

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon Series: Following Jesus...ESPECIALLY

when life gets tough!

(Studies in the letter to the Hebrews)

The Rest That Remains Study #5 (Hebrews 4¹)

Introduction:

As a kid, I learned about professional football watching Sunday afternoon games with my dad. His favorite team was the Pittsburgh Steelers. But starting in 1960, the team to beat was the Green Bay Packers, led by legendary coach, Vince Lombardi.

Coach Lombardi, besides being a Hall of Fame coach, was also very quotable. He once commented that, “The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.”

As we continue our study in Hebrews, the writer of this letter reminds his fellow believers that, to paraphrase Lombardi, the future quality of their lives in eternity is in direct proportion to their commitment to following Jesus **now** – even when life gets tough!

The author continues his loving, impassioned encouragement of these Hebrew believers. These believers had experienced, and were experiencing, a level of persecution causing them to consider renouncing Christianity and returning to Judaism. Life was incredibly tough for them at this point in the 1st Century.

The author does not question their relationship to God. He affirms that they have received eternal life through faith alone in Jesus alone and are sealed by the Holy Spirit. They are believers bound for heaven and that will not change.

What does concern him and the reason for his letter is their fellowship with the Father and how that impacts what awaits them once they are in heaven, in the presence of their Savior.

Although you and I have yet to experience the persecution our first century brothers and sisters did, all of us face challenges that might cause us to question whether faithfully following the Lord Jesus Christ is really worth it. We’ve trusted Him as our Savior but circumstances in life might cause us to doubt if living godly in Christ Jesus is really worth it.

More than a few times in my life, I’ve struggled with God, wondering if He really knew what He was doing. I struggled with my commitment to follow the Lord Whom I had trusted with my eternal destiny. I knew I was going to heaven but was it worth it to faithfully follow Him now?

Encouragement from Scripture and from other believers clearly reminded me that, yes, it is worth it to faithfully follow Jesus.

The writer of this Epistle is one of those who desires to encourage others in their walk with the Lord. Pastor Dave in his first message of this series, described the author as a person who, “...knew his readers well,” and, “...who had a close, pastoral, shepherding relationship with them.”

And because of that relationship, my sense is that instead of harsh browbeating or authoritatively demanding or condescendingly berating, the author earnestly encourages, lovingly urges, and passionately persuades these believers to enter God’s promised rest that remains!

And that is what I would like to do this morning as well.

So, before we look into Chapter 4, let’s pray to the Divine Author of this text!

In the original Greek of this passage, we find the word, “therefore” appearing six times. We will use these six “therefore” statements to guide us in understanding what the author wanted to communicate to these Hebrew believers.

The author’s use of the word, “therefore,” tells us there is a relationship between what he just wrote and what follows. It signals to us that he is drawing a conclusion.

To me, the author’s six uses of the word “therefore” serve to guide us to see what he considers important reasons for faithfully following Jesus regardless of our life situation.

¹ Last week, Pastor Dave pointed out that some scholars see 3:1--4:16 as a single unit. The beginning (3:1) and end (4:14-16) sandwich the section by considering Jesus as our High Priest.

And as a preview, the first three “therefore” statements are truths related to the “rest that remains.”

The second three “therefore” statements are exhortations, encouragements on what actions these believers should take in response to these truths so they might enter into the rest that remains.

The first three “therefore” statements are the “what” while the second three “therefore” statements are the “so what.”

Let’s read the first statement of fact, verses 1-5

First “Therefore”

Hebrews 4:1-5

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. 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. 4 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.”

The first five verses of this chapter flow out of the author’s concerns for his readers and their faithfulness based on what he just wrote, at the end of Chapter 3, regarding the rebellion of God’s people, Israel, at Kadesh-Barnea.²

So, in the first verse of Chapter 4, the author presents a conclusion drawn from this lapse of faith at Kadesh-Barnea for the purpose of encouraging and exhorting his readers.

