

Let Us Strive to Enter that Rest

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Bible Text: Hebrews 4:1-11

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We continue our study of the book of Hebrews this morning in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. This section, verses one through 11, rounds out the second major section of the book and gives us some more very important exhortations in view of our situation as believers and also what God has called us to. So let me read Hebrews four verses one through 11 as we begin this morning. Hebrews chapter four beginning in verse one.

This is the Word of the Lord.

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. 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. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 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.” 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.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.¹

Let’s pray.

¹ Hebrews 1:1-11.

Lord, you have set before us already several times just in the three chapters that we have studied the call to perseverance, the reminder that unless we continue to the end no profession is genuine or saving, no faith that fades away can bring us into contact with the redemptive mercies in Christ. Genuine faith is a persevering faith, a continuing faith. And yet, Lord, we are aware that there are so many things that challenge our faith, so many things that weaken our faith, so many things that distract us from the life of faith and obedience. And so we need to hear this reminder and more and more so, Lord, as become increasingly aware of how dangerous our situation is.

Lord, there were probably little children who left Egypt and for them life in the wilderness wasn't much different than what they had known in Egypt. Their parents provided food. They ate it every day. They might have noticed that it was the same food, manna, day after day after day. But beyond that they were able to pray and carry out their lives. They weren't aware enough of just how serious a position they were in. And, Lord, sometimes we are like that. We live our lives even though we are adults like little children, oblivious to the many urgent concerns that beset us all around. Often times we are so self indulgent that we do not give much thought to ministry and what hinders that ministry.

So, Lord, we need you to cause us to grow up, to be mature, to look around and be alert and particularly to remember and to strive to move forward and ultimately enter in to that rest that you have called us to in Jesus Christ. So please help us not only to hear, but to believe what we hear from your Word this morning. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Stacey Nelson passed on an interesting article to me earlier this week. It was a *Washington Post*, Associated Press story that had been published in the *Union Tribune* here locally back last Tuesday and it was entitled, "Loss of Faith Attributed to Spiritual Drift." It was actually a report on a survey that was conducted by the Pugh Forum on religion and public life that was a follow up to an earlier survey some time back. There wasn't... oh, 2007 there was a survey of 35,000 Americans regarding their religious beliefs and practices and then this particular study was a follow up with about 2800 people from among that larger group asking them about comments concerning changes in their religious affiliation. Ok, so they found out in the big survey that people—and they were concentrating particularly on professing Christians, Catholics and Protestants—tend to change their church affiliations. And so they wanted to find out a little bit more about why and that was then the point of this more recent survey.

Let me just read a couple of brief paragraphs from the beginning of this article. "More Americans have given up their faith or changed religions because of a gradual spiritual drift than because of disillusionment over their church's policies according to a study released yesterday that illustrates how personal spiritual attitudes are taking precedence over denominational tradition."

So there is the contrast. Personal spiritual attitudes, as over against denominational traditions. Again, quoting the survey by the Pugh Forum on Religion and Public Life is the first large scale study of the reasons Americans switch religious affiliations.

Researchers found that more than half of the people have done so at least once. Almost three quarters of Catholics and Protestants who are now unaffiliated with a religion said they had just gradually drifted away from their faith. And more than three quarters of Catholics and half of Protestants currently unassociated with a faith said that over time they stopped believing in their religion's teaching.

They also found that up to one third of people who have left their childhood faith have jumped around among three or more other faiths.

Now the article goes on to say that this was a surprise to researchers because they thought things like the scandal concerning Roman Catholic priests would have certainly been a motivation. But they found that only a very small percentage of people left the Roman Catholic Church because of that. Others left because they disagreed with particular doctrines or teachings. But, again, this idea of drifting, losing your moorings was often what was cited in this article and I looked at the back of articles, the report of the Pugh Trust itself as well as the original AP story.

The 2007 survey, so this was the bigger survey, estimated that 44% of US adults had left their childhood religious affiliation, almost half. People raised in a particular religious setting move away and they tend to move away. Many people change their affiliation by the time they are in their mid 20s. And some change two or three or more times as they move around. And so basically the article characterizes American religious affiliation like life in a butter churn where everything is just getting constantly stirred up and people move from here to there. They connect. They disconnect. And some of it is doctrinal. Some of it is social.

