

Hebrews

Lesson 3

Chapter 3:7-4:13

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Lesson 3

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

Finding God's Rest

Therefore, God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."
Hebrews 4:7

Prayers

Introduction

In Chapter One, the writer of Hebrews reflected on the deity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and how Christ was greater than angels. Chapter Two wrote about the humanity of Christ and how he was greater than Moses because Christ was the fulfillment of the law and reigns supreme over his creation and church. In Chapter 3, the theme is rest found in God with illustrations from Israel's history, primarily from Exodus 16 and Psalm 95. The illustrations include rest in the promised land, sabbath rest, and the ultimate rest found in God's salvation.

What do you think of when you think of being at rest with God?

Read Hebrews 3:7-16

^{Heb 3:7} So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. ¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

^{Heb 3:12} See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

^{Heb 3:14} We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

^{Heb 3:15} As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion" (Psalm 95:7-8).

^{Heb 3:16} Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? ¹⁸ And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

1. The illustration of the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness was an event that the Hebrews would have been familiar with. What did the Israelites do during their testing in the wilderness that indicated to God their hearts were astray from him?

They rebelled against God – grumbled about food and water, and wanted to return to Egypt. Fashioned an idol from the gold plundered from Egypt and worshipped it.

2. What was the result?

God punished them – they were kept in the wilderness until they died; they did not enter the promised land.

3. How was the lesson from Israel’s history relevant to the Hebrews' situation?

The Hebrews were returning to Judaism the way the Israelites went back to the worship they were familiar with in Egypt. Both groups lacked faith in God. The Israelites did not believe God could save them despite working many miracles in their presence, and the Hebrews did not believe Christ would save them despite working many miracles in their presence.

4. Verse 13. Why is it so important to encourage one another daily?

Stress lies beneath the smiles most Christians put on while in church. About a third of the couples face marital conflict that will result in divorce. Most families spend more than they make and pay interest on about \$6,900 of unpaid credit card debt and \$138,000 of household debt. Most men feel unconnected to church or any friends. At least half of the men wrestle with pornography and about twenty percent of women. Most couples are worried about their children's spiritual life, 70% of whom will drop out by their senior year in high school. Twenty to thirty percent of the children live in single-parent homes. Lord have mercy.

5. Verse 15. Why is it so important to respond to God’s word **Today**? Consider the parable of the sower with seed on the path, the rocks and thorns.

Mt 13:18 **“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:**

Mt 13:19 **When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.**

We often hear God’s word and are convicted of our need for change through the Holy Spirit: but our conviction passes with time. Like the seeds on the path that the birds snatch up, Satan snatches away God’s word in our hearts and the conviction that came with it.

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

Heb 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

Heb 4:3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ” And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. ^{Heb 4:4} For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”

Heb 4:5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”^a

Heb 4:6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. ⁷ Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”^{Heb 4:8} For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.

Heb 4:9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Heb 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

6. Verses 4:1 and 2 warn the Hebrews not to be like the Israelites who heard God’s word, but it was of no value to them.

a. What is the promise of rest the author is referring to?

The promise of rest is the message of the gospel, salvation through Christ by God’s grace.

b. How do we “fall short” of God’s promised rest?

We fall short of God’s promised salvation when we do not believe in Jesus Christ as God’s Son and our Savior for our sins.

7. In verse 4:3, there is a sudden change in illustrations, from the Promised land to the promise of the Sabbath rest. 4:3 “For somewhere it is written.” This phrase is a Greek idiom and does not mean unfamiliarity with who or where the scripture was written. In this case, the author is quoting Genesis 2:2-3:

Ge 2:2 By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

What does the word “holy” mean in Genesis 2:2-3?

We usually associate holy with a person’s purity or righteousness, but that is not the meaning here. The Hebrew word “qadosh,” translated as holy in Genesis, means to be set apart for a special purpose.

8. We usually think of the Jewish Sabbath as a legalistic observance, but God described the Sabbath as a celebration when he commanded the Israelites to observe it. ¹⁶ The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. ¹⁷ It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever” (Exodus 31:16-17b).

a. How is a celebration different from rest?

Observance of the Sabbath was to be a celebration, not “no activity.”

- b. What was God seeking for his people in the command to observe the Sabbath?

God was seeking communion with his people through worship. He wanted his people to refrain from their daily work activities to set aside a day for worship. God did not need physical rest on the 7th day; the rest was to take time to enjoy his creation, his work.

9. Verses 4:6-8 discuss the failure of Israelites to enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience. Then the author says something that should have been surprising to the Hebrews, Joshua obeyed and entered the Promised Land but still did not give rest to the Israelites who entered the Promised Land.
- a. What is the rest the author of Hebrews is referring to?

Rest in God's promise is salvation through Christ.

- b. Disobedience prevented the Israelites from entering the Promised Land. Does disobedience prevent our salvation by faith in Christ?

Not having faith in Christ prevents our salvation through Christ. All Christians sin, repent, and seek God's forgiveness through Christ's blood sacrifice. That is why John writes, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense —Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1).

Claiming faith in Christ but wilfully continuing in disobedience is another matter. The scriptures comfort the sinner struggling with their sin but condemn Christians who are willfully disobedient, without remorse or repentance. Christians in the Corinthian Church were committing horrible sins without repentance, so Paul writes, "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." " (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

One of my favorite illustrations by my pastor was about sin and grace. He drew a big mound in the air and said, "If you sin this high, then God's grace is this high" (jumping as high as he could, waving his arms above the mound). The broken-hearted can take great comfort in God's promise of forgiveness. The message to the proud is, Today is the day of your salvation, Repent!

10. 4:12-13 Today, the writer might use the illustration of a surgeon's scalpel if he wanted to convey the idea of something incredibly sharp. How is the cutting of the word of God similar to the surgeon's scalpel?

When we go under the surgeon's knife, the intent is to heal, and so it is with God's word.

Closing Prayer