Now the way one section of verse one is translated in my Bible (and other translations but not all³) might cause us to miss what I believe is the author’s meaning. In most translations, we read something like this: *...let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it...*

² See Numbers 13-14

³ See Christian Standard Bible, Common English Bible, Easy-to-Read Version, The Message for a similar translation

A better translation that fits the sense of the passage is this *“...let us be careful that none of you suppose that he has missed it.”*⁴

What might they have been thinking they had missed as far as entering into God’s rest? One thought is they had failed spiritually to the point where there was no longer any chance for them to receive such a blessing.

But the author is not thinking that, or else he wouldn’t have been writing this letter! There is still hope for these believers.

A more likely reason is that the writer was confronting a similar problem that Paul experienced with the Thessalonian believers who believed Christ’s promised return had already happened!⁵

Whatever their reason for considering a return to Judaism, the author reassures his readers they had not missed anything.

The promise of God’s rest remains, and if they faithfully follow Jesus now, they can enter into it.

And God’s rest that remains is for us as well!

God’s rest in Hebrews is an important concept. The word “rest,” as a noun, appears twice in Chapter 3 and 8 times in Chapter 4. These are the only occurrences of the word in Hebrews.

For these Hebrew Christians, they understood, from their Scriptures, that this “rest” was historically linked with the concept of “future inheritance.”⁶

So, in the context of Hebrews 3 & 4, the word “rest” has a very Jewish flavor to it which helps us understand its use here. And the author’s use of a portion of Psalm 95 reinforced this understanding.⁷

⁴ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, 1983. Hebrews, Zane Hodges, p. 788

⁵ See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Hebrews 10:36-37

⁶ See Deuteronomy 12:9; 25:19

⁷ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, 1983. Hebrews, Zane Hodges, p. 788. “The Septuagint (a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek) appears to be the text from which the writer of Hebrews is quoting (Psalm 95). It includes notable passages where the word for rest...in connection with Israel’s

In Psalm 95, the psalmist contrasts faithful worship with rebellious disobedience. And it is that rebellious disobedience that led to the wilderness wanderings and the loss of God's promised rest and inheritance in Canaan for Israel.

And this disobedience took place even though the Israelites of Moses' day heard the "good news" about God's promised rest.

That's in verse 2. And, according to verse 2, this is the same "good news" these believers had heard about God's rest. And in this context, the "good news" is about God's rest.⁸

Rest/Inheritance was offered to Israel in the Promised Land. God promised it. However, those who rebelled – were unfaithful – due to unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea lost that privilege and did not enter that rest.

The author's encouragement to his brothers and sisters in Christ is this: God's rest that remains is available to you. Faithfulness in acting upon God's promise is what is required.

One point of clarification: what is in view with God's rest and inheritance is NOT eternal salvation. What is in view is the believer's involvement in Christ's future kingdom.

Faithfulness in following Jesus now, leads to our Lord's "well done" in Heaven.⁹

If we learn anything from the Kadesh-Barnea incident with Israel, it is this – unbelief leads to loss but faithfulness leads to blessing.

In verse 3, the author draws a parallel between two historical illustrations of "rest" and the rest that remains for these believers

The author develops this even more in the following verses but here he underscores the critical component to entering the rest God has promised.

That critical component is this: take God at His word; live faithfully based on what He has said is true.

The two historical events the author uses are a reprise of Israel's rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea and God's rest after Creation. The author pulls from each account a truth related to "the rest that remains" to encourage his readers.

And those truths are what lead us to our 2nd and 3rd "therefore" words of encouragement.

To summarize the first "therefore" statement of fact: The believers to whom the author writes have not missed God's rest. **God's rest remains for those who faithfully follow Jesus.**

Verses 6-8 lead to our second "therefore."

Second "Therefore"

Hebrews 4:6-8

6 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 [God] would not afterward have spoken of another day.

Because a "promise remains of entering God's rest..." the writer concludes some will enter it. But in reprising the Kadesh-Barnea lapse of faith and Psalm 95, he adds another detail.

This detail has to do with Joshua's entrance into Canaan that did not lead to a permanent possession of the land which is why the offer of "Today" was extended through King David hundreds of years later.