It is interesting. Now, it is interesting from a sociological standpoint because, of course, as far as the *Union Trib* is concerned or the *Washington Post*, for that matter, all these religions are equally valid or invalid. So you drift into one, you drift out of another. It really doesn't matter all that much. You might become unaffiliated for a while and then eventually you will re-affiliate. But as far as the world is concerned religion is religion is religion. Spirituality is spirituality is spirituality. It really doesn't matter. It is just kind of an interesting thing to notice I suppose like the migratory patterns of Canadian Geese or something like that, you know.

But it is interesting for us to compare this with the attitude of our author here in Hebrews because for our author in Hebrews—as we have already seen—drifting away from your moorings in Christ, stopping believing for any reason whether it is a social reason or an ethical reason or a doctrinal reason spells deadly danger.

So from a world perspective we can look at this and say, “Oh, well, no big deal, just a kind of a curiosity. But for our author he has already reminded us and he will remind us again in this passage that having come to the message of Christ and then drifted away is to court certain and eternal disaster. And so we can't take this lightly. We need to take it very, very seriously.

Now in this fourth chapter as you notice just from the reading of it, the author is carrying on with the themes that he introduced in chapter three, comparing Jesus to Moses and then zeroing in on the experience of the children of Israel under Moses as they came out of Egypt, but had not yet entered into the Land of Promise.

And he wants us to see ourselves in that same picture. We have come away from unbelief, perhaps, as pagans or even from other kinds of religious convictions. He was talking to Jews who had become Christians. But we haven't yet finished our course. The pilgrimage isn't over yet. And so we are in that same between era in our lives where we are still subject to great danger. We are a pilgrim people. We are moving on. And he wants us to draw lessons from the largely negative example of the children of Israel. I mean, there were exceptions like Moses himself, like Joshua and Caleb. But by and large the children of Israel in that generation were a bad example and we are urged not to follow them. So that is the point here in this section as well.

The first thing that he wants us to understand here in this fourth chapter is that the good news, the good news for the people of God, ancient and contemporary and even now for us contemporary as well, is that we may enter in to God's rest by faith and obedient faith.

He has already quoted several times the threat from Psalm 95. "They shall not enter my rest."² It was there in chapter three verse 11 and then again in verse 18 and now it is repeated several times in our own text this morning.

But now he wants to move to a more positive statement that is implied by that threat. Namely, there is the promise of entering God's rest. That is a privilege that God holds out to his people. We may enter in to his rest. That promise, says verse one, still remains. It still stands. This is the good news that was preached to them—the fathers in the wilderness—and has been preached to us as well, both his original readers and those of us who are reading the book today all these many years later.

And that verb there that is used—and he uses the verbal form, not the noun, to evangelize, εὐαγγελίζω (yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo) is the verb, but it means to preach the good news. It is the kind of preaching of the good news that is characteristic throughout the New Testament. And I mentioned a few weeks ago that should tell us something about the ministry of the law. The ministry of the law is not the ministry of bad news. It is the ministry of good news. The good news always entails bad news. We have to know that we are sinners before we are going to embrace a Savior, but there was good news in the old covenant under Moses. There is good news for us today. And, basically, within this context that good news is we may enter God's rest.

Now what does it mean by this idea of God's rest. Well, as you read this passage you can see that it is really looking back all the way to the original creation account in Genesis one and two. The rest that is God's rest is the rest that God himself entered into at the completion of his work of creation. I mean you remember. God created in six days. Did

² Psalm 95:11.

this day one, did this day two, did this day three. And the author here quotes from the beginning of Genesis two in verse four concerning the end of that creative work.

Let me read from Genesis two verses one through three.

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.³

So the rest is basically a resting from his creative work. Now, because we usually associate rest with physical weariness and you work hard all day, you want to go to bed at night and rest. Or maybe you just want to sit down and put your feet up in front of the TV set and rest.

