warning to "fear"

lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." (v1)

and the final call to hold fast our confession.

Chapter four makes the implications of chapter 3 explicit.

The Christian community is the heir of the promise to enter God's rest.

The promise to enter God's rest is open –  
do not fail to enter it.

What does it mean to "enter God's rest"?

The idea of entering rest is rooted in the inheritance of the Promised Land –

in Dt 12:9 Moses says, "you have not as yet come to the rest

and to the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you."

The book of Joshua uses this language several times –

especially in Joshua 1:13 – the LORD your God is providing you a place of rest  
and will give you this land

and Joshua 21:44 – And the LORD gave them rest on every side (cf. 22:4, 23:1)

Later, in 1 Kings 8:56, Solomon says,

"Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel"

Entering God's rest means living in the midst of *shalom* – peace – well-being.

And so Hebrews 4:1 says:

**1. The Promise Still Stands (4:1-5)**

*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*

This is the first time that we hear the language of "promise" in Hebrews.

We'll hear a lot more of it as we go.

You are probably used to Paul's way of talking about the promises:

that which was promised to the fathers has been fulfilled in Christ.

Hebrews has a slightly different way of saying it.

What God has promised to the fathers, he has promised to us in Christ.

And because Jesus is the faithful high priest,  
we have greater confidence.  
Since then 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).

So the point of 4:1 is *not* that Jesus has fulfilled what was promised,  
but that the promise itself still stands.  
God promised that his people would enter his rest.  
And that promise still stands.  
That promise now comes to you!

#### **a. The Gospel and Faith**

Remember that the wilderness generation failed to enter God's rest through unbelief.  
Do not be like Israel in the wilderness!

And just as in chapter 3,  
Hebrews starts with a comparison.  
Remember how Hebrews compared Moses and Jesus?  
He started by saying, "Jesus was faithful, just like Moses."  
And so here, he begins,

<sup>2</sup> *For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*<sup>[a]</sup>

"For good news came to us just as to them."  
The gospel was preached to us, just as to them.  
They heard the good news of redemption from slavery in Egypt.  
"But the message they heard did not benefit them,  
because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

All those in the wilderness heard the message.  
But the wilderness generation did not believe the message that they heard,  
because they lacked faith.  
There were some who believed.  
Caleb and Joshua.  
They are "those who listened"—but the wilderness generation was not united by faith,  
they did not share the faith of those who heard and believed.  
Hebrews will draw attention to Joshua in verse 8,  
but here the simple contrast is sufficient.

The only way to enter God's rest is to hear the message *and believe!*  
"For we who have believed enter that rest,"  
and then Hebrews reminds us that we are still dealing with Psalm 95.  
"As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest."

### **b. The Land as a Picture of God's Seventh-Day Rest**

What is this "rest" that Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3-4 are talking about?

The promise of entering God's rest is the promise of sharing in the eschatological blessings—the blessings of the last days—the blessings of the kingdom of God.

But while this "rest" is future for us,  
it is present for God.

God entered his rest on the seventh day of creation.

*...although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works."  
<sup>5</sup> And again in this passage he said,  
"They shall not enter my rest."*

The image is rather simple.

Genesis tells us that God created the heavens and earth in the space of six days.  
Each day begins and ends with "and there was evening and there was morning,  
an "Nth" day."

But after the seventh day, there is no such statement.

Hebrews takes the silence of Genesis 2 as suggestive.

The reason why Genesis never speaks of the "end" of the seventh day,  
is because the seventh day has not ended.

God's work of creation was a six-day work,  
but his rest is never-ending.

And when God promised Adam an inheritance of life,  
he was calling Adam to enter into his rest.

Adam was to labor in his six-day weeks,  
just as God had labored in archetypal six-day week.

Our weeks are patterned after God's creation week.

His six days of working and one day of resting becomes the archetype –  
the pattern – the original –  
and our weeks are to be shaped after that pattern.

Every Sabbath was to be a reminder of God's Sabbath-rest,  
a day of anticipation, looking forward to our eschatological entrance  
into God's rest.

The whole history of redemption can be seen focused around this idea of rest.

Israel was called as God's firstborn son to enter his rest.

But at Kadesh, in Numbers 14,

the son refused to heed his Father.  
He refused to enter God's rest,  
and so God swore in his wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

In other words,  
Israel has repeated the sin of Adam.  
God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations would be blessed,  
but it will not be through the wilderness generation!  
The first generation of Israel repeats the sin of the first generation of Adam.

