Hebrews 4:1-11 – "Resting or Restless?"

Summary Statement:
Hebrews 4:1-11 teaches that God has provided a rest that is available to believers through faith. It emphasizes obedience to God's voice as key to entering into that rest, which is both a present experience and a future hope.

Outline:
1. The Promise of Rest – 4:1-3
2. The Permanence of Rest – 4:4-8
3. The Participation in Rest – 4:9-11

1. The Promise of Rest – 4:1-3

4:1-2 - ***Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.[2] 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.***

I don't know about you, but I love rest. Rest is a wonderful thing. I have come to cherish my Sunday afternoon nap and just… rest. I know many of you enjoy times of rest because I see you doing so here, while I'm trying to preach about rest. I'm glad you're applying the message, but if you could wait until I'm done that would be great 😄.

Rest is a key theme throughout Chapters 3 and 4. In fact, here in the passage we're looking at today the word ***rest*** or ***rested*** is used 9 times.
This is something the writer of Hebrews does not want his audience to miss out on. And it's something *we* should not be missing out on. This rest is not a past experience, nor is it a forfeited experience. This is a promise for us today and there's a charge being given for us to enter into this rest. And notice, the promise remains of entering ***His*** rest. This is a rest that comes from God. It's not just a rest from the Lord, but it's a rest in the Lord.

And we should absolutely fear that we are not attaining to this rest. It's easy to come up short. Let me tell you, it's a little easier for some of us than others – you don't have to remind me of that fact.

Now it would be wise to look at the different views and meanings of this rest. There are certainly different concepts of rest that could easily cause you to fear in the wrong way. If you look at this rest solely as our future rest in heaven, then you can begin to worry that we can come up short just by our unfaithfulness, or if we didn't try hard enough. But our entrance into heaven is not based on our efforts or faithfulness but on Jesus'!

So in Hebrews we see rest being communicated in a few ways:

- It's illustrated as a historical opportunity. God wanted to bring the Israelites into the Promised land and give them rest.
- We see rest as a present reality where God wants His people enjoying the fullness of life He has for them.
- We see rest as a principle that God established when He rested on the 7th day of creation.
- Rest is seen as a future enjoyment when we are with the Lord Jesus and our work on earth is done.

So the promise of rest that remains does have connection to the future heavenly rest, but in our context the author of Hebrews wants his readers to know and experience the rest presently available for them in Jesus!

- There's not been a lot of that presently for many of these Hebrew believers in Jesus. They've been getting hit hard by opposition. They've begun to question their decision to follow Jesus. They've been getting restless instead of resting in Jesus.
- So the author is saying, there's blessing awaiting you if you don't come up short.

And right here in Vs. 1 we're confronted with this contrast between ***us*** and ***them***.

- The ***us*** is the believing Hebrews who have put their faith in Jesus and have become followers of Him.
- The ***them*** is looking back to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses.

Both groups heard the word of the Lord. They were given promises of life and goodness,
The Israelites feared taking on this rest. They looked at the challenge in front of them and thought they would be devoured if they entered into that rest of the promised land. They heard the word, but it was not ***mixed with faith***.

- Faith certainly *"comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). But hearing the Word needs to be mixed with faith in the Word. It's something that you grab a hold of and say, this is truth, this is real, I need this. Some will hear but not receive it, others will hear it and it will become life to them because they receive it by faith.
- Are you taking in God's Word by faith? Do you read it and wonder sometimes, *I wish this was real.* This is the living Word. We'll see the power of it next week in vs. 12. May we see this Word as dependable, reliable, and life giving when we receive it in faith.

So when those 12 spies went into the land, 10 of them came back in fear and unbelief. They saw the fortified cities and the giants in the land and thought they would be devoured. Their fear was greater than their faith.

But now interestingly, the writer of Hebrews says ***let us fear***. Fear can be a very negative thing, but it can also be a positive. Fear can be a great motivator in our lives.

- Illustration: getting golf balls at night and getting chased.

The Israelites feared going in, but here we see we should have a greater fear of not going in and walking in the fullness of what God has for us.