And so when we think about after six days of labor, then we think about rest as inactivity. But obviously God's rest is not the rest of inactivity. I mean, he didn't get worn out saying, "Let there be light," and there was light.⁴ Oh, it is such sweaty work to say, "Let the dry land bring forth the animals and so forth."

No, God didn't get tired while he was creating so that he needed a rest. Actually, after God finished his work of creation he continued to work in providence, sustaining and upholding all that he had created, ordering and bringing it toward its ultimate goal. And soon he would be active in the work of redemption.

So as Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."⁵

So when we think about rest we are not thinking about inactivity, recuperation from strenuous labor. Rather, God's rest is really more along the lines of his own satisfaction and delight in all of the things that he has made.

You know, if you have ever made anything from a beautiful meal to maybe a piece of furniture or something else that you have created out of your own hands, you know that once the job is done if it is well done... My wife likes to quilt. She quilts for hours and hours and hours and hours. And eventually the quilt is done. And it is a great pleasure, then, to lift it up and look at the finished product. And there is a delight in the completion of the task. And it is that kind of satisfaction in the completeness of God's work of creation that gets at the idea of his rest.

The Father, the Creator God took pleasure, delight in all that he had done. Remember, every step of the way in the intermediate conclusions he looked at all that he had made and behold it was very good. And the next step was very good and the next step was very

³ Genesis 2:1-3.

⁴ Genesis 1:3.

⁵ John 5:17.

good. And then he looked at the whole of his work and he was satisfied. It was all very good.

And what is interesting is that Adam and Eve who were created on the sixth day were invited immediately to enter into God's enjoyment of his completed creation. They didn't do anything yet. Their first day was the seventh day which was the sabbath day. So having been created and given a command to labor and do all their work, yet, their initial enjoyment of God and of his rest came before any work had taken place. They were invited to join God in the enjoyment of the whole creation. That was the blessedness of the sabbath day and Adam and Eve entered into that blessedness immediately.

And so when we think about that original creation, the Garden of Eden, as a home for God's human creatures, that was part of this blessedness. Access to the tree of life that was in the midst of the garden, that was part of the blessedness of this rest. And, indeed, the intimate fellowship that they enjoyed day by day with the Creator God was also a privilege of rest.

And so, in effect, rest is entering into communion with God, fellowship with God, joining him in the satisfaction of the completeness and beauty and goodness of his work.

We could say it this way. God's rest was man's highest good. Man's goal in being created was to enter into God's rest. And so we read here in verse 10, "Whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."⁶

Now, for us that does entail a physical resting. But more than that, it means that our life is given purpose by our entering into God's rest. We can take a look at what we are doing and why. It is the contrast to the kind of frustration and bitter disappointment that can come to human life apart from a knowledge of God.

So God's rest was his own satisfaction in his creative work completed and very, very good and Adam and Eve were made to enter into that.

But, of course, we know from reading Genesis three that they didn't enter into that rest, at least not for very long. Soon their own rebellious, disobedient unbelief forfeited that rest. Unwilling to be God's followers and servants, they wanted to become gods themselves and they lost that rest.

And from banished Adam and then later banished Cain, right down to the generation of Israel wandering in the wilderness, that aimless restlessness, that wandering is emblematic of the life of human kind in their distrust and disobedience.

Much later the prophet Isaiah says:

⁶ Hebrews 4:10.

“But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace [or in some versions there is no rest]” says my God, “for the wicked.”⁷

And so our natural condition as fallen people is restlessness, wandering. And you have known people like that. Maybe some of you have been that way. You are always moving on to something different, a new place to live, new toys, a new job. You are never satisfied where you are. There is no sense of completeness and meaning and purpose. And so you have got to keep going. You have got to keep going. Well, that is the idea.

The whole human race, because of our rebellion against God, our falling into sin, have become restless. There is no peace for the wicked. Or, again, as Augustine put it, “You made us for yourself, God, and we don’t find our rest until we rest in you.”