It is not the first Adam—it is not the first Israel—nor is it the first Joshua or the first David,  
who will enter God's rest.

So the fact that Hebrews starts by saying that "the good news came to us just as to them"  
does not sound like very good news!

## **2. The Peril of Disobedience (4:6-11)**

Because there is a genuine peril of disobedience.

### **a. The Gospel and Disobedience**

The Promise is that "it remains for some to enter" God's rest,  
but the peril is that those who formerly received the good news failed to enter.

Verses 6-11 focus on this peril of disobedience

Verse 6 says that some failed to enter because of disobedience,  
and then verse 11 warns us not to fall by the same sort of disobedience.

It is not enough to hear the message.

It is not enough even to follow the external directions of the message.

Israel followed the external directions:

They left Egypt, were baptized in the Red Sea, followed Moses,  
and ate the manna and drank from that spiritual rock that followed  
Israel through the wilderness

(And Paul says that that rock was Christ).

So Israel partook of Christ in all these external ways.

But simply hearing the message and following its external directions is not enough.

You must *believe* the message.

And Hebrews says that this warning is still the same **today**.

The warning is still the same.

But *today* is different!

Like Israel, we all have those yesterdays that threaten to define us.

We all have those moments that try to suck us back into them.

We *need* a better *today*!

## **b. Entering God's Rest**

Last week we saw how Israel was like a 2-year old—constantly testing his Father and rebelling against him.

The promise of Psalm 95 is that there is a new day.

“Today, if you hear his voice...”

The experience of the wilderness generation is not going to define the history of God's people.

Your yesterday does not have to define today!

The test is the same: the call to persevering faith,  
but the result can be different!

And, in the end, Hebrews says, the result *will* be different.

And in Joshua, the result was different.

Joshua's generation believed God!

There was a faithful generation that was not stuck in yesterday!

They trusted God's promises, and so entered the Promised Land,  
following the Anointed Conqueror, and taking possession of their inheritance.

The solution to the wilderness rebellion is Joshua.

Right?

Yes...

Joshua caused Israel to inherit...

But after Joshua comes Judges!

Judges does not paint a pretty picture of life in the Land.

The lessons of the wilderness did not endure long in the memory of God's people.

So it is not the first Joshua that matters.

In Greek, the name Joshua is “Jesus.”

So verse 8 says “for if Jesus had given them rest,

God would not have spoken of another day later on.”

(Our English translations translate it “Joshua” because that *is* who is referred to –  
but in Greek there are two Jesus's – two Joshua's).

Having started by saying, “you are like Israel at Kadesh,”

Hebrews now says, “but here's the difference. We have a better Joshua!”

When Adam failed to enter God's seventh day rest,

that was the moment that created the necessity of another day.

If man was going to enter God's rest, there must be another day—beyond the seventh day.

Read verses 6-7.

*<sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*

There must be a new "today"–  
there must be an eighth day, as it were, when man can enter God's rest.

*<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God<sup>[b]</sup> would not have spoken of another day later on.*

If Joshua had brought about that day of rest,  
then Psalm 95 would have been unnecessary!

Sure, there was a sense in which David gave Israel rest (as Solomon says in 1 Kings 8).  
But again, after Solomon, things fall apart.

All of our seventh-days keep falling short.  
We need another day.

And that day has come in Jesus Christ.  
In Jesus Christ "Today" has dawned.  
It's why all the gospel accounts highlight the fact that the resurrection took place  
on the *first day* of the week –  
and John even speaks of an eighth day.

And because this final "Today" has come in Christ,  
*<sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, <sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

God entered his rest (ceased from his work of creation) on the seventh day.  
We enter that rest (ceasing from our creational work) on our Sabbath-rest.

Some have tried to make "resting from works" a reference to resting from "sinful works,"  
but that destroys the parallel between God's works and our works.

God rested from his creational works on the seventh day.  
And even so, we also rest from our creational works.

Our Sabbath-rest is our entrance into God's rest,  
when we will share in that glorious rest which God entered on his seventh day.

Now, this word "Sabbath-rest" (Sabbatismos) is not the ordinary word "Sabbath."

Hebrews is not talking about the old seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews.  
No, this Sabbath-rest is the eschatological Sabbath.

Jesus has entered God's rest.

