

A Rest for the People of God

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

Introduction

Last week, we looked at the author's admonish to "consider Jesus" so that we might be sure that we may not drift from His care and provision as the apostle and high priest of our confession. This morning, we encounter another warning from the author of Hebrews regarding rest for the people of God...

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.'
¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
'They shall not enter my rest.'"

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵As it is said,

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

¹⁶For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

⁴Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For 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. ³For 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. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." ⁵And again in this passage he said,

"They shall not enter my rest."

⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again 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."

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Exposition

As I have already mentioned, we encounter another warning from the author of Hebrews about the danger of drifting away from God in this passage. The way that the author goes about issuing this warning is by quoting a passage of scripture from the Old Testament, specifically, Psalm 95:7-11, which is addressed to the people of Israel. In the original context of Psalm 95, David addressed the rebellion of the people against God's Word at Meribah, where they tested the Lord and questioned His ability to provide for them. The sin at Meribah in the wilderness was the sin of unbelief. The people of Israel doubted the power of the LORD, and because of their rebellious unbelief and doubt, God did not allow the wilderness generation to enter into His rest in the promised land. So, now, in Hebrews 3, the author takes Psalm 95 and uses it to warn His predominantly Jewish audience of the dangers of unbelief. The warning comes in Heb 3:12-14, which states, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." Let's break this down a little further.

I. Take Care to Believe God's Word (Vss. 7-19)

The author addresses his readers as brothers and sisters in Christ. He is not assuming that his audience is full of lost sinners, but rather, professing Christians who claim to follow Jesus. In their attempt to follow Jesus, there is a danger that the author must address – the danger of a being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" which leads to "an evil, unbelieving heart" that "results in people falling away from the living God." This danger is never more clear or present than when such people fail to hear the voice of God and trust Him. That was the setting of the original Psalm, if you recall. The people had just seen the great miracles of God no more than 20 days before that made it to Meribah. God had delivered his people from the Egyptian through incredible miracles, yet the people could hardly make it three weeks before they started doubting the provision of God. They refused to hear the voice of God and trust Him, which led to their exclusion from the Promised Land. Their fundamental sin was unbelief in the Word of God.

The author's solution for his audience was for them to "Take Care" of how they hear and receive God's Word. Furthermore, they were to "Exhort One Another Daily" so that they would not be led astray by the deceitfulness of sin. Do you see the implications of his exhortation? Take care how you receive the Word of God and live in close relationship with others who will hold you accountable to your confession of faith. Let me ask you this, "Is this real for you this morning? Do you take the Word of God seriously? Do you have people in your life that will hold you accountable to the Word of God?" You need such people in your life. Furthermore, you need to take the Word of God seriously! And I get it, some people here are not avid readers, but taking care to receive God's Word is not a matter of loving to read. There are many people who love to read that do not take care to receive God's Word. Taking care to receive God's Word entails reading for sure, but it also entails meditating on God's Word, memorizing God's Word, listening to God's Word as it is preached, and obeying God's Word. This is not a matter of love for reading, this is a matter of love for living as a follower of Christ! This is food for your soul!

What is at risk when we do not take care to receive God's Word and exhort one another daily? We are at risk of falling into unbelief, and as unbelief grows, our hearts harden, and as our hearts harden, we drift away from God, and if we drift away from God, we prove that we were never really one of His children to begin with, as **1 John 2:19** states, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that is might become plain that they all are not of us." This means that how you live after you make your initial profession of faith in Christ tells a lot about your faith. If you endure to the end, if it was because you belonged to Christ. If you do not become hardened, if you do not become led astray by the deceitfulness of sin, if you persevere, it is because you belonged to God from the beginning. However, those who have initial faith and some signs of spiritual life but eventually fall away from God, these are the one who were hardened, who were led astray by sin, and who were never apart of the household of God to begin with, over which Christ himself reigned as the Son (Heb. 3:6).

The author's point in this passage is that just like the Israelites that started out with some initial faith after their deliverance from Egypt, their unbelieving hearts eventually caused them to be excluded from the Promised Land, that is, the rest of God. "Because of their disobedience, God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest." So where does that leave us?