And yet for all of that man’s rebellion against God, in his redemptive mercy God reopened access to his promised rest. The good news that was proclaimed to the generation that Moses led out of Egypt was that God would bring them into the rest that was symbolized by the Promised Land.

Ok, God said to Moses, “Go into Egypt. Tell Pharaoh to let my people go. I am going to take you to a land that I will give you and that land will be your sabbath rest. That will be the place where you enjoy this wonderful fellowship with me which is rest.”

And in that Promised Land, again, there were going to be earthly blessings that were themselves indicators of spiritual prosperity and peace. Once they entered into this land, they were going to live in houses that they hadn’t built, cities that they hadn’t organized. They were going to reap from fields and orchards and vineyards that they hadn’t planted. They were going to drink from wells that they hadn’t dug. I mean, it was all as we say turn key. God had made it ready for them, but those material blessings were simply a sign or one aspect of the deeper spiritual blessings that they were going to enjoy because that was where God was going to live with them and bless them with his presence.

In Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse nine God makes this interesting comment through Moses. “The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers.”⁸ That is the kind of promise that is attached to the land where they are to enter in.

And so Joshua was the one who would have given them that rest. But Israel was unwilling. And so the first point then in this section is that God has held out for his people this promise of rest. We can have fellowship with him and we can enjoy the blessings, not only the physical blessings, the material blessings, but even more the

⁷ Isaiah 57:20-21.

⁸ Deuteronomy 30:9.

spiritual blessings of joining God in his satisfaction and delight in the meaningfulness and purposefulness of all of his work.

But Israel failed to enter in and that is the second point. Israel failed to enter in because of their unbelief and disobedience.

We talked about this last time, but just to remind you again. For our author the Fathers, that is that generation in the wilderness, put Yahweh to the test. They provoked the Lord to anger by their repeated expressions of unbelief and rebellion through 40 years in the wilderness. Even though they saw God's works of redemption and mercy again and again and again. I mean, think about it. He provided sweet water when there was only bitter water. And then he provided water from a rock when there was no water at all. And then he gave them manna every single day to sustain their lives. Indeed it says their shoes didn't wear out for 40 years. How is that?

I know some of you ladies might not like that because a new pair of shoes is kind of a treat and it is always nice to say the old ones are worn out. Theirs didn't wear out. For 40 years God cared for them and helped them and blessed them. And they saw his works and yet every time there was a challenge they responded in unbelief, in bitterness and in grumbling.

And, again, as I mentioned last time when it actually came time to enter into that promised rest they disobeyed. They refused to go in because of their unbelief, an unbelief that manifested itself in the form of fear.

Remember Numbers 14 beginning in verse one. The congregation raised a loud cry after they had heard the report from the spies, at least 10 of the spies that there were giants in the land. And they began to grumble against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword?"⁹ A completely off the wall, irrational accusation, but it was an expression of fear, of unbelief and of disobedience.

And for that reason God said, "All right. You don't want to enter into my rest? You will not enter my rest. Back out into the desert with you for 40 years. You wander around until you are all dead, the adult generation, and then the children that you said you were so concerned about, they will grow up and I will take them in and give them the land that I promised to their fathers."

Now all of that by way of background, then, brings it down to the exhortation of our author here. He comments on the same incident there in verse two. "For good news came to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."¹⁰

⁹ Numbers 14:2-3.

¹⁰ Hebrews 14:2.

If you are reading the ESV you will an alternate translation in the margin. I think that is the preferable one. So the idea was they heard, but they did not believe. They didn't mix what they heard with faith and therefore what they heard did not benefit them.

Now, here again, this is so important that we take this on board because you and I hear a lot of God's Word. We hear Sunday school classes. We hear by reading Christian literature. We read our Bibles. Maybe we listen to it on tape. We listen to sermons, endless sermons. But hearing all by itself doesn't save anybody. Hearing is not enough. And here those who heard did not profit because they did not believe what they heard. It is all important to remember that hearing and doing... it is too bad there isn't an English word that compounds that, doing-hearing or hearing-doing. If were Germans we could just make a word that would compound that. But hearing and doing is the only way we can benefit from the Word of God.

