



11: Work Hard For That Rest

"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

"So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest,'"

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

Hebrews 4:1 – 11

In chapter 3 verse 7 the writer of the book of Hebrews left his main line of thought to warn us, his readers, that we must persevere in following the Lord. He quoted part of Psalm 95, holding the children of Israel on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land up as an example of what can happen to those who don't. He said we need to see to it that none of us has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from God like they did. He rubbed the point in by reminding us that they — the children of Israel — never entered into the rest

God promised them because of their unbelief. But he's not ready to let it go at that. He wants to leave us in no doubt that the warning he has derived from Psalm 95 was not just a warning for Israel; it's a warning for every follower of the Lord, even today, even us.

The Promise Still Stands

First, the writer wants us to know that the rest promised to the children of Israel is still on offer and we must fear lest, like them, we come short of it.

"Since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem (be found or judged) to have come short of it."

Hebrews 4:1

Wouldn't it be horrendous to come to the final day looking forward to God's rest only to be found unworthy of it and so miss out. The horror of that thought is an indicator of the degree of fear that's urged upon us in this verse.

- ◆ *What might it mean, speaking practically, for you to fear being found to have come short of God's promised rest?*

But You Have To Hear It With Faith

Just like we have, the children of Israel heard the good news about God's promise of rest but what they heard brought them no advantage because they didn't hear it with faith (verse 2), and the rest is only for those who have faith. God swore in wrath that those in Israel who didn't trust Him wouldn't enter it (verse 3).

- ◆ *The writer says that the message was not mixed with faith in them. What does it mean for the gospel — the good news of salvation — to be mixed with faith in us?*

What Kind Of Rest?

Why do the writer of Hebrews and David, the Psalmist he's quoting, talk about what was promised to Israel in terms of entering God's rest? What do they mean? What is this rest that's been promised to them and us? That's the question the writer addresses in verses 3 to 10.

He begins by linking the rest spoken of in Psalm 95 — the rest he's been talking about — with God's rest spoken of in Genesis 2:2.

"The works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place (Genesis 2) of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works" and again in this place (Psalm 95): "They shall not enter My rest."

Hebrews 4:3 – 5

So the promised rest He's talking about — the rest that was promised to the children of Israel and that's still available to us — is not a nice place in Canaan; it's the same rest God enjoyed on the seventh day: God's rest.

What's more, if this rest still remains to be entered into and if the children of Israel didn't enter into it and if it was still something that could be fallen short of in David's day, well then it can't have been just the promise of a nice place in Canaan (verses 6 and 7). If Joshua, who led them into Canaan had given Israel this rest David wouldn't have still been talking about it the way he did hundreds of years later (verse 8).

So the promised rest in mind here is still on offer (verse 9) and it's the kind of rest God enjoyed on the seventh day: work completely done, satisfied, content: it's a Sabbath rest.

The Coming Sabbath

The rest we look forward to is a future hope — we haven't yet fully experienced it. We'll see in later chapters that we can experience in part, by faith, here and now but essentially it's the rest of Heaven. It's a rest we'll share in common with God. It's an end of toil. It is satisfaction, it's contentment, it's the kind of freedom from care and anxiety that God enjoys. It's the rest spoken of in Revelation 14.

"Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from now on! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

- ◆ *If, as it's portrayed here, the Sabbath is a picture of the kind of rest we can look forward to in heaven, what can we learn from that about what our Sabbaths should be like here and now?*

Here are some words from Albert Barnes' commentary on these verses that might help you think about this.

"The best description of Heaven is to say that it will be like an eternal Sabbath. Take the Sabbath on earth when best observed, and extend the idea to eternity, and let there be separated all idea of imperfection from its observance, and that would be heaven. The Sabbath here should be like heaven, there should be the same employments, the same joys, the same communion with God. They who do not love the Sabbath here on earth, are not prepared for heaven."

Albert Barnes

So One More Time...

We saw in our last study that the writer of the book of Hebrews is not, in this aside, just sounding a warning about the danger of failing to persevere in faith, he's also telling us about things we can do to make sure we are not found among those whose hearts are unbelieving. We've been urged to beware of the possibility, we've been told to encourage one another with a sense of urgency and we've been cautioned to conduct our lives in fear. In verse 11 too we're not just being warned, we're also being encouraged to be diligent: to work hard to make sure we do, at last, enter into the rest of Heaven.

So, these verses have been a further warning and they have been an encouragement to maximum effort but, don't forget, they also hold before us a picture of the goal: the Sabbath rest we look forward to: God's rest. In that, they are verses that strengthen our hope and so strengthen us for the kind of perseverance they call us to.