4:3 - ***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.***
Those who do believe (presently) experience this blessed rest. We're not being pulled apart in stress or chaos. We're at peace because we're living in peace with God.
These are wonderful truths to take in. We who have believed, ***do enter that rest***. Understand that when Jesus died on the cross to pay the debt for your sin, He called out: ***It is finished***. The work is done in other words. There's no longer a work that we can do to contribute to our salvation. The only work that is done (and it's not even work) is believing in Him. This is the faith spoken of in verse 2. It's faith that brings about rest!

And those that believe, enter into rest. Those who don't believe – like Israel, won't enter that rest. This is why the author of Hebrews quotes again this verse from Psalm 95:11 (as he did in Ch. 3:11). Now this rest was available for them. In

fact this rest has been available since the foundation of the world. This was always the plan of God – to provide this blessed rest in and through His Son, Jesus.

- Revelation 13:8 says that Jesus was *"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."*
- God has always had this wonderful plan in mind that Jesus would provide our rest. It's a rest that God wants us all to enjoy.

We also see next that God has established an example of rest.

2. The Permanence of Rest – 4:4-8

4:4-5 - ***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"; [5] and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."***

God reminds them of the pattern He established right from creation – that He rested on the 7th day.

God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them in 6 days, but that 7th day was to be a day of rest. It's an example for us that God intends us to rest.

- Now this doesn't mean that God is no longer at work. This rest implies that He was satisfied with the work.
- So too, our rest is one of satisfaction that Jesus has finished the work. And our work today is simply believing in Him, trusting by faith that He has completed the work for us.

This section ultimately shows us 2 kinds of rest. As Gromacki points out, there is the creation rest (4:5) and there is a salvation rest (4:5). [1]

- With the creation rest, God intended to reveal that we need a regular rest. We're to be active but not to wear ourselves thin. This is why He put in His very commandments (#4) that we are to remember the sabbath and to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8-11). Six days you do your work and on the 7th day you do no work. Not only was there a sabbath day but there was a sabbath year. All of this was a clear sign of Israel's special covenant relationship with God. Not working a day, or not farming your land for a full year every 7th year, was a huge act of faith. Israel would demonstrate their obedience in how they followed this. The Sabbath became an important symbol of trust.

[1] Gromacki, R. (2002). *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews* (p. 73). Kress Christian Publications.

- And the salvation rest is echoed in Vs. 5 where the author once again quoted from Psalm 95:11. He does this to show that though Israel in the wilderness did not enter into their rest, it is still a rest that is available (as we'll see clearly in the verses ahead). The writer of Hebrews uses a past warning as a present day encouragement. Their disobedience did not cause this rest to be null and void for all time. The present day people must be sure to not harden their heart as their fathers did, but rather respond in faith and persevere in obedience in the things of the Lord.

The point primarily being made in Vs. 5 is that God's rest was not exhausted by creation, the wilderness, or Joshua's conquest; it still stands as a promise, and therefore the readers must not imitate Israel's unbelief or disobedience.

We too must heed this warning. If Israel came up short even after they had all the amazing experiences in the wilderness: manna from heaven, water from a rock, quail by the bucket loads, how much more should we take heed? God was good and miraculously provided for them, yet they still did not believe that God could bring them into the Promised Land.
If they did not enter in after all that, may we be sure to fear missing out on so great a blessing. And all it takes is believing – trusting that God will provide that rest.

Now one side note: we're talking about Israel not entering into the land. We know they eventually did. But remember, it wasn't Moses that led them in, it was Joshua. Moses is a picture of the law. He's the writer of the first 5 books of the Bible known as the law.

- And you see, the law can never bring you into the fullness of God. If you're living by the law and rules, you'll keep chasing that rest because you'll find yourself failing and faltering. The law couldn't provide your salvation and the law (Moses) could not take Israel into the Promised Land and the fullness of God.
- Who brought them in? Joshua! And Joshua is Jesus' Hebrew name (Yâhowshuʻa). Only a life surrendered to Jesus and following Jesus can bring us into the fullness of what God has for us: salvation today and eternal life forever. That brings great rest and peace to my soul.