Back in chapter three verse 16 we were told about "those who heard and yet rebelled."¹¹ So hearing might provoke us to rebel. And I wish I had a dollar for every time someone has told me over the last 35 years in pastoral counseling, "I can't do what the Bible tells me to do."

Oh, you can't or you won't? Hearing can provoke unbelief and disobedience. Jesus said it is not those who hear alone, but those who hear and do.

So in the third point place then we here today, you and I, Chula Vista 2009, are in a parallel situation to that generation in the wilderness. Before us, too, stands God's renewed promise that we may enter into his rest. And the question is: Will we follow Israel's example of unbelief and disobedience and therefore fall and fail to enter, or will we, indeed, enter in by faith in Christ.

The author here, again, uses this quotation from Psalm 95 as a kind of a bridge to bring the promise of Genesis two and the promise of the Exodus period up to the time of David and therefore up to the time of his own readers and, indeed, for us as well. He comments the threat, the promise implied in the threat, in Psalm 95 was written many years after the time of Moses and Joshua.

So if Joshua had given the people rest by bringing them into the land, then there wouldn't have been any additional comment regarding entering God's rest, but there was. And so the promise is a contemporary promise for the author's own audience including us today.

So just to read it again. "Therefore...the promise of entering his rest still stands."¹²

And then verse six.

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he

¹¹ Hebrews 3:16.

¹² Hebrews 4:1.

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. 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,”¹³

Even though we live in the new covenant and many of the promises of God have already been fulfilled in Christ, some of those promises have a present and a future dimension to them as well so we are in the same interim experience as the Old Testament saints were in the wilderness.

Now in verse three here in chapter four the author says we who have believed enter that rest. What he means is we are the ones, believers are the ones who are entitled to enter into the enjoyment of God’s rest. That is to say, faith alone—if we want to put it this way—the qualification for entering into God’s rest. You certainly don’t enter in by unbelief. You don’t enter in by rebellion and disobedience. You don’t enter in by your own merits, your own efforts all by yourself. But, rather, we enter in by faith. But, again, faith is a living and active thing. It is a faith which obeys.

It is worth noting—and I am going to mention this again in Sunday school, but I will just plug it in here—that when our confession of faith defines saving faith in chapter 14, section two it tells us that by this faith we believe everything that the Bible says on the authority of God speaking and respond appropriate to what each word from the Bible tells us. And then it itemizes three things: yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.

Now I think most modern believers equate saving faith with embracing promises. And, certainly, faith embraces promises. But our fathers who framed this confession recognize that that faith also includes both trembling at threatenings like in this book and in this passage and obeying God’s commands.

You see, the danger is that we, for various reasons—and, again, you could go back to that Pugh survey—why do people drift away? Why do people leave their commitment, let’s say, to a biblical faith in which they were raised? There may be a million reasons for it, but the danger is that it happens. We follow Israel’s bad example of unbelief and disobedience.

You know, sometimes when we read texts from Scripture, see, if somebody wanted to really use red letters to good effect—and I always complain about red letters where they put the words of Christ supposedly—it would be nice if you had a button on your Bible that you could push every once in a while which would make certain letters red. In this passage, then, notice the warning in the end of verse one failed to reach it, if that was red. You say, “Oh, I should pay attention that that.” That is the danger. I will fail to reach it. “For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit

¹³ Hebrews 4:6-9.

them, because they were not united by faith...”¹⁴ That one should be red, the importance of faith in those who listened.

Verse six. “Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed...”¹⁵ That one ought to be in red. “...failed to enter because of disobedience,”¹⁶ another red word.

Then verse 11. “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest.”¹⁷

Fail. Fail. Fail. Now the warning. Strive to enter that rest. That should be in red “so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”¹⁸

And, again, I call your attention to the way in which it uses faith and disobedience, faith and obedience and unbelief and disobedience as interchangeable because true obedience is the obedience of faith.