We are not to think of "Today" as a 24-hour period of time but as an undefined period of time in which believers have the opportunity to faithfully follow Jesus. The reward for faithfully

possession of the land is clearly paralleled with the word for inheritance."

⁸ *gospel* – εὐαγγέλιον (euangélion) meaning "good news" See Luke 1:19 and 1 Thessalonians 3:6 as other examples of the same Greek word being used to mean another kind of "good news."

⁹ Matthew 25:14-29

following Jesus will be to experience God's future rest and inheritance in Christ's Kingdom.

So, because of the 2nd "therefore" of Hebrews 4 we understand:

1. There is a "rest" that remains.
2. Some will enter it.
3. Faithless disobedience has consequences.
4. Faithfulness TODAY is rewarded with God's future rest.
5. Be attentive to God's voice by not hardening your heart.

Then because of the first two statements of fact, the author concludes with a third truth.

Third "Therefore"

Hebrews 4:9-10

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.

The author states as clearly as possible -- there remains a rest for believers. He wants his readers to know they haven't missed this opportunity, it is for them, – and you and me, too – it is worth following Jesus even when things get tough.

He gives this additional information related to Creation to give a better picture of what this "rest that remains" is like.

Here's how one commentator described it: "The fact that God 'rested' does not mean He was tired, but that His task was finished. Believers enter into that experience the same way God did, by finishing their task...The concept of rest is thus enriched to mean 'finished work.' For the readers of this Epistle, to enter into rest meant to finish well..."¹⁰

As believers, we have been given a stewardship from our Lord. But what does that look like?

At its most basic level, Paul describes it in his first letter to the Corinthians.

1. 1 Corinthians 4:2 –*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*
But faithful doing what?

2. John 15:14: *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*
3. 2 Corinthians 5:20: *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ...*
4. Romans 12, Ephesians 4: Faithfully and creatively use your spiritual gifts within the sphere of your influence
5. 1 Corinthians 13: Love well

Throughout the New Testament, we are, as believers, encouraged to fulfill responsibilities in ways that honor our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, what that looks like may change throughout your life, yet the basic task remains the same: Faithfully follow Jesus until He returns, or you go "home" to be with Him where you can hear Him say, "well done!" And you enter not only Heaven, but God's rest!

Understand that this "rest" / "inheritance" in Heaven does not equate with inactivity. The inheritance-rest experience for a believer in heaven will be where we serve and live in the presence of Jesus with no opposition such as we might have experienced here on Earth.

For these persecuted saints, that would sound so amazing.

¹⁰ Dillow, Joseph C. 2012. **Final Destiny**. Colorado Springs: Paniym Group, Inc., p. 102.

For the author of Hebrews, rest” was what one entered into when a believer finished his/her work here on Earth. This rest is the reward that comes to the faithful, persevering Christian who has lived with eternity in view.”¹¹

And it is that kind of “rest” that remains for the believer who faithfully follows Jesus even when life gets tough.

Those are the three *therefore* statements of fact, the truths the author wanted to make sure his readers knew. They are the “what” of this chapter.

Now for the three “so what” *therefore* statements. We could say it this way: Because of what you just read, here is what you should do!

Fourth “Therefore”

Hebrews 4:11-13

11 Let us THEREFORE be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account.

Since a rest remains, “*...let us be diligent to enter that rest...*”

The first thing I notice is the author includes himself with these believers in urging them to be diligent “*...Let US...*” And diligence implies being serious in faithfully following Jesus so they can enjoy the rest, the inheritance, that awaits those believers who do persevere.

The alternative is to experience the loss of such enjoyment because of disobedience. Again, the unfaithful believer will experience loss of reward yet will still be in Heaven.

Yet God has provided a living and powerful resource to guide us as well as to warn and judge us – His Word!

¹¹ Dillow, Joseph C. 2012. **Final Destiny**. Colorado Springs: Paniym Group, Inc., p. 96.

Some see these verses as a warning of judgement. And while judgement is certainly in view, what I gather from these verses is encouragement as well.