Now, even though Joshua brought them in and Israel eventually experienced the promised land, there was still a rest to attain to for this Hebrew audience.

4:6-8 - ***Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, [7] 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." [8] For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.***
The author quotes again from a different part of Psalm 95 – Psalm 95:7-8. The emphasis is on the ***Today***. David wrote this hundreds of years after Joshua and Israel had taken the land. But the Psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that there is still a rest to receive ***today***.

So don't harden your heart. Don't think this rest is unattainable, or historical, or not applicable. This is a rest that is available for all. The only thing that would restrict this rest is your own disobedience and unbelief.

- "Unbelief for the believer is the refusal to act like God is telling the truth." [2]

Again, even though Joshua led the new generation in, this rest is not completed or done away with. That's the point being emphasized next that if you're not all resting right now, I hope you really take home with you today…

3. The Participation in Rest – 4:9-11

4:9-11 - ***There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. [10] For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. [11] Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.***
The writer has been making a case in this chapter to show that God has been offering a rest from the beginning of time. That's been the whole flow of thought in this passage. We've seen the verse in Psalm 95 repeated a few times in the last two chapters. And this is to show that even in David's day there was an invitation to this rest, saying: ***Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.*** How could God say it was for that day if it was a closed issue after creation, or after Israel was shut out of Canaan, or after Joshua had finally led them in? On the contrary, after all these events, God was still using the word *Today* as a day of opportunity!

[2] Evans, T. (2019). *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (p. 1317). Holman Bible Publishers.

- This invitation was and is still going out for people to not harden their hearts but to rather accept this great gift of rest by the Lord.
- That's why the writer could say confidently – ***there remains therefore a rest for the people of God.***

God is still sending out that invitation for people to come to Him, to receive salvation, to enter in to that rest.
We can now have this incredible peace when we come to Christ and accept this gift of grace and salvation. It gives us peace with God (**Romans 5:1**) and the peace of God (**Philippians 4:6-7**). What happens when you experience peace? You're at rest!!

"There are three different words used for "rest" in the Scriptures. The first (*anapausis*) refers to the rest of sleep, the rest which brings positive refreshment to a weary person (Matt. 11:29; 26:45; 1 Cor. 16:18; Rev. 4:8). This first word does not appear in Hebrews.
The second (*katapausis*) occurs often in this book and was discussed earlier. It stresses cessation from activity, the quitting of work.
The third word (*sabbatismos*) is distinctively biblical, whereas the meanings of the first two were based upon the average work day of the natural man. This term underscores the sabbath rest of God and is used only once in the New Testament (4:9)." [3]

- The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon defines it this way: "The blessed rest from toils and troubles looked for in the age to come by the true worshippers of God and true Christians." [4]

It's a reminder that there is more to come! We're invited into rest now.
Remember Jesus' words: **Matthew 11:28–30,** *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.""*
This rest is experienced as we abide in Him and live for Him. But no matter what you may encounter, experience or endure in this life, keep abiding in Jesus. He's greater than anything else and He, and only He will lead us into our final rest with Him in Heaven. What a day that will be. So be diligent to continue on. Many are

[3] Gromacki, R. (2002). *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews* (p. 75). Kress Christian Publications.
[4] Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

falling away in disobedience or unbelief. But may we be those that continue on in faith all the way to glory!

"The writer's argument runs like this: God has promised a rest to His people (v. 1), but Israel failed to enter that rest (4:6). His promise still stands, because Joshua (v. 8) did not give them this spiritual rest, even though he did lead them into national rest (see Josh. 23:1). Otherwise, David would never have spoken about this rest centuries later in Ps. 95. Conclusion: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (v. 9, NKJV)." [5]

Points to Ponder:

1. **Rest in His Finished Work** – Jesus has done what we could never do.
2. **Rest in His Faithfulness** – God's promises are greater than our circumstances.
3. **Rest in His Invitation** – Today is the day to hear His voice and respond in faith. Enter in!

NKJV *The New King James Version*

[5] Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 685). Victor Books.