Now notice in verse 11. There is a striving in all of this, striving. And it is the striving of faith. Faith is not passive. Again, too often you hear faith described as letting go and letting God. You shift into neutral. You let God pick you up and take you where you he wants you to go. Dependence in God is not passivity, but rather strenuous effort, but it is the strenuous effort born of faith, of confidence in God.

For too many interpreters today striving in their mind means works. And since we don’t believe in justification by works, therefore, there is no room for striving in the Christian life. They just reject the idea.

If you reject the idea of striving as part of the Christian life, you completely gut this letter of its force. There is hardly anything left worthwhile in this letter if we lose sight of that call to striving, to making effort. Now what is the hardest job you ever had to do in life where you really had to work hard, you had to strive? Maybe it was an intellectual striving. You had to do homework. You had to read extra books. You had to stay up night after night preparing for... I know this all sounds strange to you students because you don’t necessarily want to put that kind of effort in your studies.

But some people have striven intellectually. Athletes strive. They want to make the team. There is not enough slots for everybody on the varsity and so they work and work and work and work so that they might enter into participation on that team.

Politicians who spend mountains of money and energy and time because only one person can win the election and they want to be that one person. And the apostle Paul uses the same kind of example when he describes the Christian life. He says, “I am not like a

¹⁴ Hebrews 4:2.

¹⁵ Hebrews 4:6.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hebrews 4:11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

shadow boxer that is out here going...” Or as we do today we do Kung Fu exercises. Nobody is going to actually smack you if you are shadow Kung Fuing, but you get into a fight with a real Kung Fu master and you are going to have to strive. You are going to have to struggle in order to prevail.

Paul says, “I don’t run around aimlessly, but I run diligently and disciplinely.”

Why? Because there is no second place in this race. You win or you lose. And I am afraid too many Christians think they are going to make some kind of a cut because 60% or 70% might make it. No. You win or you lose. So there is that emphasis upon striving. And Abraham himself is the example of that active striving faith.

Let me just show you a couple of other passages quickly. Turn over to chapter six a moment. This... in chapter... in verse nine we... this is... comes right after one of the very, very strong warnings in this book about falling away. But having warned so strongly, then the author, in a sense, backs off a step in verse nine and he says:

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.¹⁹

Is it all of grace? Yes, because it is promised. But how do you inherit the promise? By passively letting go and letting God? No. By sluggishness or laziness? No. But by earnestness, striving to enter in. And yet it is the striving of faith.

And then in verse 15 of that same passage it says, “And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.”²⁰

But there, again, patiently waited doesn’t mean inactivity. In Hebrews chapter 11 verse eight it says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.”²¹

And can you imagine God promising Abraham and then Abraham says, “I think I will stay right here in Ur of the Chaldees. This is where my family lives. This is my culture. This is my home town. You bring the promise to me.”

Wrong. He had to go. He had to obey. And later on he had to obey the command even to offer up Isaac. But he did it because he was looking to receive a promise of grace.

¹⁹ Hebrews 6:9-12.

²⁰ Hebrews 6:15.

²¹ Hebrews 11:8.

Actually, this argument there in chapter four looks all the way forward to the 10th chapter and the 19th verse where after the author has explained in detail how Jesus opens up the way into God's presence through his sacrifice and his priesthood, he then calls us to draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. That is to say, to enter into God's rest. Jesus opens the way, but we must enter in and we enter in by striving.

Any notion of easy believism is completely blown away by the book of Hebrews. There is nothing easy about being Christian. It will take your hardest thinking, your most energetic efforts, your most rigorous self discipline and yet it is all of grace. It is all the Spirit of God at work in us both to will and to do his good pleasure.²²

Endurance, keeping what we have to the very end. That is the key. And it does not nullify grace or promise.

Now just one more word before I close. Mentioning... well, I didn't read it, but in that same 10th chapter among other things, we are exhorted not to neglect meeting together as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another in all the more as you see the day drawing near.²³

We have been talking about sabbath rest and I just wanted to mention, again, the connection between the weekly sabbath and this idea of pilgrimage. I mentioned it last Sunday at the beginning of the service and I want to use the same example today. On this pilgrim path that God has marked out through... for us through this present wilderness age, he has put way stations, just like they had for the pony express or for the over land stage route where you could get a fresh set of horses, get something to eat, maybe rest a driver and then move on. And the sabbath days, the weekly sabbaths are those way stations along this pilgrim path.