In my diligence to enter the rest that remains, if I yield myself to the Lord and desire to be faithful to what I know to do now, His Word will guide me as to what my next steps should be.¹²

God has provided this rich, eternal resource for our benefit to enhance our ability to lay up treasure in heaven and to glorify our Lord. His Word cuts through the fog and darkness, giving wisdom and clarity to life.

That’s encouraging to the believer who is diligent in wanting to enter God’s rest.

Now considering the judgement that is in view, the Word of God judges righteously and completely. You and I can know that at the Judgement Seat of Christ¹³, there will be no inequity or imbalance in judgement there because, “*...all things are...open to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account.*”

Along with God’s Word as a resource to guide us, the author reminds us, with his fifth “therefore” statement, that Jesus is our great High Priest.

Fifth “Therefore”

Hebrews 4:14-15

14 Seeing then that (or “THEREFORE since”) we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Since a rest remains, “*let us hold fast our confession*” which includes the encouraging news that our Savior, Jesus Christ, now serves as our heavenly High Priest.

¹² Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 John 1:7

¹³ The Judgement Seat of Christ is for believers only. It is NOT a determination of destination (i.e. Heaven or Hell) but a determination of reward and privilege in Christ’s Kingdom.

The author reminds¹⁴ his readers, who were enduring persecution, that they could know – and we can know - that Jesus understands and sympathizes with the difficulties and struggles in life they were experiencing. And He knows what you might be experiencing in your walk with Him right now.

The exhortation to ***Hold fast this confession*** has the sense of holding on tight to this truth. And more than just words, it is the person of Jesus Christ you are holding tight to!

He is for you! He is with you! He will strengthen you in your inner being. Jesus wants you to enter His Father's rest and serve with Him in His Kingdom, so He intercedes for you in Heaven for He is your High Priest!

And, if that were not enough, because we have such a High Priest, we have access to one more resource the author describes with the sixth “therefore” statement.

Sixth “Therefore”

Hebrews 4:16

Let us THEREFORE come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the Temple that restricted access to the Holy of Holies to all but the High Priest once a year was torn in two from the top to the bottom.¹⁵ Our Savior's propitiation for our sin also gave us access to God the Father in a way never before possible.

We can come directly to our Father because of what our High Priest has accomplished for us.

We are told to come ***boldly***, that is, with confidence, to a ***throne of grace*** which speaks of our Father's sovereignty as well as His benevolence.

You are invited to come, with confidence, to seek mercy and find grace in your time of need. The particular need of these believers had to do with physical oppression and persecution.

Plus, they were struggling with the temptation to return to Judaism as their way to reduce their persecution.

Whatever you are struggling with as you seek to faithfully follow Jesus, you are invited to come to God's throne of grace.

The purpose of this invitation to God's throne of grace though is not to remove all the difficulties from your life. The purpose is to provide the spiritual strength and wisdom to deal with life's difficulties as you faithfully follow Jesus so you may enter the rest that remains.

Conclusion:

Of genuine interest to me is this: all three action steps revolve around the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to being our High Priest, Jesus is the Word and His Word will one day be the basis of judgement.¹⁶

And it is Jesus Who both intercedes for us before the Father and Who has given us access to come confidently to His throne, a throne of grace!

The author is presenting Jesus as superior to anyone or anything within the system of Judaism, so why would his readers want to go back to a system that is now obsolete and inferior to all that Jesus has provided for them?

And for you and me, Jesus is superior to anyone or anything – PERIOD! Follow Him!

Even more amazing, God through His Son, invites, urges, pleads with you, as His child, to participate in what He has planned for all of eternity – the Kingdom of His Son!

You who by faith alone have trusted Jesus Christ alone, receiving the gift of eternal life, you are going to heaven, you will spend eternity there with the Lord.

And, your heavenly Father wants even more for you in His heaven, so He has provided these divine resources so you can, by faithfully following Jesus, enter the rest that remains.

Prayer | Dismissal

¹⁴ See Hebrews 2:17-18

¹⁵ Mark 15:37-38

¹⁶ John 1:1,14; 12:48