He now partakes of the eschatological Sabbath,  
so to continue to practice the old seventh-day Sabbath  
would be to return to Moses—to live in the shadows.  
So Jesus has entered God's rest.  
What about us?  
Do we yet partake of the eschatological Sabbath?

Some have tried to say that we are living in the eschatological Sabbath,  
and that we have entered God's rest in Christ.

And there is a sense in which that is true.  
But that is NOT what Hebrews says.  
Hebrews says that we must still "strive to enter that rest."

In other words,  
we have not *yet* entered God's rest.

Yes, Jesus (our Joshua) has entered God's rest.  
You, however, are still at the point of decision at Kadesh in the wilderness.  
Will you believe God's promises in Jesus Christ?  
Or will you rebel and perish in the wilderness?

The call for us is to be diligent—to strive to enter God's rest.  
The time has not yet come for rest.  
We are called to work.  
Notice that Hebrews does NOT say,  
work, in order to be saved.  
Our works do not save us—  
our works are simply those (as Paul says)  
that God has created us in Christ Jesus to do.  
"It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith,  
And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not by works,  
so that no one may boast.  
For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works,  
which he prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph 2:8-10)

Either you believe God's promises,  
and therefore walk in good works,  
Or you rebel against God's promises,  
and fall by the same sort of disobedience as Israel in the wilderness.

And so (v11)

<sup>11</sup> *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

### **c. Entering Rest and the Sabbath Pattern**

So does this passage say anything to us about our weekly Sabbath observance?

Plainly Hebrews is not focusing on this.

And certainly Hebrews is not very friendly to the idea of a 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath.

The seventh day, for Hebrews, is insufficient.

There must be another day.

And since the book of Acts speaks of the regular gathering  
of the people of God on the first day of the week for worship,  
it is easy to see a sort of argument from analogy here.

Later on in Hebrews, he will portray the corporate worship of the church  
as participating in the heavenly worship (Heb 12).

Even though we have not *yet* entered our rest,  
we have a foretaste of it in our worship.

When you hear the message proclaimed,  
and you respond to it with faith,  
you are striving to enter your rest.

In this way the weekly Sabbath-celebration (*Sabatismos*) is a picture of the future.

God created us to work for six days and rest on the seventh.

That creational pattern hasn't just "gone away."

If the sabbath-celebration is entirely future,

then how do you know that it is going to happen?

The weekly sabbath-celebration which we celebrate every Sunday,  
is a sign to the church that we are still "on the way."

We are the eschatological community—we are those who live in anticipation  
of that final sabbath-rest.

And so our weekly sabbath-rest functions as a sign,  
reminding us week-by-week that we are still walking by faith.

This is why Hebrews will say later:

"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of some"

You need each other!

You need to be reminded of who you are in Christ

### **3. The Power of the Word/Son (4:12-14)**

And it is particularly in the preaching of the Word that you hear this.

The wilderness generation refused to believe the word that was preached to them.

(Read v12-13)

*<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

This Word slew the Israelites in the wilderness.  
This Word will judge you as well.

The “Word” does not just mean the “Bible” (although the Bible is God’s Word)  
nor does it just mean preaching (although preaching is also God’s Word)  
and for that matter, it does not just mean Jesus (although he is emphatically God’s Word).  
All of these are included—  
because scripture, preaching and the incarnate Word all do this!--  
but however the Word of God comes,  
it penetrates to the deepest crannies of our being  
and lays bare the secrets of your heart.

You cannot hide from God’s Word.

Nor should you want to!  
To be naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account  
is a beautiful thing!

Because of verse 14:

*<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

The difference between the wilderness generation and us  
is that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

We have the faithful Son of God—not just a servant in the house, like Moses,  
but a Son over the house.

This is what gives comfort to Hebrews’ exhortation.

And because Jesus was faithful over the house as a Son,  
therefore you are called to faithful living as children of God.

We have a different future than the wilderness generation.

Your yesterdays do not need to define you –  
and because of what Jesus Christ has done,  
your yesterdays *will not* define you.

Yes, let us fear and let us strive,

but our godly fear, and our humble striving is not because of any lack of confidence.  
It is because we hold fast our confession!

4:14 draws us back to 3:1.

*<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

Jesus is the apostle and high priest of our confession.

He is the substance that we hold fast to.

He is that which endures while all the passing fancies of life flit by.

Jesus is our *today*

Our today is *Jesus*.