You don't have enough energy even in the Spirit to last past six days to a sabbath. You need the rest and refreshment, the redemptive rest and refreshment of the weekly sabbath.

Or, to change the picture slightly, you are traveling through a vast desert. You are looking for oases along the way, someplace where there is water.

Some of you might remember that vivid and really hot scene in *Lawrence of Arabia* where they set off to go across this desert that is called the anvil because it is like a reflector and the sun just beats down on it and they know that there is not going to be any water until they get across the anvil. And so they travel by night. But even traveling by night they slow down and so the sun catches up to them. And it is beating down on them. And the question is: Are they going to make it to water? That is the picture.

It grieves me that so many contemporary Christians have so little understanding of what the sabbath is and why they desperately need it. But they actually choose of their own free will not to keep the sabbath because they think there is something that will do them

²² See Philippians 2:13.

²³ See Hebrews 10:25.

more good. Or the slightest inconvenience relative to the sabbath. Oh, you have a nine o'clock service? Oh, that's really, really early. It is not too early to go to work. It is not too early to get your children to school. Why would it be too early to meet with the living God who without his fellowship you cannot survive?

You see, if you are living your life the way you should, by the time you get to Saturday your physical weariness should be nothing compared to the urgency with which you need the means of grace that are available on the sabbath and you want to be the first one to get there to the watering hole there in the oasis. We need these weekly sabbaths.

When we read the sabbath commandment, we usually read it from Exodus where the reason given for the sabbath is God worked for six days and rested on the seventh. I don't know how many of you have ever noticed that in Deuteronomy in the parallel passage the reason is different. The reason stated in Deuteronomy chapter five, why we should keep the sabbath is that you remember "remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."²⁴

The sabbath is all about carrying us along in this earthly pilgrimage. I am afraid that the Church has already given the sabbath away and our culture, of course, is happy to give it away and we are going to return to slavery because the sabbath is the pledge of our freedom in Christ. It reminds us that we are pilgrims. And when you stop remembering you are pilgrim then you get at home in the world and if you make your camp in the desert, dear friends, you will die. If you stop here and don't continue your pilgrimage you will die.

It doesn't require that you turn around and go back to Egypt overtly embracing what you once turned away from. It doesn't even require that you drift away in one direction or another. All that is required for you to die spiritually is for you to stop moving forward. And if your Christian life isn't growing, you are dying. If your commitment isn't growing, it is dying. If your diligence in serving the Lord isn't growing, it is dying. And that is why this author warns us again and again and again. Don't stop. Keep going.

And the beauty of the sabbath is that the Lord gives us a taste of that final glorious rest.

The weekly sabbath in a sense is the bridge between the already that we enjoy of God's grace, God's rest and the not yet of that final glory and rest in a whole new creation.

So this section ends by comparing Moses and Jesus and asking you: Are you going to continue to follow Jesus into God's rest? Or are you going to give up or turn back or drift away?

The Pugh trust will ask you why and they will mark a box. God asks you why, but the box will be life or death. May God grant us grace to enter into his rest through faith, an

²⁴ Deuteronomy 5:15.

obedient, a living, an active, an enduring faith in the Lord Jesus who, as we will see in this book has opened the way wide for us to enter in to God's rest.

Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord, for your Word, for its challenges. Help us to take it seriously, to realize that being a Christian is not a game that we play, that it requires our most strenuous effort, our single minded purpose and devotion and that if we do not move forward, if we do not grow we will surely perish. So, God, give us your strength, give us your grace. May we be diligent, striving to enter in so that we might enjoy that rest which you yourself enjoyed having finished your course and entered into your Father's rest. So we follow you looking forward to that day when we also will enter into that rest.

Deliver us, oh Lord, from our restlessness, our aimless wandering, that which brings despair and death. Point the way and help us to walk in it we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.