The author is warning us to take God's Word seriously and hold one another accountable that we might finish the race that has been set before us! He does not want to see any of us end up like the unbelieving Israelites from the wilderness generation. He does not want us to be like the rocky ground in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-23), which initially "receives the Word of God with joy, but since it has no root, only last a short time, because trouble and persecution comes, leading us to fall away." He doesn't want us to be like the soil among the thorns, which chokes the word, making it unfruitful. The author of Hebrews want us to be like the good soil, when the seed falls and bears much fruit! For those that bear fruit are the ones who revealed to be the sons and daughters of God's house! They are the ones that enter God's rest, which is the next point of the passage...

II. Take Care to Enter God's Rest (Vss. 4:1-13)

The problem with the wilderness generation was not that they did not hear or have God's Word, it was that they did not obey and trust God's Word. They were content to be delivered from Egypt, but they did not want to persist in obedience to God. They wanted deliverance without discipleship. They didn't want to have to change anything about their life in order to pursue faithfulness to God. They wanted a savior but they didn't want a lord, but that is not how God works. God will be our savior and lord, or He will be nothing to us. We do not get the benefits of his salvation apart from faith and repentance, and repentance involves a reorientation of our whole life to the things of God.

This is what we find in the rest of this morning's passage – just like the people of Israel had progress to make after their deliverance from Egypt, so we, as Christians, have progress to make as well. We do not simply begin with God, we also persevere with Him by faith!

The author of Hebrews draws upon the imagery of the people of Israel entering the promised rest. The promised rest was patterned off of God's own rest that we saw in Genesis 2:1-3, where we are told that God entered into His rest after completing the works of creation. The Sabbath command is also patterned off of God's rest. The point is that there is work to complete, progress to be made before we enter into God's rest. God did not rest before He finished his work, and we should not either. We have progress to make in terms of holiness. We have progress to make in terms of our pursuit of Christ and obedience to His commission. When Christ returns, we want to be found working faithfully, "striving to enter into the promised rest" that is offered to us in Himself. We do not want to be meandering around, tossed to and fro by every wind or doctrine. We don't want to coast into our eternal home. We want to run with endurance and passion the race that is set before us. We want to run the race in order to win the prize, and the prize is God's rest!

I believe the point here in this passage is that we need our perspective changed. If we were passionate about entering into God's rest, into His eternal Sabbath, then we would take care to obey and receive His Word! We need our minds reoriented around these great realities because we are so distracted by other things. We are distracted by the rest of the world, by the leisure of the world, by the trinkets of the world. It is just easier to pick up our phones and check out Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or Snapchat, or play to some game on our phone, or easier to turn on the television and watch the news or our favorite shows and movies, or pick up our favorite novel or historian, or turn our attention to the stock market, or window shop for the next gadget or tool that we "really need." It is just so much easier to do these things than to pick up the Word of God, read it, pray through it, meditate on it, or listen to it at church. It is just so easy to not care about eternal things and to be captivated by the all the trinkets that this world has to offer, and that is why we need our perspective changed! We need to become passionate about entering into God's rest, which means, we need to be about the completion of the work that He has given us to complete.

And so, some of you are here this morning and you are convicted as you hear this and you are thinking, but I've already wasted so much time being fascinated by the things of this world. I've already spent so much time meandering through life. I've hardly expended any energy "striving to enter into God's rest," why should I even bother starting now? Because this passage tells you to! That is why! Look at how this passage refers to the present – "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart as those in the rebellion!" Have you heard His Word today? Yes! Have you fully entered into His rest yet? No! Then the author of Hebrews would tell you this morning – "Strive to enter His rest" by taking care to believe His Word, because "we who have believed have entered that rest!" (Heb. 4:3)

Conclusion - How, then, do we enter the rest of God? According to this passage, we strive to enter into this rest by being receiving the message of the Word of God with faith. If you recall, it was a failure to believe and remember God's Word that resulted in the wilderness generation not entering into the Promised Land. When we forget or refuse to believe God's Word we become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, which results in an evil, unbelieving heart. When our hearts are exposed to God's Word, God's Word will do the work that our hearts need. Therefore, see to it that you do not neglect to be exposed to God's Word. Take care to believe and obey it. Exhort each other to do so, until the day that we enter God's rest for God's people.